Challenges to local e-democracy

A conceptual analysis of a bottom-up study of e-democracy practices in a multicultural Swedish municipality

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Abstract: This paper takes off from a case study of an e-dialogue – a form of e-democracy in a multicultural Swedish municipality. In spite of high policy pressure and commitment the application was a failure. We thus discuss four potential challenges to e-democracy based on the case study, with general implications. We have identified four challenges: the limits of technology; the lack of issues; the lack of real influence; and a weak sense of community. While these may explain failure, if addressed they may also open up possibilities for success.

Keywords: E-democracy, municipalities, influence

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1. Introduction

Swedish municipalities are opening up policy-making and decision-making processes from previously closed government structures into a complex structure of networked governance. In these processes participation and accessibility for citizens, civil society actors and stakeholders are central. They are striving to improve legitimacy by inclusion and openness. Information and communication technology (ICT) are empowering and have the potential to open up governing processes for dialogue and influence. The use of the Internet for voting and representation may be the most far-reaching reform based on this new technology. There is potential for democratic developments by improved usage of technologies in democratic processes (e-democracy).

E-democracy can also be seen as a response to declining levels of political participation and decreasing public trust that undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions. Politically motivated citizens, especially among younger generations, appear to be channelling their political interest towards forums outside traditional democratic institutions. Instead of joining traditional political parties citizens are seeking out organisations and groups that are more tailored to their specific political interests (Holmberg & Weibull, 2008; Dalton, 2004). Local democracy takes place in municipalities, and in Sweden municipalities have a high level of autonomy. Municipalities often approach these challenges by forming e-democratic arenas to invite and meet citizens and discuss issues of their general local interests online. In the broader context of e-government, e-democracy is an opportunity to make practical use of technologies but can also be seen as an attempt to make old-fashioned, non-Internet-based (without e-) institutions and structures survive in an e-society.

ICT and e-democratic tools are supposed to have the advantage of being easily accessible and flexible to individual demands, and this can be used to increasingly engage the public. Instead of being forced to travel to a specific location on a specific date and time in order to participate in a
political meeting, citizens can use ICT to access information, give their opinions and even interact with others from the comfort of their home and at the time of their choosing. There are also opportunities to express opinions in different ways and in less formalised structures with lower thresholds to enter. Several studies have pointed out such general potential for bringing technology into democratic processes (Heeks, 2006; Fountain, 2001). There is a common European policy ambition to reconnect with citizens and reinvigorate democracy through the use of the Internet, smart phones and other forms of information and communication technologies (ICT). Even if e-democracy is not an explicit objective, the core values are still there in documents like the Action Plan 2011-15 (EU, web, Action Plan).

E-democracy has been on the agenda in a multicultural municipality in the southern suburbs of the capital region of Sweden for some years. In order to increase integration and political legitimacy, the municipality of Botkyrka has introduced extensive e-democracy arenas for citizens. The new arenas have been motivated as deliberative and inclusive as well as tools for increased integration. Both local council members and key actors in municipal public administration made great efforts to develop and promote e-democracy. The expectations of the new on-line forum for integration and participation were high. But after a few years these on-line forums, chat groups and other ICT-based communities are still almost empty, since it was not in use. There are no active discussions going on. No more than a handful of citizens have entered and tried to start discussions. Not even when the designers of the system introduce new topics and advertise them on the municipal Website does anyone take up the thread. It is not an overstatement to say that e-democracy in Botkyrka is a failure. This is a case study of local failure in introducing e-democratic forums, to discuss the main challenges identified and discuss their general implications.

1.1. Aim of the paper

The aim of this paper is to discuss the challenges that made e-democracy fail in Botkyrka municipality, general implications from this case and potential to overcome such challenges. The analysis focuses on the interpretations and presentations given by policy documents, policy makers and administrative professionals. The paper proceeds in three steps. First we briefly contextualise e-democracy in Sweden and present the municipality of Botkyrka. In the second section, we discuss the four identified challenges conceptually and in relation to the literature in the field. Finally, we draw some concluding remarks and discuss general implications to overcome these challenges and the potential for making e-democracy work in a sustainable and legitimate way.

1.2. Case study methods

Botkyrka is one of the municipalities in Sweden where e-governance and experiments with e-democracy has progressed the furthest. This development has been recognised by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) who point out Botkyrka as a forerunner (SALAR, 2009). That in combination with the local interpretation for the failure were the main reasons for choosing Botkyrka for this particular case study. In addition, the high level of immigrants and a youthful population makes it interesting.

The case study grounding this conceptual discussion is part of a joint research project at Linköping University between political science and information systems. The study utilised a qualitative research method where the empirical foundation for the study was drawn from interviews with local municipal council members and civil servants, official policy documents and investigations of the implemented e-democracy measures.

Our part of the case study took off from a key interview with a high-level professional, who also pointed out the key policy documents. The continuing selection of informants among the municipal administration and local council members was a “snowball” process, where one informant pointed to the next. A total of five personal interviews, two focus group interviews and extensive document studies of policy documents, Website/community studies made up the field work. In this analysis we consider the municipality as a unified actor. However, if approaching related issues there could be opportunities for analysing differences among local council members and professionals. Another aspect could also have been to include a citizen survey in the study, but that has not been made so
far in this study. However, in a related study in the same municipality a colleague studying public e-services did focus group interviews with citizens and in response to a brief question regarding e-democracy they had neither experiences nor any comments to make on the issue (Jansson, 2011).

The analysis presented in this paper has a grounded approach. When all interviews were transcribed and an initial analysis of the documents had generated key quotas, we categorized the arguments and found the challenges towards e-democracy in Botkyrka. Through this categorization the four challenges presented and discussed here appeared to be the main categories. That clear empirical impression was related to other studies and will be presented below and further tested through our conference seminar.

2. E-Democracy a crucial part of ICT and e-government

E-Democracy is a crucial part of the use of ICT in general and e-government in particular. When promoting ICT in local communities large efforts are often put into ideas of participation and inclusions through e-democracy tools. This section presents the case study.

2.1. Sweden an advanced ICT nation - contextualising the case study

Sweden is often seen as an early adapter of technological developments and belongs among the international leaders with regards to e-government (see e.g. Flak, 2005; UN e-government survey, 2008). This is both a strong policy aspiration and a practice in governmental bodies in general as well as firms and private use as a symbol of modernity and progress. In 1999 the Swedish government committed itself again to the ambition of becoming an internationally leading information society accessible to all (gov’t bill 1999/2000:86), aiming to improve efficiency, 24/7 access and security (Ishammar Bjurström & Grönlund, 2005; Wihlborg, 2000).

The Swedish government has also long noted the potential of ICT as possible tools for strengthening democracy by for instance improving the dialogue between political officials and the citizenry. E-democracy is used as a complement to the norm of the representative democracy. There are several arguments for this progressive attitude towards the use of technology for democratic purposes in general. Democracies need to be constantly re-invented and today citizens' willingness and capacity to participate in the traditional political process is changing together with society as a whole. It is therefore argued that it is important that the structure of the democratic system is continuously reviewed and revised to perform its duties in local policies as well as practices.

2.2. Municipalities - a testing ground for e-democracy

Swedish municipalities have a strong constitutional local autonomy. Thus the policies and practices regarding ICT have mainly developed locally and been adapted to local circumstances, interests and capacities. Municipalities have their own administrative procedures and attempts at coordination and harmonisation risked resistance which would delay and undermine the progress of e-governance. However, a voluntary national association of municipalities (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, SALAR) has found that the level of e-governance development is more substantial among municipalities with a population greater than 30,000. Municipalities have of course been influenced by developments in other places but it can still be said that local authorities have served as a testing ground for e-governance initiatives. This is especially the case with regards to e-democracy. The development of e-services and e-administration can be found on all levels of the government structure but e-democracy has primary been attempted on the municipality level.

The municipalities are thus the organisational context where the Swedish work to realize e-democracy takes place from "piecemeal experimentation and embryonic policy" (Coleman and Norris, 2005). In the Swedish institutional setting the municipalities have the tools and often the ambition to re-invent and develop democracy.
2.3. Botkyrka - a context for experimenting with e-democracy

Botkyrka has a population of approximately 81,000, which makes it a rather large municipality by Swedish standards. It is situated in the southern part of the Stockholm region and has been described as one of the most international municipalities in Sweden. Over 100 nationalities are represented within the municipality; 51.4 percent of the inhabitants have an immigrant background. This can be compared to inhabitants with an immigrant background in Sweden at large: 17.8%. Botkyrka has in some respects been regarded as a transit municipality for newly arrived immigrants, who after a while move on to other municipalities in Sweden. This has resulted in insufficient knowledge about how Swedish society functions and a general low degree of political awareness. Botkyrka has often had one of the lowest voter turnouts in the country and the ambition of the project was to raise the political awareness of the public in an attempt to get more people to vote. Because of this many immigrants in Botkyrka have refrained from actively involving themselves in politics. This is a situation that the local officials views as deeply unsatisfactory (Botkyrka municipality, 2008). Another defining characteristic of the municipality is its youthful population. The average age is 36.9 years (compared to 41 years in Sweden at large). The multicultural and youthful make-up of the municipality can be seen as two main factors behind the municipality's active policies towards increased democratic participation.

There is also a general ambition to promote new technologies and be a modern municipality. The local council has adopted a policy document on "e-" in general, not just referring to e-democracy. A key statement in this document is to:

By actively taking advantage of the benefits of IT technology, we can instill the belief in citizens and others that Botkyrka is an attractive town with good municipal services. The fact that Botkyrka also has a reputation for being at the forefront of modern technology will facilitate future recruitment, while increasing our ability to retain skilled and dedicated personnel.

(Authors' translation, Botkyrka municipality 2008, p. 2)

The strategy document declares that the construction of a democratic system can never be considered complete. This document shows, however, more of an internal perspective considering the municipality as an organisation rather than a community as a group of citizens.

The e-democracy strategy document especially emphasise the need to approach the younger generation in new ways in order to engage them in the political process. Younger generations are believed to be more issue-oriented and less willing than previous generations to accept entire issue programs of traditional political parties (Botkyrka municipality, 2008). This conviction has support by many scientific studies that have found that younger people appear to be more issue-oriented than older generations and that they are therefore more likely to join single-issue organisations like Greenpeace and Amnesty instead of traditional political parties (see e.g. Norris, 1999; Amnå, 1999; Dalton, 2004). Botkyrka municipality (2008) therefore argues that a structural adjustment of the democratic systems is required in order to encourage political engagement by younger citizens.

Fewer and fewer people engage in politics as members of political parties or take positions of public trust. Voter turnout decreases. Meanwhile, political interest and knowledge in general has remained at least as high as before. But the conditions to exercise their democratic rights are not equally distributed, neither between men and women of different ages nor in groups with different social and ethnic backgrounds. Large groups risk being placed outside of the democratic process - or are already there. Growing distance between different groups and political marginalization undermines confidence in the democratic system.

(Authors' translation, Botkyrka municipality 2008, p. 2)

These remarks show that the municipality views the crisis of the representative democratic system as a motivating factor for democratic engineering. The trend of declining levels of political participation is a democratic challenge. There is an obvious risk in placing more people outside of the political process and thereby contributing to increased marginalisation of already politically weak social groups. Democratic engineering in the form of e-democracy is therefore used in an attempt to

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1 Born abroad or with both parents born abroad.
revitalise the political process and mobilise the citizens to actively engage in politics. In this way they aim to stimulate a democratic dialogue. There is an inclusive focus facilitating women and men from all social groups to take advantage of their democracy.

2.4. The Botkyrka e-dialogue - an empty e-democratic forum

One of the primary vehicles for involving the general public in local politics through the use of ICT is an e-dialogue that was made available to the public in 2006. The e-dialogue is a virtual forum located on the municipal Website where registered users can initiate and discuss political issues of their own choosing together with other registered users. Non-registered users can enter the e-dialogue and read what has been submitted but they can not actively engage in the discussion before registering and logging in. The e-dialogue is described to visitors of the forum as a possibility to influence political decisions at an early stage of the policy-making process. It is stated on the Website that local politicians will listen to the views that are expressed in the forum, participate in the dialogue and take the views expressed with them into the decision-making process of the representative democratic system. However, it is also emphasised that the e-dialogue is not a decision-making body and that the forum serves as a complement to the physical advisory citizen panels that are conducted in the six municipal areas. This logic is further reinforced by the fact that the e-dialogue forum is structured around the same municipal areas as the physical advisory citizen panels. Upon entering the forum the user has to choose a dialogue of a specific municipal area before reaching subordinate forums dedicated to specific issues. No forum exists on the e-dialogue where political issues involving the municipality as a whole can be discussed.

The e-dialogue can be accessed through the municipal Website but is not easily found upon entering the site. No reference is made to the e-dialogue on the main municipal home page and it requires a minimum of four clicks before entering the e-dialogue. The navigation required to suffice with four clicks demands prior knowledge of the structure of the site as it is not immediately obvious. The forum as such provides a visible impression of being a very basic Internet forum without any sophistication or design appeal. A benefit however is that the forum is easily manoeuvred even for a novice user. The dialogue is exclusively conducted in written Swedish even if this is not an explicit requirement. A language requirement can nonetheless be seen to be implicitly implied by the fact that no support is provided for users of other languages. For instance, there exists no English version of the e-dialogue nor are there any English instructions and information about the e-dialogue. Users that lack proficiency in Swedish are subsequently not welcomed to participate in the e-dialogue. This is a fact of some importance considering the multinational character of the municipality population.

The number of initiated discussions under the forums designated for discussion about issues concerning different municipal areas varies. The forums of some municipal areas have no initiated discussion at all while others have over a four-year period generated between 5-10 initiated discussions. About half of all discussions have been initiated by forum moderators or by local politicians. The other half of the discussion has been initiated by users but one single user has initiated most of them. Overall the response can therefore be regarded as limited and the dialogue superficial. The e-dialogue as a whole has received a total of 77 submissions between May 2006 and January 2010. Fifty-nine of these submissions pertain to two of the six municipal areas. Most of the discussion has been short statements of opinions with brief or no follow up into a more evolved discussion. The discussions that has been initiated or drawn interest from the general public have been issue-oriented with direct relevance to the present situation while the politicians appear more interested in discussing political visions and general guidelines for the future development of the municipality. This reflects differences of purpose for the e-dialogue which can serve to explain the limited interest because overall the results of the e-dialogue have been discouraging. It seems clear that neither the general public nor the local politicians have shown any real interest in upholding a democratic dialogue in this form of electronic forum. Dialogue that has been initiated by the different sides has not evolved further and both politicians and users have been left with unanswered questions and comments. This failure shows both the mutual interdependence of the process and

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2 At least not during 2009-2010
how vital it is to quickly reach a critical mass of users. If the general public refrain from entering into the dialogue, the politicians will find it a waste of time and direct their attention elsewhere. The same is true if the public attempt to launch a dialogue with the politicians and the response on the other end is limited. The result is a negative spiral where the general public perceives it as a waste of time and effort to participate in these forums and that will cause the local politicians to feel the same way and rapidly the entire forum is abandoned.

2.5. Botkyrka illustrating challenges towards e-democracy

Botkyrka municipality expresses a fear that the relationship and dialogue between elected officials and citizens have slowly eroded over recent decades. This erosion is believed to have been partly caused by a sharp decline in the number of elected officials, which has resulted in fewer everyday contacts between active local politicians and ordinary citizens. In an attempt to counter this development the municipality has been working to raise the general awareness of local politics and strengthen the interaction between citizens and local politicians. This awareness and dialogue is perceived as crucial to secure the vitality of the democratic process.

Confidence in democracy must be built through a relationship between citizens and elected officials, not only in the election campaign, but continuously. Without a living democratic dialogue in civil society, with active, informed and engaged citizens, representative democracy stagnates.

(Authors’ translation, Botkyrka municipality, document Dnr KS/2008:392, p. 8)

The initiative that gained most national recognition for the municipality is its government offices, or one-stop shops. The establishment of these offices started in 1987 and they can best be described as public service units where personnel with general competence provide services in a number of different administrative and authority sectors. One of the purposes of these offices is to offer information about government services and provide assistance on how to contact government agencies. Most of the democratic initiatives and citizen platforms in the municipal repertoire before 2002 took place in a physical environment but since then steps have been taken to create virtual citizen platforms as well. A driving force behind this development was the possibilities provided by the ability of ICT to provide cheap, simple and quick services. Botkyrka believes that the public demand for efficiency and service-providing capability is increasing and that ICT is a cost-efficient way to meet many of these demands. Just as people increasingly handle businesses with the bank virtually, public agencies can also develop new channels for public service. Another reason for the venture into e-democracy is the belief that technology represents the future. Technological advancements have generally marked the path of development and when e-democracy surfaced as a fashionable democratic initiative the municipality wanted to add this platform to the repertoire. As expressed by the municipal board of directors and local civil servants alike there existed a curiosity within Botkyrka with regards to the possible benefits of the new technology but also a desire to keep its position as a municipality in the forefront of democratic innovations.

3. The identified challenges - explaining failures?

We will now discuss the four challenges towards local e-democracy that we have identified in the case study. Even if this section further deepens the analysis of the case study on e-democracy in Botkyrka, some more general implications will also be discussed. The identified challenges are:

- The limits of technology
- The lack of issues
- The lack of real influence
- Weak sense of community

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3 Interviews with the municipal board of directors and the municipal civil servant responsible for the development of local democracy, Ahmad Azizi.
These four factors have been identified through the in-depth bottom-up study but we will here argue that they may have more general implications. The challenges have been identified through the bottom-up study and as such they are closely related to the study format.

3.1. The limits of technology

ICT has come to represent modernity and because of this the municipality felt pressured to adjust and develop new service and citizen platforms that would help the municipality better handle current problems and prepare for the demands of the future. In many ways the introduction of the e-dialogue reflected a "field of dreams" mentality: by building the virtual discussion forum, the belief was that the general public would make use of it.

The belief that technology will help to solve democratic shortcomings is neither new nor specific to Botkyrka. Technological advancement has through history caused discussion about the democratic potential of the new technologies. Television was perceived in the 1950s to hold great potential to strengthen and enrich democracy. It was commonly believed that television would help to unite people and serve as a vehicle to educate and inform the citizenry and thereby make them politically more knowledgeable and capable of engaging actively in politics (Johansson, 1997).

In Botkyrka there was a dual problem generated by the limits of technology. First, there was the limited private access to the Internet among immigrants and the hesitation to use public computers for issues more private than checking general information. Second, the language issue also made the digital divide even deeper. Even if there are emerging applications to translate information on the Internet, these were not used.

To keep up a positive approach we will not fall into a negative idea of technological determinism. We hope that new applications and easier access will handle this challenge. But there are challenges to bridge the technological divide of the local participation in e-democratic initiative. Technology provides opportunities for some groups but leaves others behind.

3.2. The lack of issues

One of the most basic aspects of democracy is the local inclusion and the idea of local common issues to handle together. Usually they are based on living in the same community and sharing the public spaces and spheres of the community. However, for e-democracy these have to be re-invented on-line.

Another possible hindering factor to an e-dialogue is the lack of public interest. The forum did not serve any understandable purpose to the public. Asking people to visit an internet forum on the municipal Website and initiate a political discussion puts a lot of responsibility upon the general public. As has been shown by the meagre debate on the forum this is a responsibility that the general public so far has been unwilling to take on. This reluctance should not automatically be interpreted as a sign of low political interest among the public. The democratic crisis has in part manifested itself through a declining public interest to engage in traditional forms of party politics. In Botkyrka the marketing of the e-dialogue was limited and few people knew about it. The e-dialogue has no stated purpose other than serving as a forum for discussion about local democracy.

Most people are therefore relatively happy to leave everyday politics to elected politicians and they need to be further motivated in order to make them willing to seek further influence. This is something that Botkyrka's e-dialogue failed to take into account. Therefore, the problem is likely not a shortage of channels into the political process, but rather the shortage of interest to engage actively in politics. In order for the e-dialogue to be successful and attract public interest it must become more appealing.

We will argue that the question of local democratic issues on-line has to develop in close interplay with bottom-up ideas from citizens and top-down from the elected council members and public administration. Thus there has to be a re-configuration of what issues are discussed on-line and how they are presented. E-democracy has to target the basic idea of what issues make people care to reach out for sustaining discussions on-line.
3.3. The lack of real influence

Most e-democratic forums are designed as parallel structures to the "real" formal democratic decision-making structures. Thus there is more or less always an impression of being side-stepped or at least not included for real.

In the information about the e-dialogue it is clearly stated that the forum is only advisory and that the decision-making powers reside in the representative democratic system. The forum is not structured in such a way that visitors are asked to vote on anything; there are only open discussion threads where registered users are free to speak their minds and ask questions of local politicians. There are good reasons for why the representative system should be cautious about handing over political power to Internet forums but the message potential users of the e-dialogue get upon entering the site is that participation will result in questionable political influence. This can be a deciding factor against participation in the e-dialogue for the common citizen — why spend time and energy on discussing local politics when you are not assured some degree of real influence? Opinions and suggestions concerning local politics can be voiced in other ways, for instance through the preferred method of communication for the citizens in Botkyrka, by sending e-mails, letters or making phone calls.

Citizens need to feel that their contributions will matter, otherwise the risk is imminent that the process will appear pointless to them. The same conclusions have been reached in other cases such as the Oxford Internet Institute (Coleman et al., 2005). One of the experiences was from a project in Germany, the German Bundestag’s e-democracy project, that was deemed to have failed partly because it was not made clear enough to the participants how the ideas from the online discussions would influence political initiatives. They conclusions drawn were that "users are quite able to differentiate between real and fake calls for participation (Coleman et al., 2005, p. 5).

This is a real challenge to e-democracy in general since it has to have a "real" role. Adding e-democracy to other democratic structures never makes it real. E-democracy has to become a real way of exercising influence.

3.4. Weak sense of community

The fourth and final challenge we identified through this case study is the weak sense of community on-line. This also builds on and combines all the challenges discussed above. When there is a strong sense of community there are also common issues to handle in a democratic way.

Communities where citizens have strong ties of loyalty to each other and local political institutions are more likely to get people to engage in community activities than communities where such ties are weak or missing. Botkyrka belong to the second category of political communities as the municipality is marked by a weak sense of community identity caused by different forms of internal divisions. One division is caused by the fact that the municipality is structured as six different municipal areas. This division has resulted in citizens having loyalties to their respective municipal area but to a lesser degree to the municipality as a whole. It is also possible to find an ethnic and social division between the different municipal areas. Citizens that have an immigrant background and a low degree of social capital tend to live in the municipal areas that are densely populated suburban landscape characterised by large grey apartment houses while ethnic Swedes with a higher degree of social capital tend to live in the more sparsely populated residential districts. These divisions have undermined the establishment of a shared community identity. In fact, citizens from one municipal area, Tullinge, which is one of the municipal areas dominated by ethnic Swedes, even formed a political party and advocated for separation from the rest of Botkyrka. The Tullinge Party ("Tullingepartiet") was formed one month before the elections of 2006 but still managed to receive a support of 1.77%, giving them one mandate on the municipal council. In the elections of 2010 public support had grown significantly and Tullingepartiet gained 10.51% of the votes in the entire

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4 Grödinge and Tullinge can be classified as sparsely populated residential districts while Alby, Fittja, Hallunda, and Tumba are the more densely populated suburban districts.
municipality, making them the third largest party with six mandates. This even further illustrates the weak sense of community, which may even undermine e-democracy even more.

The notion of community and civic culture, which are important for democratic institutions to function properly, has been eroded by an excess of liberalism (Barber; 1984; 1997). Citizens are becoming increasingly individualistic and primarily concerned with economic gains causing politics to become more about securing private advantages and less about the pursuit of public interests. Barber therefore argues for the introduction of democratic measures, like neighbourhood assemblies, that will foster the emergence of a "strong democracy." Barber's essential argument is that by allowing and encouraging citizens to adopt a more active role in the governance of their respective communities the notion of community and civic culture will be rekindled, which in turn will lead to a more genuine democracy.

There are potentials to create a sense of community on-line, but they are seldom local. On-line other issues and common values make people form communities. However, formal politics are still based on the notion of territorial belonging. This paradox may have to be solved before we see real on-line communities that make e-democracy work.

4. Concluding remarks

The experiences of e-democracy in Botkyrka were discouraging, but even though it opens up for general discussions of challenges towards new technology in democratic settings. There was not a single reason for the failure of the e-dialogue in Botkyrka. The four challenges discussed above are attempts to identify and discuss more general challenges. The challenges identified and discussed above were the limits of technology, the lack of purpose, the lack of influence, and the weak sense of community. In the specific case study we could see how the local actors both policy makers and professionals within the municipal administration were struggling with these challenges, but the opportunities to overcome them are indeed locally embedded.

Based on the outcome of this process one could have argued that it was useless to start the project and invest time and other resources in it. But the municipality showed that they are willing to try a wide variety of new democratic approaches in the hope that some of these measures will yield positive results. Thus we will finally point out some potential opportunities to overcome the identified challenges, which were not part of the field study but emerged from our analytical discussions.

4.1. Conclusion of challenges and openings for practical responses

The first identified challenge was the limits of technology. Here it appeared in several cases there was a general lack of access to ICT in forms of computers and Internet connections, despite public access in libraries, etc. There were also barriers towards participation in e-democratic dialogues in the design of the forum, e.g. registration. In spite of this it is hard to see technology as a general challenge since it is the very base of "e-". There must be potential to overcome design issues, perhaps by easier technologies like smart phones, etc. There are also schemes promoting ICT access in low-income households in Sweden.

The second identified challenge was the lack of purpose and aims for actually entering the forum. This is probably generated by the top-down approach, where the municipal administration and politicians define what is supposed to be discussed. There are other open forums in social media, for example, approaching local issues. However, such on-line forums are not considered e-democratic even if they promote local democratic discussions. A broader interpretation of e-democratic technological arenas may even further expand the understanding of local democracy and its issues. This points to a general problem of democracy, not just e-democracy: a mismatch of issues on the formal political agenda and the issues valued as important among the general public. There might be opportunities to handle such divides if formal democratic agencies reached out in social media used for (and thereby legitimized by) other general purposes.

The third identified challenge was the lack of influence by the e-dialogue in Botkyrka. The forum aims to open up discussion but does not extend to decision-making arenas and situations. The
real influence rely on the representative democracy and administration. Thus formal decisions cannot be delegated to citizens without restructuring more of the fundamental basis of democratic institutional arrangement. However, in the long run that might develop as a consequence of this challenge.

Finally, the fourth identified challenge is a lack of a sense of community in the e-dialogue forum. There were no clear common issues or any expressions of common interest, like "we in Botkyrka" in the e-dialogue, even though the concept of a "Botkyrka spirit" was indeed frequent in policy documents and among the professionals in the municipal administration (Jansson, 2011).

4.2. Further implications

We hereby open up for discussion on conceptual challenges towards e-democracy focusing on the mismatch of "old" structures meeting new technologies and the challenges to open up for real restructuring of democracy. To meet the challenges of issues and community other studies may have to open up to other social media in relation to formal e-democratic forum. Another related political scientific challenges is to find ways to integrate e-democracy as e-dialogues into traditional frameworks of participation and inclusion.

To overcome the challenges there are demands for re-thinking democracy as well as use of ICT in everyday life. This study can be read as a confirmation of the problems of "just" adding technology to a tottering representative democracy. Here both academics and policy-makers have to look for innovative and creative ways of approaching the decreasing trust in representative democracy and the opportunities given by new media and technologies.

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