

An idea for an open source democracy

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Note on the translation

This text is a translation of my paper in Dutch. The translation is done by myself, which has nothing to do with any narcissistic trait but everything with the lack of money for a professional translator. My writing style in Dutch contains long, sometimes complicated sentences, and though the English text could probably be of better language quality if I had chosen to write a new text straight in English, I have chosen to follow the formulations of the Dutch original as closely as possible in order to present my idea as accurate as possible. I gave it my best and I hope it will do until a professional with passion for democracy will volunteer...

The thesis

As long as there is (rightly) no awareness yet that a place in paradise is guaranteed for every world citizen, including his offspring, in our earthly live already, and therefore the sustainable existence of the socioeconomic conditions for a happy life is not an obviousness for anybody, my thesis, based on experience on different levels, is:

Any elite, that is the total of its members, is attaching to the plush in a way that the mechanisms raising from this attachment are much more decisive for the continuation and even enlarging of power imbalances than any other force, including all (initial) good intentions. This is also true for groups with just little power, but still more power than most people have, and also for groups with a leftist stature. An elite is an elite.

This thesis therefore also applies to representational democracies (by definition a system of elites, chosen or not!) both to their governing body and their controlling body. With the latter there is always the hidden agenda matter. For members of the controlling body there is the plush of the current seat, but the plush of the body that is to be controlled is gluing already when they are not even sitting on it (yet)! Therefore, real, convincing opposition, that is the one with a convincing threat of 'sending 'm away' as an always available final move, is not possible, because everybody will be badly in need of each other at the next elections in order to compose the lists of candidates and to redistribute the seats afterwards!

So if any parliament member actually brings in a motion of no confidence, this will, whether they are aware of it or not, cause a threat to most of his colleague parliament members - even within the own political group! The few opponents of the board that are not after a changeover of power because of personal ambitions, will therefore always be isolated by their own mate parliamentarians, unless there will be such an enormous public pressure, that opportunities will rise for those parliamentarians to get prematurely on the higher board plush without needing the current elite. So people with sincere engagement for progress will often drop out disillusioned, and if not, they will either get ethical corrupted or they will achieve far too little.

Due to this kind of mechanisms you ought to get rid of constructions with a representational democracy, without throwing away democracy itself. And this is possible! The technology is there, and so is the wide availability of it.

Associations with the expression 'open source democracy'

The expression open source democracy should bring up the following associations:

- Resourcing of the thinking about democracy: what do we really mean with 'power to the people'? Do the current forms of democracy actually meet this principle? Etc.
- Availability for everyone
- Implicit recognition of the existence of *enough* expertise in the population itself
- The active co-creation of a better democracy, that is the thinking along with all of us about all the problems we are facing on small and large scale in this world
- The free share of the results of that thinking along
- The incorporation, in a structured way, of all small and large contributions to democracy inside a bigger entirety
- Software

What is my interpretation of open source democracy?

An open source democracy is a democracy that people make themselves. Not voting from time to time on persons or parties, but again and again, and on self-created plans and solutions. Not, as in a

referendum, being allowed to say yes or no to a precooked decision, but acting together with all the people involved right from the start: addressing an issue, addressing causes, finding partial solutions, voting on partial solutions, working out solutions, voting on worked-out solutions, etc. My idea starts with online collaborative mindmapping, open source of course, linked to online fora for free debating and polls about the mindmap items. Based on the mindmap items with most votes different versions of a policy paper/vision/solution will then be made in a collaborative writing environment (Wiki's), those versions will be voted on again, etc.

The power of open source democracy on the political and social area

We are talking about already existing tools here, every one of them already worthwhile themselves, but their combination even greatly enhances power: in this way it is possible to develop something right from the bottom in a structured and democratic way, with the maximum possible support, and making use of all the available knowledge. Besides: like this, it is all about the contents instead of the persons who write that contents. And: the process of the building up from the bottom of a vision (or ideology!) is the essence of the vision itself! Because only in this way you will get an honest and complete picture of what everybody wants, *and* of the results that are eventually coming out of the jointly job to honour all those wishes in the best possible way. It's a kind of what the Dutch call 'polderen' (consensus policy), but then digitized, very structured and democratic, with the really affected at the negotiation table instead of only the elite.

If, on top of this, you apply the principle that the moderators (which can thus be everybody, but also, based on their contributions, chosen senior moderators) will focus mainly on the vulnerable group at date, then you will maximally prevent the rise of a new elite, and therefore there will be a maximum chance of sustainable power balance! This is by the way my interpretation of the socialistic term 'permanent revolution' and then works as follows: moderators (of course (also) the vulnerables themselves!) who are promoting solutions and visions for disadvantaged groups, will so provide the opportunity to those disadvantaged groups (like for example the political left!) to exercise great pressure (in a full-blown open source democracy it should, of course, be regulated by law that the mindmap item with most votes is simply determining the concerning legislation!). Think of the boost that every member of a disadvantaged group will get if he can continuously see that many others want the same thing as he wants! By contrast, elites don't have to mindmap to promote their needs, and if they do, it will be so obvious that their needs are just the endurance of their power, that their items will automatically get less votes. (The trick is also to turn their wishes (for example: I want to keep my privileged position) into solutions that will benefit all (like: that is only possible if you are ready to reduce your wealth, because then the labour income share will increase, which will increase demand, etc.).)

The focus on the vulnerable/disadvantaged group at date doesn't even have to be taken as a rule to still be the leading principle. Are these groups not just by definition disadvantaged because they haven't (had) sufficient control over their lives? And the group that isn't disadvantaged at date but is vulnerable (the precariat)? Those people will either be scared to lose their control over their lives, or, in case they didn't have that control, they just had luck with their living situation until date. If everybody is having free entrance to the mindmaps, the vulnerable/disadvantaged will feel the greatest need to participate AND will have the highest chance to win the public opinion. And the other way around: the more powerful and the richer in socioeconomic way, the less need for participation and the more obvious their motives will be if they do. So there is an automatic tendency to balance.

Advantages concerning the quality of decisions and concerning the chances of their successful implementation

Digital 'mindmapping', applied with a tool with a 'online collaborative feature' (everybody can work in it) and with a voting feature (but voting is also possibly through the poll function of a forum), is, if applied massively, not only a very powerful method for the development of visions, wishes and solutions, etc. in a structured and democratic way, it is also a very effective method to promote the free inventorying of ideas and theses, at the same time preventing to disturb this process by premature judgement making. In addition will all factors connected with complex issues, including those factors from which it is not clear immediately how they are related, continuously stay in sight. At last is mindmapping a very attractive way of presenting.

Texts produced based on this method, are thus reflecting the maximum use of the knowledge potential of all the people that want to participate *and* those texts will have, by definition, a broad support. When there is time to produce more versions of a text, versions that will be proposed for vote, possibly per point or paragraph, then you will get a text with the greatest support possible! In each case will this method, through the active participation in both the development and decision making processes from all the people involved, contribute from the very beginning not only to the quality from the solution but also to the successful implementation of a solution, even when that solution is not yet known!

To enlarge the support for proposed solutions and policies even more than what is already happening through the cooperative development, it is also wise to have a look at the way of voting. When you are working based on the usual majority decisions, there will always be a part that will not get what they wanted, which can, in the case of more than two voting options, even be an absolute majority of the voters! This is where the systemic consensus principle can help. This method is not based on preferential votes but, on the contrary, on 'resistance votes'. Every voter gives zero points to the solution he totally agrees with, ten points to the solution he is totally against, and one to nine points to every grade in between. The solution with the fewest resistance votes will win. In this way it is not 'the winner takes it all', but will only those solutions win that are facing the lowest resistance. So this is a system based on solidarity with the focus on finding solutions that are acceptable for everybody, where systems based on the majority principle will automatically put the focus away from the contents of the solution towards the finding of allies to achieve the triumph of the own will...

Practical aspects

This method of open source democracy can be applied at every level. To achieve an optimal policy on a larger scale a pyramid of mindmaps could be build (of companies, associations, neighbourhoods, cities, regions, etc.). Every mindmap can be started by everybody, but to ensure construction chosen moderators (based on their contributions to mindmaps) could also be assigned.

Access will always be free, but to ensure a minimum participation *and* to promote political awareness and/or sense of responsibility, participation duties could be randomly assigned periodically.

Role of the representing power

Another, very important, side-effect from the in this way created direct democracy, is that the representational democracy (the parliament) will be more or less superfluous, which means that contents will go before the persons elected, and secondly that the always immense risk of power abuse (the thesis we started with!) will be eliminated simultaneously!

The fact that a representational power can become superfluous doesn't mean that personal qualities in the area of rhetoric and the art of convincing are losing importance. On the contrary: an omnipresence of democracy at every area and level will provide much more involvement by the people, which will make them to organise, in order to promote their mindmap items or to better understand those from other people, physical meetings probably more than ever. This is actually very good of course, and power abuse will still be impossible because the decision power will always stay with the whole community which is after all digitally voting on mindmap items which contents is never about persons (because solutions are in essence not about persons but about rules, plans or agreements).

So, in the ideal world there will be no need for representational power anymore, but as long as it is still there (also for the connection with undemocratic entities and still traditional democracies elsewhere) this power should have the following tasks:

- Controlling the execution of the decisions taken in the open source democracy
- Providing substantive contributions to the mindmaps in order to (keep on) engaging maximally in the dialogue with its voters
- The continuous guarding of power balances, everywhere and at every level. For this a continuous guidance and surveillance of the open source democracy itself and its principles is necessary (protection against, among other things, abuse by hacks, trolls, etc.)
- The (continuous) promoting and starting of new open source democracy projects, by, among other things, making this form of democracy *and* the stimulating of general critical thinking, part of education programs at all levels
- Starting open source democracy projects in organisations/bodies of which their elites are most receptive for it (this in relation to the above mentioned risk of abuse by the elites)
- Making, preferably based on the open source democracy, all persons that have the ultimate responsibility for organisations, councils or political bodies electable *and* removable

Some thoughts about the ethics of the popular will versus that of 'the good dictator'

But popular will can also be directed wrongly, isn't it? Is democracy not only the means to reach the goal of equality? If anybody would have merely good intentions for anybody, and anybody was always informed well, then anybody should be able to agree with anybody and there would be no need for majority decisions. The other way around, if somebody with bad intentions succeeds in stirring up a majority, then a majority decision will only give trouble. Both cases show that democracy is coercive, so from this perspective democracy doesn't differ from dictatorship. This is rising the question of how the ethical value of a democracy compares to that of 'the good dictator' (the one with enduring good intentions for anybody).

So, with democracy there are always the risks of being stirred up or not being informed well, and hence the possibility of decisions that turn out badly for some groups. Will this also be the case if decision making is left to an elite? The extreme form of this is the theoretical case of a good dictator. With him the risk of being stirred up and badly informed is, exactly because he is alone, even much bigger, because only he has to be stirred up and getting badly informed. But what if he will work like this: for every decision to be taken he is using the open source democracy method, but he will not take over any decision until it matches with his for anybody right intentions. This implies that the more time you take for a decision the more socially that decision will be.

The level of being well informed and the chance of blocking bad intentions

But what is the chance for a good dictator/elite? And for a dictator/elite that will be good forever? The past is giving us very little hope on that. While democracy is providing chances to serve the

interests of as many as possible groups. But if democracy keeps restricted to voting a new elite time after time, then you will still opt for the principal of institutionalised elites and thus keeping the civilisation inhibiting dynamics of the plush. The open source democracy however is also providing the solution for not being informed well: every citizen can choose his speciality, and exactly because every citizen is specializing himself, the chance for *all* citizens to be informed well will be maximized (after all, every specialist will, statistically spoken, provide the most and the best contributions to the mindmap at stake; mindmaps on the basis of which the interested or involved citizen will determine his choices).

The same applies to the chance of being stirred up based on bad intentions: all citizens can see and have the right to participate in the mindmaps, so the level of screening and adjusting will be maximal.

To shift towards more central levels of control (like a European political union based on the current structures!) will cause the exact opposite: based on the specialisms of a decreasingly amount of people decisions will be taken, so the chances on either not being informed well as on stirring up based on bad intentions as on the keeping of that stirring up uncorrected, are all bigger).

The necessity of a... dictatorship of the control by all!

The continuous control of *all* people over their own individual and communal live is therefore, even apart from the way how to materialise that control, providing maximal chance to constrain all thinkable misery (groups of) people can impose on each other, and maximal chance to serve the interests of and therefore improvement of the position of the vulnerable/disadvantaged groups. The consequence of this thesis is that no single detour should still be allowed to be taken: democracy is end and means at the same time: we have to decide democratically how to design democracy; decide democratically what to do with the current power structures; decide democratically how to (re)distribute power and property (because the presence or non-presence of true control by all transcends even the opposition socialism – capitalism!) etc. etc. The power inequalities can then be eroded from inside: true democratic control or not, in the open source democracy, by the collective creating of their mindmaps, people are already initiating the desired design of their living together. This initially virtual control will lead to a self-consciousness that, at a given moment, will simply not tolerate the actual lack of democratic control any longer!

The actual overtaking of power and property

This democracy revolution is therefore essentially different from the classical ideas of revolution where, also after pressure built-up collectively, is chosen for an abrupt overtaking of power and property, after which a new elite is installed immediately or will emerge by itself. And whatever good intentions that elite will have, because then there is not (yet) a collective control structure, we will principally not have come one step further with the thesis we've started with. With the democracy revolution however, when, at some considerable scale, the moment of intolerance described above has arrived, and the taking over of power and property is at stake, not only that control structure will have been designed already and even be operational in an instant, also the concerning optimal content solutions are worked out already and are ready for implementation.

The actual moment of transfer of power and property will always be a confrontation, whatever form of revolution, but here another potential advantage of revolution by democratising is emerging: where in the classical Marxist revolution the whole system has to be overthrown at once, at least on a national level (in order to achieve control over contra-revolutionary resources like police and army), the democracy revolution can take place at the scale of let's say a company: exactly because the whole alternative and by every person involved co-created (and ascribed!) system is ready for

implementation *and* because it is not about an ordinary change of power, when the moment has come, also on that limited scale, the status quo can, instead of just forming a threat to the elite, simply turn out to be untenable, and only a simple strike or occupation of buildings will prove to be enough to start doing things in another way and with others – that is: with *every* other!

From caterpillar to butterfly, every generation anew

You could also say that, while the world keeps turning, the existing control structure is transforming from a caterpillar in its cocoon to a butterfly of open source democracy, and that subsequently a strike or occupation will burst the cocoon, so that suddenly becomes clear there is no caterpillar anymore – the old control structure has turned to a dead and effectively powerless shell, but at the same time a new control structure of beautiful and fertile butterflies is spreading its wings.

The metaphor of caterpillar and butterfly is also revealing because of another reason: like the reproduction of the butterfly starts again with the caterpillar, also the open source democracy has to be born anew every generation, and completely analogous with the words of the American thinker John Dewey, education, *Bildung* is its midwife. Even in a world of total open source democracy, every new generation has to deal with empire-builders, unforeseen drastic events and threats, and of course with humans eternal urge to change, that constantly both can lead to his downfall as to his saviour. And there is only chance for saviour when the open dialogue about the living together of human is put mandatory from early childhood.

And now?

Globalisation has made the grip of capitalism, i.e. the neoliberal family, so totally, that it twists the parliamentary democracies round its little finger till in the lowest organisational levels. And thus it all boils down to wake up and stimulate the critical capacity and political responsibility of the *non-chosen* citizen to prevent us from decaying into even more extreme inequality, a new (cold) war, not to say barbarism! ‘There is no alternative!’

When applying the open source democracy, it will bring completely new dynamics, including undesired side-effects and unforeseen difficulties. Still many questions are waiting for answers: for example what do you agree on the term wherein the actual voting result will be turned into the effectuation of the underlying policy proposal? How much time will you give for the implementation of such a proposal? Are you, in order to enlarge the number of votes, going to work with delegates on topics where you are not comfortable with or simply lack the time for? (Delegates are a form of representational democracy again, so then you should surely build in the possibility to withdraw your vote that is cast by your delegates (transparency!) at any moment as well as your authorisation to them.)

In any case will the implementation of the open source democracy, even on the smallest scale, quickly and extensively descend an awareness that collective control does not only feel good and is very necessary indeed, but also ought to be an obvious characteristic of the whole society!

So let’s start experimenting as soon as possible! Everywhere, but especially inside the current representational democracy bodies, so that at first the (awareness of) true democracy will come there where the policy is made *until now*!