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## Democracy and digital technologies

*Democracia y tecnologías digitales*

*Democracia e tecnologies digitais*

EDITORIAL

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#### **Abstract:**

Information and communication technologies are shaped by society but also modified by political structures and it is precisely because of recent technological developments that the debate about their great democratic potential has been updated and stimulated. The idea of an information society has served to open the debate on the democratic principles that should be present in technology. Hence the importance of paying attention to the subject. Linking technologies and democracy implies talking about a wide range of scenarios in which different users, content, and various elements interact.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Democracy, Participation, Information and Communication Technology, Digital Technology.

#### **Resumen:**

Las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación están moldeadas por la sociedad, pero también modificadas por las estructuras políticas. Y es precisamente por los desarrollos tecnológicos recientes, que se ha actualizado y estimulado el debate sobre el gran potencial democrático que tienen. La idea de una sociedad de la información ha servido para abrir el debate sobre los principios democráticos que deben estar presentes en la tecnología. De ahí la importancia de prestar atención al tema. Vin-

cular tecnologías y democracia implica hablar de un amplio abanico de escenarios en los que interactúan diferentes usuarios, contenidos, y diversos elementos.

### **PALABRAS CLAVE**

Democracia, Participación, Tecnologías de la información y la comunicación, Tecnología digital.

### **Resumo**

As tecnologias de informação e comunicação são moldadas pela sociedade, mas também modificadas pelas estruturas políticas. E é justamente por causa dos desenvolvimentos tecnológicos recentes que o debate sobre seu

grande potencial democrático tem sido atualizado e estimulado. A ideia de uma sociedade da informação tem servido para abrir o debate sobre os princípios democráticos que devem estar presentes na tecnologia. Daí a importância de se prestar atenção ao assunto. Ligar tecnologias e democracia implica falar sobre uma ampla gama de cenários nos quais diferentes usuários, conteúdos e vários elementos interagem.

### **PALABRAS-CHAVE**

Democracia, Participação, Tecnologias de Informação e Comunicação, Tecnologia Digital.

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Unlike high-risk technologies, information and communication technologies are a systemic network technology that generates factors that support democracy (Barber 2002). All those innovations that involve networks and services have expanded their capabilities and reduced the cost of transmitting voice, video, text, data and images in real time. They have even convincingly demonstrated the full potential to reshape the organization of society, mainly because ICTs are seen as disputed terrain, sites of discursive struggle, as the focus of activism (Dahlberg, 2011) and as educational spaces.

Technology is shaped by society but it is also modified by political structures (Werle 2000). And it is precisely because of recent technological developments that the debate on the great democratic potential of information and communication technologies (ICT) has been updated and stimulated. The idea of an information society has also served to open the debate on the democratic principles that should be present in technology. Hence the impor-

tance of paying attention to the subject. The interrelation between society and technology is recognized and in the interrelation which economic, social and cultural change processes interact with technological changes. These changes lead to different types of information society, considered democratic. Democratic quality arguably depends on how ICTs are applied, because technology can enable people to obtain the information they need to examine competing political positions and issues, and provide the means for their recording and subsequent aggregation as 'public opinion' of elections through electronic voting, web feedback systems, petitions, email, online surveys, etc. (Dahlberg, 2011). It can also allow access to services designed to improve access to education for the disabled or other disadvantaged minorities. Democratic quality can even be the result of a historical accident. For example, the evolution of the Internet and the TCP/IP protocols on which the networks are based. In the beginning, there was no plan to guide the

development of the web with the intention of obtaining dividends. It ended up being an accident because there was talk of a democratic dividend of a public domain nature.

According to the authors Catinat and Vedel (2000), everything depends on how public authorities make use of ICTs. Technology is social both in its origins and in its effects (Mackay 1995), and it is not only in the framework of its use, but even in the framework within which technology is designed, which makes them play a crucial role in shaping the democratic quality of ICT.

The social and political importance of ICTs is undoubtedly remarkable. Firstly, the scope and breadth of ICT systems, where information and communication infrastructures and their penetration into society can be considered in an analogous way. The combination of the scope, breadth and degree of penetration of such systems underscores the importance of their democratic quality. These characteristics may be more or less compatible with the values and structures of democracy. Second, it is related to the network nature of ICTs. One of the generic properties of a network technology is interdependence and complementarity. And depending on the design created for users, they have effects that are not limited to just one individual, but also affect all users of those technologies (Iversen et al., 2004). Therefore, all the options regarding its design and use can be evaluated from the point of view of its democratic ramifications.

The importance of information and communication technologies for a democratic society

has also been supported by expectations related to the growth and development of the Internet. It is considered that the web facilitates digital democracy, democracy online, and that thanks to it we interact in different contexts (global and local) with different impacts (social, political and personal) and with different objectives (positive and negative). But ICTs by themselves do not strengthen democracy. Their effects largely depend on the purposes for which the technologies are used and are mainly determined by the design of the technologies used, which may be compatible with the general principles of democratic governance (equality, access, transparency, accountability of accounts, etc.). Whether a technology supports or impedes democracy can rarely be directly attributed to the interests and preferences that shape the design process.

The Journal *Obra Digital* has felt the need to attend to a little-explored area that brings together two important issues in our day to day: ICTs and democracy. Our number 19, corresponding to the months of September 2020 to January 2021, consists of 6 articles in the block of the monograph entitled "Digital uses for the promotion of democratic experiences" and is coordinated by Dr. Jordi Collet -Sabé and Dr. Mar Beneyto-Seoane, both researchers from the University of Vic - Central University of Catalonia. In the articles in this issue, the authors establish a holistic body of knowledge that invites us to reflect and deepen on the different social and educational impacts that have been generated in the process of interaction between technologies and democracy. As experts on the subject, the authors are in a good position to describe the state of the art, reflect

on the different processes that take place in different virtual environments, their link to democracy, and the analysis of the social and educational impacts that can be generated in these spaces. Linking technologies and democracy implies talking about a wide range of scenarios in which different users, content, and various elements interact.

I do not want to close this presentation without inviting our readers to check the two miscellaneous articles that make up our number nineteen. The first of them titled the "Netflix as an audiovisual producer: a snapshot of the serial fiction co-productions" and "Participatory learning contexts in secondary school: from pre-sential education to virtuality."

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