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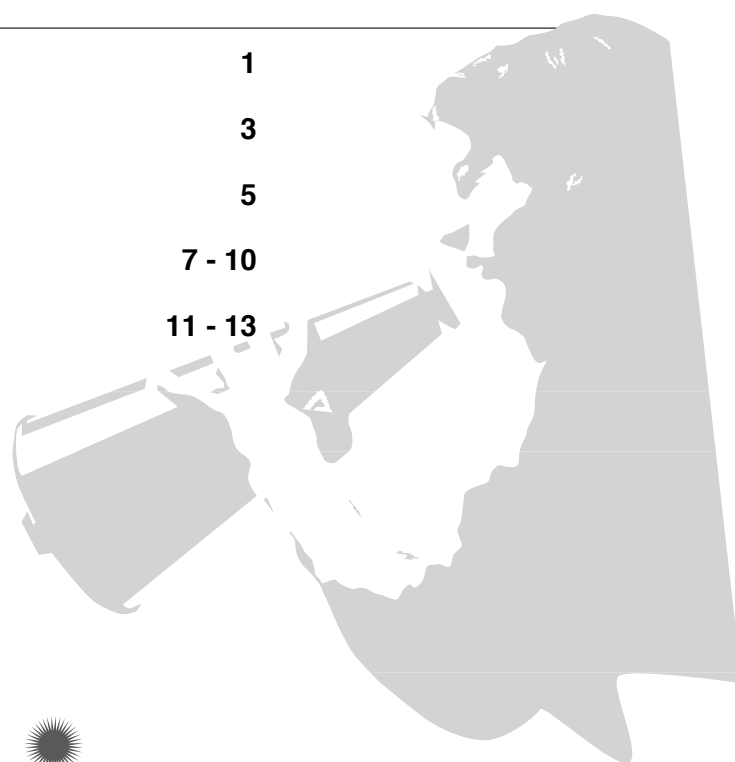
The Pamphlet

Putting the 'E' in Democracy: e-participation for the active citizen

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1) Introduction

This pamphlet accompanies the short course *e-democracy* which has been developed as part of the Strengthening Democracy and Train the Take Part Trainers programmes.

Its aim is to explore themes and ideas associated with *e-democracy* as well as to provide a bank of *e-democracy*-related resources which can be accessed by those wishing to engage with the *e-democracy* debate further.

Fundamentally the pamphlet takes a case study approach in its overview of the nature and provenance, strengths and challenges of *e-democracy* with a particular focus on how *e-democracy* can be used for organising and campaigning through the use of *e-tools* and *e-approaches*.

There are three important points that need to be made here:

Firstly although the 'tools' that can help to facilitate *e-democracy* - such as email and twitter - are discussed in detail, this pamphlet is neither aimed at the 'techie' nor intends to provide a 'how-to' guide. Although it is assumed that the reader has some familiarity with the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) landscape, all of the tools referred to can be accessed free of charge by those with a relatively rudimentary ICT knowledge.

A second point refers to technology deficit and the digital divide. It is true that a technology deficit remains in the global north and south and this is usually, though not solely, related to poverty and disadvantage. However this is changing and even in the most poverty stricken countries, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa,¹ cyber cafes, mobile phones and new ways of communicating are changing the landscapes of communication and participation forever. Although access to the Internet remains low - at about 8% of the population,² mobile phones are used by almost 50% of the population in the so called 'less developed' regions.³ This is an increase from 1 in 50 to 1 in 4 of the population over the last 8 years.⁴ In 'developed economies' 44% of people access the Internet in Europe and over 50% in Australasia. Whilst there is unevenness within and between countries - for example high speed broadband availability - the trend is resolutely upwards. By the end of 2008:

There were over 4 billion mobile cellular subscriptions worldwide, translating into a penetration rate of 61 per cent and almost a quarter of the world's 6.7 billion people were using the Internet. (ITU, p3)

Such technologies - both drivers and outcomes of globalisation - have changed the world and the interconnectedness between peoples in ways impossible to imagine even a decade ago.

Finally this pamphlet is concerned with democracy in the widest sense of the word - not only in terms of access to technology as described above but also the democratic or anti-democratic nature of the technology itself. Some writers, such as Raymond Williams, challenge the idea that technology happens inevitably and that it is simply a reflection of invention, progress and unforeseen outcomes⁵ - though this is usually how it is presented. Instead Williams argued for an account of events which '*restores intent to the process of*

¹ The designation sub-Saharan Africa is commonly used to indicate all of Africa except northern Africa, with the Sudan included in sub-Saharan Africa.

² An increase of over 1000% between 2000 and 2009.

³ The term is one used commonly by the United Nations and similar bodies.

⁴ International Telecommunications Union (2009) Measuring the Information Society - The ICT Development Index, Geneva, ITU

⁵ R. Williams, (1974) Television: Technology and Cultural Form, Glasgow, Fontana.

research, development and application'. In other words, Williams identified the practices and social needs for which a technology is often developed and which are usually central to the continuation and stability of social systems in crisis or more usually, the profit motive. He argues that decisions about technology are economic and political decisions as much as scientific ones. Yet it is not, as Williams' points out, the technology itself that is the problem, but rather the minority ownership and control of its development, usage and dissemination. How technology is used and abused is what should concern us, not its existence or development.

2. Context

This section is concerned to briefly explore the origins of democracy and to trace the relationship between direct, representative and *e-democracy*. It goes on to examine the 'democracy deficit' and discusses how and why *e-democracy* is often presented as one solution to democracy in crisis.

2.1. Origins of Democracy

Democracy is a word or idea with a multitude of different meanings. On one level it is about elections, voting, politics and Government but most people would agree that democracy is equally important in all of the ways in which people relate to each other whether at work, in families or in communities. Democracy however, is an idea beset by practical and philosophical difficulties.

For example, what happens when people's 'rights' or freedoms come into conflict with each other? What about problems to do with participation? Or accountability? Democracy is about decision-making and how decisions are made but who actually participates in decision-making? Is it automatically more democratic for decisions to be made by the many, directly, than by the few, indirectly, through representation? When we think about the ways in which decision-making takes place in small groups such as community associations, tenants groups, school governing bodies, youth clubs or workplaces we are reminded of how complex this can be. Whenever people join together to do something, they have to grapple with democracy because it involves issues to do with participation, dealing with minority views and the difficulties of reaching informed decisions which appear to be fair to everyone.

The meaning of democracy has changed over time and throughout much of its history it has been an ideal or a theory and not a description of any existing political system or society. It is also worth remembering that until recently most people regarded democracy as the worst type of society and government imaginable! When the 18th Century political theorist Edmund Burke wrote about the French Revolution he argued that democracy was against the '*natural order of things*' and, '*the most shameless thing in the world*'. He believed that a system in which the majority (the 'mob') could rule the minority (the wealthy, educated or well-born) was to be avoided at all costs.

Roots of Democracy

We have to cast back a long time in history to find the origin of the idea of democracy but when we do, we can apply the term participatory or direct democracy to it. The term democracy was first coined in Ancient Greece 2,500 years ago to describe the political situation which had developed in one of the Greek city states – Athens. All of these states governed themselves differently but in Athens, with its population of 50,000, there had been a struggle for power between the notables (the rich or ‘well-born’) and the many (the poor). The system that finally emerged went by the name of democracy and it had many of the features – such as immediacy and direct participation- often ascribed to *e-democracy*.⁶

Not everyone in Athens supported the idea of direct rule by the people and most Greek philosophers and writers criticised the system because it enabled the ‘low born’ to participate to the same extent as the ‘high born’. Indeed the demos (as it was known) was frequently described as the ‘mob’ or the ‘rabble’. Yet despite economic inequality (the unequal distribution of wealth was as great in Ancient Greece as it is in contemporary societies) and the fact that crucial sections of the population were excluded from decision-making (most notably women, slaves and foreigners), the political system that existed for a short period all those years ago is unique in human history.

This uniqueness was based on a number of assumptions and ideas which Greeks held about their political and cultural life; in particular the idea that there was equality before the law and that all citizens, rich or poor, had equal political rights. This meant that citizens had the right to speak in what was called the General Assembly - the forum in which everyone gathered to make decisions about public affairs. Second was the belief that everyone had an equal right to express their views. A third assumption was that active political participation in decision-making was a duty of every citizen. This meant that all citizens were expected to concern themselves with public affairs and that a citizen’s first allegiance was to the well-being of the city state and not to themselves. Fourth was the assumption that the people and the General Assembly, which were one, was the sovereign body - its decisions were absolute and total authority rested in it. It is from this arrangement that the principle of popular sovereignty arose - the idea that all authority rests in the people. Finally, Greeks believed that by governing themselves directly there would be no separation between the state (the government) and society (the people). Athenians did not choose a government every five years as citizens in modern democracies tend to do, nor did they devise structures which were responsible for governing particular functions of the state. Instead, they continuously governed themselves and in their view, state and society were indivisible - they were one and the same.

Athens was run on a day to day basis by what was called the *Council of Boule* which was composed of approximately five hundred citizens elected by the General Assembly. The council met daily and prepared the agenda for the General Assemblies which were held ten times a year. Everyone - whether serving on a jury, the Council of Boule, or working in other government or administrative departments - was selected by ‘lot’. This meant that citizens were selected to participate in turn, rather than be elected. The rule that citizens could not be chosen more than twice in their lifetime meant that individuals were unlikely to acquire too much power or influence. So committed was the General Assembly to equal participation by all citizens that a system of payment for attendance was introduced to avoid the poor from being excluded.

⁶ The word democracy embodies two Greek words, demos (meaning people) and kratia (meaning rule or authority). If we look at these words carefully we can see that democracy meant rule by the people - a term which reflected, to a certain extent, the way in which Athens was governed.

There were many flaws in the Greek political system - slavery existed and women, who accounted for over half of the Athenian population, had no political rights and were excluded from citizenship. Indeed, equality was understood in Greek society to mean the freedom for men to participate not fairness for all. Yet the Greeks did have interesting ideas about democracy. Active citizenship was central to the whole arrangement of democratic Athens and striving for the common rather than the individual good was the underlying philosophy of the system. The idea of the right and duty of citizens to govern and participate directly in public affairs encouraged the Greeks to be active citizens. As a result a democratic culture was established which reflected both how people were governed and the way in which people in the society related to each other?

The Ancient Greeks had valuable ideas about active citizenship and decision-making but their notion of democracy did not extend beyond the political sphere. The idea of democracy was limited to deciding how people were to be governed and the concept of democracy in private as well as public life was not properly articulated until the twentieth century. The legacy bequeathed by the Greek experiment was essentially one of direct government by the people themselves but it was short-lived and other models of democracy quickly replaced it. Although participatory democracy has remained a vision to many of how democracy could be, generally it has been viewed with hostility or seen as impracticable in an increasingly complex society – *e-democracy* however, can be said to raise the possibility of direct or participatory democracy once again.

Representative Democracy

Democracy of any description was rejected for much of the 2,000 years following the Greek experiment. The idea of 'government by the people' and the demand for political rights continued to emerge at certain moments in history but the ownership of property, usually land, was a precondition for political rights. Those without property found themselves excluded from any form of participation in decision-making with the wealthy fearing that the poor would attack or seize their property and forcibly redistribute it. Of equal concern was the view that 'the people' were mentally and morally unfit to participate in politics. It was believed that if 'the people' did participate, then society would experience a 'tyranny of the majority' whereby an ignorant 'common people' would make decisions which would turn the 'natural order' upside down.

Yet despite the hostility of the rich towards the poor, changes in social and economic structures forced changes in political organisation and eventually, political representation. The semi-feudal regimes which had held sway for centuries came under pressure from the emerging middle classes who were excluded from government, politics and decision-making. The gradual accommodation of these people into the political structure resulted, over time, in the model of democracy with which we are familiar today - representative democracy.

The 'big bang' in Britain occurred in 1832 when Parliament (until then composed only of wealthy landowners) passed the Reform Act. This was the first step towards the gradual extension of the franchise (i.e. the right to vote) to all adult men, regardless of their status or wealth. Similar developments took place globally. In the United States, a franchise based on property and an electoral system whereby those qualified to vote chose to be governed by persons they considered to be more able than themselves was instituted. Representation rather than participation began to be preferred on the grounds, so it was argued, that representation would ensure that the competing interests of each individual would be catered for and that those elected would be able independently to define the best for the community.

The French and American Revolutions in the late eighteenth century had raised the spectre of popular action and all regimes subsequently perceived the necessity of restraining what

was seen as the threat of the popular will. As a result, the active participation of the citizen has been replaced in most spheres by the practice of representation. Although it is clearly the case that everyone cannot be involved directly in organisations and decision making all of the time, most people would agree that there are many problems associated with representation – whether it be corruption, lack of accountability or the resulting apathy and alienation that seems to be experienced across the body politic in representative systems.

During the twentieth century the meaning of democracy has continued to evolve. The development of welfare states in some countries after 1945 introduced the idea of social rights which implied social citizenship, social and liberal democracy and the recognition of the role of human agency in shaping personal and political life.⁸ Citizenship, it will be remembered, was central to Greek thinking because it was from the duty to be active as a citizen within the collectivity that the right to be a citizen flowed. However in western societies citizenship and democracy are focussed on individual rights and the economic policies of the free market rather than any notion of social duty or active democratic participation.

2.2. The Democratic Deficit

What has been termed the post-war settlement⁹ witnessed consistently high engagement by citizens with electoral politics. However since this consensus began to disintegrate it has become clear that representative democracy is in crisis on a number of different levels. For example most people would agree that although some progress has been made, fundamental freedoms and human rights (including the universal right to a decent standard of life)¹⁰ have not been met. Democracy has not ‘delivered’ for many. Instead we see increased poverty, social exclusion, inequality, the restriction of rights at work and, for asylum seekers and many others, the erosion of liberties – and this in the ‘prosperous’ west. Moreover, industrial restructuring, a deteriorating welfare system and rapid technological change combined with demographic changes, have created widespread feelings of economic and social insecurity.

However despite these developments it would seem that people have never been so disinclined to vote and participate in the UKs ‘first past the post system’. Indeed there is a similar story in many ‘mature’ democracies as voters demonstrate their feelings of powerlessness and disillusionment about their effectiveness as citizens to influence change.¹¹

7 It was not until 1928 that women under 30 won the right to vote.

8 Central to the notion of active democratic citizenship is the idea of human agency. Essentially, this means that through our own efforts either as individuals or by working with others we can make a difference to the way we live. In other words, we can act consciously to change things; rather than having things done for or to us, we can shape and influence national or local politics, influence the policies and practices of agencies concerned with health, education, the environment and so on. The concept of the active citizen stems from this because the citizen is someone who recognises that they have a responsibility for what goes on and therefore a responsibility to try to effect change. An understanding of active citizenship and human agency enables us to move democracy beyond its usual political boundaries. If we can do this, we can make democracy visible in every part of our lives.

9 That is, the post second world war period 1945- 1979 of relatively full employment, the growth of the welfare state and accommodation between capital and labour ...

10 Possibly the most important post-war right is the recognition that all people have the right to a decent standard of life. For example the European Convention on Human Rights is concerned to secure for its citizens full personal and social rights, the right to liberty, access to justice and respect for private life.

11 In the last general elections the voter turnout in France (2007) was 83.8% (on average over two legs); in Germany (2005) 77.7%; in Spain (2008) 73.9% but in the UK (2005) a mere 61.3% of the electorate cast their vote. This turnout was a slight increase on 2001 when only 59.3% of those eligible to vote in the UK cast their ballot. In 1997 71.3% of the electorate voted, a drop of 12% in just 4 years. Although the turnout in UK general elections has been steadily decreasing in the post-war era, it has never dropped beneath its ‘normal’ historical range (between 71.9% and 84%) until 1997, a trend which continued the two subsequent elections. Turnout in European and local elections is even lower. Dennis Kavanagh. David Richards. Martin Smith. Andrew Geddes. (2006) British Politics, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This trend has been growing over time. As long as 15 years ago, in an opinion poll for the 1994 Channel 4 documentary, 'Bite the Ballot', it was revealed that although 61% of people considered Britain to be a democratic country, 30% did not. It would be interesting to know what this figure looked like now!

There are three key concerns associated with democracy in its current form and which are voiced by people:

Participation: the essential hallmark of representative political democracy is participation through suffrage but growing numbers of people clearly no longer think that participation is relevant. And it is not just apathy but the growth of large and often disadvantaged communities (particularly immigrants) who are excluded from full citizenship. This problem of social exclusion is likely to be of growing significance in the future and will further undermine democracy. No country can really call itself a democracy if significant sections of its population are excluded, alienated or restricted from full participation in social, political and economic life.

Representation: Democracy is supposed to be about representation but if people do not participate then they cannot be adequately represented. And how representative of the electorate are those that we vote into Parliament anyway? A majority of those elected come from very different social, economic and educational backgrounds from those that they represent. Nor do our representatives reflect the gender or ethnic make-up of the country.

Accountability: Once elected to Parliament, our representatives are increasingly unaccountable to the electorate. The recent scandal around expenses is just one example. The issue of accountability is problematic at all levels of government but also in many other democratic arenas - in trade unions, voluntary organisations, clubs and societies etc.

Yet this 'crisis' is not as straightforward as we might imagine - nor is it necessarily all 'gloom and doom'. There is evidence, for example, that whilst many people do feel alienated and helpless in the light of current events, others are choosing to express their active citizenship in fields beyond formal politics and often using new tools that we associate with *e-democracy*.

3) What is e-democracy?

In this short section we define *e-democracy* as well as consider how much it has spread and why people are turning to *e-democracy*.

3.1. Definition

One definition of *e-democracy* offered by Steven Clift is as follows:

E-democracy represents the use of information and communication technologies and strategies by democratic actors within political and governance processes of local communities, nations and on the international stage. Democratic actors/sectors include governments, elected officials, the media, political organizations, and citizen/voters. To many, e-democracy suggests greater and more active citizen participation enabled by the Internet, mobile communications, and other technologies in today's representative democracy as well as through more participatory or direct forms of citizen involvement in addressing public challenges.

Naturally there are many definitions of *e-democracy* but most commentators would agree that Clift's definition captures the essence of the term and idea.

That is that *e-democracy* uses tools which are accessible to the many and which, because of their networking and collective possibilities, enable rapid, direct responses to politics or issues of concern to citizens.

3.2 Why e-democracy?

We have begun to explore in previous sections why it may well be that in the words of Alvin Toffler:

The political technology of the industrial age is 'no longer appropriate technology for the new civilization taking form around us. Our politics are obsolete.' (from *The Third Wave*, 1980)

This view may still be a minority one but it is clear that many governments, policy makers as well as citizens across the globe, have some empathy with this perspective and are seeking new, innovative ways to engage with existing political structures, processes and systems. In part this is recognition of the cultural shift associated with new technologies and the knowledge (or digital) society and in particular, the technological expectations of new generations.

Politics is now operating in a changed communications landscape which is inhabited by citizens used to immediate access to a range of interactive tools of an asynchronous¹² nature. Information via the Internet is available with a couple of keyboard clicks and what is known as the X-Factor generation is making decisions and affecting outcomes instantly. Social networking is a particularly important emerging area for *e-democracy* and there has been a great deal of speculation about the Internet's potential to facilitate the engagement of younger citizens in politics – many of whom appear to be alienated from party politics and are likely to be more experimental and open to new approaches.

This has significant implications for social action as well as formal politics as we can see in the case studies. Even in countries with traditional political systems such as the UK, establishments now promote notions of *e-government* and *e-democracy* and explore diverse ways to accommodate the tools of the new technology and culture of 'internet participation' in political life.

¹² Asynchronous is something that is not simultaneous; not concurrent in time and opposed to synchronous. A process in a multitasking system whose execution can proceed independently.

It has also been claimed by some commentators that *e-democracy* is the new electronic cradle of democracy which is usually based on the fact that there is a lack of centralised control and relatively unfettered speech to be found in Internet newsgroups, mailing lists, blogs, wikis and chat rooms. However others would suggest that controversy continues to surround these tools and that the lack of centralisation and unfettered free speech can equally result in offensive and exploitative actions and behaviours.

Critically *e-democracy* can facilitate a micro political approach meaning that 'small issue' politics get heard as well as a 'big' political issues approach. Perhaps it is this aspect that makes it particularly appealing to citizens and activists. Above all *e-democracy* claims to promote effective participation; voting equality, control of agenda setting and inclusiveness as well as a dynamic framework for organising, collaborating and sharing knowledge.

The Internet clearly has the potential to renew interest in civic engagement and participation as well as help people to get organised, become active and get their message across.

4) E-democracy tools

Introduction

This section introduces a selection of digital tools that have been used to facilitate democratic conversation and action in recent years. Later, case studies will give some examples of how the tools have been used to support democratic engagement. For the moment, the tools are introduced and their particular qualities described.

The first thing to note, however, is that this selection of technologies is only a sample of such tools. One of the characteristics of the digital age is how new ways of communicating and working together emerge and change continuously. This technical change is evident in the functionality of hardware devices¹³ and software programs, but just as importantly, in the ways that people find they can apply the technology. Therefore, the notion of a tool as a static device would be misleading; tools for *e-democracy* should be understood as ways in which people can communicate in order to organise, collaborate, gather information and opinion, motivate, inform and influence other people.

A further overriding characteristic of such tools is their accessibility: they are usually simple to use and cheap. In most cases the cost of using such tools is incurred in the initial purchase of hardware (e.g. a PC or a mobile phone) and the ongoing costs of running such devices. Many of the services discussed here are not paid for directly by the subscriber but through advertising or 'freemium' accounts where advanced users pay for the privilege of more functionality and capacity.

Ten types of e-tools are introduced here and each offers its own characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. Some of those listed below share much in common, but have important differences. For example, Facebook, Ning and Twitter might collectively be described as online social networking or social media tools, but as we will see, each one of them is used differently.

The tools are best understood for what they can do: how they serve a specific purpose when matched to a strategy or requirement. Some of the tools can be technically integrated, but for most of us they should be thought of as a toolset, with each component having a particular complementary purpose and stand alone functionality. Some will be more familiar than others, but none of the tools discussed here requires significant training; if they cannot be picked up easily by anyone then their value to democratic work is insignificant.

¹³ That is, in what the hardware can do for the user.

From Web 1.0 to Web 2.0

Before looking at particular applications it is useful to understand how the World Wide Web has changed in one very important respect since the turn of the century. The first ten years of the Web were characterised by its capacity to distribute information produced by people and organisations who had the technical ability and funds to produce 'static' websites. These websites required the expert intervention of programmers, website designers and web managers. At the time this was felt to be potentially liberating, but still excluded most people from actively participating. This phase of the web's history can be referred to as 'Web 1.0'.

Web 2.0 emerged in the early years of the twenty first century with the advent of blogs, wikis and podcasts. Web 2.0, as outlined by O'Reilly (2005), describes a changed digital environment where the Web is a platform for harnessing collective intelligence; where data is dynamic and abundant; where software is in perpetual beta¹⁴ and attitude and approach is more important than the technology. It is a social, creative and collaborative space in which 'small pieces [of knowledge] are loosely joined.' All of the tools that are discussed below are an outcome of this shift to Web 2.0.

Collaborative production amongst disparate people is a feature of Web 2.0, which is also often referred to as the 'Read/Write Web.' This switch from mediated knowledge to the democratised web is often described as 'disruptive'. Jay Rosen captures this in a 2006 blog article called *'The People Formerly Known as the Audience'* which describes the same democratic phenomenon that has seen the music, newspaper and publishing industries in crisis as independent voices become louder: the Digital Age is the age of the user-producer.

Ten tools to change the world

1. Email

Of all the tools discussed here, email will be the most familiar and easily understood: its basic functionality allows each of us to communicate directly with people whose email addresses are known to us, either on a one-to-one or one-to-many basis. The communication is asynchronous, though rapid, and can be extensive, especially as it can carry links to other Internet-based information and services. The technology also supports conversations due to its inbuilt Reply functionality, but its effectiveness has been reduced due to the quantity of email traffic that many people now receive and the unsolicited 'spam' or 'junk' messages that are habitually distributed. Nevertheless, elected representatives and public services promote their openness by publishing email contact addresses as a matter of course and the use of email lists by smaller organisations is a relatively simple and effective way to ensure that membership can be kept up to date. Email interaction is seen as a key tool of *e-democracy*.

2. Google - the art of search and discovery

Search tools have always been central to the Web allowing information to be discovered. With the abundance of information on the web, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is an important consideration for anyone who needs to ensure their information is discovered. This is particularly important given that most people searching for information will use the first page of Google hits presented to them. Therefore organisations which are keen for their information to be found will use keywords in page and post titles, and throughout their text. The art of using metadata (information about information) in the form of tags or keywords embedded in page is also increasingly important.

¹⁴ That is, is always in test mode.

3. Google Office - collaborative documents, spreadsheets, presentations and interactive forms

Google Office is one of several suites of free online toolsets (another being Zoho.com) that challenge the dominance of locally installed Microsoft Office software. Being online ('in the cloud') brings two key benefits: the software and data are more accessible to the producer - you don't have to copy files across the various machines you use; and documents can be produced collaboratively, dependent upon invitations. Collaborative writing can be a creative, revealing and a democratic process in itself, something that previously has not been feasible to the extent it is now. Google docs can be published online, printed to paper, or kept private as online documents. Other free web tools, such as Slideshare.net, also make sharing presentations online easy.

4. Facebook - social media and networking tools

Facebook, initially established for US college students in 2004, now has in the region of 350 million members worldwide. Central to its attraction is its functionality that allows its members (anyone over the age of 13) to post update messages to their 'wall' so that their selected friendship network can stay in touch with each other throughout the day. 'Pokes' are another tool which allows direct messaging within Facebook. A wide range of social media tools, some of them developed by third party organisations to meet particular needs or interests, complement these fundamental tools. Together the Facebook toolset enables each user to easily create a customised personal and social online presence. Beyond the innate ability of these active networks to spread information virally (that is, to spread information rapidly), are several tools that support more formal organisation, in particular user-defined Facebook groups.

The idea of online 'friendship' networks is evident in many web-based services and exemplifies the web's democratic capacity: everyone can have a voice. That doesn't mean, of course, that everything that is said is true or valuable and so such information and communication needs to be used with care and a critical eye. MySpace (owned by News Corporation) is a similar popular social networking site, whilst applications such as 3D Virtual Worlds (e.g. Second Life) also support the development, in different ways, of organisational networks.

Ning.com and Crowdvine.com are two examples of free social networking tools (supported by advertising) that allow organisations to set up their own private multi-functional online networks, useful for forming virtual organisations or supporting real world groupings. These tools have begun to replace other online forums such as Yahoo or Google Groups and bulletin board systems.

5. Blogs

A blog (derived from the term 'web log') is a website, usually produced by an individual or organisation, in which a sequence of 'posts' or articles is published. Blog authors, commonly referred to as bloggers, will write short pieces at a frequency and regularity that is determined by them to meet their needs. Some blogs are highly crafted and thoughtful, whilst others are immediate and responsive. Some bloggers develop large followings, whilst others produce blogs that are intended to be more personal, reflective, diaries. As with other websites, blog postings often appear as results in web searches (i.e. when terms are put into search engines such as Google or Bing). Some blogging tools allow the author to assign 'tags' (keywords) to enhance discoverability and the careful titling of posts and the use of significant words within the posts can also result in high discoverability. The 'blogosphere' (that part of the web that is populated by blogs) is a particularly contentious space occupied as much by highly opinionated writers as it is

by well evidenced, thoughtful and informed commentators. Care, therefore, needs to be taken in navigating this space, especially if you need to trust the information and ideas you find there.

Blog accounts can be set up freely using services such as Wordpress.org or Blogger.com (owned by Google). For organisations seeking more control, blogging software can also be installed on their own servers. Wordpress, for example, provides a free set of blogging tools for individual or multi-user requirements. Blogs can be set up to generate RSS feeds. RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication, a concept that allows interested parties to subscribe to feeds of information. In this way people who have a particular interest can automatically receive updated feeds from several sites of interest using an aggregation tool such as Bloglines or Google Reader. Monitoring multiple sources of information (including blogs, podcasts and other outputs) can help an organisation keep up-to-date with current news, opinion and resources.

6. twitter

twitter (small 't') is a 'micro-blogging' tool; it allows the producer to make brief posts (140 characters or less) to their own twitter channel. A twitter channel is more commonly known as a personal twitter 'feed', a dedicated stream that delivers a person's 'tweets' (short postings). twitter prompts the producer to respond to the simple question "What are you doing now?", but in reality a tweet can contain any bite-sized piece of information including links to more detailed, web-based information. The ability to post short messages is only part of the secret of twitter's success; its main attraction is the way it supports social networking. Twitterers follow other twitterers and because each person's network is unique to them twitter allows great little ideas to be spread from one friendship group to another through a relay process of 'retweeting' or forwarding. While 99% of messages might be of little value they are also brief enough to not overwhelm the reader. twitter, as with other social networking tools, allows people to identify other potentially like-minded people: if I see that Jo is following one or more of my friends it is highly likely that Jo and I will also have something in common, so it makes sense for me to 'follow' Jo for a while (and perhaps vice versa) to find out if there is any valuable commonality. twitter's networking capacity results in a powerful self-moderated or filtered communication structure that can be useful in virally spreading information.

Most people using twitter will be following many others. When you follow someone you will see their tweets aggregated with the postings of your other twitter friends in a single display, so a post from Jo will follow one from Jane and one from Jack and so forth. Your own tweets will also appear in this automatically updated stream of social consciousness.¹⁵

7. Wikis and Wikipedia

A wiki is a collaborative web-based environment where structured information, or articles, can be written. Access to information in the wiki, and rights to editing it, can be controlled by the owner of the wiki to suit the purpose of the wiki site. Some wikis are intended to be extensive and encyclopaedic, whilst others are intended to be tightly focused around areas of common interest. A wiki can be used as a convenient way to produce a structured website for an organisation offering information that in the past would have required someone with skills in writing HTML code.

¹⁵ As well as tweeting and retweeting messages you can refer to other twitterers by using the '@' symbol and their twitter name, or by direct messaging twitter friends by using 'd' as a prefix to a name. A common technique, and one that is likely to be useful to groups with common organising interests, is to establish a twitter 'tag' for a topic. twitter tags take the form of #unique_tag_word such as #ourgroup. Postings that include this 'hashtag' are not private but allow people to follow a tagged topic using twitter search tools. Tweets can be posted from several applications such as Tweetdeck on the PC or Tweetie on the mobile phone.

Wikipedia is undoubtedly the best known wiki. It introduces itself as a:

“Free, web-based, collaborative, multilingual encyclopedia project supported by the non-profit Wikimedia Foundation. Its name is a portmanteau of the words wiki (a technology for creating collaborative websites, from the Hawaiian word wiki, meaning “quick”) and encyclopedia. Wikipedia’s 14 million articles (3.1 million in English) have been written collaboratively by volunteers around the world, and almost all of its articles can be edited by anyone with access to the site.”

Wikipedia continues to be developed by the people that visit and use it and is constructed using a freely available wiki technology called Wikimedia. If you have access to a web server (and some technical knowhow) you can start your own Wikimedia wiki, thus allowing you and those in your network to write, amend and publish collections of up-to-date knowledge around topics of shared interest. There are many other more user-friendly wiki tools that do not need to be set up on your own server. As with other Web 2.0 tools anyone can register for a free account, give their wiki a name and begin writing. Pbwiki and Wetpaint are two well known tools that operate in this way.

8. Online petitions and survey tools

The Internet is notorious for the unwanted ‘spam’ and junk mail it delivers and so caution is required before using it to promote political campaigns. Websites, blogs and wikis can provide links for visitors that enable them to opt into e-newsletters, and services such as Google Forms provide those with a web presence with a simple interactive, yet easy to use, technology for gathering information from visitors. For example, the names and email addresses of those who might be interested in particular topics or their opinions can be gathered. These can then be automatically collated and downloaded as spreadsheets or displayed on the site. There are other free online surveying tools that can support the collection of useful data such as Survey Monkey, Polldaddy.com and Vizu.com. Gathering data in this way is open to abuse however, as it is difficult to verify the identity of visitors.

9. YouTube, Flickr and podcasting - user-generated digital media

Anybody can publish videos on the Web for the world to see. YouTube, now owned by Google, is one of many free online video services. Videos made using web cams built into or attached to PCs and laptops are ideal for recording talking heads. It is simple to become a YouTube publisher: just go to YouTube.com, sign up for a free account, click on the Upload button and then select the option to Record from Webcam. There are many other sources for user-generated video content: mobile phones with video capability can grab and distribute footage within minutes, or relatively cheap, pocket-sized flash drive video cameras (e.g. the Flip) can record sound and vision wherever you are. Such cameras attach to any modern computer and the video file can be edited or uploaded directly to YouTube.

Getting videos to YouTube is only half of the opportunity. As with other Web 2.0 sites the concept of social networking is at its heart. YouTube members can form groups with other members around shared areas of interest. Membership to these groups can be controlled by group owners. ‘Tags’ (or keywords) can be applied to videos and the use of carefully worded titles for videos mean that the discoverability of the media is enhanced. YouTube is particularly known for its ‘viral’ videos: videos that develop a life of their own as they are ‘favorited’ and passed on from one friendship network to another just like a common cold. Clever, attractive viral videos can become overnight successes because they are engaging and provocative. Equally, many inane videos receive similar adulation, but at the end of the day it is the end-user who decides what to watch and what is important for them. This is what makes YouTube and other social media networks different to traditional

broadcasting and so potentially empowering: the editor, guided by friendship network recommendations, is the end-user and not a broadcast executive.

Flickr, now owned by Yahoo, is one of several online photo sharing services. It also handles digital video but is best known for its network of photographers. Flickr handles any form of digital image, e.g. photographs, screenshots, diagrams and illustrations. The sharing of digital media online highlights many issues such as the validity of information, copyright and ethics. Flickr, for example, has attempted to address the accessibility of information by not simply providing a technical distribution platform, but by being closely associated with the Creative Commons (CC) movement. CC offers a range of copyright licences that clearly signals what work can be used, how and by whom. Many Flickr account holders value the opportunity to have their work widely used (especially by non-commercial or educational users) and therefore apply liberal licences to their work. CC licences are being used across the web by media producers such as blog writers, musicians and photographers.

'Embedding' is another important concept of the democratic web: media can be posted to sites that are good at handling particular types of digital media, but can be integrated into other sites using the 'embed code' that these sites provide. YouTube videos, for example, are just as likely to be viewed as part of a blog post as they are on the YouTube site itself. The blog owner just has to know how to copy and paste the code. Audio technologies in the twenty-first century allow us to capture and distribute voices to anyone, anywhere, anytime.

Podcasting mean that any of us can become broadcasters, or perhaps it is more useful to say 'narrowcasters' given that technology enables us to distribute recordings economically to niche audiences. Podcasts, like blogs, are serialised publications; if you discover a podcast series that you like you can subscribe to it so automatically receiving other episodes distributed through the same channel. The word 'podcast' is often used more generally to describe any web distributed audio, not just those that have a podcast feed for serialisation. The important change over recent years, as with other media, is not the strict technical method per se, but how it is adapted to meet the needs of producers and audiences.

Podcast recording can be done using readily available digital voice recorders, recorders built into mobile phones, dedicated mid-range MP3 recorders, or high quality microphones and mixing desks plugged into digital audio workstations. Perhaps the simplest and most common approach to podcasting is to use a laptop with a built-in microphone, or one attached through the standard USB connection, together with recording software such as the freely available Audacity. Audacity allows you to record conversations or import recordings made on other devices for editing. These can be mixed together or tidied up and saved in the MP3 format ready for web delivery.

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technologies, such as Skype, are another technology that allows any of us to speak with others, wherever they are located. Skype telephony is widely used to connect people across the Internet cheaply and often at better quality than landline technology. Skype calls are usually free, even when the participants are spread across the world and can also be used for making conference calls (i.e. involving more than two people). Because the technology is computer-based, they can be easily recorded. Mobile phone applications, such as AudioBoo, allow us to podcast instantly. This is an example of the way technologies are converging: AudioBoo is a mobile microblogging audio device, like an audio version of twitter.

10. Mobile phones and ‘convergence’

The advent of smart phones such as Apple’s iPhone, Google’s Android phones, or multifunctional devices produced by other manufacturers, mean that many of us are carrying a powerful, connected, multimedia capable computer wherever we go. We can check or publish to our email, twitter feed, Facebook groups and other web services at anytime as long as there is wifi or mobile connectivity. This instant, timely access to up-to-the-second information brings a powerful agility to democracy. Five years ago the desktop computer, the laptop, the PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) and the mobile phone were generally understood to be distinct devices but rapid technical change in networking (eg wifi and broadband) and hardware manufacture, and the desire to see the \$100 laptop for educational purposes (resulting in cheap netbooks), has led to a more mobile view of everyday technology in the West. Elsewhere, in Africa for example, mobile technology has led the digital revolution due to the excessive cost of establishing a hard-wired infrastructure over huge distances in poor countries. Innovation there has impacted the drive for technical convergence.

Discovering e-democracy tools

New tools emerge continuously so the specific applications discussed here are bound to be complemented by others soon, if they have not already become the ‘next big thing’. Many people are not confident users of digital technology however confidence can be quickly developed by exploring the tools collaboratively. Once you have considered the specific tools that interest you here, follow through some of the links in the Appendix. As you explore new tools remember that the best tools will have a well-defined and limited capability, so ask “How can this tool help us?” and do not spend too much time considering what it isn’t so good at.

5) E-democracy Case Studies

Introduction

The case studies that follow illustrate how some of the technologies introduced in the previous section have been used to affect democratic change. Each case study takes a similar form, describing the context in which technology was used to facilitate democratic engagement, how it was used and by whom, and the impact it had. Questions for discussion also accompany each story.

Case Study 1 - Iranian presidential elections of 2009

Tech-savvy Iranians used the microblogging tool twitter to overcome government censorship. twitter allowed those opposing the incumbent government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to send pictures and messages to the outside world as events unfolded during the 2009 presidential election. MirHossein Mousavi, standing in opposition to Ahmadinejad, used twitter himself throughout the election (<http://twitter.com/mousavi1388>) and anyone using the twitter hashtag ‘#iranelection’ in their message collectively contributed to the updated stream of information that ensured the world’s media was able to relay news from events as they happened. The feed, made popular during the June 09 election, continues to provide a focus for those tweeting on the state of Iranian politics over six months later (<http://twitter.com/search?q=%23iranelection>).

twitter was also used by protesters, to a certain extent to organise themselves, especially after the result in favour of Ahmadinejad was announced, which many felt was an unreliable outcome. However, twitter is a public feed so its organising potential is limited; protesters knew that what was visible to their friends was just as visible to their enemies. Nevertheless, a notice posted on the twitter website on June 14th described how a scheduled maintenance operation had been delayed to avoid disrupting the important communication

role it was playing at a critical point during the events around the election. Pictures and videos of protests and of what appears to be government authorities chasing and beating protesters were also posted using online media sites such as YouTube.

Though the Iranian government eventually blocked direct access to twitter, Facebook and similar tools, other sites emerged as portals to these services, ensuring that messages were distributed. The government also blocked the use of mobile phones during the election period. However, as fast as channels were closed down new online communication methods were found by individuals and groups.

As the CBS News article 'Twitter Tells Tale Of Iran Election'

(<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/06/15/tech/main5090788.shtml>, 15 June 2009) points out, twitter and other Internet based tools are popular amongst the young and affluent and so there is likely to be a bias in the collective message that emerges through such channels. Nevertheless twitter and YouTube provided connectivity with the outside world that in a previous era would not have been available.

Questions

- How reliable is information distributed using social networks such as twitter and Facebook at times of political upheaval?
- Because it is easy to set up accounts on online social networks how do you know whether people are who they claim to be?

Resources

- "14 June 2009 Iranians protest against election results 14 June 2009" YouTube video by iranoost09, posted 14 June 2009 at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KFubPVok7A&feature=player_embedded
- "The Role of Twitter in the Iran Elections of 2009" YouTube video by pfisternia, posted 14 December 2009 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aNkeP2T5Xvw#>
- "Twitter Tells Tale Of Iran Election" CBS News online article published 15 June 2009 at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/06/15/tech/main5090788.shtml>, 15 June 2009

Case Study 2 - China's relationship with the Internet - the Great Firewall of China

Companies such as Google, Yahoo and Skype have found that in order to extend their reach into China they have had to agree to filter the content they carry according to the requirements of the Beijing Government, a position that contrasts markedly with the spirit of openness they thrive on elsewhere. For example, in December 2006 Microsoft's MSN had to shut down a Chinese blogger's site at the request of the government there.

China's firewall, known inside the country as the Golden Shield, is a series of relatively crude methods used to manage access to information. One method used by the government is the distribution of a confidential list of forbidden phrases to companies operating there, whilst all Internet traffic entering or leaving China must pass through government-controlled gateways where email and website requests are monitored.

However, the Chinese government came under great pressure to open access to restricted websites prior to the Beijing Olympics for visiting journalists, as Tara Branigan reported for the Guardian.co.uk site on 1 August 2008. Despite this, the same content remained out of bounds to Chinese citizens.

Government censors in China shut down twitter as well as other social networking and image-sharing websites on 2 June 2009 as part of their attempt to block coverage of the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Despite these attempts at controlling communication with the outside world via the Internet, over 25% of China's population use the Internet, a growth of about 1,500% over the last ten years (Internet World Stats).

Questions

- Should governments be able to censor the use of the Internet in their countries?
- How does censorship affect access to information in the West? At what levels does censorship operate and what is the impact on democracy?
- What will the impact of the Internet be in non-Western countries where its growth and penetration has been of a similar order to China's?

Resources

- 'China relaxes internet censorship for Olympics' by Tania Branigan, Guardian Online, 01 August 2008, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/01/china.olympics>
- China Censors: The Tiananmen Square Anniversary Will Not Be Tweeted' Kim Zetter, Wired, 2 June 2009, at <http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2009/06/china-censors-internet-before-tiananmen-square-anniversary/>
- Internet World Stats, online at: <http://www.internetworldstats.com>

Case Study 3: Grassroots punditry - the rise and effect of online media during the US Presidential election of 2008

Arianna Huffington, editor in chief of The Huffington Post - an aggregated blog which brings together many liberal bloggers, has claimed that: "*Were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not be president... The problem wasn't the age of the candidate; it was the age of the idea.*" The US elections were notable for the effect of blogging and the use of user-generated video distributed online. Neither of these practices should be mistaken as the territory of the young; in the US such channels were readily exploited by the politicians themselves, broadcasters, as well as politically active members of the electorate across the political spectrum.

However, there were more voters under the age of 25 in the 2008 election than in previous elections due to a boom in the US birth rate that began in 1989. As a result Obama's campaign actively sought to engage a demographic that it believed had become jaded by the traditional coverage of politics and elections on television. Both Obama's and McCain's campaigns exploited YouTube as a powerful, yet free and uncontrolled, communications channel (<http://www.youtube.com/user/BarackObamadotcom>). Democratic strategist Joe Trippi said in an interview conducted by Claire Cain Miller for the New York Times, "*The campaign's official stuff they created for YouTube was watched for 14.5 million hours... to buy 14.5 million hours on broadcast TV is \$47 million.*"

Earlier in the campaign YouTube teamed up with CNN to host primary debates for both parties who responded to video clip questions posed by the general public.

In a post election article, journalists at Politico described the 2008 presidential campaign as "*by far the most engaging in modern history because there were so many ways for voters, journalists, politicians and political organizations to follow the action or join in.*" Typical of many reflective articles Rasiej and Sifry say,

"The online tools used by the campaigns were so powerful that they left an entire new political media ecology in their wake, empowering tens of millions of citizens. These citizens are no longer just passively receiving and following the news but also creating and delivering it, as well as organizing their own campaigns on behalf of candidates and issues. The

communities they've formed have raised a bucketful of money and wielded a truckload of influence."

Much has been written about the 'vital edge' that the Obama team's understanding of the Internet gave them in a country where 33% (Pew Research Center) go online for their political commentary. But the Internet's influence on voting was diverse; the traditional media's historic dominance had been undermined. Rasiej and Sifry, in the online magazine Personal Democracy Forum discussed technology's impact on politics and revealed a number of telling statistics such as:

- Number of Facebook friends on Election Day:- Obama: 2,397,253; McCain: 622,860;
- Number of online videos mentioning the candidate uploaded across 200 platforms:- Obama: 104,454; McCain: 64,092;
- Number of Twitter (still a nascent technology during the election) followers:- Obama: 125,639; McCain: 5,319.

The New York Times article also highlights how there was *"a sea change in fact-checking, with citizens using the Internet to find past speeches that prove a politician wrong and then using the Web to alert their fellow citizens."*

Obama's team continues to run its own blog, Organizing for America (<http://www.barackobama.com>), which provides links to the Obama Plan alongside relatively inconsequential postings featuring pictures of him with his family.

Questions

- Is the use of online social media to engage electorates just a US phenomenon?
- The editorial role of professional journalism has traditionally been understood as a safeguard against political extremism in democratic societies. How does the spreading influence of the online pundit challenge the political status quo?
- Online media appears to give anyone a voice. Surely this is what democracy has aspired to, but if everyone is shouting can anyone be heard?

Resources

- 'The Reason for the Obama Victory: It's the Internet, Stupid' by Betsy Schiffman, Wired, November 7, 2008 online at: <http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2008/11/the-obama-victo/>
- 'How Obama's Internet Campaign Changed Politics' by Claire Cain Miller, New York Times, November 7, 2008 online at: <http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/07/how-obamas-internet-campaign-changed-politics/>
- 'The Web: 2008's winning ticket', Politico, by Andrew Rasiej and Michah L. Sifry, posted 12 November 2008, online at: <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1108/15520.html>

Case Study 4: Rising Tide - single issue global social networking

Rising Tide's use of the Internet is typical of many single issue campaigning organisations who have learnt how to exploit the reach of blogs, Facebook and Twitter.

In the UK, their website introduces them as *"a grassroots network of independent groups and individuals committed to taking action and building a movement against climate change."* The organisation's site uses Drupal, an open source content management tool that allows them to offer sub-sites focused on regional groups, leaflets, fact sheets, videos and reports, action announcements and links to related organisations and individuals.

Rising tide recognise that change will come in response to the actions of people not institutions and so their use of social media is appropriate in supporting this activity.

The blog format allows them to post information pages alongside regularly updated news and their 'blogroll' (links to like-minded bloggers) ensures that key messages benefit from the amplifier effect that is a characteristic of network structures.

Blogging tools such as WordPress generate an RSS feed; this means that it is easy to offer a subscription service so that members can be alerted of developments using the RSS reader of (e.g. Google Reader, Bloglines, Pageflakes, etc) of their choice.

As with any organisation that seeks to actively engage its members Rising Tide NA has its own twitter account (risingtidena) so that their microblogging news can be followed by anyone who is interested. A scan of their twitter feed during the Copenhagen Climate Conference in December 2009 (#copenhagen) shows them posting frequent messages on not only the issues, but on how the police were organising their ranks, for example,

"Police put on helmets after #blue-block people crossed the police tape before the fence #reclaimpower #rpa 2:44 AM Dec 16th from web", followed by "RT @Agent350 Photos of the big #ReclaimPower protest going down right now inside #Cop15: <http://bit.ly/6KLclx> 2:45 AM Dec 16th from web "

An analysis of these two randomly selected messages reveals that they were posted within a minute of each other using a web browser rather than a mobile phone application or text message or dedicated twitter application such as Tweetdeck. The has tag '#blue' indicates that people on twitter had decided that 'blue' would be a useful code word worth following during the demonstration and similarly '#reclaimpower' and '#pra' were also words to follow during the protest. 'RT' is the syntax used for a 'retweet' - Agent350's message in this case has been forwarded and that message contains a shortened URL link to photos of the protest at <http://bit.ly/6KLclx>. The photographs referred to can still be seen at that URL which references the 'It's Getting Hot in Here' blog which was, according to the timings of the posts and comments, being updated as events unfurled. Rising Tide NA's public Facebook presence shows the group's friends with links through to their Facebook sites and lists their Facebook campaign pages.

Questions

- To what extent does managing an effective online presence require technical skills and time?
- How can social software be used by a single issue organisation so that it represents the groups interest or mission clearly?
- How does inter-group networking amongst single issues groups help to encourage solidarity and avoid destructive divisions?

Resources

- Rising Tide NA is online at:
their blog: <http://www.risingtidenorthamerica.org>
their twitter feed: <http://twitter.com/risingtidena>
their Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/people/Rising-Tide-North-America>
- Rising Tide UK is online at: <http://risingtide.org.uk/>
- It's Getting Hot In Here is online at: <http://itsgettinghotinhere.org/2009/12/16/reclaim-power-action-begins-inside-copenhagen-climate-talks/>

Rising Tide North America use a WordPress blog. They say, "Rising Tide's tactics are diverse and creative, taking a bottom-up approach to connecting the dots between oil, war, capitalism, coal, and the destabilization of the global climate."

Case Study 5 - Getting Organised: the LabourStart campaign

LabourStart (<http://www.labourstart.org/>) is an online news service maintained by a global network of volunteers. Its aim is to serve the international trade union movement by collecting and disseminating information and by assisting unions in campaigning and in other ways. LabourStart's daily labour news is in more than 20 languages and its syndication service is used by over 700 trade union websites. News is collected from mainstream, trade union, and alternative news sources by a network of over 500 volunteer correspondents based on every continent.

LabourStart moved up a gear in its campaigning activity in 2002 with the launch of the ActNOW campaigning system. Tens of thousands of trade unionists now participate in various mass emailing campaigns and more than 50,000 individuals are currently subscribed to the LabourStart mailing list.

Eric Lee, the founder of LabourStart, continuously explores how new technologies can be used for participation and campaigning and he explains why Labourstart has, in November 2009, launched the first-ever global trade union Twitter petition campaign against Vale, the mining company which is riding rough shod over workers in Canada and Brazil.

Eric describes how he discovered that twitter, particularly in the US, is a really effective and vibrant way of organising trade unionists. It is an automated process – (so it is easy to 'manage') and has four strengths in particular:

- 1) It is free – and can take place on any computer or mobile
- 2) It reaches massive audiences
- 3) You can 're-tweet' so it is constantly cascading
- 4) It is still relatively new so it receives a great deal of media attention

Tweeting does not necessarily reach a 'young' demographic – Facebook does that. Most users are in their 30's.

The Campaign

Since being privatized in 1997, the global mining giant Vale has unleashed a vicious attack on workers. The company undermined health and safety standards in Brazil and now it's set its sights on Canada. In 2009 negotiations with the United Steelworkers (USW), Vale claimed it needed deep concessions - despite making over \$13 billion (USD) in 2008 net profits. The company's strategy is to divide and conquer by undermining seniority and providing lesser benefits to new employees. 3,500 members of the USW rejected Vale's demands and went on strike in mid-July. Vale has since announced it will hire replacement workers and force other union members to do the work of the striking miners. Meanwhile Vale workers throughout Brazil are struggling to hold on to jobs, earn a living wage, achieve minimum standards for safe working conditions and guarantee basic labor rights. Vale employees and their unions in Brazil and Canada are fighting back together, reaching out to workers in a global campaign for fair treatment at Vale.

LabourStart began a **mass email campaign** by inviting those signed up to collectively send the following (or their own) message.

Dear Vale CEO Roger Agnelli,

I am deeply concerned about how global mining company Vale is treating workers. Although Vale is highly profitable, the company has provoked a labor dispute in Canada and now is replacing the striking miners, while continuing to play hardball with workers in Brazil. Vale should quit trying to divide unions and communities. The company must return to negotiations and make fair offers in Brazil and Canada.

LabourStart learnt that Vale Inco was recruiting staff via Twitter. LabourStart would really like to have found Vale Inco recruiting scabs! Immediately following on from this, the Tweet campaign began. Eric sent the following message:

We need to turn up the heat on Vale Inco. 3,500 miners in Canada have been on strike since July and the company is not budging. Over 6,200 of you have sent off protest messages (such as the one devised for email as above) - and we need to keep growing that number. But we also have to find new and innovative ways to deliver our message to the company. It turns out that Vale Inco uses Twitter to recruit new staff. At the moment, they don't seem to be using it to recruit strike-breakers, but there's no reason why they won't. If they can use Twitter to tell people how great it is to work for their company, we can use the same tool to tell them what we think. If you are a Twitter user, please click on the 'Sign and tweet' button on that page. If not, please sign up to Twitter (it will take you only a few seconds) and then go to our petition. Over 1,000 people sent off tweets in a day targeting the rabidly anti-union U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Let's see if we can wake up Vale Inco, and bring them back to the negotiating table. Sign and tweet our campaign today.

Tweeters were then asked to Sign and Tweet a petition to show support for 3,500 striking Vale Inco workers in Canada <http://act.ly/1esRT>. The company was overwhelmed with emails, a massive petition and a huge online community keeps everyone alerted to events as they unfold. Strikers have described how important they feel this solidarity action to be.

For the present Eric is experimenting with tweeting but as he says:

I stick with a technology for about a year – it is good for democracy, then its time to move on!!

Questions

- How important might twitter be as an international solidarity and organising tool?
- What is democratic about twitter?

Resources

To explore how a trade union is using various e-democracy tools see <http://forums.e-democracy.org/groups/newham-issues/messages/topic/14XEHbPuk7iVoZvZodANoL>

6) Conclusion – strengths and challenges?

This pamphlet has briefly traced the move away from direct to representative democracy and suggested that some facets of *e-democracy* imply that a more direct and inclusive democracy is possible through new technologies. It has also been concerned to explore some of the new participatory tools and approaches available to citizens as well as political parties.

Yet whilst it is clear that *e-democracy* does open up some important, inclusive, participative spaces – as evidenced in many of the examples given in this pamphlet - some of the questions posed following the case studies indicate that there are challenges associated with *e-democracy* too.¹⁶ For example a digital divide does still exist, identity theft is a problem and online voting can be distorted through rigged 'inputs'. There is also scepticism about the impact that participants actually have through online engagement.

It is right that we are constructively critical of *e-democracy*. Whilst we continue to live in an unequal society it is unlikely that massive changes will take place within traditional political systems simply through using new methods and approaches. How much will these tools help to overcome alienation in a real and fundamental sense?

However as tools for organising, getting your message across, networking and acting as citizens, the tools discussed here – as well as the ideas associated with *e-democracy* such as inclusion, participation, equality – should not only enhance political literacy but contribute towards strengthening democracy in a number of important ways.

¹⁶ For a full discussion on 'challenges' see OECD 2003

Appendix 1 – Resources (work in progress)

Articles and Data

- Jay Rosen (2006) 'The People Formerly Known as the Audience' PressThink blog, online at: http://journalism.nyu.edu/pubzone/weblogs/pressthink/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html
- Stats on internet usage: <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats4.htm>
- Measuring the Information Society - The ICT Development Index: <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/publications/idi/2009/index.html>
- <http://stevenclyft.com/> - incorporating <http://www.publicus.net/articles/edemresources.html>
- OECD (2003) Promises and Problems of *e-democracy*, - challenges of online citizen engagement <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/9/11/35176328.pdf>

Various e-democracy sites/portals

- They Work For You: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/>
- Ask Bristol: <http://www.askbristol.com>
- Number 10 e-Petitions: <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/> (+7% of Britons have signed an e-petition on this site) "Petitions have long been sent to the Prime Minister by post or delivered to the Number 10 door in person. You can now both create and sign petitions on this website too, giving you the opportunity to reach a potentially wider audience and to deliver your petition directly to Downing Street."
- **Fixmystreet.com:** <http://www.groupsnearyou.com>: Groups Near You helps people in your neighbourhood get to know each other
- <http://www.louder.org.uk/index.php>
- <http://www.headstar.com/site/index.php> - Publishes e-government bulletins and lots of stuff on the UK 2010 general election.
- **E-democracy.org** - The online town hall that works - with real names and civility - <http://forums.e-democracy.org/>
- *e-democracy* – Europe - Articles and resources about trends and issues relating to *e-democracy* in Europe <http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/focus-on-countries/europe/trends-and-issues-europe/e-democracy-europe.html>

US

- <http://forums.e-democracy.org/> - online town hall

WEA SCHEME OF WORK		Climate Change			
Course title: E-democracy					
Tutor:					
Course Learning Outcomes:					
By the end of the course the learners will:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Be familiar with the nature, purpose, tools and uses of e-democracy – nationally and internationally. ● Have considered the strengths and challenges of e-democracy as a process of engagement through a case study approach. ● Have explored and reflected on how e-democracy can be used by them in their own areas of interest and as active citizens. 					
Session Number/Date	Learning Outcomes	Learning Methods	Resources Methods	Assessment Reviews	Progress
Session 1 (2.5 hours)	<p>Developed an understanding of the nature of e-democracy.</p> <p>Developed an understanding of the various tools and trends associated with e-democracy and how these can be used by the active citizen.</p> <p>Begun to think about 'effectiveness' through case study examples. Interactive exercises 'Climate Change – get active'.</p>	Discussion, group work, investigation and reporting back.	Use of IT suite Reading short extracts e-democracy pamphlet.	Feedback commentary, questioning and responses, self assessment, peer responses.	
Session 2 (2.5 hours)	Students will have: Reflected on and 'practiced' how e-democracy can be used for their own campaigning and/or political interests through case study work and group discussion.	Discussion, group work investigation and reporting back.	e-democracy pamphlet.	Feedback commentary questioning and responses, self assessment, peer responses.	



WEA SESSION PLAN 1		E-democracy	
Course Title: E-democracy			
Session Aims		To explore the nature and purpose of e-democracy and to think about its effectiveness.	
Session Learning Outcomes		<p>By the end of the session students will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed an understanding of the nature of e-democracy. Developed an understanding of the various tools and trends associated with e-democracy and how these can be used by the active citizen. Begun to think about 'effectiveness' through case study examples. 	
Resources			
IT learning centre			
10.00 - 10.10 - 10.30	<p>Course Introduction</p> <p>To identify student expectations and understanding of e-democracy.</p>	<p>Course Introduction.</p> <p>manage group activity - Activity 1.</p>	n/a
10.30 - 11.15	<p>Reflecting on democracy and e-democracy. What claims are made for e-democracy?</p> <p>Break.</p>	Tutor input - Activity 2.	<p>Check if these expectations were met at end of workshop.</p> <p>Questions, activity and discussion.</p>
11.15 - 11.30			
11.30 - 12.30	<p>To continue to consider the strengths and challenges of e-democracy by looking at case studies.</p>	<p>Introduce two case studies - Activity 3.</p>	<p>Group work and independent reflections on expectations.</p> <p>Reading short extract/quote and discussion.</p> <p>Group work exploring what works/what doesn't work/what is effective through case study examples.</p> <p>Questions, discussion, activity, group work and report back.</p>
Notes and comments:			

E-DEMOCRACY

WEA SESSION PLAN 2		E-democracy		
Course Title E-democracy				
Session Aims To enable participants to 'try' e-democracy as well as reflect on its usefulness/relevance/value in terms of own campaigning interests as an active citizen.				
Session Learning Outcomes By the end of the session students will have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflected on and 'practiced' how e-democracy can be used for their own campaigning and/or political interests through case study work, activity and group discussion. 				
Resources IT learning centre.				
Time	Activity Objectives	Tutor activity	Learner activity	Methods for checking learning
1.00 - 2.15	To explore e-democracy and campaigning.	Input & Facilitation - Activity 4.	Applying lessons from case studies to own issues/ look something up/ e-campaigns.	Questions, activity and discussion, group work and report back.
2.15	Break.			
2.30 - 3.10	The e-democracy debate.	Input & Facilitation – Activity 5.	Participation in debate around a motion.	Identification of key trends and being able to argue for or against them in a debate format.
3.10 - 3.30	Evaluation and what next?	Facilitation - Activity 6.	Evaluation activity.	Evaluation activity.
Notes and comments:				

TUTOR NOTES SESSION PLAN 1: e-democracy

10.00 - Course Introduction (10 mins)

- Welcome. Ask people to introduce themselves, say where they are from and what their interest is in e-democracy. (keep this very brief)
- Take participants through any housekeeping issues – coffee times, fire escape, toilets, lunch if applicable, etc.
- Ask if there are any questions, if anyone has to leave early, etc .
- Outline the session aims and outcomes (whether it is session 1, or sessions 1 & 2.) Describe the day to them.

Idea!

Ideally participants will raise questions / issues as you go along but sometimes it is preferable to put together a questions/concept board. Participants can then write any concerns/issues, etc they have and want to discuss on post-it notes. Tutors can then find 10 minutes at the end of a session to address these 'notes'.

10.10 - 10.30 - Student expectations and understandings of e-democracy

ACTIVITY 1 – What is e-democracy?

- **Part 1** - Ask students to think of one thing they want to get out of the day. Ask them to write this on a post-it note and put it on a sheet of flipchart – telling the group what it is as they post it up. Tutors can refer back to this at the end of the final session. **(5 mins)**

NOTE: It is important that tutors respond to the expectations raised in this activity – provided that they are relevant and realistic! It may be that tutors need to tweak the programme slightly in order to meet expectations if this seems appropriate and reasonable.

- **Part 2** - Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4 (depending on numbers in class). Ask each group to brainstorm the question: What is e-democracy? The way to answer this is to contrast it with 'traditional' democracy. Ask someone from each group to write up the words/ideas suggested by participants onto a piece of flipchart and prepare to report back verbally to the full group. **(5 mins)**
- Tutors can then ask for report backs and list the key words. **(10 mins)**

Checking learning?

At various times during the report back and in their responses, tutors can ask how these ideas /actions compare with 'traditional' democracy (in terms of tools, activities and process). (See pamphlet)

10.30 - 11.15 – Reflecting on democracy and e-democracy. What claims are made for e-democracy?

You need to introduce this session by outlining some of the ‘problems’ facing traditional mature democracies. Information can be found in the e-democracy pamphlet but you can source your own data too. Concerns range from low voter turnout to the skewed demographic (no young people voting). Also, how alienated are people from traditional politics and politicians? Why is this? Are they turning more to ‘single issue politics’ such as climate change or the environment? The tutor needs to introduce this session by asking (and answering) some of these questions. **(10mins)**

Activity 2 – What claims does e-democracy make?

- See attached Extract 1. Divide people into pairs or threes and ask them to read the extract.
- What are their views about some of the points being made?
- How convincing do they think the arguments are about the advantages of e-democracy?
- Ask the group to bullet point 5 ‘problems with democracy’ and then give 5 possible e-democracy solutions.
- A spokesperson from each group can then report back. **(35 mins in total)**

Checking learning?

- questions, discussion, activity, group work and report back.

Ask participants to back up their views. How well have they understood the extracts?

11.15 - 11.30 - BREAK

11.30 - 12.30 - Case studies – using e-democracy approaches and ICT

Activity 3 – Case Studies

- Choose two of the case studies in the e-democracy pamphlet and ask participants to read them. If there are any issues around reading you could read the case studies aloud as they are very short.
- Ask participants to address the questions that accompany the case studies. If you are in a room that has access to computers, you could also ask participants to look at some of the sites listed under the two case studies. Through this they can familiarise themselves with the usage of Internet tools.
- Rather than separate into small groups, participants may prefer to stay together for this activity. Add further questions to the case studies or omit others depending on the interests of the group.
- You might wish to link this activity to the ‘debate’ in session 2. **(55 mins in total)**

Session Close (5 mins)

Close the session by asking for comments on the session and spend a few minutes looking at the comment board if necessary.

TUTOR NOTES SESSION PLAN 2: e-democracy

1.00 - 2.15 - *e-democracy* and campaigning

The aim of this session is to encourage participants to consider some of the tools and ideas they explored throughout Session 1 and apply them to their own campaign - or a hypothetical one.

As tutor you may wish to ensure that students are clear about the variety of tools available electronically. (See pamphlet). However, if you do not feel confident about this it may be appropriate to ask for some ICT support. It is assumed (though not essential) that participants have access to computers for some or all of the *e-democracy* course. **(30 mins introduction)**

Activity 4 - Campaigning

Divide students into small groups and give them the following linked activities:

Part 1) Imagine that you are part of a small local action group and that you need to raise awareness of the issues that your group feels are important. You want to target:

- others in your community to encourage greater understanding of your mission and participation in achieving your aims
- the press so that they have access to well researched, informative and vibrant information that you can refer to in a digital press release
- your MP to demonstrate that your concerns are real and are shared by similar groups nationally and internationally

For each of the above, come up with two technologies that you might use as a group to meet your needs. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the technologies in each case. **(25 mins)**

Part 2) Now consider your own political and campaigning interests. How might you begin to think about e-democracy tools and approaches in relation to your own interests? What options and possibilities emerge?

(15 minutes) Ask participants to report back and share their thoughts with the wider group. **(5 mins)**

2.15 - 2.30 - Break

2.30 - 3.10 - The debate: our conclusions on e-democracy

You will need to briefly introduce the debate. **(5 mins)**

Activity 5 - Debating

The motion is: E-democracy and ICT offer the best solutions for greater participation, accountability and results in the macro and micro politics of the future.

Look at the pamphlet to explain this further but obviously by this is meant 'big and little' issue politics.

Divide the group into 2. One group will speak for the motion, one will speak against. Each group needs to select two speakers to do this. Groups need 10 minutes to prepare their arguments. Each speaker is then given 3 minutes to put the case for or against (a total of 4 speakers in all) and the remainder of the group have to vote at the end of the speeches as to which arguments they found the most convincing - regardless of the group they were originally in. The tutor will sum up at the end of the debate and before putting the motion to the vote. (35 mins in total)

3.10 - 3.30 - Evaluation and what next?

Activity 6 – Evaluation

First of all return to the post-it notes and ask people to respond as to whether or not their expectations have been met.

Then ask each participant one-by-one to:

- Share one good thing about the day
- Share one thing that could be improved
- Describe one thing (or not) that they are going to think about further in relation to e-democracy and e-tools

Give participants a couple of minutes to think about responses. End the day.

INTERIM Activities

If *e-democracy* is taught over two separate sessions (i.e. 2 evenings on consecutive weeks) you can set tasks such as these below so that students can 'have a go' themselves. They are written directly to the student.

1. Social Networking

Join twitter at www.twitter.com and develop an e-democracy network.

(Note: you can remove yourself from networks as easily as you can add yourself to them).

Your challenge is to 'follow' some of the following and compare how they use twitter in their political and social lives. As you watch their twitter activity consider how they come across on twitter compared to other media that they might use.

Find and follow some of the following people and find out who else is following them (you can find people's twitter names on their own websites or by searching for them at twitter.com):

- Your MP or another MP who you are interested in
- A friend or someone you have met who is also interested in e-democracy
- A multi-national company or the press officer or other representative of such a company or large organisation
- A well-known pressure group
- Somebody who has tweeted about a topic, place or person that interests you (hint: use <http://search.twitter.com/>)

Look out for people using hash tags in their posts (e.g. #ourCause). Find out how many different people are using the same hash tag to share information on a particular topic:

- Can you see any evidence of messages that make reference to other tweeters by using the @ symbol?
- Can you see any evidence of ReTweets where messages contain 'RT' at the beginning of a message?

2. Blogging

Go to www.blogger.com or www.wordpress.com and set up a personal blog. If you are nervous about doing this use a pseudonym. Find out how to make a post. Give your post a catchy title using words that will stand out. In your first post briefly introduce yourself and the things that you find important in life. Write it in an interesting and engaging style so that people who come across it are likely to check out other posts you make. Ask your colleagues from the e-democracy class to check out your blog and respond!

EXTRACT 1 - e-democracy.....

1) Taken from a presentation on E-democracy and E-government, Peter Ferdinand, University of Warwick,

E-democracy is a quiet revolution, which will transform the nature of representative democracy by facilitating more direct and more numerous links between representatives and individual voters.

Officials will come under greater direct pressure to be accountable to citizens who become used to asserting claims directly themselves, rather than just relying upon their representatives to forward their cases and complaints.

2) Taken from wiki-pedia and associated resources

E-democracy suggests greater and more active citizen participation enabled by the Internet, mobile communications, and other technologies in today's representative democracy, as well as through more participatory or direct forms of citizen involvement in addressing public challenges. Electronic democracy can help improve democratic participation, increase civic and political literacy and voter apathy and become a useful asset for political discussion, education, debate and participation.

E-democracy can reinvigorate interest in the democratic process. And one of its goals is to reverse the cynicism citizens have about their government institutions.

E-democracy offers an incredible range of data and information at the tap of a key. It also leads to a more simplified process and greater access to government information. It makes people more accountable as citizens can see what is going on.

E-democracy can also carry the benefit of reaching out to youth as a mechanism to increase youth voter turnout in elections and raise awareness amongst youth. With the consistent decline of voter turnout, e-democracy and electronic voting mechanisms can help reverse that trend.

Challenges:**1) Trust**

There is a need for popular trust if the presumed advantages of e-democracy are to be realized. e-democracy must not erode the existing quality of democracy, and preferably should enhance it.

2) Access

e-democracy should ensure the free and fair access for all citizens to the democratic process. It offers access and an inclusion possibility for some but raises the challenge of marginalization of the e-unskilled.

3) The Challenge of Security

E-voting poses the challenge of maintaining the security of the system and the privacy of the individual voter, which involves:

- a) Ensuring the system registers each electronic vote accurately whilst at the same time maintaining the anonymity of the vote.
- b) Ensuring the integrity of the system against attempts to manipulate the outcome and, possibly, crash it.
- c) Preserving the privacy of the voter, despite the need to carry out checks on the functioning of the system. This also imposes an obligation on people working in this sector not to misuse or lose an individual's data.

