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# The Genre System Lens on E-Democracy

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**Abstract.** E-Democracy aims at enhancing citizen involvement in societal communication and decision making. However, the very ideals of democracy vary while reports of e-democracy in use have often left them undiscussed. Moreover, theoretical works on the potential of information technology (IT) for democratization have often viewed IT as a “black box”, and assumed that technology should create an impact as such. Hence, there is a dearth of research on the interplay between models of e-democracy and actual IT artefacts in use. We suggest and elaborate an analytical framework, which combines the genre system lens of organizational communication and contemporary e-democracy models. The framework adheres to the ensemble view of IT artefacts. We illustrate use of the framework through a retrospective analysis of four e-democracy applications. The framework reveals similarities and differences between particular e-democracy contexts and applications, which can now be more concretely discussed at the level of genre systems and their constituent genres. Such analytical dimensions as malleability, genre compatibility, and density of genre systems may give insight for further research and knowledge accumulation on e-democracy.

*Key words:* E-Democracy, genre, genre systems, IT artefacts.

# 1 Introduction

The idea of democracy depends fundamentally on effective communication and decision-making about public issues among citizens, politicians, officers and other stakeholders (Habermas 1996; Van Dijk 2000). In the era of computers and digital media, a proportion of, if not all, such activities can be supported by information technology (IT). Computer support for democratic decision-making and communication has been around since the 1970s. The first computer-aided voting system was developed in 1970 (Turoff 1972) and the first “electronic town meeting” was held in New York in 1973 (Becker & Slaton 2000). The concept of tele-democracy has, since the 1980s, addressed interactive solutions, which utilize telephones, interactive television and computers to inform and to register citizen opinions and feedback about varying issues (Becker & Slaton 2000). The first e-mail applications for enhancing municipal and state-level democracy were introduced in the end of the 1980s (Groper 1996). The term e-democracy became popular in connection to the Minnesota Electronic Democracy forum in 1994, regarded as the first www-based application in the field (Clift 2000).

It is widely suggested that e-democracy enhances democracy and supplements functions of the traditional societal institutions (Aidemark 2003; Chadwick and May 2003; Grönlund 2003; Hoff et al. 2003; Kampen and Snijkers 2003; Macintosh et al. 2005). Potential envisioned benefits include improved interaction between citizens, politicians and the administration (Jensen 2003), broadened political participation (Chadwick and May 2003; Grönlund 2003; Kampen and Snijkers 2003; Tsagarousianou et al. 1998) and equal access to information for all (Hoff et al. 2003; Tsagarousianou et al. 1998). Based on these characteristics, our definition of e-democracy refers in general to the use of IT for involving citizens in political communication and decision-making together with the other stakeholders.

Beyond a handful of local success stories, e-democracy initiatives have rarely resulted in any large-scale impact on public participation. A lack of public debate over the role of IT on societal decision-making and communication has restricted success in e-democracy projects (Schmidtke 1998). Moreover, the stakeholders who possess operational power in representational democracies may appear reluctant to adopt e-democracy innovations (Mahrer and Krimmer 2005). However, we still share the common belief that e-democracy has the potential to evolve and to become more effectively combined with the objectives and ideals of democratic societies (Aidemark 2003; Anttiroiko 2003; Biasiotti and Nannucci 2004; Grönlund 2003; Hoff et al. 2000; Hoff et al. 2003; Marcella et al. 2002; Smith 2000; Steyaert 2000).

In contemporary theorizing of democracy, use of IT has often been simplistically coupled to direct “cyberdemocracy” and radical change of political decision-

making. This ignores the need to understand how IT could more broadly influence the prevailing forms of democracy (Bellamy and Taylor 1998; Hoff et al. 2000). Moreover, much of the recent research on e-democracy has regarded technology, such as ‘the Internet,’ as a black box, instead of identifying how different IT artefacts and their uses relate to the varying models of e-democracy recognized in the field (Päivärinta and Sæbø 2006).

Hence, in this article, we focus on the question: How can we understand e-democracy in more detail in the varying contexts of the actual applications? Especially, our aim is to seek a means for

1. Analysing the interplay between abstract democracy ideals emerging in context and concrete IT artefacts
2. Cumulating knowledge across applications of e-democracy by comparing the contexts and solutions and suggesting lessons learned for other settings with similar characteristics

For these purposes, we suggest a theoretical lens, which combines elements from the genre theory of organizational communication (Yates & Orlikowski 1992; Orlikowski & Yates 1994; Bazerman 1994; Yoshioka et al. 2001; Yates & Orlikowski 2002), and recent advancements in the theory of e-democracy models (Päivärinta & Sæbø 2006). The ensemble view of the IT artefact (Orlikowski & Iacono 2001) is used as a conceptual basis for summarizing our theoretical elaboration.

To explore how the analytical lens can be used for retrospective description and analysis, four examples of e-democracy applications representing four e-democracy models are described in light of the framework. This reveals differences between genre systems in varying democratic contexts, even though many contexts may involve seemingly similar IT artefacts and individual genres. In line with the more generic ideas of Päivärinta (2001) and Yoshioka et al. (2001), we argue that the genre-based analytical lens has the potential to create a more cumulative knowledge base from the previously scattered pieces of e-democracy research. Our work brings theory in the field further from the plain e-democracy models and from the black-box theorizing about the role of IT (e.g., Päivärinta & Sæbø 2006). In addition, we suggest minor adjustments to the contemporary analysis frameworks of genre systems.

The framework is declared in section 2, and section 3 presents an analysis of four e-democracy implementations in light of the framework. Section 4 summarizes the analyses and section 5 discusses implications of our work for e-democracy research and genre system analysis in general. Section 6 introduces our ideas for further research and presents our conclusions.

## 2 The genre system lens on e-democracy

We elaborate our argumentation and framework in two phases. Firstly, we introduce four models of e-democracy based on a recent review on e-democracy literature. However, the plain focus on democracy models does not cover all aspects of full-fledged IT artefacts. The second part of the framework elaboration thus suggests the genre system lens as a conceptual aid to concretize the ensemble view on IT artefacts aimed at enhancing e-democracy and gives grounds for its usefulness as an analysis tool. Before these two phases of argumentation, we sketch the concept of the ensemble view on IT artefacts (Orlikowski and Iacono 2001; Benbasat and Zmud 2003), which serves as a conceptual background for our work.

### 2.1 The ensemble view on IT artefacts

The IT artefact represents the core subject matter in the field of information systems (Orlikowski and Iacono 2001). Here, IT-artefacts are defined as “those bundles of material and cultural properties packaged in some socially recognizable form such as hardware and software” (p. 121). Furthermore, they introduce the ensemble view of IT artefact, which arguably gives the most covering perspective to information systems in context, in which the technology is “only one element in a package.”

Much in line with the ensemble view, Benbasat and Zmud (2003) argue that the IT artefact is the core concept of the field of information systems and define it as: “the application to enable or support some task(s) embedded within a structure(s) that itself is embedded within a context(s).” They continue by saying that the hardware and software design of IT artefacts “encapsulates the structures, routines, norms, and values implicit within the rich contexts in which the artefact is embedded” (p. 186). That is, any full-fledged IT application idea involves

- the *context* in which it is implemented,
- the organizational and social *structure(s)* using and being touched by the system
- the *tasks* supported, and
- the *technology* (or technologies) installed (Orlikowski and Iacono 2001).

In the following, we introduce the models of e-democracy, and suggest the genre system lens as a means for proceeding from the abstract democracy models towards fully-defined IT artefacts for e-democracy.

## 2.2 Models of e-democracy

Ideas and ideals of democracy vary between societies, communities, and even stakeholders within one community. Literature on Democracy models (Held 1996; Lively 1975; Van Dijk 2000) uses varying characteristics in order to clarify differences among democracy ideas. A review of this literature (Päivärinta and Sæbø 2006) suggests a covering but simplified comparison of various e-democracy models based on two fundamental dimensions: inclusion in decisions and control of the agenda (Dahl 1989). Inclusion refers to the idea of whether or not all members of a society are able to participate in current debates and decision-making processes. Control of the agenda is related to the issue of who decides what issues should be addressed in the

<i>Citizens set the agenda</i>	<i>Partisan e-democracy</i>	<i>Direct e-democracy</i>
	<p>Citizens express bottom-up opinions and critique on existing power structures. No explicit connection to the existing governmental or political decision-making processes is defined beforehand. Citizens set the agenda for public discussions, but not for decision-making.</p> <p>IT is introduced to obtain visibility for alternative political expressions uninterrupted by political elite.</p>	<p>Citizens participate directly in decision making processes. The citizens are online, affecting the decisions to be made. Citizens set the agenda both for public discussion and decision-making.</p> <p>IT is a crucial pre-condition for democracy to support coordination among decision- makers.</p>
<i>Government (politicians and officers) sets the agenda</i>	<i>Liberal e-democracy</i>	<i>Deliberative e-democracy</i>
	<p>Government serves citizens who participate in elections and related debates. Government would like to inform and be informed by the citizens without a clear connection to the decision making process.</p> <p>IT is introduced to improve the amount and quality on information exchange between government and citizens.</p>	<p>E-Democracy projects are used for targeted purposes involving citizens in public decision-making processes. The citizens have a good reason to expect that their voices concerning a particular matter are heard.</p> <p>IT is developed for increased citizen participation and involvement in decision making processes.</p>
	<i>Citizens do not have an explicit relationship to decision making processes beyond elections</i>	<i>Citizens have an explicitly defined role in decision making processes.</i>

Table 1: Models of e-democracy (Päivärinta & Sæbø 2006)

first place. The resulting four stereotypical models; liberal, deliberative, partisan, and direct e-democracy, (table 1) allow analytical comparison on different theories, empirical situations and stakeholder perceptions between the models (Päivärinta and Sæbø 2006).

Partisan e-democracy is independent from or in opposition to existing power structures. No explicit connection to the existing government or political decision-making processes is defined. The impact is materialized mostly through general-level pressure of public opinion (Fung 2002; Schneider 1996) both in connection to and between elections (Moon and Yang 2003). Partisan e-democracy projects allow for citizen-initiated participation and implicit citizen involvement in the decision-making process. Active citizens can participate in the political debate not just by using traditional communication channels or by contacting their representatives. Although the word “partisan” is often negatively loaded, referring to advocates for a particular person or cause, Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) use the term in a smoother sense, referring to activities of ordinary citizens in the field of e-democracy, rather than those initiated by politicians. However, a desire to have an impact on the status quo characterizes the partisan model.

In the liberal e-democracy, governmental agencies and the political elite set agenda for decision-making processes. Citizens participate only implicitly, if at all, in the most of those, except voting in elections. Meanwhile, the citizens are mostly regarded as consumers of services and subjects to public governance. Liberal e-democracy is based on a representative government, where citizens form the electorate, participate in public debate and give mandates to representatives (Held 1996). The concept of Deliberative e-democracy connects citizens more explicitly and directly to decision-making processes (Held 1996; Pateman 1970) and emphasizes the role of open discussions in the public sphere (Gimmler 2001). Politicians and citizens share ideas via dialogue and discourse which then leads to the formation of public political opinion. This is a form of representative democracy where transparent input and cooperation between citizens, politicians, and administration constitute the legalisation of power.

The Direct e-democracy model represents a radical alternative to the representative models of democracy. In Direct e-democracy, network-based groups and individuals take over the role of traditional institutions (Bellamy 2000; Held 1996; Lynne 2004). Direct democracy focuses on how traditional institutions lose power in favour of network-based groups or individuals (Bellamy 2000; Held 1996; Lynne 2004). The Internet no longer represents a supplement to traditional communication channels, but a crucial pre-condition for democracy (Bellamy 2000).

In the field of e-democracy, IT is often mentioned with general-level concepts such as ‘the Internet’ or ‘the discussion forum,’ without much accumulation of experience from the actually implemented applications to create more detailed theo-

ry-based knowledge from the field (Päivärinta and Sæbø 2006). A theoretical base remains yet to be created and the contemporary theories of e-democracy mainly summarize some variation in structures of relationships between citizens, politicians, and administration. The IT artefact thus remains as a ‘black box’ because not much attention is paid to actual structures, tasks and technological details. On the other hand, empirical studies reported from actual e-democracy implementations, in turn, often stay implicit with regard to the democracy models while they do focus varyingly on tasks of stakeholders and new IT solutions in one context. The context may be conceptualized in terms of (often weakly grounded) success measures for a particular solution, such as a number of postings received to a forum, without much comparison to other cases or theory (Päivärinta and Sæbø 2006). Theoretical elaborations to form a more detailed analytical framework for e-democracy applications are thus needed.

## 2.3 The genre system lens

This section suggests and motivates the genre system lens of organizational communication to be adopted for elaborating an analytical framework for e-democracy applications.

Yates and Orlikowski (1992) defined a *genre of organizational communication* as a typified and recurrent communicative action, which can be identified primarily by its substance and form. The substance of a genre refers to the socially identifiable and enacted motives and tasks, which give a rational reason for communicative utterances to exist. The form includes issues related to the preferred media for the typified utterances, structural characteristics of how information and communication content is organized and stylistic expectations for the language and other semantically meaningful expressions used. Moreover, identified genres also involve expectations about communities and roles, by which the communicative utterances in question are re-produced and utilized (Yates and Orlikowski 1992). The digital media has added the possibility to add computer-aided functionality to communicative utterances (Shepherd and Watters 1999). For example, the cases of simple functionality of individual home pages in the web, such as linking functionality or hit counters, search functionality of the information portal sites, and the shopping cart and payment functionality of e-business sites may illustrate this idea. Now, the very existence or absence of certain functionality can become a characterizing element of a ‘cybergenre’ (Shepherd and Watters 1999).

In addition to discussing individual genres as such, the concept of genre systems (Bazerman 1994) addresses the analysis of interrelated genres in larger-scale communicative systems or processes (Conger and Schultze 1999; Yates and Orlikowski

2002). For example, presidential elections can include a plethora of typical communication genres in any society—campaign speeches, candidate blogs, media debates, polls, voter registration, voting, results of voting, and many more. Yates and Orlikowski (2002) propose the ‘5W1H’ (Why, What, Who/m, Where, When, How) framework to define and analyse genre systems in more detail:

- The ‘why’ element declares the expectations on the socially recognized purpose of the genre system as a whole.
- The ‘what’ element clarifies the communication content; the constituent individual genres; and their relations that altogether contribute to the general-level purpose of the system.
- The ‘who/m’ element declares the stakeholders, the producers and target audiences of communicative utterances, participating in communication through the genres.
- The ‘where’ element explains the spatial expectations on where the communication takes place.
- The ‘when’ element discusses the temporal, time-related, issues related to the communication.
- Finally, the ‘how’ element reveals the technical issues of implementing the communication in practice; for example, in relation to particular IT artefacts.

## **2.4 The analytical framework**

Based on the discussion above, table 2 summarizes an analytical framework in light of the dimensions of the IT artefact. The context element of e-democracy can be explicated further by discussing which e-democracy models (Päivärinta and Sæbø 2006) prevail, or would be desirable, and why. Now, the e-democracy models provide a theory-grounded framework for this element to define one or more prevailing ‘whys’ in the context at hand from the viewpoint of all involved stakeholders to reach a common denominator, which forms the general-level ‘why’ to be shared for the whole e-democracy environment.

The Who/m element clarifies the stakeholder structure of an e-democracy solution. Under this element, we found it important to study the issue of ‘whose’ e-democracy is actually under discussion, in addition to explicating who communicates to whom. For example, in the review by Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006), some solutions are owned by loose communities of citizen activists; some are owned by media companies; some by municipalities or government offices; some by political

parties, etc. The ‘whose’ element makes power relations among the stakeholders more explicit.

<i>IT Artefact Ensemble</i>	Corresponding Analytical Element of the Genre Lens Framework on e-democracy
<i>Context</i>	Models of e-democracy help position the overall values behind the solution. Why? (of a whole genre system).
<i>Structure</i>	Who/m? Whose? What? (relations between individual genres).
<i>Task</i>	Why? (of individual genres), When? Where? What? (information contents and forms of individual genres).
<i>Technology</i>	How? (functionality, media, and other technical specifications of individual genres).

Table 2: The e-democracy models and genre system lens in light of the ensemble view of IT artefacts

The genre system lens acknowledges that genres may have varying interrelationships within a genre system. Genres can form smoothly integrated workflows (for example, Conger and Schultze 1999), but there may also exist contradictory purposes among individual genres within a system, which anyhow serve a greater level of purpose as a whole. As an example of the latter, Yates and Orlikowski (2002) discuss the contradicting genres established to practice justice, like those used by lawyers and prosecutors, which still both contribute to the bigger purpose of practising justice.

The task element can be covered by identifying the purposes (‘why’) of individual genres taking part in the genre system, including the communication acts/tasks required to process received information inputs to resulting information outputs (Conger and Schultze 1999); and the spatial and temporal issues of the genre system and individual genres. The ‘what’ aspect characterizes further the typical content(s) and form(s) of individual genres, which are formed to support one or more tasks.

Finally, the technology element delves deeper into the functionality and other technical specifications of software and hardware to implement the genres and their relationships – represented by the “how” aspect of the genre system framework. In this way, the lens of genre systems of organizational communication (Yates and Orlikowski 2002) together with the framework of e-democracy models (Päivärinta & Sæbø 2006) provides theoretical concepts on which to build descriptions and designs, which cover all elements of the ensemble view of IT artefacts.

Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) illustrated how a generic idea of one IT artefact, the “discussion forum”, was taken into use in different ways under four democracy models. However, their analysis largely neglected the task and structure elements of

the ensemble view. In order to explore the analytical potential of the genre system lens, and thus begin the process towards validation of our theoretical elaboration and analysis of its contributions, we conducted retrospective descriptions and analyses of four e-democracy cases. The aim was to examine and illustrate whether and how the above-elaborated framework could provide a useful analysis and knowledge accumulation tool with the potential to open the black box of IT, if compared to the previous work of e-democracy models alone.

### **3 Retrospective analysis of four e-democracy cases**

The e-democracy literature includes a good number of textual reports and empirical research on e-democracy implementations (Päivärinta and Sæbø 2006). For example, we found and browsed 651 e-democracy-related references from three major library databases (ISI Web of Science, EBSCO Host, and IEEE Explore). The purpose of this section is to illustrate the value of the suggested theoretical constructs and discuss the potential of the genre-system lens rather than reviewing the whole literature of e-democracy in the light of it. Hence, we chose a convenience sample of e-democracy cases from the browsed literature for our theorizing purposes to further illustrate the analytical power of the suggested framework. (A more detailed content analysis of the existing literature as a whole in light of the framework remains for future research).

The e-democracy model framework by Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) was used as a starting point. We sought candidate cases that would represent the different e-democracy models and describe a solution of e-democracy, which is or has been used in practice. The description of a chosen solution should have been preferably made by a person, who had participated in the project in question, so as to ensure the validity of interpretations concerning the purposes and uses of the initial solutions. We identified relatively detailed research reports, which fulfilled our criteria, on three out of the four democracy models: the Partisan model (Aikens 1998), the Liberal model (Rose & Sæbø 2005), and the Deliberative model (Stanley & Weare 2004). To cover and illustrate an analysis on the direct e-democracy model, we chose to include our own analysis of a municipal internet party, which was mentioned by Päivärinta & Sæbø (2006).

Based on the genre lens framework, the following issues were analysed:

- Total purpose(s) (Why) of the genre system mentioned and the Democracy model in question

- Relationship of the genre system to the political decision-making process in the given context (implicit / explicit)
- Owner of the whole genre system (whose)
- Names and purposes of individual genres being a part of the genre system in question (why)
- Stakeholders expected to communicate through the individual genres (who/m)
- Relationship of a particular genre to other genres (what)
- Expectations about where the communication takes place (where)
- Temporal, time-related expectations concerning the communication (when)
- Expectations about information content and typical forms of communication present in the content (what)
- Medium and functionality of communication (how)
- Impacts of the genre system / genre on the stakeholders (if any)

Our genre analysis process was somewhat straightforward if compared to the methodical content analyses, pursuing identification of emerging genres from a body of data on a new communication platform (for example, Orlikowski and Yates 1994; Rose and Sæbø 2005). We have identified the genres of the analysed e-democracy applications based on the names that the reports themselves use to describe the communication patterns involved, and in the case of direct e-democracy, by the terms coined by the Internet party itself, when they refer to the communication happening on-site. Hence, we focus less on identifying new genres. Rather, we discuss already identified genres in the e-democracy cases in question.

### 3.1 Genre system for partisan e-democracy

The Minnesota electronic democracy was one of the first political forums on the Internet (Aikens 1998). The overall idea of the ‘Minnesota electronic democracy forum’ as a *genre system* (Table 3) is to promote the sharing of information on and discussion of Minnesota politics and public policy during and beyond the election and, if possible, even to change the existing political landscape. However, the site claims no explicit relationship to decision-making processes about the matters being discussed. Hence, we categorize the *context* for the Minnesota project into the Partisan e-democracy model, where the main idea is to give public access to

<i>Why (system)</i>	"Promote sharing of information and discussion of Minnesota Politics", "change distribution of power in the democratic process", and "improve our representative democracy"		
<i>Whose (system)</i>	Founded by a citizen/activist , maintained by citizen activists, hosted by 3 <sup>rd</sup> party organizations, and controlled by the founders		
<i>Genres</i>	<i>Messages to the discussions (MN-Politics)</i>	<i>e-Debates (MN-debate)</i>	<i>Agora- The MN e-democracy chronicle</i>
<i>Why</i>	Open discussion about timely issues	Candidate-to-candidate-debate to inform citizens	Express well-formulated opinions
<i>Who/m</i>	Citizens and politicians	Politicians debate; citizens suggest issues; moderator checks legitimacy	Produced by editor and invited authors.
<i>What (relation to other genres)</i>	Subscription to the forum. May set the agenda for e-debates.	Issues raised by citizens in the MN-Politics are debated among candidates.	General articles to motivate candidate participation in e-Debates
<i>Where</i>	On the web-site	On the web-site	On the web-site
<i>When</i>	Ongoing; mostly under elections	Pre-set periods under elections	On-going, partially depending on timely issues
<i>What (information)</i>	Opinions, arguments, and questions	Candidate responses to given issues	Article-like stories
<i>How</i>	asynchronous e-mails posted as discussion threads	E-mails posted as discussions threads	Published on the world-wide web
<i>Genres</i>	Press release	Announcement of the e-debate	Subscription to listserv
<i>Why</i>	Advertise the forum, gain visibility	Inform about existence, time and place of e-debates	Register users
<i>Who/m</i>	Produced by the host	Produced by the host	From subscribers to the list moderator
<i>What (relation to other genres)</i>	Inform about MN-Politics forum	Time, place, information about the e-Debates	Intention to participate in an appropriate forum
<i>Where</i>	(not specified)	(not specified)	(not specified)
<i>When</i>	Under elections	Before the eDebates	On-going
<i>What (information)</i>	Information about the forum	Information about web-events	Subscription. Information about different roles
<i>How</i>	e-mails	"The Internet"	e-mail

Table 3: Genre System analysis of the Minnesota e-Democracy Forum

information from and about candidates from a government/politician-independent perspective. The idea is more about free presentation of ideas and information than agreeing on one given perspective (Aikens 1998). The forum was founded by a citizen activist and developed by citizens interested in politics. A 3rd party organization volunteered to host the forum. The forum allows citizens, civic organizations, and candidates to participate freely in the political debate.

A few genres were well described in the reports describing the solution. The idea of Messages to the *politics discussions* was to support an accessible conversation about politics in Minnesota. The conversation took place, in principle, continuously; but the level of activities varied according to issues raised. The connection to the decision making process was implicit, since no-one can tell how the discussions would influence the political decisions. Discussions used e-mails and the listserv technology, but the characteristics of these artefacts were not presented in detail in the case description used. Aikens (1998) refers to the number of monthly entries to the discussion list as a measurement of the success of the site. At its liveliest (typically under governor and senate elections), the site attracted roughly 550 individual messages monthly, which Aikens regarded as a “great burst of activity” (p. 7).

Candidates, in turn, were invited to discuss politics by using *e-debates*. Citizens became thus informed about candidates’ viewpoints and could raise their own issues to agenda through a screening procedure controlled by the activists running the site. By using the listserv technology with asynchronous messages, entries and rebuttals, e-debates took place during elections and campaigns for five days each. Here, the activists managed to attract the main candidates by giving visibility to their press releases on the website, which represents a considerable achievement, given the modest coverage of the solution (it was estimated that ca. 700 persons followed e-debates) in 1994 in relation to more traditional media.

One of the activists developed a genre called “*the Agora- The MN e-democracy chronicle*.” The purpose was to express well-thought-out writings and opinions by the editor and invited contributors. The Agora should facilitate the democratic process in the Minnesota electronic democracy forum and focus on the discussion on the construction of a new prototype for an “electronic town hall.” Under elections, the chronicle genre was also used to give space for the opinions of the candidates, and even used as a tool to attract them to e-debates.

To inform about debates and other ongoing activities, a set of advertising-oriented genres were mentioned, including *press releases* and *announcements of e-debates*. These advertised the forum and on-going timely events to potential subscribers and tried to get visibility in traditional mass media. Use of the solution required *subscription to listserv* according to which the site moderators were able to control the use of the solution, and e.g. assign legitimate persons (such as candidates) to e-debates. Altogether, the report used little space to discuss the advertising and ad-

ministrative genres related to the solution in more detail. However, for practical implementations and benchmarking purposes, such information could be extremely useful. By making these issues explicit, we would be more enlightened about the practical requirements for maintaining such solutions and, for example, the usefulness of particular advertising strategies, if the impact of particular advertisement genres is more systematically evaluated.

The site still existed in February 2008, now as a part of a collection of e-democracy forums (E-Democracy.Org 2008). The organization has gained the status of an institutionalized non-profit organization. The founder(s) of the project have even managed to trademark the term “e-democracy”, claiming right to control to which purposes the term could be used in other e-democracy solutions! Another interesting anecdote is that the site claims to represent a “non-partisan, volunteer-based project, whose mission is to expand participation and build stronger democracies and communities through the power of information and communication technologies and strategies” (E-Democracy.Org 2008), which indicates a different connotation for the term “partisan” in the context of the pursued democracy model than in the work of Päivärinta & Sæbø (2006).

### 3.2 Genre system for liberal e-democracy

Rose and Sæbø (2005) describe a Norwegian project in which a municipality-initiated discussion forum, the Democracy Square (demokratitorget.no; Table 4), was set up to “encourage political participation” of citizens in the local elections and beyond. Their work is also of importance in relation to our research, as they use the genre lens for analysing sub-genres of the *discussion forum* genre through a content analysis.

The project spoke of citizens as “electors” with no further connection to any decision-making processes beyond elections. Moreover, the *discussion structure or site structure* to organize the *discussion threads* was pre-defined by the implementation group, with few, if any, possibilities to affect on that. In this sense, the project can be categorized as an example of the liberal e-democracy model, in which the citizen participation ultimately results in better information as a basis for voting decisions. Here, of the main proportion of the altogether 593 analysed entries, 525 were posted within the month before the election, right after the forum was opened. This number compares well to the participation numbers of the MN-Democracy above, whereas the Kristiansand area has less than 10% of the number of inhabitants compared to the metropolitan area of Twin cities in Minnesota. However, the following 269 days after the elections resulted only in 68 additional contributions (Rose and

Sæbø 2005). Hence, the informing function of the liberal e-democracy approach could only attract a reasonable number of users in connection to elections.

<i>Why (system)</i>	Encourage political participation; increase contact between politicians and electors; and availability of information; increase citizens' engagement		
<i>Whose</i>	Two regional and one local municipality, project-driven		
<i>Genres</i>	<i>Discussion thread</i>	<i>Site and discussion structure</i>	<i>Notice board</i>
<i>Why</i>	Participation in themed debates	Categorization of debates and information about the site	(not specified)
<i>Who/m</i>	Citizens and politicians	Discussion categories and structure predefined by host organization	(not specified)
<i>What (relation to other genres)</i>	Discussions linked from the main site	Categories and popularity of discussion threads; log- in fields; links to register; and information	(not specified)
<i>Where</i>	Website	Website	Website
<i>When</i>	On-going activity faded out after elections	Continuously	(not specified)
<i>What (information)</i>	Discussions; marketing; consultation	Preset categories; menu to other information; log in functionality	(not specified)
<i>How</i>	Registered users can open threads or respond	Dynamic links to most popular discussions, and other information	(not specified)
<i>Genres</i>	<i>Information: e-democracy</i>	<i>Information: demokratitorget.no</i>	<i>User registration</i>
<i>Why</i>	(not specified)	(not specified)	To get rights to post entries
<i>Who/m</i>	Producer not specified (host organization?)	Producer not specified (host organization?)	From subscriber to organization
<i>What (relation to other genres)</i>	Links to parties, candidates, and general information	Linked from the main site	Linked from the main site
<i>Where</i>	Website	Website	Website
<i>When</i>	Continuously	Continuously	When a user wants to subscribe
<i>What (information)</i>	Links to information	(not specified)	Personal user information, aliases
<i>How</i>	Hyperlinks	(not specified)	Links from the main site

Table 4: Genre system analysis of Demokratitorget.no

The content analysis by Rose and Sæbø (2006) reveals that a great many citizens implicitly disagreed with the prevailing liberal model of e-democracy; and used the forum with a clear agenda to move it towards a more deliberative model of democracy, with greater ambitions of influence on actual decisions. The politicians, in turn, remained mostly on the safe side of giving information about their agenda and opinions, whereas engagement into discussion from their side remained modest at best. The facts that there was no real need to check for personal information concerning the subscribers and that the politicians' interest vanished after the elections (followed by decreasing citizen interest) strengthen this interpretation.

A wider look on the Democracy Square from the viewpoint of genre systems revealed also other sub-genres of the site, which had been mentioned, but was still not discussed further by Rose and Sæbø (2005). For example, they mention that the solution contained *information about e-democracy* in general and *information about the solution itself*. It remains unclear what had been the purpose of such information, who had produced it, and for which audience. The user registration process has been used mostly as a voluntary opportunity for politicians to give information about their background, whereas full anonymity with aliases and even inadequate personal information inputs have been otherwise allowed. The *notice board* was mentioned, but paid no further attention to, besides a mention that it was only little used. However, from the viewpoint of the genre-system-based analysis, there might have been valuable lessons learned also from the less-described genres and their relationships to the discussion forum, as well. Here, the genre system lens suggests that perhaps we should not be satisfied with reporting design implications for one genre at a time, but that we should take a step back and look at the genre system as a whole. Compared to the case of MN e-democracy above, Rose & Sæbø discuss little about advertising for the solution in other forums or media.

### 3.3 Genre system for deliberative e-democracy

Stanley and Weare (2004) investigated an on-line rule-making system for gathering public inputs on a federal policy-making process. The *Strategy and performance planning site* (Table 5) provided opportunities for interest-group involvement in connection to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) in the U.S. Here, the interest groups, including citizens, have an explicitly defined possibility to comment and guide the policy-making process; and their contributions are formally attached to the policies; and should thus make a decision about a policy transparent with regard to the stakeholder input. This genre is called the *docket*. In addition, a *web-based discussion forum* supplements the web-based *e-docket*. It was implemented in parallel with the traditional paper-based docket.

<i>Why (system)</i>	Gain and document public input to a congressionally mandated preparatory phase of a strategic policy plan		
<i>Whose</i>	FMCSA		
<i>Genres</i>	<i>Discussion threads</i>	<i>e-docket</i>	<i>Main site</i>
<i>Why</i>	Discuss federal strategy	Provide official stakeholder input to policy documents	Access to documents and discussions
<i>Who/m</i>	Drivers, citizens, consultants and government officials	Government officials, citizens, consultants, trade unions, industry	(not specified)
<i>What (relation to other genres)</i>	Linked from the main site	Linked from the main site	Structure and access to the whole system
<i>Where</i>	FMCSA website	FMCSA website	FMCSA website
<i>When</i>	Continuously	Continuously	Continuously
<i>What (information)</i>	Opinions concerning further policy	Prepared comments from interest groups	Structure and links to documents and discussions
<i>How</i>	Users post messages; Moderator moderates	Registered users are able to post comments	Links and menus; user registration
<i>Genres</i>	<i>New message broadcast</i>	<i>Documents for information</i>	<i>Advertisement</i>
<i>Why</i>	Encourage interaction, review others' comments	Access to draft plans and reports	Advertise the site
<i>Who/m</i>	Registered visitors and site users	From FMCSA to site users	From FMCSA to public and own employees
<i>What (relation to other genres)</i>	Linked from the main site	Linked from the main site	Information about the system
<i>Where</i>	e-mail	FMCSA website	(not specified)
<i>When</i>	Daily	Continuously	In the initial phase
<i>What (information)</i>	Discussion messages	Draft plans, reports, information	E-mails, online press releases
<i>How</i>	Automatically constructed e-mails	Documents posted on web	(not specified)

Table 5: Genre systems analysis of FMCSA

The FMCSA owns the application. The explicit role of interest groups, including citizens related to the issue to take part in the decisions being made, places this genre system within the Deliberative model of e-democracy. In this case, the success of the experiment was measured through a comparison concerning entries

gained through the traditional docket. The e-docket attracted new interest groups to the discussion, including more untraditional stakeholders in addition to the typical interest organizations, which follow policy-making issues professionally. As well, the number of entries was clearly better than through the traditional means (except with regard to two exceptions in which particular professional organizations had hugely campaigned among the public in more concrete matters). Moreover, the discussion forum gave valuable additional comments and information especially from citizens, who would otherwise have been too cautious to post their comments on the formal e-docket. Hence, Stanley and Weare (2004) conclude that it is the *combination* of these communication forms, rather than their role individually, which affects the whole result.

In addition to the discussion forum and e-docket, a number of other genres related to the genre system as a whole. *New message broadcasts* summarized daily contributions of discussion for those willing to follow-up the debate. A few types of *documents for information* provided access to draft plans, reports, and facts collected by the agency. *Advertisements* were made, when the system was launched to get awareness from the public. This was conducted using e-mail, press releases and memos to employees at FMCSA, and the authors estimated that the word had proceeded person-to-person. It seemed that the whole big system of genres here was considered necessary for the success of the solution, rather than any individual element as such.

### 3.4 Genre system for direct e-democracy

Despite a few advocates for the direct e-democracy model (for example, Westen 2000), its actual implementations have remained rare (Aidemark 2003; Heidar and Saglie 2003; Myles 2004; Netchaeva 2002; Päivärinta & Sæbø 2006). The main objective for any genre system moving from representative democracy towards direct democracy is to empower citizens to be able to make influential decisions directly, without interruption from representatives or government officers.

Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) identified two municipal Internet parties that had explicitly adopted the idea of direct democracy in their internal decision-making process. From these, the site of demoex.net, in Vallentuna, Sweden, was analysed more closely (Table 6). The main objective for the Internet party genre system is to allow all members to affect the behaviour of the party representatives in the city council meetings and decision-making. The party also gained one representative to use political power in the municipal board. The representatives commit themselves to vote in agreement with the internal online voting results of the party, not necessarily according to their own wishes. The solution is owned by the party (organized

<i>Why (system)</i>	Forum for direct democracy as a complement to the political system, where everyone may influence decisions being made. Members are able to take part in debates, which form the ground for decisions. Party representatives follow the member decisions.		
<i>Whose</i>	Citizens activists coordinate and maintain, volunteer resources needed to keep the service alive, party members in charge of the agenda, discussions and voting.		
<i>Genres</i>	<i>Debates on new initiatives</i>	<i>Debate and voting for party's stance</i>	<i>General level idea forum</i>
<i>Why</i>	Citizens (members) suggest topics	Citizens (members) debate and vote	Debate general level ideas
<i>Who/m</i>	Citizen to citizen. Members participate, everyone able to read	Members able to vote	Members initiate, everyone may read
<i>What (relation to other genres)</i>	A special section of the discussion forum	Party stance for meetings in the municipality organs	A section of the discussion forum
<i>Where</i>	Subcategory "Förslag til motioner"	Subcategory "Fullmäktige"	Subcategory "Internt ideforum"
<i>When</i>	When timely issues arise	Before municipality meetings	Continuously
<i>What (information)</i>	Issues suggested, debates, voting	Debates on municipality issues, voting	Comments, ideas, responses on ideas
<i>How</i>	Users suggest topics to be taken up, search function	Comments on issues, e-voting functionality	Member can initiate, search function
<i>Genres</i>	<i>Instructions and ideology documents</i>	<i>Archive</i>	<i>Registration</i>
<i>Why</i>	Inform about the purpose	Document history	Ensure legitimacy of members
<i>Who/m</i>	From party to everyone	Maintained by party	Potential users and party administration
<i>What (relation to other genres)</i>	Guides and rules for participation	Archives news, initiatives, decisions	Give rights to participate, linked from the forum
<i>Where</i>	Subcategories "Så fungerer det" and "Om demoex"	Subcategory "arkiv"	Connected to log-in
<i>When</i>	Continuously	When decisions have been made	When someone would like to join
<i>What (information)</i>	Instructions, explanation of ideology, FAQ's	Articles, press releases etc	Personal contact details
<i>How</i>	Organized by topics, links to information, search function	Menus, documents, links, search function	Forms to register, e-mails back to registrants

Table 6: Genre systems analysis of Demoex.net

in the form of an association), but decisions (also on how to develop the communication system further) are initiated, debated, and taken by the party members.

Any registered user can raise new initiatives, which are to be debated in a screening process, which decides by a simple majority, whether the initiative is interesting enough to be taken into formal voting inside the party, and/or lifted up by the party in the municipal board by the representative(s). Another genre with direct decision-making concerns the issues brought in by the party representative, on which the party has to form an explicit stance. Again, such issues can be debated and voted within a given time-frame. The party also has a *general-level idea forum* for issues that do not require formal decision-making. The decisions, together with relevant materials, are archived. The archive can be accessed through the web.

*User registration* is needed to join the Internet party as a member with full rights. Through a web form and e-mails, requests for username and password are delivered and technical support communicated back to members. User identification and validation is of great importance to maintain the legitimacy of the decisions. *Instructions and ideology clarifications* concerning the idea of direct e-democracy and the use of the site could be found at the party's website, using html sites and document files. Here, the party gives a guide for the contributors with advice on how to make the messages clear, and contribute to the debates.

Perhaps the most important success indicator for the demoex.net party is the fact that it was able to increase its share of votes in the 2006 elections (from 1,7% to 2,9% of the votes), ensuring its representative in the municipal council for a new period. The actual number of discussants or activity to raise new issues to discussion seemed more modest, at best. It was typical that an issue to be voted upon had gained 10-20 votes each. However, the party is clear that it represents a citizen-initiated experiment; and that the very concept of direct (local) e-democracy is still under constant elaboration. Such multi-year experiments will anyhow provide valuable experiences and ideas even for wider audiences about this model of e-democracy.

## 4 Summary of the analyses

Although each of the cases involves use(s) of a seemingly similar technology, the discussion forum, the genre system framework reveals differences between the four IT artefacts of e-democracy within all analysis dimensions. The differences start from the very model and impact of e-democracy pursued, with an immediate impact on the views on political communication and decision making, and the roles of the involved stakeholders. The impact from e-democracy solutions under different models were discussed under different measures. Whereas the solutions with only

an implicit relation to decision-making (MN Politics and Democracy Square) used simply numbers of contributions (without many figures where to compare), the *demoex.net* was mainly speaking of its real vote share in elections. Perhaps the most scientific evaluation had been conducted in the FMCSA case, where the government could directly compare the number and coverage of stakeholder contributions to their experiences from the previous manual dockets gathered through traditional media.

With regard to the stakeholder roles, the citizens were expected to participate in each of the analysed genre systems, but in different ways. Whereas the MN-Politics expects the citizens to indirectly impact politicians with the discussion threads, the Democracy Square governors spoke of citizen participants simply as electors, expecting perhaps less from them. In the FMCSA solution, the citizens knew beforehand how their comments would become visible in connection to the policy under discussion, whereas *demoex.net* expects the citizens by themselves to actively raise and discuss issues and decide upon them within the party organization. Here, the democracy model framework gives a means for comparing such differences in the expectations concerning stakeholder roles and interactions. Accordingly, the very *owners* of the genre systems in question may vary, reflecting on the ideals of who should be the dominant and agenda-setting stakeholder in the public sphere.

There were differences also among the interrelationships between individual genres. *Demoex.net* represents perhaps the most tightly intertwined genre system of three distinguished, but interrelated, discussion forums, and carefully explicated ideas about rules, ideas, and user legitimation. Here, the communication genres relate explicitly to municipal meetings, under which the party needs to take a stance to varying issues. As well, the users of the FMCSA e-docket were clear about the institutionalized nature of the genre in parallel to the traditional paper-based docket which also had maintained its full legitimacy. However, many discussants who shied away from the formal e-docket had participated in the less institutionalized discussion forum. The FMCSA also had perhaps the most systematic advertising effort through many advertisement genres and channels to involve participation. The MN-politics forum required the contributors to appear using their own names, whereas the Democracy Square paid less attention to such issues—perhaps due to the implicit or non-existent ambition for citizen impact on on-going decisions. Here, the ‘where’ aspect actually comes up in relation to where the genres related to the web-based genres take place. The more successful solutions had defined their relationships to the ‘real world’ traditional genres more explicitly, if related to the pretty stand-alone implementation of the Democracy Square.

Genres in genre systems may be more or less affected by the other genres; and contradictions may exist within the level of the whole system. For instance, the “two-ways interactive discussion message threads” for deliberative democracy (ta-

ble 3) influenced topics to be discussed in the FMCSA e-docket (and vice versa). Through our framework, such interdependencies between genres can be analysed. Identifying conflicting genres in genre systems, such as the conflict between the overall purposes of the genre system (*Why* at the context level) and purpose of genres (*Why* at the individual level), could help to explain destructive anomalies in genre systems. For example, in the democracy square, the expectations of citizens about the purpose of the discussion thread genre did not always meet the ideas of the site governors and politicians. If such conflicts exist, the genre system could hardly succeed achieving its purpose. The genre-system-level analysis helps to identify and discuss such issues explicitly.

The temporal aspects varied as well. The Democracy Square was, at the end of the day, a one-off, election-related, experiment, whereas the MN-politics had also managed to survive between elections, although with less interest from the users. On the other hand, the MN-politics had clearly election-related e-debates, which used the discussion forum functionality differently from its public use. The FMCSA forum and docket was clearly an issue-based experiment, which can be compared and replicated to other issue-based, government-owned e-democracy experiments later on (such as in Carlitz & Gunn 2002). In Demoex.net, the actual e-democracy solution involves the work of the party all the time, especially under the municipal board meeting dates.

With regard to the content aspect, several differences of discussion forum content could be found among the solutions even based on these brief sketches of the applications in question. For example, e-debates in MN-Politics vs. the general-level idea forum of demoex.net clearly represent two different genres although to some extent similar technical features. So do the identified sub-genres of the Democracy Square vs. the issue-focused communication in the FMCSA forum, as well. Interestingly, it seems that demoex.net is perhaps the only solution in which the citizen participants can also straightforwardly affect the future form of the communication solution itself. In other analysed solutions, such power for 'meta-communication' (Päivärinta 2001; Yetim 2006) was solely possessed by the owners, that is, hosting activists and organizations, of the systems in question.

The framework addresses differing uses related to seemingly similar technological functionality, depending on the context and content of communication. For example, user registration functionality was used in all the solutions. However, the democracy square did not really force the user identification whereas the verification of the subscriber was a real issue in demoex.net, as well as in MN-Politics, although for different reasons. Furthermore, uses of the discussion topics and threads, although functionally similar, clearly varied across the genre systems and even within one system. For example, in the MN-Politics, the moderators selected discussion threads for e-debates, whereas the ordinary forum allowed free posting

of new threads. On the other hand, different technologies could be used for similar purposes. For example, a message to the discussion thread could be delivered through a listserv e-mail or written directly to the web forum application. Here, we can now discuss about which technological choices would be the most meaningful for the particular task and individual genre at hand.

In general, a cross-case analyses of the four genre systems suggest at least three new analytical dimensions, which may have some significance for gathering lessons learned from the already implemented e-democracy applications: *Malleability*, *Genre compatibility*, and *Density*.

Genre systems can be more or less *malleable* with regard to their ability to adjust to the emerging stakeholder needs. For example, the FMCSA forum was able to flexibly utilize the entries from the less formal discussion forum as a part of inputs to a policy under discussion, whereas the Democracy Square attempted to keep up a stricter structure for discussions controlled by the governors of the list. This raises an interesting discussion about whether or not it would be possible to design such malleability in genre systems, without disturbing the clarity and already enacted purposes and forms of existing communication genres too much. Based on these four cases, it seems that better malleability might facilitate greater utilization of the applications, whereas we saw no clear indications that it would have had a negative impact on the understandability of communication.

Individual genres may be more or less *compatible* in relation to the purposes and forms of each other and to the enacted purpose of the system as a whole. For example, the Democracy Square had little use for the notification board, as its purpose was not even explicitly defined. Moreover, it used the user registration genre only at the surface level, whereas the internet-party really checked the identity of the members in order to practise legitimate decision-making.

Individual genres within a genre system may have more or less *dense* relationships to the purposes and forms of the other genres while forming the overall purpose for the genre system. The MN-politics forum had relatively loose interrelationships between its e-debates and the Agora genre, and these could in principle continue to exist even without each other. The internet-party and the FMCSA case, in turn, seemed to need the implemented genres altogether to fulfill the whole purpose of the system effectively.

## 5 Implications

### 5.1 Implications for e-democracy research

Empirical research on e-democracy has remained a scattered field lacking theoretical foundations and cumulative knowledge that would guide research and practise forward. In this paper, we respond to the call for more theory building in the field (Andersen and Henriksen 2005; Grönlund 2003) by introducing the genre system lens for e-democracy.

Differences between the seemingly similar IT artefacts were identified throughout the analytical dimensions of the suggested framework. Such differences remain less obvious without a more detailed analysis on the whole ensemble view of the application in question: overall purpose and democracy models; structural roles of involved stakeholders; tasks expected from the stakeholders; particular communicative genres in relation to other genres and tasks; information content related to the identified genres; and the more detailed IT functionality (such as user registration, log-in, e-voting) becoming meaningful in varying ways in relation to varying genre systems. We argue that the genre-system-based framework offers a holistic analytical means, which brings the ensemble view of the e-democracy forward.

Our analysis of the four e-democracy solutions above illustrate how the framework can be used to widen the scope of analysis from single genres or single types of IT artefacts towards a more holistic understanding of how particular genre systems consist of genres interacting with other genres under contextual value assumptions of the concept of democracy itself. As well, the interplay between e-democracy models and IT artefacts becomes more concretely visible (Tables 3-6). Especially, the framework brings the previous discussions about IT artefacts and single genres (Rose and Sæbø 2005; Päivärinta and Sæbø 2006) towards more cumulative ideas of IT artefacts in the field of e-democracy. For example, Rose and Sæbø (2005) discussed a single genre in their suggestions for design, whereas Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) combined one type of IT artefact to a discussion of e-democracy models, neglecting the dimensions of tasks, genre relations, and intertwined communicative content of all genres. Researchers can use this framework to accumulate knowledge into more fine-grained categories of genre systems in the field.

The above analysis indicates further that e-democracy applications can and should be described more in depth so that the potential lessons learned from them could be concretized and cumulated. We suggest that the genre system framework provides a basis for more cumulative research efforts, which would be able to learn more from previous research. Moreover, we suggest proactive research efforts to

utilize and test the framework in novel development efforts tightly connected to practice. Although a more covering review of the e-democracy literature is needed to come up with more general knowledge of the state-of-the-art, the examples (Tables 3-6) give hints on what can be missing from the contemporary e-democracy applications.

To summarize, we argue that the framework represents two contributions to contemporary e-democracy research by providing: 1) an in-depth framework in light of which to cumulate knowledge of studies on the success of particular e-democracy models and particular implementations of applications under them (which can also provide guidelines for practitioners) and 2) a theoretical basis to categorize, compare, and criticize e-democracy research, which has hitherto remained largely implicit on varying elements of the ensemble view on IT artefacts, as declared above.

## 5.2 Adjustments to genre system analysis

Compared to the previous genre analysis frameworks, this research illustrates in general the potential of field-specific theories as a means for scrutinizing the context element of IT artefacts. The field-specific theories about the context element give additional insight into genre analysis and genre systems. In our work, recent elaborations of e-democracy models provided a natural starting point for analysis, whereas other IS fields could fruitfully use or develop their own theory frameworks and combine them with the genre system lens. For example, the field of e-learning might benefit from discussions about models of pedagogical theories and approaches combined with down-to-earth experiences from particular genre systems for learning, or, the field of managerial decision-making might want to contrast certain genre systems of managerial communication to particular decision-making approaches.

As another adjustment to the contemporary genre-system frameworks, we found it meaningful to highlight the issue of ‘whose’ genre systems are actually regarded as legitimate communication platforms to exist, in addition to analysing the ‘Who communicates and to Whom’-aspect of particular genres alone. For example, commercial media has recently provided appealing communicative platforms, whereas their neutrality to publish information and citizen inputs may well be questioned in cases of conflicting interests. It may even be necessary to cultivate genres possessed by multiple interest groups to keep the whole phenomenon of e-democracy healthy and dynamic. The whose-aspect has been less prominently visible in the previous genre system analysis frameworks.

Whereas the previous genre system frameworks have often illustrated analyses of one genre system at a time (Yates and Orlikowski 2002) or a generic genre taxonomy (Yoshioka et al. 2001), our cross-genre-system analysis revealed three general-level

ideas for knowledge cumulation. The malleability, genre compatibility, and density dimensions may provide explanatory power for describing why some e-democracy applications succeed (or don't succeed) over time in their societal contexts.

## **6 Further research and conclusion**

Further research is needed to validate and elaborate the suggested analytical lens. First, an obvious next step is to investigate the e-democracy research field more representatively through a more thorough content analysis of the reported e-democracy cases in the literature. Such a study could investigate whether or not the focus of the field has moved at all from the liberal model towards the others, and perhaps create a bench-mark typology of e-democracy genre systems, thus building a basis for further empirical and design-oriented work. Second, three out of the four cases in our analysis represented rather pure models of e-democracy (whereas the stakeholder conceptions of the prevailing democracy models varied in the case of Demokrati-torget). Further research could examine the possibilities for genre systems, where different views of the democracy itself could exist simultaneously. The question remains whether genre systems could be developed to genuinely address stakeholders with fundamentally dissimilar views on democracy, in line with the suggestions by Rose and Sæbø (2005)? Connected to this line of research, it may appear fruitful to study variations of the genre system malleability, genre compatibility and density among the implemented solutions, and to explicate system designs that could successfully combine such issues.

As a logical step forward from studying the existing solutions, proactive research approaches, such as action research and design science, will provide fruitful data while simultaneously developing novel solutions for e-democracy. To start this, a thorough content analysis of the current e-democracy literature would help to collect such lessons and ideas for consideration and to map them with more generic stereotypes and taxonomies of genre systems.

We started with the argument that there is a lack of knowledge of the interplay between varying democratic ideas in context and opportunities of contemporary IT artefacts. We suggested and elaborated an analytical framework for this purpose, which combined the genre system lens together with models of e-democracy. The framework provides a set of theoretically grounded concepts, which adhere to the ensemble view on IT artefacts, representing thus an attempt to conceptualize e-democracy systems more in-depth than the previous theories of the field. Future work is needed to investigate if this understanding could also help to design applications in practice, which would involve citizens to a greater extent in political communica-

tion and decision making. As well, more theoretical efforts are needed to ponder the shortcomings and benefits of the genre system lens in more detail in relation to the competing theoretical approaches to understand IT artefacts in the society. In-depth comparison of the genre lens versus more agency- and evolution-oriented theories of systems and infrastructure development, such as the actor-network theory, might appear beneficial to crystallizing the contributions of the competing approaches in the selected fields of interest.

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