Friend or Foe?

Technology and Democratic Participation

Involve | Centre for the Study of Democracy

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@participatory
Someone made a remark about the telegraph which seems to me infinitely correct, and which brings out its full importance, namely that, at bottom, this invention might suffice to make possible the establishment of democracy among a large population. Many respectable men, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau, thought that the establishment of democracy was impossible among large populations. How could such a people deliberate? Among the Ancients, all the citizens were assembled in a single place; they communicated their will...
The invention of the telegraph is a new factor that Rousseau did not include in his calculations. It can be used to speak at great distances as fluently and as distinctly as in a room. There is no reason why it would not be possible for all the citizens of France to communicate their will, within a rather short time, in such a way that this communication might be considered instantaneous.

Alexander Vandermonde, 1795. In: Mattelart 2003:22
Technology and Participation: Friend or Foe?
Rationale
Lowering Transaction Costs
Mobilization X Normalization Hypotheses: Conflicting Findings
Some Findings
Rio Grande do Sul State | Multi-channel PB

N = 23,000
Why technology often fails?

- Focus on technology
- Political will x incentives
- Simplification (easy to do, heightened by technology)
- Poor understanding of incentives
- Bad participatory engineering (e.g. participant selection, deliberative x aggregative, sequencing)
- Lack of articulation with institutions, processes and systems
- Deliberative paternalism / limits of online participation
- Bad technological design (re-introducing participation costs) and graphic design
For a new agenda on democratic participation and technology
renewal of the argumentative body
For a new research agenda:

- Evidence on effectiveness of participatory processes
- Evidence on role of ICT
- Bringing “nudge” and “think” together: choice architecture for participation?
Methodological opportunities
data on existing citizen engagement platforms
FixMyStreet

Effect on responsiveness and propensity to participate

$N = 381,623$
FixMyStreet

Predictors of Government Responsiveness

N = 381,623
technological opportunities for experiments
Rio Grande do Sul

GOTV – Randomized Controlled Trial

\[ N = 50,000 \]
Thank You

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