

A vast field of stars in space, with a prominent reddish-orange nebula on the left side. The stars are densely packed, and the overall color palette is dominated by deep blues, purples, and reds. The text "In an immense universe...." is centered in the image.

**In an immense  
universe....**



On a small blue  
planet



In Aarhus,  
Denmark



We find Jakob Linna....

# Studying the Internet

And its democratic consequences

**CLICK TO GO ON!**

## **The background**

**The coming of the Internet**  
(from the 80's and onwards)

### **The crises of Western democracies**

- decline of parties
- decline of public sphere
- the I.O.'s take over
- political apati

### **The 4th democratic wawe**

- 1989: end of The Cold War
- Fukuyama: end of history
- The Global Village effect?

## **New media and democracy**

**The assumption: medias have consequences for democracy**

Democracy and public sphere seen in relation to mass medias:

The 19th Century – the papers

The 30's – the radio

The 50's and 60's – the television

The 70's – cable and teletext

The 80's – MINITEL, city networks, public access

The 90's – the Internet?

## **The immanent democratic shape of the Net?**

### **7 characteristics for the Internet**

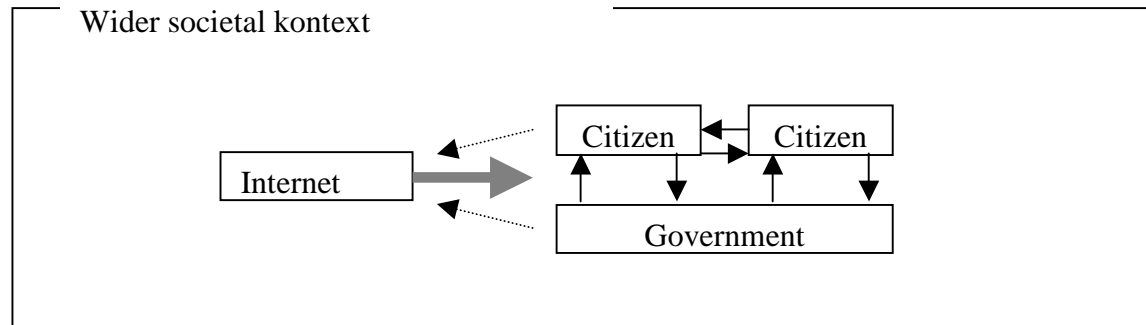
- **Interactivity**
- **Narrowcasting, not broadcasting**
  - **Peer to peer-communication**
  - **Flexibility**
- **Integration of existing medias**
- **Decentrality**
- **Limited possibility for control and censorship**

## **Democratic expectations for the Internet**

- Virtual Communities (Howard Rheingold)
  - Information Highway NII (Al Gore)
  - Direct democracy (Newt Gingrich)
  - Town Meetings (Benjamin Barber)
- Open public administration (UK, Scandinavia)
  
- But what about the other side of the coin?**
  - Let's go into the details**

**The simple assumption:**





**It is a bit more complicated.....**

## **At least four aspects of Netdemocracy**

- 1. The public sphere**
- 2. Barriers and power**
- 3. The citizens' democratic skills**
- 4. Political participation**

**Lets go into further details....**

## **The public sphere**

### **Potentials:**

**Classic ideals: Habermas and Athens**

**Technical possibilities for connecting citizens**

**Electronic town-meeting**

**Link citizens-politicians**

**A weather-cock for the public opinion**

### **Problems:**

**The number of participants**

**Overload of the politicians**

**Soundbite culture**

**The "no longer shared" world**

**=> The risk for wider society**

## **The breakdown of barriers and power**

**”The Internet tends to demolish existing barriers and structures of power”**

**The lack of censorship and control  
The decline of middlemen (politicians)  
Broader access to political agenda-setting**

**But....**

**The digital divide (widening of the gap?)  
Who are the new holders of power?  
Control and surveillance (Panopticon?)**

## **The democratic skills of the citizens**

### **Education and information level**

The information highway

The risk of "information overload"

Validity problems of the Internet

Who controls the knowledge?

### **Economical and social conditions**

Cheap

Anonymity diminishes social differences

The medium of equality?

## **Political participation**

### **A range of possibilities**

- The electronic ballot
- New forms for referendums and polls
  - "checks & balances"
- Campaigning and complaining
- Debate among the citizens

### **Points:**

**formal participation is not enough**

**Do the citizens want influence or just entertainment?**

## Current experiences with netdemocracy

The international context:

- The Gulf War (IRC used to obtain true information)
- Serbia and Kosovo (medias streamed via the Net)
- China (the only public sphere)

The national context:

- Minnesota
- E-democracy projects
- Mixed experiences

## **Tools for democratic action?**

### **Internet as information**

(superhighway, library, web-pages)

### **Internet as communication**

(dialogue, debate, feedback)

## **The Internet as information**

### **Forceful tool for seeking information**

Instant access to anything => understanding, resources, skills

### **Providing information**

Web-pages, e-mail campaigns, "searchability"

But....

Danish parties for example only provided information

Understand the interactivity and multi-dimensionality

## **The Internet as communication**

**The Internet is a social medium!**

**The focus in democracy is to make people talk and collaborate**

- Webpages has to contain debates, feedback, dialogue
  - Campaigns have to be both-ways
  - Dialogue with members, voters and the public
    - Dialogue with politicians, civil servants
- Think about what you want and how to obtain it
  - Do not do it because you can

## **The necessities for democratic action**

### **Ressources**

(narrow the digital divide, social capital, citizenship education)

### **Inclusiveness**

(public access, skills, but not necessarily universal)

### **Purpose**

(government, party, private – what do you want)

### **Design**

(does always carry an implicit political purpose)

-has to be created in a dialogue with the users

## **New democratic possibilities**

The need for new institutions

(demand for democratic debate about bio-technology, information management and control, global capitalism, the environment, terrorism, law and order – all in all the Risk-society)

- Deliberative polling
- New forms of action
- New organisational modes (decline of parties)
  - Grassroot activity
- Or..... The funfair democracy

## **The future?**

Much potential, many visions

### **What do the politicians want?**

E-government (effectivity) ↔ E-democracy (legitimacy)

### **What do the citizens want?**

Deliberative democracy ↔ consumers paradise

There is no determined way

In the end this is up to the actors of the game, you and me!