

Review of Bachelor's thesis

Proponent - **Keith Crawford**

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Bachelor Thesis Title: «Why hasn't Internet Affected Democracy to a Greater Extent ? Electronic Democracy as the Future of Democracy in Europe»

Written by: **Anna Kralova**

This was a valiant attempt to try to ascertain why, over the past ten years, the internet has not influenced the democratic process, in the same sort of way that the new technologies have brought about substantial changes in other fields, e.g. journalism, in the way the burgeoning social networks have brought about a massive change in the way that news is reported worldwide.

Two problems became immediately apparent with this topic. Firstly, there is very little available literature written about the implementation and use of "electronic democracy" in Europe or elsewhere. Secondly, the fact remains that very few countries have actually started to use the new technologies, either in normal voting or the introduction of greater number of referenda, for example – something for which the internet is ideally suited. Indeed, the internet has hardly impinged on the way democracy functions in Europe, other than facilitating communication between parliamentary representatives and their electorate, through various blogs managed by Members of Parliament or simply sharing opinions on which party to vote for on *Facebook* or other social networks. Yet, originally, the hope had been expressed that the internet and the new technologies would potentially allow greater participation in the legislative process of each country, as people could be involved really quite cheaply in policy initiation through nationwide referenda, which would now not engender great cost. In essence, the internet was to give every country the possibility of involving everyone in the legislative process, as has traditionally been the case in Switzerland, which takes almost all of its major and quite-major decisions by referenda.

In this respect, Anna was correct to distinguish between "electronic voting" and "electronic democracy", whereby the former merely allows the electorate to vote in the exact same way as now, for the same type of traditional political parties, with the same types of policies, but on the internet or through social network sites, e.g. Estonia. The latter, on the other hand, allows greater scope for the electorate to take part in the legislative process by voting on actual policy options through various referenda at different levels of government, e.g. Switzerland, where the Swiss are a clear example of an electorate engaging in "electronic democracy", where it proved quite easy for the Swiss to adapt their very particular system of direct democracy to the internet.

She was also right to identify electronic democracy as a new manifestation of direct democracy, and, in that sense, can perhaps work only where there is a very particular type of political culture, which is why Anna used Switzerland as her model for the potential greater use of the internet and social networks within the democratic process. In this respect, she also pointed quite rightly to the risks inherent in the promotion of electronic democracy, as well as some of its clearer advantages.

Related to this point, it would have been interesting to perhaps to investigate why some European countries that have used referenda on constitutional issues in the past, France, Denmark, Ireland or Holland, just to mention a few, do not seem to be planning greater involvement of their electorates in actual decision-making, when this is now technologically possible and when electorates all over the world are beginning to both criticise and challenge the "unsatisfactory" way that traditional representative democracy is working nowadays.

Overall, I feel that was a very good attempt to tackle very many issues involved in the introduction of a Swiss-type, direct, “electronic” democracy into the normal democratic political system. On the whole, this was really quite a comprehensive overview of the problems involved in something which is going to have to be faced by most European democratic countries, as well as the EU as a democratic organisation itself, in the not-too-distant future.

As it stands I would award this a B+, since it is a strongly analytical work. B+ would be my absolute minimum if the student made a reasonably good defence of her thesis. This would mean a “very good” or 2 under the Czech system.

Keith Crawford, UK FHS