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Abstract

Municipalities in several countries have adopted measures of e-democracy in order to strengthen citizen involvement in the political decision-making. For this reason it has been expected that the Internet would lead to a deepening of democracy. However, e-democratic measures do not necessarily entail a deeper involvement of citizens in the political decision-making; it can also serve to strengthen the traditional representative structures. This study examines the implementation of e-democracy in the websites of 188 Finnish municipalities in order to assess whether the initiatives offered adapt a representative, participatory or deliberative perspective on democracy. The results suggest that the Finnish municipalities largely use their websites to inform citizens on on-going decision-making processes, thereby strengthening the traditional representative democracy rather than deepening the democratic involvement of citizens.

Introduction

The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet has been offered as a remedy for curing the perceived democratic ills. Scholars suggest that the Internet may help revive democracy by allowing greater interaction between citizens and representatives in the quest to ensure a thriving democracy (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Loader & Mercea, 2012). Authorities in several countries have been eager to implement e-democratic solutions to bolster their democratic credentials (Calista et al., 2010; Segard, 2010). This solution has also been tried in the Nordic countries (Torpe & Nielsen, 2004; Haug, 2007; Olsen & Solstad, 2012).

A central issue is the extent to which the authorities make use of the possibilities offered by the Internet and related ICTs to implement measures that allow citizens more of a say in the political decision-making. Various initiatives have been launched under the label of e-democracy or e-participation (Chadwick, 2003; Päiväranta & Sæby, 2006; Scott, 2006). All of these initiatives aim to enhance the functioning of democracy with the help of the new technological possibilities, but they differ in the extent to which they empower citizens in the political decision-making. Hence, the implications for democratic practices are likely to differ depending on the kind of initiatives launched (cf. Michels, 2011).

For this reason, it is important to examine whether authorities use their websites to implement measures of e-democracy to empower citizens. This has been a particularly salient topic at the local level of government, since this is where most democratic innovations have been implemented (Smith, 2009: 20). Previous

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empirical studies have often been case studies of specific introductions of e-democracy (Sirkkunen & Kotilainen, 2004; Märker, 2009; Marques 2010). Although these studies may help generate knowledge on what initiatives are successful they cannot help us understand the extent to which authorities have launched initiatives and what forms they take. For this reason, other studies have studied how local authorities use their websites for democratic purposes more generally (Pratchett et al., 2006; Medaglia, 2007; Colombo, 2010).

This study contributes to this research agenda by examining e-democratic measures on 188 Finnish municipal websites. As the other Nordic countries, Finland has traditionally had a strong representative democracy at the local level (Sjöblom, 2011). At the same time Finland has a tradition for being early adopters of the opportunities offered by the Internet (cf. Milner, 2002: 131–132). There are therefore reasons to expect the Finnish municipalities to use their websites to enhance the possibilities for democratic participation, in particular considering the current challenges the municipalities are facing when it comes to strengthening the local democracy (Sjöblom, 2011: 258; Pihjala & Sandberg, 2012). Nevertheless, no systematic research has examined the extent to which this is actually the case.

The structure of this article is as follows. The first section outlines different perspectives on e-democracy and what democratic goals it ought to fulfil. The following section outlines how these perspectives on e-democracy can be identified through an empirical examination of the initiatives offered by municipal websites and how the study was carried out. The following section presents the results of the empirical examination before discussing the implications of the findings in the final section.

E-democracy and involvement of citizens

Citizens around the world are growing increasingly sceptical towards the political authorities and are less likely to be willing to become politically active (Stoker, 2006; Hay, 2007). This trend has also been noticeable in the Nordic countries despite these countries having high levels of political support in a comparative perspective (Bengtsson, 2012). The developments in citizen attitudes and behaviour have been a cause for concern in the established democracies at state and local levels alike.

One of the remedies offered to revive the legitimacy of democracies has been connected to the potential of the Internet and ICTs more generally in involving citizens in the political decision-making (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Loader & Mercea, 2012). The new communication technologies offer possibilities for authorities to reinvigorate the relationship to citizens and thereby alleviate the democratic problems by deepening democracy. This development has been particularly strong at the local level where we find the bulk of the democratic innovations implemented in recent years (Smith, 2009: 20).

E-government and e-democracy are two terms used to refer to the effects of ICTs on the relationship between governments and their constituents (Tuzzi et

al., 2007: 33). *E-democracy* refers to efforts that aim to increase the participation of citizens through ICTs (Chadwick, 2003: 448; Päiväranta & Sæby, 2006; Scott, 2006) by implementing top-down online initiatives that offer citizens possibilities for taking part in politics (Coleman & Blumler, 2009: 90-138). Studies of *e-government* typically concern the use of public services via the Internet or related ICTs (Beynon-Davies & Martin, 2004; Suen, 2006; Lim, 2010). Even if the differences between these two perspectives are not always clear cut it is important to observe the principal differences that exist between them (cf. Musso et al., 2000; Chadwick, 2003; Smith, 2009: 143). Studies of e-government frequently concern efficiency and cost reduction and frequently conceive the individual as a client using the services offered by the municipality. Contrary to this, studies of e-democracy conceptualise the individual as a citizen trying to influence political outcomes. This distinction is important since it affects what services and initiatives are examined in the studies. Studies of e-government include criteria such as user friendliness and operability of the web pages whereas e-democracy studies constrict the examination to features that enable citizen intervention in the political processes (Chadwick, 2003; Scott, 2006). Although both are of importance when considering the relationship between citizens and authorities, the individual in a citizen role is of primary importance from a democratic perspective (Chadwick, 2003).

When the authorities introduce such e-democratic initiatives, they ostensibly give citizens possibilities for influencing the political processes and thereby strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the decision-making. However, democracy is not a uniform concept and different models of democracy can be identified (Held, 2006). The extent and forms of possibilities on offer can be connected to different normative democratic ideals of how democracy ought to function and consequently what role ICTs should play in strengthening democracy. Although different conceptualisations exist, for the present purposes a basic distinction can be made between representative, participatory and deliberative democratic perspectives on democracy. These three perspectives correspond to different normative theories of democracy and understandings of how citizens ought to be involved in the political decision-making (Scott, 2006; Päiväranta & Sæby, 2006; Held, 2006).

The *representative perspective* on democracy resembles the classic approach to the role of citizens in representative democracies and is closely connected to what Held (2006) refers to as competitive elitism. This model is associated with thinkers such as Max Weber and Joseph Schumpeter and emphasises negative aspects of popular participation and regard massive participation as even being dangerous (Held, 2006: 125-157; Michels, 2011). The representative perspective as outlined in this study does not necessarily prescribe to the negative view of citizens found in the writings of these writers. It does, however, agree that the democratic role of citizens should be confined to choosing their leader through elections. Democracy is seen as an institutional arrangement for reaching decisions where citizens select representatives in free and fair elections who take decisions on behalf of society. All decisions have democratic legitimacy since

they are backed by at least a majority of all representatives and therefore also a majority of all voters. Ensuring a functioning democracy thus becomes a question of providing citizens with adequate information on the behaviour of their representatives to make informed electoral choices. For e-democracy, this entails that the municipal websites should predominantly give citizens access to information on what topics are under consideration in the municipality, since this makes it easier for citizens to hold the elected decision-makers accountable on Election Day. In this sense, initiatives that accord to this perspective may strengthen the individual as a voter, but they do not necessarily entail popular involvement on a daily basis.

The *participatory perspective* grants citizens a more active role in political decision-making, since these are considered to be both willing and able to take an active role in this. By taking part in a more direct fashion, citizens can ensure that their views are duly taken into consideration during the decision-making and are expressed in the final policy outcome. Participatory scholars have stressed that participation leads to better decisions in accordance with the preferences of citizens and that being active can be a valuable way for citizens to gain a better understanding of society (Pateman, 1970). This perspective emphasises Dahl's criteria of effective participation, according to which citizens should have adequate and equal opportunities for expressing their preferences for the decision-making and to place questions on the agenda and or expressing reasons for endorsing one outcome rather than another (Haug, 2007: 81). Democratic societies need to foster feelings of political efficacy and facilitate the direct participation of citizens in key institutions of society (Held, 2006: 215). For e-democracy, this entails that the primary role of the municipal websites is to channel information from citizens to their representatives, thereby guiding the municipal policy-making in accordance with citizen preferences (Chadwick, 2003: 448).

The *deliberative perspective* offers a third conceptualisation of democracy. As with the participatory perspective, there is an emphasis on citizen involvement in political decision-making, but the deliberative perspective on democracy to a larger extent highlights the possibilities for developing and modifying preferences during participation (Fung, 2004; Wiklund, 2005; Rishel, 2011). The learning aspect of participation also emphasised by participatory scholars such as Pateman (1970) hereby becomes central, since democratic politics should not just be about getting what you want, it should be about finding out what you want. The deliberative perspective emphasises Dahl's democratic criteria of enlightened understanding, which states that all citizens ought to have adequate and equal opportunities for discovering what choices best serve citizens' interests (Haug, 2007: 81). The aim should be to establish procedures that enable political decisions to be based on the free and reasoned assent of citizens (Held, 2006: 253) and adhere to norms of inclusion, reasonableness, political equality and publicity (Rishel, 2011: 416-417). A number of institutional mechanisms can support deliberative decision-making in an urban setting (Fung, 2004). Compared to the unidirectional flows of information in both the representative and participatory perspectives, communication according to the deliberative

perspective is multidirectional and interactive (Chadwick, 2003: 449). For e-democracy, this entails that e-democratic initiatives should emphasise allowing deliberation among citizens and among citizens and their representatives to achieve a dialogue that promotes the common good. This also involves ensuring that different voices are included to achieve an equal and inclusive political process. A previous study of Swedish municipalities suggests that websites have deliberative potential that often remain unfulfilled (Wiklund, 2005).

To sum up, table 1 presents the distinguishing features of these three perspectives on democracy and the role of government websites in facilitating their realisation.

Table 1. Three perspectives on democracy

	Representative perspective	Participatory perspective	Deliberative perspective
Conception of democracy	<i>Democracy requires free and fair elections where citizens elect their representatives</i>	<i>Democracy requires active citizens who give input to elected representatives</i>	<i>Democracy requires continuous dialogue among citizens and with elected representatives</i>
Role of citizens	<i>Choose between rivaling political elites</i>	<i>Participate in political decision-making by giving input or taking decisions</i>	<i>Engage in dialogue with citizens and representatives to enable enlightened understanding</i>
Role of website	<i>Information from decision-makers to citizens so they can make informed electoral choices</i>	<i>Information from citizens to decision-makers to guide policy-making in accordance with citizen preferences</i>	<i>Information feedback loop between citizens and decision makers to help form and transform preferences</i>

Note: Table based on Chadwick (2003), Päivärinta & Sæby (2006), Held (2006 and Haug (2007).

It is important to be aware of the differences between these perspectives, since different democratic innovations have different implications for both the involved citizens and society at large (Michels, 2011). Efforts that aim to influence the direct participation of citizens may serve to increase the influence of citizens and the openness of the decision-making, whereas more deliberative efforts are more apt at increasing the knowledge and skills of the individuals involved (Michels, 2011: 290; see also Smith, 2009 for a general account of the differences). Accordingly, democratic participatory initiatives including e-democratic initiatives can serve different democratic perspectives that are not necessarily mutually compatible.

E-democracy can serve to strengthen the representative democracy by giving citizens additional channels of information on what is going on in the political processes (cf. Olsen & Solstad, 2012). However, e-democracy can also deepen

democracy by providing innovative new ways for popular involvement and thereby give the inhabitants the chance to be directly involved in the political decision-making. The three perspectives can be conceived as a continuous deepening of democracy, moving from a thin version associated with the representative perspective over the participatory perspective to the deep democracy entailed in the deliberative democratic model. According to this understanding, the perspectives provide a sequential deepening of democracy by offering citizens more comprehensive roles in the political decision-making.

It has been debated whether the Internet and related ICTs contribute to improving the functioning of democracy by empowering citizens. Some fear that the electronic possibilities create a *digital divide*, since citizens differ in both capabilities and opportunities to take advantage of the new possibilities (Norris, 2001). In a similar vein, it has been contended that politics on the Internet is *politics-as-usual*, meaning the digital revolution does little to alter the existing inequalities in power and influence since the same inequalities are recreated online (Margolis & Renick, 2000; Hindman, 2009). When it comes to the implementation of e-democratic initiatives from above, it has been questioned whether these reflect a genuine interest to empower citizens, since the initiatives are often tokenistic gestures rather than genuine attempts to deepen democracy (Coleman & Blumler, 2009: 114-116). They may therefore derail citizen efforts to influence political matters and even weaken rather than strengthen democracy.

Even when launched with the best of intentions, the initiatives may not be able to fulfil the stated objectives of empowering citizens, since doubts have been raised over the empowering potential of specific initiatives such as forums (Smith et al., 2012) and e-petitions (Panagiotopoulos & Elliman, 2010). Deeper involvement may also serve to exacerbate existing differences rather than create a rational dialogue (Sunstein, 2007). Several studies of municipal and state websites suggest that the development of e-democracy is still at an embryonic state in several countries (cf. Scott, 2006; Pratchett et al., 2006; Medaglia, 2007; Seifert & Chung, 2009; Marques, 2010; Colombo, 2010; Nasi et al., 2011; Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2012).

Hence, it cannot be taken for granted that the use of ICTs contributes to a deepening of democracy. As Smith (2009: 142) reminds us, the jury remains out on the impact of ICTs on democratic theory and practice since there is little empirical work that has been done on the topic. This study contributes to this research agenda by examining whether the municipal websites in Finland serve to empower citizens.

Examining e-democracy in Finnish municipalities

Previous studies examining e-democracy in Finland have been case studies of particular examples (e.g. Sirkkunen & Kotilainen, 2004). A systematic overview of the possibilities offered by the local authorities in Finland is therefore still lacking. The use of e-democracy at the local level have been studies in other

countries (Pratchett et al., 2006; Medaglia, 2007; Colombo, 2010), but the situation in Finland is so far unknown.

This study offers such a comprehensive overview of all municipalities in Finland with more than 5,000 inhabitants. The study was limited to these larger municipalities since a preliminary examination indicated that municipalities with lower population sizes do not include as many efforts, probably due to a certain population basis being necessary to absorb the costs associated with e-democracy (The study indicates that the number of initiatives on offer levels of around 15,000 inhabitants; more on this in the empirical section). While the 188 municipalities only represent 56 per cent of the 336 municipalities in Finland at the time of writing, they cover about 5 million of the total population of about 5.4 million inhabitants in Finland, or about 93 per cent. In this sense, the study provides a comprehensive insight into what e-democratic initiatives the Finnish population has access to at the local level.

Finland presents an interesting case since it has traditionally had a strong representative democracy at the local level (Sjöblom, 2011) and a tradition for being early adopters of the opportunities offered by the Internet (cf. Milner, 2002: 131–132). For this reason, the Finnish municipalities might be expected to be leading the way when it comes to the introduction of e-democratic innovations. This presumption is supported by a study of e-government comprising 23 municipal websites around the world, where Helsinki was ranked fourth when it comes to democratic participation behind Seoul, Singapore and Bangkok (Calista et al., 2010). Hence, the Finnish municipalities may well rank highly when it comes e-democratic efforts in an international comparison. Finland may even be considered a most likely case study when it comes to the implementation of e-democracy since it ostensibly offers a fertile environment for e-democracy.

A central challenge is to determine what initiatives are connected to what perspective on democracy to be able to determine whether the initiatives serve to deepen democracy. *The representative perspective* includes initiatives that help citizens evaluate the actions of their elected representatives and make it possible for voters to make an informed electoral decision. This in particular concerns e-democratic initiatives that make it possible to follow the local political decision-making in the city council such as information on upcoming council meetings, efforts to make decisions public, possibilities for following meeting over the Internet, and the possibility for politicians and other central local leaders to inform citizens via the website.

The participatory perspective involves initiatives that channel information from citizens to decision-makers, since citizens ought to give inputs into the political decision-making and when appropriate be allowed to take decisions themselves. This includes initiatives that give inhabitants possibilities for making initiatives for decisions, commenting on proposals and decision-making feature such as e-polls. These can be general in character and make it possible for citizens to voice their views on the general political decision-making, but they can also make it possible to give detailed input to specific policy processes.

The deliberative perspective includes the formation of citizen preferences rather than just possibilities for voicing pre-existing preferences. Hence, deliberative initiatives should enable a dialogue among citizens and among citizens and decision-makers. This includes the existence of citizen forums where citizens can debate current event with each other and public figures taking part. However, it also includes other initiatives that enable discussion, reasoning, and argumentation as central elements in the political dialogue, as well as initiatives aimed at including a broader range of voices in the debate.

A list of all the indicators used in the study to identify the three perspectives on democracy can be seen in table 2.

Table 2. Empirical indicators for three perspectives on e-democracy

Initiative	Empirical indicators
REPRESENTATION: INFORMATION FROM MUNICIPALITY TO INHABITANTS	
Contact information	<i>Information on members of the local council and how to contact them</i>
Information on local council meetings	<i>Schedules for when and where the next local council will take place</i>
Information for local council meetings	<i>Agendas and protocols for meetings</i>
Possibility for watching meetings	<i>Live streaming of city council meetings and/or recordings of previous meetings</i>
Newsletter	<i>Possibility to subscribe to newsletter or RSS on current events</i>
Social media	<i>Link to profile on Facebook, Twitter etc.</i>
Blogs	<i>Leading politicians write blogs discussing current events</i>
PARTICIPATION: INFORMATION FROM INHABITANTS TO MUNICIPALITY	
Individual initiatives	<i>Possibility to provide initiatives for decision-making through e-mail or formulary (§28)</i>
E-polls	<i>Possibility to vote on current issues via electronic polls</i>
E-petitions	<i>Possibility to gather signatures to launch proposals</i>
Commenting	<i>Possibility to comment on proposals under consideration by council</i>
Mobilisation	<i>Information on how to influence decision-making and find and organize likeminded citizens</i>
User feedback	<i>Possibility to give feedback on decisions and service</i>
DELIBERATION: INTERACTION BETWEEN MUNICIPALITY AND INHABITANTS	
Citizen Forums	<i>Discussion forums for citizens</i>
Official discussions	<i>Regular public discussions with officials in forum or chat</i>
Questioning	<i>Possibility to ask questions to and receive answers from officials in public</i>
Outreach	<i>Efforts to mobilize marginalized groups such as youths or immigrants</i>

This list of measures is used to assess the extent of e-democracy in Finnish municipalities and in particular what democratic perspectives are dominant. The scores for each perspective are combined to form indexes that measure the extent to which each municipality has offered introduced e-democratic initiatives that correspond to each perspective and a combined score of e-democracy. The examination was conducted by assessing the initiatives available on the main website of each municipality (usually www.MUNICIPALITYNAME.fi) by navigating the menus and using the search function where one existed.

The data confer some limitations on the validity of the conclusions. Finland is bilingual and therefore several municipalities have versions in both Swedish and Finnish, and some even in English or other language versions. Since there may be substantial differences among these versions, only the version in the majority language of the municipality in question has been examined. In practice, this entails that most websites are examined in the Finnish version, a few in the Swedish version, while the other language versions have not been examined. The study was conducted during April-June 2012 and since the websites of the municipalities are in constant development the results may quickly be outdated. Nevertheless, although the results do not necessarily provide an adequate representation of individual sites they do provide a valid general assessment of the current state of e-democracy at the local level in Finland.

Furthermore, some municipalities make use of third party websites designed to increase popular involvement. This most notably includes the page www.aloitekanava.fi, which aims to activate youths into local political matters by offering them a channel to propose initiatives for the local community. However, this study focuses on the possibilities made available through the municipal websites and the use of third party websites is not considered an e-democratic initiative in itself (although manifestly linking to this or similar sites is registered as an effort to mobilize marginalised groups). In a similar vein, the use of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter for involving citizens is only considered if there is a visible indication of this possibility on the website. In this sense the results may underestimate the actual possibilities offered to citizens via the Internet, but they provide an adequate picture of the possibilities on offer on the municipal websites.

It is difficult to compare the results obtained with previous studies with similar objectives from other countries since the studies use different measures to capture the extent of e-democracy. It is therefore not possible to draw solid conclusions on the efforts of the Finnish municipalities in a comparative perspective. Nevertheless, whenever possible parallels will be drawn to previous studies from other countries and in particular other Nordic countries since these have similar local government structures. This makes it possible to gain some understanding of how the Finnish efforts rank internationally even if the objective of the study is not to perform a comparative study as such.

The empirical results

In the following, the results for each of the three perspectives are presented. Table 3 presents the results for the representative perspective and the dissemination of information from the local authorities to inhabitants.

Table 3. Representative e-democracy in Finnish municipalities

#	Indicator	n	%
1	Agendas & protocols	188	100.0
2	Contact information	164	87.2
3	Meeting schedule	142	75.5
4	Social media	58	30.9
5	Newsletter	57	30.3
6	Webcasts	23	12.2
7	Blogs	22	11.7
Mean score on index from 0-1 (std. D.)		0.50 (0.18)	

Note: Data compiled by author

The figures are the number and percentages of the municipalities that include the initiative in question. The final row shows the mean score on an index for the representative perspective ranging from 0-1, where each municipality is scored according to the number of initiatives included on their website and the standard deviation is in parenthesis.

All municipalities include information on agendas for upcoming meetings and protocols for past meetings. Although there were considerable differences in how far back in time the records go, this clearly shows that the Finnish municipalities put substantial efforts into disseminating information on meetings of the city council through their websites. 87.2 per cent of the municipalities include contact information to the elected representatives in the city council. This includes names of the representatives and at least an email-address and/or a phone number, frequently also more detailed information such as occupation. About 75 per cent of the municipalities provide information on where and when the next meeting will take place.

These first three results all demonstrate the important role of the municipal websites in keeping inhabitants informed about the decision-making in the city council and making it possible to follow the proceedings. In his study of the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the USA, Scott (2006: 345) reports that about 60 per cent include Council meeting agendas and 53 per cent include Council minutes. Although the study is a few years old, the Finnish municipalities on average surpass these and related measures for the much larger American city areas. The evidence for the last four indicators is less conclusive since they are implemented to a lesser extent. Slightly more than 30 per cent of the municipalities include a visible link to a profile on social media or offer the possibilities for receiving news in a newsletter or more frequently via RSS-feeds. About 12 per cent of the municipalities offer the possibility to follow council meetings either live or in a recorded version via the websites and or offer politicians the possibility to inform the electorates via blogs on the municipal web pages.

Nevertheless, the general outcome is that the Finnish municipalities offer several initiatives influenced by the representative perspective. This is also indicated by the index score of 0.5 which shows that on average the municipalities include about half the possible initiatives. In other words, the municipalities on average include 3.5 initiatives that aim to inform citizens about the political decision-making and the representatives who take them. Although it is difficult to compare the current results with previous efforts it indicates that the Finnish municipalities have emphasised informing the public on political matters in accordance with the representative perspective. Previous studies of Denmark and Norway also indicate that the municipalities in these countries use their websites extensively to provide information to inhabitants (Torpe & Nielsen, 2004; Haug, 2007; Olsen & Solstad, 2012). In this sense, the e-democratic efforts sustain the local representative democracy already known to be strong at the local level (Sjöblom, 2011).

However, there may also be efforts that aim to further deepen democracy by introducing initiatives that allow for greater participation and deliberation. The results for the participatory perspective are shown in table 4.

Table 4. Participatory e-democracy in Finnish municipalities

#	Indicator	n	%
1	Feedback	172	91.5
2	Individual initiatives	92	48.9
3	Mobilisation	46	24.5
4	Consultation	4	2.1
5	E-polls	0	0.0
6	E-petitions	0	0.0
Mean score on index from 0-1 (std. D.)		0.28 (0.15)	

Note: Data compiled by author.

The Finnish municipalities are generally less eager to use their websites for giving citizens the chance to provide input into the political decision-making. The most important exception concerns user feed-back, since more than 9 of 10 municipalities provide inhabitants with the possibility of giving feedback via their websites. In this sense, most of the municipalities provide some mean for citizens to give input into the political decision-making. However, the feedback option is on most websites a general option where the individual wanting to use it has to have previous knowledge about the decision-making and there is no guarantee that the feedback will be forwarded to the relevant decision-makers be they political or administrative. In this sense, this feature is only a blunt instrument for empowering citizens.

According to § 28 of the Finnish Local Government Act, all local residents have the right to submit initiatives to the local authorities. Although this can be done digitally, only about half of the municipalities provide the possibility to do so, meaning this democratic innovation has not been extensively implemented as an e-democratic feature. Some additional municipalities provide information on

how to submit an initiative, but do not make it possible to submit the initiative electronically.

These are the two most frequent initiatives that concur with the participatory perspective. About one in four municipalities also provide general information on how to influence political matters in society through mobilisation without necessarily providing actual possibilities for doing so. Only four municipalities provide the possibility to comment on more specific policy proposals under discussion in the municipality. No municipality provides the possibility for making even non-binding e-polls, and there are also no provisions for gathering petitions through the municipal websites.

Hence, although possibilities exist for giving input into the political decision-making, the participatory perspective has a lower priority on Finnish municipal websites. This is indicated by the average score of 0.28 compared to the 0.50 found for the representative perspective, which show that the participatory perspective has a lower primacy in the municipal websites. The Finnish local authorities have been unwilling to use ICTs to give inhabitants the change to be actively involved in the political decision-making to any greater extent. Similar results are found in Norway and Denmark, where Haug (2007) and Torpe & Nielsen (2004) also find limited emphasis on providing new channels of participation via municipal websites.

However, the Finnish municipalities may still use their websites for creating a stronger dialogue among citizens and decision-makers. To conclude the charting of the e-democratic initiatives in Finnish municipalities, the results for the deliberative perspective are shown in table 5.

Table 5. Deliberative e-democracy in Finnish municipalities

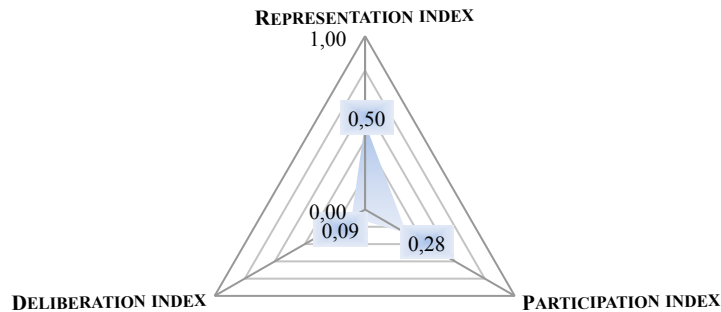
#	Indicator	n	%
1	Outreach	46	24.5
2	Questioning	15	8.0
3	Citizen Forums	5	2.7
4	Official discussions	0	0.0
Mean score on index from 0-1 (std. D.)		0.09 (0.15)	

Note: Data compiled by author.

The figures show that the Finnish municipalities have not implemented deliberative features to any greater extent. About 25 per cent include features that aim to mobilise marginalised groups in society and in this way contribute to creating a richer dialogue among citizens. Most of these efforts are aimed at young citizens, but some are aimed at for example immigrants or elderly citizens. 15 of the 188 municipalities give the possibility to ask questions and receive answers in public and there are five citizen forums found on the municipal websites (most of which were largely unused). The average score of the index of 0.09 also clearly indicate that the deliberative perspective is of minor importance in the local e-democracy in Finland. Although some advances have been made, deliberative e-democracy remains an unfulfilled potential in Finland as in Sweden (cf. Wiklund, 2005).

Figure 1 summarises the findings by comparing the average scores for the three e-democratic indexes.

Figure 1. Three perspectives on e-democracy in Finnish municipalities (data compiled by author)



The representative perspective clearly has the strongest position in the Finnish municipality websites with a mean score of 0.50. This is followed by the participatory perspective, which has a mean score of 0.28, while the deliberative perspective is largely irrelevant with a mean score of 0.09. Previous studies have also reported low figures for indicators for deeper forms of e-democratic involvement (Scott, 2006: 348; Seifert & Chung, 2009; Nasi et al., 2011; Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2012; Fedotova, 2012). Nonetheless, given the tradition of being technological forerunners and the position of the Helsinki municipality in a comparative perspective (Calista et al., 2010), it could be expected that the Finnish municipalities would be forerunners in advancing deeper forms of e-democratic involvement. Alas, this does not seem to be the case.

The apparent exceptionalism of Helsinki in offering more advanced forms of e-democracy might be explained by other factors. To establish what factors help explain the extent of e-democracy lies beyond the purposes of this exploratory study. However, the impact of municipal size is a frequently mentioned factor in the literature (Scott, 2006; Haug, 2007; Nasi et al., 2010), since it is commonly held that only larger cities can offer the functionalities necessary for e-democracy (Scott, 2006: 346). Table 6 displays the differences between the Finnish municipalities according to the population sizes.

Table 6. Size and e-democracy in Finnish municipalities

Population size	N	Representative index	Participatory index	Deliberative index	Combined e-democracy index
5-10,000	85	0.42	0.23	0.02	0.26
10,000-15,000	26	0.39	0.22	0.09	0.26
15,000-20,000	21	0.54	0.33	0.10	0.36
20,000-50,000	37	0.58	0.33	0.11	0.38
50,000-100,000	11	0.73	0.33	0.20	0.47
>100,000	8	0.82	0.54	0.50	0.65
Total	188	0.50	0.28	0.09	0.32
Pearson's correlation		0.43**	0.38**	0.63**	0.58**
Spearman's rho		0.54**	0.41**	0.50**	0.60**

Note: Data compiled by author. All indexes scored 0-1 with '1' indicating the maximum score of e-democracy. The correlation measures express the strength of the relationships between the indexes and the population size as a continuous variable. **: significant at 0.01.

Although the study does not include municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants, the importance of population size for Finnish municipalities is clear, since the population size of the municipalities is closely connected to the strength of e-democracy in the municipal websites. The larger municipalities score higher on all three indexes for perspectives on e-democracy as well as the combined score of e-democracy. The limited size of the Finnish municipalities (Sjöblom, 2011: 245) may therefore help explain the lack of e-democracy in the websites.

In addition to this, municipalities with a population larger than 15,000 score above the average on the four indexes, whereas the municipalities with smaller populations have below average scores. This could suggest that a population of about 15,000 is a necessary prerequisite for a municipality to be willing and able to sustain a website offering a wider range of possibilities for e-democracy. Although hardly conclusive evidence, it is also interesting to note the differences in the strengths of the relationships indicated by the two measures of correlation. The values of spearman's rho tend to be higher than the values for Pearson's correlation coefficient. This finding indicates that even if size and e-democracy tend to go hand-in-hand, the relationship is not linear, which supports the idea of a threshold value that should be surpassed before e-democracy becomes a viable alternative. Furthermore, the values tend to be similar across the three perspectives with the possible exception of the participatory perspective, where the strength is somewhat weaker than the results for the other perspectives and the combined measure. This suggests that the links between size and the three per-

spectives on e-democracy are similar. Hence, the developments of the different forms of e-democracy occur at a similar pace as the population size increases.

Conclusion

These results provide a number of insights into the extent to which municipalities in Finland have used their websites to introduce initiatives to deepen democracy and offer citizens new routes for taking part in the political process. In particular, they suggest that there are possibilities for e-democracy that have not yet been exploited by the authorities.

So far, the Finnish municipalities have used e-democratic measures to strengthen the traditional representative democracy. The municipalities on average include 3-4 initiatives that aim to inform citizens about the political decision-making and the representatives who take them. In this sense e-democracy contributes to making it possible for inhabitants to hold the formal decision-makers accountable in elections and thereby support the representative democracy at the local level. In this sense, the Finnish municipalities have taken advantage of some of the possibilities on offer to strengthen the existing democratic system.

However, the results also show that the Finnish municipalities have been less eager to take advantage of the possibilities to include citizens more actively in the political processes and hereby deepen democracy even further. Efforts that give citizens the chance to communicate their preferences to the formal decision-makers in accordance with the participatory perspective on democracy are rarer and efforts that aim to enforce a deliberative perspective on democracy is virtually only found in the largest municipalities. This is in line with previous results from other Nordic countries indicating that municipal websites in Denmark and Norway are mainly used for communication from the authorities to citizens (Torpe & Nielsen, 2004; Haug, 2007; Olsen & Solstad, 2012).

It would seem like the strong representative democracy traditionally found at the local level in the Nordic countries does not lead to a stronger appetite for using democratic innovations to deepen democracy. This runs contrary to conventional wisdom suggesting that the Nordic countries are in pole position when it comes to democratic development (Bergman & Strøm, 2011). A strong representative democracy may actually impede developing new ways to involve citizens in the political decision-making, since the relatively well-functioning representative democracy means there is less of a need to do so.

The lack of participatory and deliberative e-democratic measures may help explain why more and more grow disappointed with the Internet after the initial excitement over the new possibilities (Margolis & Renick, 2000; Sunstein, 2007; Hindman, 2009). The emerging scepticism may be due to authorities using e-democracy to underpin the existing representative structures rather than change the functioning of democracy. Hence, e-democracy has not been given a genuine chance to alter the status quo by implementing measures that correspond to the participatory and deliberative perspectives on democracy. This does not neces-

sarily imply that these measures are merely tokenistic gestures (Coleman & Blumler, 2009: 114-116) since they may nonetheless reflect a genuine desire to strengthen the representative democracy. Nonetheless, the efforts so far do not deepen democracy by granting citizens a greater involvement in the political decision-making. Hence, e-democracy still has potential to improve the state of democracy more than what has hitherto been the case if the authorities realise that ICT's are not just another channel for communication from decision-makers to citizens.

Finally, the results suggest that population size is an important impediment for advancing e-democracy at the local level in Finland. Whereas the larger municipalities in Finland do provide a deepening of democracy via their websites, the smaller municipalities – that in Finland are the vast majority – have been less eager to introduce such measures. That e-democracy is related to size is hardly a novel finding since offering e-democracy requires a substantial initial investment that it might be difficult to justify in smaller municipalities. However, it is somewhat unexpected that the relationship is similar for all three perspectives on democracy. There is not a certain population threshold that needs to be passed for participatory or deliberative initiatives to be introduced in addition to the representative efforts. Instead, e-democracy as such depends on the population size. A positive interpretation of this result suggests there is less of a need for e-democratic innovations in smaller municipalities since there is less demand for democratic innovations (Haug, 2007). On the other hand, adequate implementation might be a necessary precursor of civic engagement and for inhabitants to use and benefit from ICTs (Cegarra-Navarro, 2012). Such a supply-driven explanation of the use of e-democratic initiatives suggests that the municipalities need to be pro-active in implementing solutions rather than passively wait for citizen demands.

No matter what the exact nature of the relationship is, the demands for structural reforms and municipal mergers may well increase the need for a strengthening of the local democracy through the introduction of new participatory innovations (Pihjala & Sandberg, 2012). In this sense, even smaller municipalities may be well-advised to invest more in activating their inhabitants through the use of ICTs.

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