



Democracy Administration

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DEMOCRACY ADMINISTRATION

EPACE THEME PUBLICATION

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PREFACE

The following brief summarizes our knowledge of democracy administration and democracy policy based on questionnaires and desk research done within the framework of the EPACE project.

We argue that, while there seems to be a lot of innovation going on in the market economy, based on the pressures of the revolutionary changes in the information and communication technologies, our socio-political life is subjected to similar pressures and would need to take them into account as well. Thus, we are justified to talk about public sector innovation, and indeed, we do see a new wave of changes starting to take place from the beginning of this Millennium. However, the changes are slow and, while there are multiple concerns about participation rates, alienation, etc., the discourse about the renewal of democracy has not really caught on with the same urgency as we look to innovation in our economies.

There seems to be a need for both policy and administrative support for a democracy renewal process stemming from the administrative logic of the state apparatus within democratic society. Political concerns can only effectively be transformed into government action when there is collective action at the government level to further promote finding answers to these particular concerns. It seems that the first step for a government would be to recognize the problem and to create an ad hoc policy to address the issues, then, after a pilot phase, governments would opt to provide the issue with stable administrative support.

Our work distinguishes four models of how these issues have been addressed by various countries. We also provide an analytical summary of the main topics of democracy policy and the main functions of democracy administration. We conclude that for too long our societies have been content with innovations in the private sector and have neglected the opportunities presented to us in the quest for better participatory democracy. We hope that this publication will encourage more and more serious, but at the same time very practical, thinking about how we can improve our democracies.

This publication was drafted, written and published within the framework of the EPACE project (*Exchanging good practices for the promotion of an active citizenship in the EU*) in cooperation with Estonian e-Governance Academy (eGA). The EPACE project seeks to address the challenges related to the decreasing level of political and societal participation of

citizens. Especially the young, newly arrived immigrants and people with low education level, to name few, need more diversified opportunities in order to participate in civic activity and to get integrated into the society.

This publication belongs to a series of EPACE theme publications which presents good participatory practices on the following themes: democracy administration; e-democracy; civic education and youth participation and immigrants' societal and political participation.

The EPACE project is coordinated by the Ministry of Justice Finland and supported by the European Commission Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme. Project Partners are the State Chancellery of Estonia and the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality Sweden.



CHAPTER

1

INTRODUCTION

It is quite obvious that our reality is constantly changing. With the advancement of the information and communication technologies (ICTs), the areas that make use of them - basically anywhere where human interaction occurs - are also changing. Whereas economic actors deployed ICTs very rapidly, the government has adopted these technologies, even in public administration, much more slowly. Moreover, when we look at the influence of these new technologies on politics and in our societies at large, the deployment and the realization of the change is still slower.

Much of our common life is bound by tradition, and for good reason. It is to defend ourselves from rapid changes where the end result of the change is not yet known or possible to forecast with any accuracy. Building up trust consumes more time and resources than destroying it. But doing nothing in the face of serious changes amounts to the destruction of trust, too. In political life, this expresses itself in the form of voter dissatisfaction, loss of civic spirit, apathy, etc. All these vices are well documented. There is a large amount of research done on these issues in academia; however, when we think about the seriousness of these problems, it is quite surprising that these issues have not been addressed by states too often, even if the promises are made by the parties that vie for public power and promise a more responsive and transparent government.

There are two large and almost universally accepted systems ordering our common life, one called the market economy and the other democracy. Market economy means, basically, that economic actors themselves decide to interact and governments interfere in situations where they perceive a market failure and would like to improve the functioning of the market. Democracy, in this interpretation, is the basic characterization of a political system in which majority rules, but the interests of the minority are also protected, and where resource allocation takes place based on other principles than simply profit for the individual.

These two large regulatory frameworks share a common characteristic; namely, they both have built-in mechanisms to stop them from stagnating. If companies are not improving and innovating, they find it harder to deal with competition. If parties do not respond to the needs of voters, they will be voted out.

It seems that market actors are better equipped to respond to the changing circumstances than at least some political actors. This derives

from the fact that markets are regulated only by don'ts, thereby allowing them to seek competitive advantage by exploring new horizons. Democratic administrations, however, cannot develop new solutions as easily, since the law prescribes what they can do, making innovation much more difficult.

There seem to be two democratic ways of making changes within a democracy framework:

- 1) By passing a law describing the change;
- 2) By passing a law mandating that an office looks for a change.

Initially, change has to come from outside the administrative system itself, unless there is someone with a mandate to look for change from within. Even if there is a mandate for creating a change, we have to answer the practical question of who will prepare the steps for going outside the regular administrative activities, like preparing a draft bill to support a particular change.

Looking at the market economy and democracy as parallel and complimentary resource allocation mechanisms, it is rather striking how much effort is devoted to regulatory activities in specific economic fields, be it energy, housing, the production of consumer goods, food or banking. Basically, economic actors looking for competitive advantage deploy new technologies upon which sooner or later government is called in to formalize the change and limit certain activities, like possibly releasing harmful substances into society or engaging in questionable banking practices. The interested actors in the system itself push for change and, as a result, governments have entire departments dealing with changes – whether restrictive or promotional - in various aspects of the market economy.

In a democracy, if we equate it here with democratic governance and divide that into largely different fields – politics and administration – the actors look for a change on the input side, within party politics, whereas administrations are generally tasked with maintaining something that is already agreed upon and are not supposed to innovate. Nevertheless, both politics and administration take place within a changing environment and have to respond to this.

We can see quite a rapid adoption of new technologies by societies and political parties for organizational purposes like:

1. Creating messages
2. Communicating messages
3. Creating collective action
4. Providing alternative financing

These activities have undergone remarkable transformation over the last ten years as Web2-based social networks have become part of our everyday life.

At the same time, administrations charged with managing and maintaining the existing order are improving along the lines of general political promises, such as creating more transparency and possibilities to participate in the political processes. There are more possibilities which the revolution in the ICTs has brought to us.

What did this revolution do? It has changed the meaning and importance of physical distance and has diminished the costs of replicating information. It has rearranged our understanding of time, space and property. As Canadian philosopher Harold Innis - teacher of Marshall McLuhan - showed a half a century ago in his book *Empire and Communications*, polity depends on the reach of the message. Cyberspace and electronic messages have rearranged reality for us and we see administrations struggling with the results, such as the ability to control messages across borders.

There are three basic categories of democracy: direct, participatory and representative. When we think of the possible impact of new technologies on these, we can immediately see the following effects.

First, direct democracy is generally limited in its application because of the difficulty of aggregating the wishes of the participants and by the limitations of physical space and the physical message. The virtual world promises to change these parameters so that we will no longer need to put people into one common physical space. Technology makes it much easier to aggregate the separate wishes of people, providing us with a multitude of possibilities which previously would have been unthinkable or simply too costly to administer. These types of considerations can have an effect on a whole array of arrangements, from direct decision making like voting to referenda to the simple expression of one's opinion, as a guide to decision making.

Second, when we think of participatory democracy, the ocean of information delivered through the World Wide Web provides unique ways

to follow a decision process with all the wealth of information connected to it, making it not only possible but also feasible for someone outside the system to provide meaningful input to the decision-making process.

Third, only time will tell whether this means that the scope of representative democracy will be reduced. But it is clear already today that this form of democracy can also immensely benefit from the new technologies, allowing politicians not only to be connected with the world and the voter but to interact with their constituencies in ways that were not possible before.

Whereas the scope of individual action can be reduced to choice and customs, the scope and nature of change of collective action is not. Private actors have in their administrative structures development departments that are called upon to challenge the limits and to think beyond them and this does not raise eyebrows. The situation with public administrations is not so clear.

This publication is meant to explore the question of how governments react to the changing nature of political processes within European Union countries. The concern is twofold. First, we are looking for whether someone in the administration has a mandate to think about these things in a systematic way. Second, we are looking at the realizations of findings both in terms of administrative changes and in terms of policy making. We are calling this process the renewal of democracy and we mean by that any changes that are undertaken in regulating public life that go beyond the regular evolution of changing pen to pencils.

We have to agree on the scope of both issues. This presents some difficulties as all regimes under investigation are considered ‘democracies’ and it would be justified to ask whether the activities for the maintenance of these regimes would be considered ‘democracy policy’ or ‘democracy administration’. This is not a rhetorical question, as some of the replies from countries include references to regular or traditional democratic activities like election organization and some do not.

We would like to suggest that we would, for our future work, adopt a much stricter definition of democracy and regard as our primary interest the work that is done for the development of political and administrative political practices.

It is quite curious indeed that, while there is almost a fashion-like fascination with innovation in the private sector, in the public sector innovation is barely addressed. It seems that legitimate questions connected to new technologies have been those about raising the efficiency of administration at a time when new innovations have provided us with an opportunity to rethink the aggregation of our wills and other questions of common governance.

Democracy policy and administration of democracy in member states

The EPACE project received 10 responses to the questionnaire on democracy administration and 17 for the one on e-democracy, providing a unique insight into the development of the topic. This, together with the discussions in project meetings and some desk research, formed the empirical basis of this section. The countries answering the questionnaire about democracy administration were:

1. Estonia
2. Finland
3. Hungary
4. Latvia
5. The Netherlands
6. Norway
7. Slovakia
8. Slovenia
9. Sweden
10. United Kingdom

Within this selection of countries, democracy policy as an area of concern has been registered in most countries. Democracy administration as a way of treating the concern has not (yet) found favour among too many countries. It seems that, instead, political leadership in any given country first tries to formulate some principles to follow across the administration (like a demand for consultation or legislation introducing transparency in one form or another).

Democracy administration as such is not very widespread yet. In many cases, the central rationale is embodied in an institution dealing with “e” administration questions, i.e. like in Spain where e-democracy is treated together with e-government. In many countries, thinking about democracy has been delegated to academic institutions or NGOs, but there is no clear connection between the administration and those institutions.

Both of these setups are plausible ways to proceed. E-administration and e-democracy share a number of preconditions for their successful deployment, i.e. we need high levels of ICT penetration within societies and developed electronic identification systems. In general, we need to base our activities on analysis, and academic life is one source for them. However, our concern here is with the government action and administration responsible for this.

Democracy Policy

Quite logically, the first step in dealing with democracy renewal issues is when the political promises of the winning parties are translated into political strategies of governing coalitions to protect and promote democracy in their respective domestic policies. First, one can see quite a heavy stress on civil society developments in the form of national compacts and we have devoted the next sub-paragraph to analyzing this particular phenomenon. Second, quite often the focus is on local level of governance and democracy issues are developed with the point of reference on local level of governance, such as in Norway or in the UK.

The objectives of the democracy policy (q.2 in EPACE questionnaires) depend, of course, on the overall direction of any given strategy, but the concepts seem to be broadly similar:

1. Strengthening representative democracy (new ways of voting, new rules for funding political parties, cleaning up politics);
2. Developing citizenship (popular initiatives, participation, consultation);
3. Non-discrimination (minority and youth involvement questions).

Having an established strategy presupposes that there is a body that would coordinate the formulation and execution of the policy and bear an overall responsibility for the democracy policy. As this is one of the central parts of the current brief, we would like to focus on these responsible bodies separately:

Estonia	Junior Minister responsible for Regional Affairs in the Ministry of Interior
Finland	Democracy Unit in the Ministry of Justice
Latvia	Ministry of Children, Family and Integration Affairs
The Netherlands	Ministry of Internal Affairs and Kingdom Relations
Norway	Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, partly also Ministry of Justice
Sweden	Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality
UK	National Democratic Renewal Council (a Cabinet Committee supported by the Cabinet Office)

In other cases with the developed democracy policies, like with Slovakia or Slovenia, the responsibility is distributed across institutions with no single institution in charge, not even formally. And one should add that, in cases in which there is a coordinating body, the responsibilities are always distributed throughout the government, not centralized in one specific office.

The other question with democracy policies is to understand where the input is coming from or being sought after. Basically, everyone is involved with civil society and it is a question of how this is happening rather than whether it will take place. There could be a formal body organized by the government or some umbrella organization created by the civil society organizations themselves; however, it is clear that governments prefer to deal with organized interests.

It is interesting that in some countries the stress is on the civil society organizations and in some countries, like The Netherlands or Slovakia, political parties seem to play an active role. In Sweden, the input is sought even more widely, from a variety of authorities in addition to the civil society.

All countries with democracy policies have designed them with implementation targets and evaluation regimes, done usually either annually or biannually, suggesting that these activities become more mainstream, or at least entrenched, once established.

The EPACE questionnaire asked people to evaluate the number of people working in democracy administration but the answers were not conclusive, as countries vary in size and administrative traditions. It seems that the number does not really matter so much as whether such an administrative unit exists or not. In the case of the unit with the longest “administrative” history, there are just 6 full time posts and 2 part time posts in the Division for Democratic Issues at the Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality of Sweden.

It seems that large national democracy and participation projects preceded or accompanied the formulation of democracy policies, as has happened in Sweden with “Time for Democracy” in 2000-2002 or the Finnish Citizen Participation Policy Program (2003-2007), which was followed by an approved democracy policy in February 2010.

National compacts

One early and non-“e” form of democracy renewal has been the preparation of national compacts, which are also known as framework agreements between the public authorities and civil society. As they seem to provide a

distinctive approach and as there has been some prior work done on the subject, we think it merits a separate discussion.

In the following section, the discussion paper, "A European Framework Agreement With Civil Society for a Less Distant European Union," by the Open Estonia Foundation was used in combination with our own empirical research.

First of all, national compacts tend to be framework agreements to address the cooperation issues between the state and organized civil society in ways that parties do not do. Although it is noted that there has to be political will from the very centre of government present for a successful compact, it is also the case that many compacts specifically stress their party neutrality, i.e. so as to play down the fear that someone could take undue advantage of them.

What are these compacts? Looked upon from afar, there are usually two umbrella actors, the state and organized civil society, which have come to an agreement. In most of the cases, it has been the civil society which has initiated the pressure and proposed to the government a cooperation network; however, it is clear that governments have also found benefits in this idea. As the previous research has stressed, "compacts between public authorities and civil society all have one thing in common: recognition of civil society's role in society at large, often carrying out a task for the public benefit."

In the compacts, governments tend to agree on two main issues:

- Giving organisations a secure status, including through favourable funding criteria.
- Getting associations involved in drawing up public policy in a variety of forms and at different stages.

Compacts are quite often accompanied by codes of practice, which suggests that either the representatives of the associations or, more likely, their government counterparts view this as an opportunity to pressure loosely organized groups to adopt some common principles, at least partially it seems, through the promise of funding. The most common codes are on funding and consultation, but there are also codes on volunteering, communities, policy assessment, and ethnic minorities.

Framework agreements and partnerships have varying degrees of intensity. Some simply state that there should be a consultation process either by topic or by level of government, while others (like the English

Compact) note that various types of consultations should be used. One could observe the same with funding rules, which can be highly detailed or simply mentioned among other principles.

When looking at different compacts, and while recognizing the pioneering role that the British have played in developing them, it seems that a number of new member states from the other side of the Iron Curtain seem to be especially welcoming the National Compacts. Totalitarian regimes tended to regard civil societies as autonomous power sources with great suspicion and suppressed them. The longer the societies suffered from this, the stronger the efforts have been to revive the civil space.

The compacts of countries formerly under Soviet occupation tend to emerge to help the community and voluntary sector rebuild after the difficulties of the Soviet years.

The research paper on the previously mentioned compacts increased interest in agreements such as the English Compact ten years after their launch. At the same time, this shows that it takes a considerable period of time to implement a compact, as a change in mindset is required. This in turn requires effort and it is a long slow process before a change in mentality is fully accepted.

A comparison of national compacts

Name:	Time	Responsible	Content	Remarks
UK (England, Scotland, N Ireland, Wales)	11.1998 12.2000	Home secretary	Five good practices: Funding and accountability, Policy developments and consultations, minorities, volunteering, community groups	Aims to establish a partnership between the government and associations, less paperwork recommendations, an annual meeting between government and umbrella for associations
Croatia	12.2000	Croatian government bureau for cooperation with associations	Promise of consultations in the legislative process and policy making, promise of funding	Also, local compacts like in the UK
Estonia	12.2002		Participation, partnership,	Avoiding corruption for some reason not met in others, also political independence
Denmark	12.2001	Five Ministers and civil society reps	Just pol .declaration of consultations	No specific mechanism, no call for partnership

Name:	Time	Responsible	Content	Remarks
Hungary	10.2002		Increased financing	
France	07.2001	Prime Minister and umbrella association	No action plan, to be reviewed every three years, but it seems no follow up since	Ensuring that “the market economy does not degenerate into market society”
Sweden	2007	First compact was on social questions. Small group drafted, general debate, signature by gov and reps. Open to signatures by all	Codifies responsibilities on both sides. Keywords: independence, dialogue, quality, continuity, transparency and diversity	Leading to local compacts
Poland	04.2003	Act of law on public benefits and voluntary work	Council of work on public benefits set up consisting of half civil servants, half civil society reps	
Latvia	01.2005	State Chancellery	Involvement of civil society in decision making process.	Memorandum was initiated by the NGOs and signed by them and by the Prime Minister on behalf of government.

The case study: My Estonia

One of the civil society initiatives funded by the EPACE project was the “My Estonia” project. In a way, it represents a cooperative arrangement whereby all the work is done by the civil society actors, but some monetary support for the activities is coming from public authorities.

My Estonia is an example of a successful large-scale civic initiative dedicated to making Estonia more effective, simple and pleasant as a country and society, taking advantage of people’s inherent cooperative abilities and the opportunities offered by information technology. As noted above, there seems to be some scepticism about civic activism in the new member states of the EU. People still remember the spontaneous bursts of workers’ activity that were in reality carefully scripted and played out. Thus, it is rather interesting how an innate cooperative feeling and joint action can be revived despite an all-pervasive cynicism and consumerism.

The project had three direct objectives:

- To come up with a set of ideas to be implemented by communities in order to improve life in Estonia;
- To contribute to the creation of communities in all regions, allowing people to resolve key issues together;
- To set a good example of civic participation and citizen empowerment for Estonia and the entire world.

The following activities were envisioned to support the project:

- Countrywide brainstorming sessions on 1 May 2009, for generating – through discussions driven by civic initiative – ideas for making Estonia better both at the local and state level.
- Preparatory and follow up activities to support the brainstorming sessions.

The My Estonia project was implemented through the Network of Estonian Non-profit Organizations, which is an NGO by itself. Project management took place on two levels – by the Advisory Council, 7 organisational and five auxiliary committees, and 166 volunteers who joined the initiative. The Communities Committee found and supervised 431 coordinators, who organized the brainstorming session sites and provided information to potential participants.

Results

On 1 May 2008, 544 think tanks were in operation, including 409 official think tanks, 102 self-organised ones, 16 virtual think tanks and 17 abroad (in 12 different countries). Altogether, over 11,800 people participated in the My Estonia brainstorming sessions.

The brainstorming activity took place under the guidance of the facilitators, based on the Open Space method. A short summary of the discussion was recorded with a Web camera and published online. All of the ideas and promises made at the brainstorming sessions were entered online into the Idea Bank (5000 ideas) and the Deed Bank. The ideas were systematized and made searchable. An analysis was commissioned and follow up activities were defined.

The My Estonia project has contributed to the development of Estonian civil society in a number of ways:

- Introducing discussion on the topic of civic initiative to the society at large
- Providing a feeling of participation in the democracy and public policy making
- Increasing the practice of inter-sectoral cooperation
- Strengthening communities
- Creating discussions instead of demands and learning about the culture of deliberation
- Growing social capital and empowering participants
- Creating new communities both at home and abroad

Inspired by the Estonian example, countrywide brainstorming sessions were held in Lithuania on 7 November of the same year, called “Idėjų diena” (Day of Ideas). The brainstorming sessions were organized by the Let’s Do It! civic initiative in cooperation with the “I Am For Lithuania” movement. At the brainstorming sessions, people shared ideas, thoughts and suggestions for how to ensure a safer, more secure and more attractive living environment and future for Lithuania.

Involvement in civil society

As a result of the experience from an earlier similar type of project called Let’s Do It! and the My Estonia project, a structure is taking shape allowing positive changes to be introduced into society by involving and stimulating civil society. The main structure of the activities for involving large groups of people looks like the following:

- Large-scale events involving as many people as possible once a year
- Events that support enterprising initiators more than once a year
- Theme-based workshops held on an average once a month
- An Internet environment for registering and publicizing the actions initiated.
- A motivational package for supporting the actions initiated

Funding

The My Estonia brainstorming session's total annual budget was 22.8 million Estonian kroons. The cash share of the budget was 3.4 million kroons and the in-kind share, according to best estimates, was 19.4 million kroons.



CHAPTER

2

MODELS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While the discussions surrounding democracy policy and democracy administration seem to be relatively new, the situation in Europe provides for a rather wide variety of arrangements. We can look at these arrangements from different perspectives, but it seems that we would benefit from some systematization of the democracy administration. This will allow us to express certain causal links and maybe also predict the nature of the next steps, should this topic be tackled by the European states.

First of all, we can see the departure from the traditional model of simply maintaining the state structures around the beginning of the new millennium. It began with two longtime champions of democracy, the UK and Sweden, but in different ways. The UK government started by creating the first framework agreements between civil society and the government, called compacts (see the separate section on them). Sweden took a different path by providing a mandate to a Government Minister to engage in the development of democracy issues and create administrative structures to support that work.

The realization of the necessity of administrative support to the renewal of democracy issues has, by now, found a reflection in a large number of European countries and we can detect certain patterns in these administrative arrangements, in their coming into being as well as their evolution over the years.

Of course, as with any generalization, they have to be taken with a grain of salt, as reality is not easy to bend to a conceptual mould. There are a number of ways to attribute importance to different variables and, thus, our choice of variables deserves to be explained before we outline the models themselves.

First, there is the nagging question of political will. It seems that cross-cutting themes happen very seldom without that, for cross-cutting items require breaking artificial barriers that we have created for the better organization of the administration as such. Naturally, questions about democracy cut across the polity, but, as such, we can safely leave them aside with the simple realization that any such initiatives come from the political concern and promises.

Second, when answering our EPACE questionnaire on democracy administration, one had a choice of selecting responsible institutions down to the specific unit in a specific ministry. While the choice of a responsible ministry could be important, it is almost impossible to precisely compare

ministries and their respective tasks across nations. Thus, it makes sense to look into the pattern of the distribution of responsibilities instead of proper names or even the functions of the ministries.

Third, there is the functional question of what these units do, as there is a clear difference between a democracy unit that is busy allocating funds to a variety of civil society organizations and a democracy unit that is trying to establish new policies or change procedures across the government.

Models of democracy administration

Based on these considerations, we came up with four models of democracy administration. These models are abstractions of existing situations – ideal types – and, thus, none could be found in real life. However, we believe that they do convey a certain heuristic value by suggesting the possible ways of development of democracy administrations within central governments. These models are:

Traditional

Most of the countries in Europe would still fall into this category. It means that democracy is treated as given by tradition, the constitution and the laws and that no specific efforts to build new institutions or develop new practices need to be undertaken. If we look at where the questions of democracy are discussed or debated, then it is usually outside the government, in academia or by NGOs, and the connections between them and relevant government departments are not strong. Governments do support some changes if departments push for them, but there clearly is no central push or a mandate for change.

One could argue that, because of the changing reality, especially with the advancement of the new technologies, any given society that considers itself democratic should try to see whether improvements in participation and empowerment are possible and, if there has been no such discussion, the topic has not really reached the political elites of a given country yet. Quite often, the influence of new technologies in the political processes is analysed through the parts of the administration that are dealing with e-government but, since there have been no clear political demands, the administrations experiment with pilot projects only on a limited scale. The arrangements to support work on democracy could function quite well through the regular work of offices that interpret their mandate in

such a way that they should actually look for necessary changes. Or, some institutes or university departments could receive funding to do research on behalf of the government on these issues, with the government providing regular financing to these actors.

Brief summary of the evaluation: the traditional model of democracy administration seems to be still the prevailing approach throughout Europe. The major problem with it is its accidental nature, in the sense that systematic work on democracy renewal issues depends on the financing arrangements and cooperation agreements between the administration and academic institutions. There is no inherent support for democracy renewal issues, even if public interest in one or another arrangement would be very high.

Civil Society -Centred

The Civil Society-Centred Model (CSC) reflects the situation in countries which have understood that certain changes in governance are necessary, but where these changes are concentrated into concern about the involvement of the civil society in public life. By definition, it is mostly seen as a problem in Central and Eastern European countries, where previous experience with totalitarianism has been seen as disabling to civil society and, thus, there is the existence of a perceived need for special policies to revive it. In a way, this can also be interpreted as an attempt to find a structured predefined way to include input from civil society organizations into the state policy making process.

The Civil society-centred model sees the first order of business in the organization of civil society as the ability to interact with administrative structures at different levels of government. The concern with civil society tends to provide an alternative way for the aggregation of interest, as politics has been professionalized too much to suit the comfort of the active citizenry. When parties have become administrative machines of power, people intuitively start to look for alternative ways to deliver their message, whether it is about the ability to be heard or simply to provide choice in delivering social services in a not-for-profit way, as was the case with Sweden.

Other countries belonging to this model are first of all – as suggested above – the countries with the experience of totalitarianism and a concern that civil society is either not sufficiently organized or empowered. It seems

that this concern is much better perceived as a problem that needs to be solved as opposed to overall attempts to rethink the general mechanisms of the state.

One can say that civil society is surely involved in any democracy renewal attempt, but we would classify a country as approximating the CSC model when there is a clear attempt to organize the civil society and not the individual as a partner to the state.

The best practices for this model suggest two complementary methods for engagement:

- 1) To create a compact
- 2) To draw up guidelines on funding, partnering, etc.

The distinctive features of the situation usually involve concern with different levels of government and their interaction as well as no clear responsibility on the part of the state beyond establishing the first point of contact between NGOs and government.

The fact that two early adopters of compacts, the UK and Sweden, have evolved far beyond the initial efforts to create such umbrella agreements could suggest that maybe other countries with compacts or specific policies to engage the citizenry will follow suit, and that this form of democracy administration represents simply an early adaptation by governments to the question of democracy administration.

The Country Case: Latvia

A short description of the situation:

The compact was initiated by the civil society actors and a joint memorandum with the government was signed in June 2005. While initiated by 21 NGOs, by May 2009 the number of signatures had grown to 194, as every six months the memorandum is opened for new signatures. The Memorandum is accompanied by the "Policy Guidelines for Strengthening Civil Society 2005–2014" and the National Programme's "Strengthening of Civil Society 2005–2009."

Important points:

The open nature of the compact, in which a lot of attention is paid to implementation, a special Council was created for Administering and financing the memorandum: For the administration of the Memorandum, a special council was set up and supported by the State Chancellery. Questions of financing were documented in the National Programme.

Real outcomes:

the creation of a working mechanism of consultation, a provision on the financing mechanism for the NGOs.

Brief summary of the evaluation:

This arrangement provides politicians with someone to partner with in case the public response is otherwise difficult to hear. It is also partly influenced by a minimalist government model in which new structures are thought to represent the wasteful nature of government and, thus, it is believed to be better to contract everything possible out to other sources. However, the jury is still out on the influence and sincerity of politicians in this approach.

Institutional model

This type of approach would be used when a traditional central government structure is used with a clear political leader and administrative support structure. From the current replies, Sweden would best fit the bill. There is clearly no country with a Ministry of Democracy and, under such a label, it would probably never happen, as it sounds too Orwellian. In some conceptual frameworks, administration and democracy are viewed, if not as opposites, then, in any case, as having different natures. However, democracy renewal as a concern could very well belong to the executive concerns of the government which need to be addressed and to which the resulting activities need to be accountable.

Also, this type of arrangement has a number of strong points. Having an administrative unit will provide a clear line of responsibility, and having a political leader will mean that concerns have a chance to find an ear in the very centre of government. This usually also means that financing issues are not of a “where-to-find-the-money” type but, rather, part of systematic budget allocation.

The case of Sweden:

A short description of the situation: The first country to seriously engage in the renewal of democracy issues by appointing a Minister of Democratic Issues in 1998 and creating a Division for Democratic Issues within the Ministry of Justice.

Important points:

Government distinguished three instruments for empowering citizens: legislation, information, and financial support.

Causal linkages:

By having political support and administrative structures, it was easy to develop a comprehensive plan of action and find support in the budgetary process.

Administration and finances:

The responsibility for democracy issues has changed “home” but by continuously having an administrative unit to support its activities, the issue has constant support.

Brief summary of the evaluation:

it provides a coherent way to analyse the situation and to create and administer remedies to improve the situation. Quite clearly, these soft initiatives have not run amok but, rather, have improved decision making and empowerment in responsible ways.

Networked model

We could speak of the networked model in cases in which there are a number of democracy innovation centres connected to each other not through a clear leader but, rather, through distributed responsibilities with overall leadership provided by a collective body.

This arrangement seems to be becoming more and more popular as different departments have started to promote developments in their respective areas of responsibility. The advantages of this type of approach are clear. On the one hand, there is the initiative to coordinate the implementation of new practices but, on the other hand, the pockets of existing innovation can grow independently. In a way, we usually deal with a bottom-up approach here, which at the same time allows for the rapid mobilization

of resources. In coalition governments, it also means that one can create positive competition without negative political party infighting about who is more democratic than the rest.

At the same time, negotiating between different approaches with the aim to harmonize them and make them understandable for those outside any given process would be much more difficult in this model, as it relies on voluntarily accepting the guidance provided rather than being ordered to do X or Y. There are already a number of countries where democracy renewal arrangements approximate the networked model, such as Finland or Estonia or The Netherlands, but this approach is most pronounced and politically supported in the UK.

The case of the UK and the National Renewal Council:

A short description of the situation: Democracy policy is coordinated on an ad hoc basis across the government. The Ministry of Justice sets up working groups for each national election, whereas the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department for Communities and Local Government are responsible for community empowerment and e-democracy issues at the local level. The Home Office is responsible for immigration affairs, whereas the Government Equality Office proposes policies for increasing civic participation. The Youth Citizenship Commission reports also to the Department for Children, Schools and Families. It is envisioned that the National Renewal Council will bring the separate activities together and provide overall coordination and leadership in developing democracy issues.

Important points:

In the case of the UK National Renewal Council, we have a clear attempt to use democracy renewal for party political gain and to use this type of networking approach to focus attention on the overall need of the renewal process, leaving the particular initiatives to be taken care of at a lower political level. As this initiative is less than a year old, it is premature to assess its effectiveness.

Recommendations and suggestions

This section analyses the models and the causal relationships that can be observed in them. It connects the findings to a larger framework of democracy renewal which was established at the beginning of the brochure.

It is clear that there is no direct link between one or another model of democracy and the level of democratic development. The road countries have chosen to travel when pursuing democracy development, reflects their particular citizen-state relations and their administrative cultures.

There are some distinctive patterns on how democracy renewal issues are treated in European countries which have allowed us to distinguish four models for democracy administration. These models are based on the central feature upon which the democracy renewal exercise has been built in any given country and, basically, they reflect the pattern of leadership in democracy renewal issues.

This is obviously just a preliminary sketch. For the better picture, we need a more comprehensive study which would track and outline the key ingredients for a democracy renewal/policy. This would consist of more and difficult to quantify questions on such issues as legislation, culture, and leadership, in addition to resources (people and money). All this would have to be bound up within the existing structures and, if we want to suggest the best practices, we need to develop this overall picture to show where our input would make an impact. Despite some early promises, it seems to be too early to tell yet how far-reaching the interest in democracy renewal is at this time. The processes have started, even if some early forerunners can already account for ten years of democracy policies in one way or another.

There has been a joint effort by the member countries of the Council of Europe to raise the questions of democracy renewal through the work of politicians and academics, which has resulted in the publication of the *Green Book on Democracy*. It contained a large number of suggestions with frank discussions about their positive and negative aspects. As an academic exercise, it was clearly a success; however, it did not propose a mechanism for implementing democratic changes. Our current effort suggests that it is still difficult to determine even the right contact persons in many governments who could deal with democracy renewal questions.

As European governments by and large are subjected to the same pressures and face similar challenges, it would make sense to institutionalize practice sharing on a more permanent footing.

There was a suggestion to create a European Democracy Officials' Network at the "Good Citizen Participation Practices Conference" in Tallinn, Estonia in December 2009. That would clearly be regarded as a step in the right direction.

The objective of the Network would be to exchange information and practices on democracy-related issues. The Network could also act as a platform for peer consultation and forming partnerships. The Network would deal with democracy-related issues from different angles: from the formation of democracy policies and development strategies to the concrete implementation of projects and practices.

Democracy renewal has become a legitimate topic in its own right. Countries are faced with innovations from within and peer pressure from abroad as our world is becoming more and more interconnected. They should also look into implementing the recommendations of the Council of Europe. While the majority of challenges currently are related to the use of new technologies, they are not the only concerns for democracy administration. There are a number of other interesting issues that need to be looked at, such as workplace democracy or public budgeting, where ICT advancements do not necessarily play an active role.



CHAPTER

3

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Democratic governance contains the normative requirement for providing better “democracy” without the need for a separate mandate to look for one. This means that democratic political regimes have to deal with the questions of democracy renewal not as a campaign issue but as a regular activity.

For this work to be successful and to fit into a model of how current governments operate, there should first of all be a clear political responsibility designed for someone within the government. Second, for these words to create a possibility for real action, one needs to back them up with real resources. There seems to be two ways to go about this: 1) either by creating overarching programs within the government with temporary structures or with management entirely contracted from outside the government to some non-governmental umbrella organization, or; 2) by creating administrative units within the government with a clear task to look for improvements that can be made to the political processes – renewal of democracy issues.

From the limited experience currently available, we can conclude that it seems that the process of standardizing democracy renewal began somewhere around the turn of a century. Initially, there were political commitments which resulted in the development of democracy policy in some form, most likely through national compacts or civil society framework agreements. These in turn caused the standardization process through assigning the task to either one coordinating actor or simply by dispersing it in a decentralized way across the government.

These processes are far from complete. The underlying changes in the new technologies continue to influence the way we interact with government, opening up totally new approaches that could not have been envisioned even a decade ago. For now, we are firmly continuing in the representative democracy model but, more and more, both direct democracy and participatory democracy are making inroads into decision-making procedures that, until recently, were exclusively reserved for our representatives.

In Europe, we have centuries of sad experiences with revolutionary changes which tend to destroy the old and then the creatures of the new as well. It seems rather better to embark upon the evolutionary road of changing the way we understand democracy, to make our governments not only more efficient but also better at and more responsive to coping with our desires.



"This publication has been produced with the financial support of the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship programme of the European Commission. The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the EPACE project (Exchanging good practices for the promotion of an active citizenship in the EU) and the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission."

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Printed in: Tampereen Yliopistopaino Oy Juvenes Print, Tampere, 2010

ISBN 978-952-259-001-5