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Competing Visions of eDemocracy in Greenland

Negotiations of Power in Online Political Participation

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Competing Visions of eDemocracy in Greenland: Negotiations of Power in Online Political Participation

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Abstract

By offering new and alternative possibilities for political participation the Internet challenges established and conventional democratic practices and positions. The article explores how legislators and public administration employees at national and municipality levels in Greenland address these possibilities and challenges when they envision eDemocracy. Drawing on Actor-Network Theory and the works of Foucault, the article argues that eDemocratic visions are conditioned by discourses that are continuously shaped by power strategies, ongoing events, and the associations among a wide variety of human and non-human actors. The article argues for a two-step approach to understand the process by which eDemocracy is constructed. First, by tracing the associations among the actors that contribute to the construction, and secondly by analyzing the power relations that make certain visions of eDemocratic more likely or needed than others. The article concludes that eDemocracy as envisioned by Greenlandic legislators and public administration employees involves the citizenry to a greater degree than conventional practices, but also implies unequal power relations among citizens, legislative bodies, and the public administration.

KEYWORDS: eDemocracy, Discourse, Power, Greenland, Foucault, Democracy, Deliberation, Government

Introduction

'*Can people have more political responsibility? Why, yes. Absolutely! The question is whether they are allowed to*' (interview, member of Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq municipal board, November 12th 2014)

Greenland is a young democracy still in the making. For 232 years Greenlanders have had no or only limited influence on Greenlandic politics. In 1814 Greenland became a Danish colony and in 1953 a Danish county. In 1979, however, Home-Rule was introduced and Greenland's first national parliament was democratically elected (Janussen, 2003). In 2009 Greenland took yet another step towards independence and became largely Self-Ruling. To this day it belongs to the Kingdom of Denmark, with Denmark providing an annual subsidy of approximately GPB 353 million. Denmark also maintains control of foreign and defence policy. Greenland is a parliamentary democracy with two legislative levels: the national parliament, Inatsisartut, which has 31 seats, and the four municipalities of Qaasuitsup Kommunia, Qeqqata Kommunia, Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, and Kommune Kujalleq, which have 70 seats in total. Elections are held every fourth year.

As of today, Greenland faces grave political challenges that have attracted attention on, and repeated calls for, civic political participation. Thus, parliamentary decisions regarding extractive industries have spawned public outcry for participation resulting in, amongst other things, the formation of a coalition of NGOs that works for better citizen involvement (Sermitsiaq.ag, 2014a). Simultaneously, feelings of loss of local democracy affected by a 2009 structural reform that reduced 18 municipalities to four have surfaced in public and political debate (sermitsiaq.ag, 2012, 2014c and 2014d).

The two largest municipalities, Qaasuitsup Kommunia and Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, have responded to these challenges in different ways. On March 25, 2014 Qaasuitsup Kommunia consulted its citizens on whether or not to divide the municipality, with 79 percent voting for a division (sermitsiaq.ag, 2014e). Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq has begun to set up local councils in the cities (Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, 2014c). In addition, the legislative bodies and the public administrations have recently begun exploring the democratic potentials of the Internet. Employing the Internet to enhance democracy seems promising considering Greenland's geography and settlement pattern. With a land area the size of Saudi Arabia and a population size equal to that of the Cayman Islands (57,728) (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014), Greenland is one of the least densely populated countries in the world (indexmundi, n.d.). Despite high prices and unstable connections, 72 percent of the population has home access to the Internet. Town dwellers score highest with an Internet penetration of 75 percent, compared to 53 percent in small settlements (HS Analyse, 2013).

The first major ICT-facilitated governance project is the online citizen portal, sullissivik.gl, which was opened to the public in 2012 (KNR, 2012). The portal provides services and information to citizens. In addition, Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq has held its first online poll (Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, 2014a). Meanwhile, citizens increasingly use social media for explicit political purposes, with the effect of challenging the democratic establishment. For example, in autumn 2014 a Facebook group called "Demonstration against the Government" arranged a demonstration, which led to the

Government's resignation and call an early election for parliament (sermitsiaq.ag, 2014f). Taking these circumstances into account, this article pursues the modest question of how legislators and public administration employees in Greenland construct eDemocracy through different visions of its potential.

Theory

The concept of 'eDemocracy' is far from settled. Rather "The very discourse on e-democracy is heterogeneous" (Vedel, 2006: 230). The concept of 'eDemocracy' embraces all kinds of democratic strands from representative and statistical democracy (McLean, 1989) through deliberative (Coleman & Gotze, 2001) and strong democracy (Anttiroiko, 2003) to radical democracy and agonistic pluralism (Dahlberg & Siapera, 2007).[1] 'eDemocracy' most often implies greater political participation. In principle, however, it encompasses any democratic form that can be sustained by the Internet. The question, then, is how the concept of 'eDemocracy' is envisioned locally by legislators and public administration employees and why some visions of eDemocracy are argued for at the price of others. This article argues that the process by which eDemocracy is constructed is conditioned by Internet-based technologies and local power relations. In order to shed light on this construction process I first turn to Actor-Network Theory (ANT) for a theory of action and actors. Afterwards, I turn to Foucault for the tools to understand the link between visions and discourses and how power operates through discourses. Last, I present the methodological approach.

According to ANT, an action is that which modifies the state of affairs. Consequently, anything that is capable of altering the state of affairs is an actor (Latour, 2007, 71). When people turn on their computer, when fiber optic cables transmit data, and when government websites invite political participation, they act. Or rather, they participate in the course of action. "By definition, action is dislocated. Action is borrowed, distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, betrayed, translated" (Latour 2007, 46). It can be difficult to discern how an actor changes the course of things. As long as an actor performs the same actions over time the actor tends to slip into the background. This is especially true with regard to nonhuman-actors because they are more stable than humans (we change our minds more often than computers). If an actor's contribution is modified, however, we can trace the change in the entire course of action and thereby apprehend the actor's prior contributions. It is not until a nonhuman actor, say a light bulb, breaks down that we notice and appreciate that it made it possible for us to read the newspaper. Likewise, it is not until the Internet connection is lost during a Skype call that we come to realize how our online conversation was possible only by the mediation of the Internet.

Obviously, this is a very simple account that merely serves to exemplify the principles. A wide range of diverse actors is needed in order to bring about that specific course of action we might call online political participation. Within this string of actors, each contributes to the course of action in a specific way. They do not passively transmit a

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[1] For a comprehensive account of democratic ideals that are subsumed under 'eDemocracy' see Päivärinta & Sæbø (2006).

program of action. Rather, they are interrelated mediators that "transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry" (Latour, 2007, 39). See for example (Latour, 1994: 38) for a description of how speed bumps on campus force drivers to slow down by translating the moral imperative '"slow down so as not to endanger students" into "slow down and protect my car's suspension".' When legislators or citizens utilize Facebook for political rather than social purposes, they modify the meaning of Facebook from a social medium to a political medium. At the same time Facebook structures the possible field of political action. The technologies used to support eDemocracy distribute, suggest, influence and dominate the visions of eDemocracy. As we will see in the analysis, Internet-based technologies influence quite explicitly legislators' and public administration employees' visions of eDemocracy.

ANT provides the tools to understand and investigate how eDemocratic visions are conditioned by associations among several human and nonhuman actors. It does not, however, tell us why it might be interesting to investigate these visions. To my mind, Foucault provides this argument by linking visions and discourses.

Discourses are the rules that condition systems of 'things said' (Foucault 1991, 63). That is, among many other things, ideas, norms, and visions are discursively conditioned. Visions are, furthermore, one among several other discursively conditioned ways that we construct phenomena. As eDemocracy is still novel in Greenland, visions are the primary means by which eDemocracy is constructed as of today.

Power and discourse are inherently intertwined. Discourses legitimize, construct, and provide meaning to social relations. A liberal democratic discourse, for example, makes representative parliamentary democracy meaningful—it constructs citizens as voters and parliamentarians as legislators representing a constituency through elections, and it legitimizes the power relations between legislators and citizens. Power is the immediate effect of divisions and inequalities in social relations (Foucault 1990, 94). Social relations structure the possible field of action in different ways. Constitutional differences between legislators and citizens, for example, make it more or less difficult for people to participate in and influence politics. This means that power "operates on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of active subjects is able to inscribe itself. It is a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases or contrives, makes more probable or less; in the extreme, it constrains or forbids absolutely" (Foucault 2002, 341).

In order to study discourses "we must question them on the two levels of their tactical productivity (what reciprocal effects of power and knowledge they ensure) and their strategical integration (what conjunction and what force relationship make their utilization necessary in a given episode of the various confrontations that occur)" (Foucault 1990, 102). In order to study how legislators and public administration employees provide meaning to eDemocracy, then, we must analyze who says what and why. This implies that we trace the associations among all contributing actors—human as well as nonhuman. Furthermore, we must analyze the relations that condition their visions of eDemocracy. Thus, by studying legislators' and public administration employees' visions of eDemocracy we can derive the discursive conditions of possibilities and thereby make possible a critique of the inherited power relations.

Method

The method used to examine the paths by which eDemocracy is being constructed in Greenland — and to analyze the tactical productivity and strategic integration of these constructs — was a tri-part cycle. First, actors were identified and characterized as either primary or secondary actors. Next, data on eDemocratic visions was generated. Finally, the data were analyzed, which in turn pointed towards new actors. Through the three iterative steps, the associations between actors were traced and mapped. The ensuing network drew the paths by which eDemocracy is currently constructed in Greenland. Each of the steps is discussed in the following three sections, starting with the identification of actors.

Identifying Actors

At least two research approaches are possible within the theoretical framework. A pearls-on-a-string approach and an octopus approach (Figure 1). The pearls-on-a-string approach is issue-focused and traces how and why an issue is constructed as it passes through several actors. The octopus approach is actor-focused and traces how and why an actor is informed by several other actors when constructing an issue. The two approaches determine which actors are relevant and which kinds of conclusions can be drawn. The strings-on-a-pearl approach can provide only limited evidence on why each actor shapes the issue as they do. This would require that we account for all the relevant associations of each actor. The octopus approach provides such evidence. But it is limited in scope because it focuses on only one actor and does not trace how issues are shaped beyond the first associations. This study is interested in how and why legislators and public administration employees in Greenland construct eDemocracy. Correspondingly, the current study employs the octopus approach.

Figure 1. Research Approach
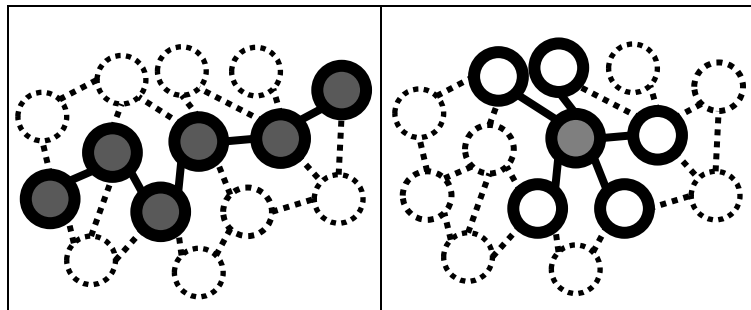
Note: The pearls-on-a-string approach (left) focuses on one issue and traces how it is shaped as it passes through several actors. Each actor is given equal attention. The octopus approach (right) focuses on one actor, which is given primacy, and traces how this specific actor is influenced by several secondary actors when shaping an issue.

The study distinguishes between primary and secondary actors. The primary actors are legislators (members of parliament and members of municipal boards) and public administration employees (employees at the State administration and in municipalities). Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq is included as the only municipality due to accessibility issues: its administrative and political headquarters are located in the capital Nuuk, as is the Self-Rule central administration and the national parliament. Not all legislators and public administration employees are equally relevant: some legislators discuss issues of political participation; others do not. Some public administration employees work with issues pertaining to eDemocracy; others do not.

The legislators and public administration employees who partook in the study were identified through public materials, the popular press, and interviews. During a public debate on large-scale mining projects in the national parliament, a member of parliament called for better conditions for civic political participation in general (Inatsisartut, March 26, 2014). In an interview with a public administration employee at the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources on April 10, 2014, the same legislator was described as having "an ideological vision […] some very general principles [... and wanting] transparency." In order to trace how this specific legislator envisions eDemocracy, an interview was set up. Similarly, an interview was set up with two candidates for parliament, because one of them had written an article in sermitsiaq.ag (2014g) calling for more direct democracy.

Actors that are not legislators or public administration employees but that influence their visions of eDemocracy are considered as secondary actors. These were identified through analysis. The analysis, for example, showed that the eDemocratic element of online dialogue is thoroughly influenced by and contingent upon nonhumans like Facebook and Sermitsiaq.ag (the website of a national newspaper, which allows for online debate of articles). Consequently, Facebook and Sermitsiaq.ag are relevant secondary actors.

Following this associative approach, several primary and secondary actors were identified (Table 1).

Table 1. Actors and Subgroups of Actors.

Category	Actors	
Primary actors	Members of legislative bodies	**Parliament** **Municipal Board** **Village Boards** **Siumut**. Siumut is the leading party of the government and three out of four municipalities

			IA. IA is the largest party in opposition to the government and the leading party in the municipality
	Public administration employees	Self-Rule Administration	**Agency for Digitalization** **Department for Domestic Affairs** **Ministry for Health and Infrastructure** **Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources**
		Municipality Administration	**Office for Strategic Development** **Department of Communication** **Board of Directors** **Management of Construction and Environment**
Secondary actors	Citizens		**Citizens**
	Organisations		**The union of Greenlandic municipalities (KANUKOKA)** **The NGO Coalition for Better Citizen Involvement**
	Technologies		**sullissivik.gl** **sermitsiaq.ag** **Facebook** **betrireykjavik.is**. betrireykjavik.is is an eDemocratic project based in Reykjavik, Iceland.
	Enterprises		**TelePost**. TelePost is a Self-Rule owned company that manages the communication infrastructure

| | Kimik iT. Kimit iT is a private enterprise that provides three out of four municipalities in Greenland with IT and manages the link between Greenlandic public IT systems and the Central Person Registry in Denmark.

Nets. Nets is a private company that manages the login system used for sullissivik.gl. It is owned by Bain Capital, Advent International and the Danish pension fund ATP. |
| The researcher | **The researcher** |

The researcher (i.e. the author) is a significant secondary actor having worked three and a half years at sullissivik.gl, and through setting up and partaking in interviews, conducting the analysis, and tracing the associations.

Generating Data

The data for the study consists of political practices, public materials and open-ended interviews. The political practices include the first online poll initiated by Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq in August 2014. Public materials include newspaper articles and official statements concerning the online poll, the parliamentary report on the structural reform (Strukturudvalget, 2005), the national digitalization strategy 2014–2017 (Naalakkersuisut – Government of Greenland, 2014), the opening speech by the Government Premier at the opening of the autumn session of the parliament on September 13, 2013 (Hammond, 2013), observation at a public panel debate entitled 'The future citizen inclusion' arranged by WWF and ICC Greenland, and an administrative memo concerning citizen inclusion in political decisions regarding the mineral sector (Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources, 2013). Finally, in March, April, November and December 2014 interviews lasting from one to two hours were conducted with 15 legislators and public administration employees. Peek and Fothergill (2009, 44) argue that the number of interviews should "reflect the research plan, including which sub-groups have been targeted" and that "three to five groups are usually adequate, as more groups seldom provide new insights." For this study, eight interviews, of which four were group interviews, were deemed enough. The interviews are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. List of Interviews.

| Primary actors | Subgroup | Type | Date |

Legislators	Member of Parliament (MP)	One-to-one	04-28-2014
	Candidates for Parliament (CP)	Group (two participants)	11-27-2014
	Members of Municipal Board (MMB1)	Group (three participants)	04-11-2014
	Member of Municipal Board (MMB2)	One-to-one	11-12-2014
Public administration employees	Department for Domestic Affairs (DDA)	One-to-one	04-30-2014
	Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources (MIMR)	One-to-one	04-10-2014
	Office for Strategic Development (OSD)	Group (four participants)	03-14-2014
	Department of Communication (DC)	Group (two participants)	12-04-2014

The purpose of the interviews was to examine how legislators and public administration employees construct eDemocracy and to identify additional actors that influence these constructions. Interviews, and especially group interviews, are well suited to meet these demands (Wilkinson 1998, 1999). First of all, the aim of group interviews is to make the participants talk to each other, rather than answering questions from the interviewer. Secondly, group interviews are a useful way to generate normative opinions, as it lets participants discuss their norms (Kitzinger, 1994; Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). It is easier to discuss normative opinions than personal experiences. To foster interaction among the participants while keeping the conversations thematically relevant, a rough interview guide was designed. It consisted of four broad thematic questions: Why is political participation relevant? What is political participation? How could political participation be technologically mediated? What are the possibilities and challenges for technologically mediated political participation? Each theme had several sub-questions intended to sustain the conversation. Some of these were descriptive such as 'how do you experience online political deliberation?' and some were normative such as 'who ought to set the political agenda?'. It was not a problem that normative and descriptive questions were mixed. During interviews, participants did not restrict themselves to descriptive answers even though they were asked a descriptive question. Rather, descriptions were saturated with values. Correspondingly, participants justified their opinions through accounts of their experiences.

When conducting interviews, the researcher necessarily influences the production of data. This is problematic according to a view on discourse analysis, which states that the proper object of study is discourses that would be present even without the intervention of the researcher (Poulsen, 2000). Against this critique, I would argue that the researcher's interference in the data production is not a problem that needs to be addressed. Rather, the researcher is simply an actor on a par with other actors. The fact that the interviewer interferes in the data production does not disqualify the data. What is called for, rather, is an analysis that accounts for how the researcher contributes to the visions of eDemocracy.

In order to facilitate the analysis, all data were coded using QDA Miner Lite,[2] a free-to-use coding software that lets you structure any text source into actors, themes, subthemes, moods, patterns of interaction, etc.

Data Analysis

The analysis attempted in this article derives from a theoretical framework best described as 'associative discourse analysis.' The purpose of the analysis is to examine how members of legislative bodies and public administration employees construct eDemocracy and why they construct eDemocracy as they do. The first step is to trace associations among actors (Latour 2000, 2007), by paying attention to the sources that inform the primary actors' visions of eDemocracy. Any source is valid and counts as a contributing actor as long as it modifies the vision under consideration. If a public administration employee draws on Facebook in order to define eDemocracy, then Facebook adds to that definition. Next, attention must be paid to the effects on power relations that the specific vision implies. A vision of eDemocracy, for example, that frames political participation in terms of mere information consumption, leaves legislators with the authority to take political decisions while making it all the more difficult for citizens to influence these decisions. The implied effect is that the political power relationship between the two is unequal. Finally, the analysis needs to consider the context to which the specific eDemocratic vision responds. One such contextual factor is the technological possibilities of for example massive online collaboration, which legislators and public administration employees might perceive as a threat to their privileged positions. Consequently, they need to reinvent and legitimize their positions.
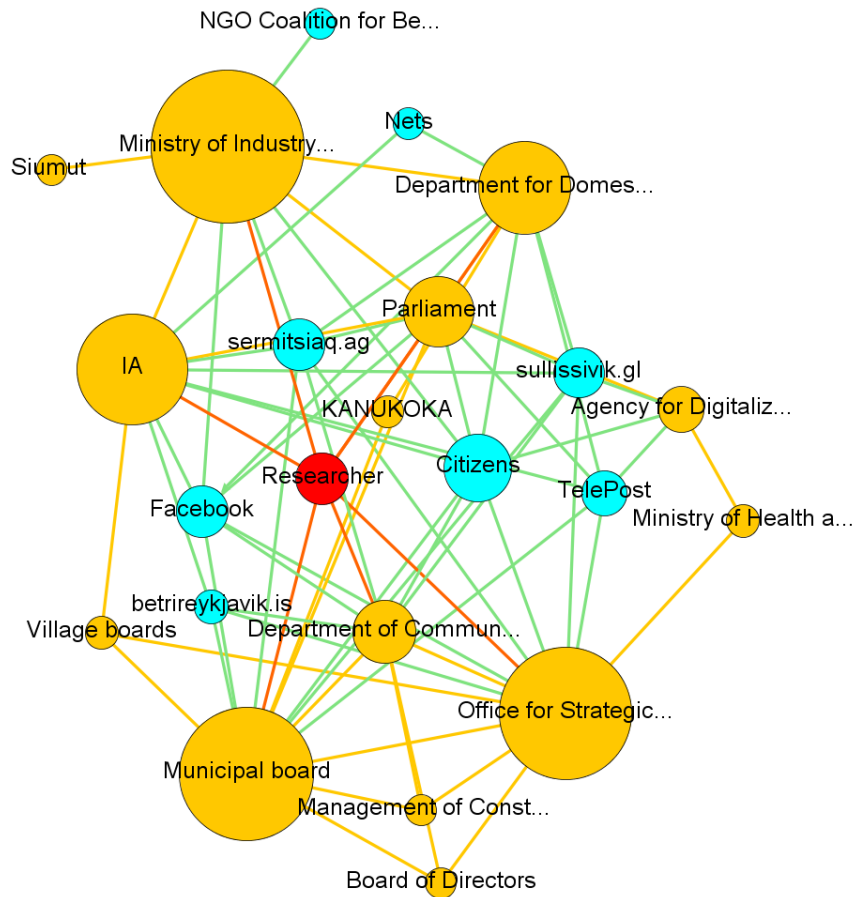
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[2] http://provalisresearch.com/products/qualitative-data-analysis-software/freeware/

Analysis and Findings

Paths of Discursive Power

Following the method of associative discourse analysis, a map was created to describe the paths of discursive power (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Paths of Discursive Power.

Note: Yellow nodes: Primary actors. Blue nodes: Secondary actors. Red nodes: the researcher. Yellow edges: associations between primary actors. Green edges: associations between primary and secondary actors. Orange edges: associations between the researcher and primary actors. A node's size indicates the number of associations in which the actors are a part; the larger the node the greater share of the median number of total associations it has.

eDemocratic Impetuses: Strategic Integration

The legislators and public administration employees in this study are simultaneously pushing themselves and are being pushed towards greater use of ICTs to facilitate and enhance democracy. They do not see themselves as the primary driving forces behind eDemocracy, but as respondents to technological development and emerging uses. Thus, the simultaneous technological motivation and conditioning is expressed in statements like "that's just the way the development goes, right?" (OSD), "it is more important than ever that we constantly consider digitization as a driving force" (Naalakkersuisut – Government of Greenland, 2014: 2), "I think that [eDemocracy] is the future... it is approaching faster than I think" (MMB), "We must admit that sometimes we feel that it is not so much legislation and so on that affects daily life. It is as much technological change" (DDA) and "It is a platform [the Internet] you must use and that you have to develop more" (MP).

Similarly, the actors' opposition towards the democratic status quo is articulated: "I don't think that politicians listen enough to the citizens" (CP); "It's almost gradually becoming a form of shareholder democracy where at each election, each general meeting, people evaluate: 'Have I been happy? Have I got enough out of it? Like, have I got enough of my share?'. If not, then I choose a new board. Instead of having a participatory democracy" (MIMR); "It has been a tradition to say: 'It is the municipality's problem or it is the Government's'. Point fingers and say: 'it is you who must take care of this'. Instead of seeing oneself as part of the solution" (OSD); "Only rarely do we get in touch with the very young. It is them who are to lift the burden in the future. They are the ones who need to understand the word 'democracy'" (DC).

Thus, democratic crisis coupled with technological developments and emerging uses motivate legislators and public administration employees in Greenland to envision eDemocracy.

eDemocratic Constructions

How do legislators and public administration employees envision eDemocracy? How are these visions informed by associations with other human and nonhuman actors?

The legislators and public administration employees in this study frame eDemocracy primarily in terms of a technologically mediated dialogue between them and citizens. Consultations and voting also form part of their visions for eDemocracy. These types of democratic interaction, however, are not deemed as important as a democratic dialogue between citizens, politicians and the public administration. The value of eDemocracy, in other words, is largely judged by how well it can facilitate a democratic dialogue. During an interview with the municipal board (MMB1), one participant talked about the necessity of restoring democratic dialogue, which had suffered from the 2009 structural reform that reduced 18 municipalities to four, and that in the process of creating municipal power centers removed the municipal legislators from large parts of their constituencies. To this, the remaining participants agreed:

P1. It [democratic dialogue] is a prerequisite for…
P2: Yes
P1: … participation and dialogue and that you don't control from above, but that you kind of listen how ... how can we work together in the best possible way so
P2: Yes. I see it as the core
P1: Yes

Similarly, a public administration employee argued that the overall political quality would improve by a greater dialogue with citizens: "The more input the better. The question is just how" (DDA). The dialogic element is also prioritized outside the eDemocratic context. When the Government Premier opened the fall 2013 parliamentary session, she stated that "The Government is of the opinion that information and dialogue with people create the best projects. […] I have previously mentioned that the Government prioritizes local democracy. These are not just empty words" (Hammond, 2013).

The democratic dialogue is also accentuated by technologies. When discussing eDemocracy, interview participants tended to draw heavily on their experiences with Facebook and sermitsiaq.ag, both of which facilitate online debate, to the effect of limiting their eDemocratic visions to concern online dialogue rather than for example online petitioning. Facebook and similar social media are understood both as challenging and as creating greater possibilities for democratic dialogue. Legislators and public administration employees value online dialogue because it affords citizens not comfortable with speaking directly to either legislators or public administration employees an alternative communication channel. That is, compared to face-to-face dialogue online media creates a comfortable distance between citizens on the one side, and legislators and public administration employees on the other. In addition, the distancing effect is valued because it diminishes the influence of informal power structures. According to legislators and public administration employees the informal power relations of the traditional Greenlandic clan society constrain political participation in Greenland as of today. Thus, it is primarily heads of communities that speak in public debates while the majority's voices are subdued (OSD, MP, MMB1 and MMB2). By making it possible for citizens to raise their voice from the comfort of their homes it is hoped that the effect of the clan relations can be diminished. The distancing effect, however, is also framed as a challenge to the democratic dialogue. Thus, the potential quantity of citizen-generated input challenges the process of lawmaking: "we have talked a lot about how to monitor our media […] That is, Facebook and our webpage, when two-way communication becomes possible there" (DC). This seems especially worrisome to public administration employees who frequently mentioned that citizen involvement is very expensive and time consuming: "It's just extremely tedious […] And it would be much more so if you began to include social media" (DDA). This is deemed all the more troublesome because the public administration already lacks resources: "we just have to realize that our administration, great as it is, have enough to do" (MP).

Technological mediation also poses a challenge to democratic dialogue because it is understood as encouraging a certain type of dialogue that is judged as having a politically

low standard. When asked how they would feel if the political agenda were set by the citizens via a technological platform the members of municipal board replied (MMB1):

> P1: I do not know how to interpret those responses on sermitsiaq.ag, Facebook and ...
> P2: Mmh
> P1: uh... I don't think it's benign. And I do not think its quality... it is very bitter [laughter]
> P3: Mmh
>
> P3: I think that this form for debate [online debate] is free of risks. People can sit at home in their living rooms
> P1: I completely agree
> P3: and all that rage, where does it come from?
> P1: mmh
> P3: There is so much anger
> P1: [sighs]
> P3: and I think that it pollutes the debate in some way

This view was also clearly expressed by public administration employees (MIMR): "That is what you experience on Facebook. But that is not—in my world—an expansion of democracy. Quantitatively it is, as people state their opinions. But, come on, it is a pile of rubbish".

Legislators and public administration employees call for citizen involvement. However, they also perceive citizens as people who are not genuinely interested in politics but who are rather primarily interested in the drama. When speaking on citizens' interest in politics legislators at the municipal board agreed that national politics catches the attention of the citizens because it is much more spectacular than local politics (MMB1). Thus, it is not the politics per se that drives citizen interest but the drama. In addition, they compared the eye-catching drama of national politics with the way citizens themselves discuss politics online:

> P2: I draw a parallel between the comments at sermitsiaq.ag and the debates that go on in the parliament. Because there is [snaps fingers] fireworks
> P1: Mmh
> P3: Mmh
> P2: and it is action packed and there are highly explosive topics and cliff-hangers and everything
> I: [laughter]
> P2: It's extremely exciting. And maybe there is just no tradition in local politics to dig trenches from which you shoot at each other

The same problem was voiced by public administration employees (OSD):

> P3: So it [local politics] is perhaps interesting enough in principle, and there
> may also be some things on the agenda that are of interest to someone, but
> they just won't spend time on it anyway. So they have some other interests
> and some things... It's just...
> P2: I think you're very much right that local politics just isn't very sexy
> P1: mmh
> P2: Well, it just doesn't sell tickets the same way

The citizens' political disinterest was also voiced by a parliamentary legislator. In this case, it is the researcher who initially frames the citizen as politically disinterested. The legislator, however, agrees with this characterization right away and underscores the seriousness of it:

> I: Who shows up [at public political meetings]? And why do the rest not
> show up? One thing can be structural challenges
> P1: Yes
> I: they do not have the time. Another thing may just be that they're actually
> not interested
> P1: Yes. They don't care a whit
> I: Yes, exactly
> P1: And there are a great many of those, I think
> I: Yes
> P1: And their numbers are growing (MP)

Citizens, moreover, are thought to favor social events to political events. Thus, one public administration employee compared public meetings with a 'kaffemik,' that is, a traditional informal social gathering widely used to celebrate birthdays: "This is the way one perceives local democracy: that you, as a minister or politician, go out and talk, even across political parties, and say what you want to say and the village's residents have the opportunity to get up close and are allowed to ask questions. Yes it is a bit like a good kaffemik tradition" (MIMR). Tradition and cultural preferences were also framed as direct challenges to the prospects of eDemocracy:

> P1: I don't know. I just find it hard to imagine that eDemocracy can be
> achieved in our smaller settlements. Not even in Paamiut [the town closest to
> the capitol of Nuuk] [laughter]
> P2: Mmh
> […]
> P3: But ... I agree with P1. I think it is very much part of the culture, still,
> that the relation...
> P2: Yes
> P3: The personal relationship
> P1: Mmh

P3: It is very very important
P2: Mmh
I: Yes
P3: And therefore the physical meeting is still very important (MMB1)

Low Internet penetration is not understood as an obstacle to the implementation of eDemocracy in the remote areas of Greenland. Approximately half of the households in the smaller settlements have Internet access (HS Analyse, 2013). In addition, the structural reform, which created four massive (in terms of size) municipalities out of 18, presupposed that services and information could be provided to the citizens in the most remote areas via the Internet (Strukturudvalget, 2005). The obstacle is the citizens themselves. Their cultural preference for personal relationships and therefore for face-to-face meetings with legislators makes it unlikely that they would endorse the idea of online political engagement.

While the citizen is understood as politically disinterested, it is strongly emphasized that people tend to be informed and hold strong opinions on political issues that affect them personally: "if you ask people directly into the area that affects them—whether it's their child's school or day care or it's their recreational club or whatever it may be—their senior center—and this is something that relates to their life, then people will speak up" (MMB1). In a similar way, citizens are perceived as possessing local as opposed to expert knowledge: "The locals they know their nature. And if you have the patience and time, it implies an astounding amount of knowledge about a lot of issues. About the weather and stuff. There are many of the locals who believe that our airport is placed at the wrong site. It's always foggy out there […] and it blows all the time […] that is the kind of things that the locals know about" (MIMR); "Often, people possess knowledge of local conditions, which can be critical to a project's success" (Hammond, 2013); The public may possess knowledge about practical issues (e.g. weather and road conditions) that improves a mining project (Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources, 2013).

The self-perceptions of legislators and public administration employees also make up significant elements of their vision for eDemocracy. Public administration employees speak of themselves in terms of their professional integrity. According to them, greater involvement of the public via online dialogues is valuable insofar as it improves the quality of acts and the efficiency by which policies are drafted and implemented. That democratic dialogue is understood in terms of administrative efficiency is seen most clearly from the National Digitalization Strategy:

"The democratic dialogue is the cornerstone of society, and therefore
politicians must have access to documents anytime, anywhere. There should
be an analysis of needs, mapping of processes and choice of solution that can
support the politicians' work and streamline the administration"
(Naalakkersuisut – Government of Greenland 2014, 12).

The goal is to facilitate a more efficient public administration rather than providing the populace with a communication channel. In a similar vein, dialogue between citizens

and public administration employees is valued insofar as it ensures that policies are reasonable and workable:

> P1: "so fundamentally... that ought to be the first thing you need to do: It is to make sure that you have some legislation that people generally perceive as good and reasonable and workable" (DDA).

Legislators speak of themselves as visionary as opposed to the citizenry. One legislator provided an account of how her genuine interest in the future of the community was met by indifference from the elder community members:

> P3: I remember that I have tried asking, for example, in Elderly Associations "What do you think about your grandchildren's future?"
> P1: mmh
> P3: So as not only to talk about retirement and home care
> P1: Yes
> I: Yes
> P3: And I thought it was really neat of me asking that way
> P2: [laughs]
> P3: Because people of course are very concerned about their children and grandchildren and some also have great-grandchildren. That didn't bring me very far. And I was really genuinely curious
> I: Yes
> P3: What is the perspective and dreams for them at 80? In 20 or 30 years, how will this community look like? There came a bit. But it was pretty obvious that what they were passionate about was their own tiny world (MMB1)

In addition, legislators perceive themselves as ensuring political responsibility.

> P1: We listen and we have... we are in dialogue. So as P3 says, they [citizens] cannot come and say "Hey. Now there must be a culture house here." Come on... "All right, look..." come on
> P2: Mmh
> P1: There must be a meaning to it [laughter]
> P2: Ultimately, we are the decision makers (MMB1)

According to the logic of this vision, democratic dialogues need to be adjusted to the citizens' assumed political capabilities. That is, the legislative bodies or the public administration must decide on which topics are to be publicly debated and which are not. Furthermore, they need to frame these topics in a way so that citizens are able to participate in the deliberation, which means that the topics need to be sufficiently concrete and affect the citizens personally. "Greenland's Self Rule and the mining companies [must] pay attention not to 'drown' the people in information—and only disseminate the information expected to be relevant to the population" (Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources,

2013). As such, the power to set the political agenda and frame topics is very much placed in the hands of the legislative bodies and the public administration. That this is actual practice was unmistakably expressed by the Government Premier: "The parliament and the government are elected to make decisions on behalf of the people. But sometimes the issues are so important that we have to ask the public directly. Earlier, I mentioned that the government wants to abolish the overall policy of zero tolerance towards uranium. This principal question we decide here in the parliament" (Hammond, 2013). The premier acknowledged that the citizenry ought to be consulted on important issues. However, as the second part of the quote makes apparent, this does not amount to much. Though it was an important and even principal issue, citizens were not to be involved in the decision on whether or not to abolish the zero-tolerance policy towards uranium extraction. The issue was not to be subject of a public vote, most likely because the government, which argued for an annulment of the zero tolerance policy, feared that the public felt otherwise.

The view that legislators, rather than the general public, are necessary critical decision makers also surfaced during a panel debate on the future citizen. The Minister of Industry & Mineral Resources, when pushed by the other participants, threw out his arms in a surrendering gesture and stated in an ironic tone "Well, then we can just do direct democracy like the Swiss Cantons and vote for everything" (author observation, panel debate, April 24, 2014), effectively closing the topic. One possible and indeed plausible interpretation of the ensuing silence is that no one of the participating actors really found direct democracy desirable. This opposition towards direct democracy also surfaced during an interview with a parliamentary candidate. When asked what he meant by 'direct democracy,' he corrected the researcher and stated: "I wrote about MORE direct democracy […] Not that we should import Switzerland's form of government" (CP). Instead of deciding on political decisions, the citizens are to contribute with local knowledge and perspectives once the overall political decisions have been made. For example, it is the legislators' task to decide if a new airport is needed while the citizenry can be consulted on the concrete location of the airport.

The view that legislators ought to take the overall decisions while the citizenry can be consulted on more specific elements is also practiced. In November 2013, the national parliament decided without much public attention that a new parliament building was to be erected in Nuuk. On July 30, 2014, Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq announced in a press release that there would be held an online public vote on where to place this building.[3] Citizens in Nuuk were asked to choose one of the three sites or none of these. In addition, they could comment on their choice. The result of the vote was not binding but was meant to inform the decision to be made later by the municipal board. This approach to citizen involvement was pitched as 'entirely new' (Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, 2014a).

In August the chairman of the national parliament publicized a booklet that argued very strongly for one of the three sites (Johansen, 2014). The booklet did not have the intended effect, though. Instead of persuading the populace, it raised the public's awareness and critique of the entire project. Later in August one of the larger demonstrations in Greenland's history took place (sermitsiaq.ag, 2014b). The protesters demonstrated against the entire project and demanded that the money was spent on schools and public housing

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[3] City planning is a municipal matter.

instead. Consequently, the online vote also gained public attention and momentum: "There was a natural interest in this topic" (DC). When the vote was finally completed at the end of August, three percent voted for the site preferred by the chairman of the parliament. 56 percent voted for none of the three sites. The citizens' comments, which were publicized along with the vote results, show that almost everybody was against the project as such and preferred to spend the money on schools and public housing (Epinion, 2014).

Why did Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq consult the citizens on this matter? And why was it an online consultation? Employees at the Department of Communication employed an argument for efficiency and said that the online consultation saved the public administration a lot of time and money (DC). Legislators said that "it was a democratic experiment" (MMB2) thereby painting a picture of the visionary politician. On the basis of the analysis in this article, we can offer some possible alternative explanations: first, it was a concrete issue. The four options, from which the public could choose, were very specific. No political vision was required to vote for one or the other site. Second, the final decision was left in the hands of the municipal board. The vote result was not decisive for the final decision but only meant as a way to inform the legislators. Third, it was not a critical issue. It was only the *place* for the building that was to be decided upon, and not the building itself. This was stated explicitly once the issue had caught the public's attention (Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, 2014b). The decision for a *non-decisive* vote was also technologically conditioned. Greenlandic banks and the national citizen portal, Sullissivik.gl, use a secure system to identify users and ensure secure transactions. The same system could have been used to identity voters and to ensure secure votes. However, only 50 percent of the electorate had access to this secure system at the time of the vote. It was, therefore, not an option if the vote were to be representative. Instead, it was decided that voters would identify themselves by providing their email address,[4] although it is an insecure way to identify voters. The drawback, or convenient consequence (depending on the perspective), was that the end-result could not be decisive for the final decision. It could be either secure but not representative, or representative but not secure. Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq chose representativeness over security, and placed the final decision in the hands of the municipal board. As one legislator said during an interview: "It is a way to preserve the responsibility [laughter] […] and the power" (MMB2).

The legislators and public administration employees in this study continuously attuned their visions for eDemocracy to unfolding political events. In August and September 2014 two large political demonstrations were arranged by citizens. The first demonstration, as discussed above, was targeted at the Parliament and the plans to build a new parliament building. The second demonstration was targeted at the government and especially the Government Premier, of whom protesters demanded resignation due to misuse of public funds. The demonstration attracted somewhere between 500 and 1,000 protesters. The Premier resigned next day and called an early election (sermitsiaq.ag, 2014f). Following these events legislators' and public administration employees' conceptions of their own roles and of the citizens' political capacities changed somewhat.

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[4] One may wonder whether this choice for a quick, albeit insecure, solution was made in order to take advantage of the momentum of public attention.

Three interviews were conducted with candidates to parliament (CP), members of the municipal board (MMB2) and Department of Communication employees (DC) after the protests had taken place. Compared to the interviews that were conducted prior to the protests, one can detect a change in the way legislators are described. Prior to the protests legislators were described primarily as politically visionary and responsible. After the protests they were also described as someone who could get too much power (MMB2). The quality of online debate was interpreted in a slightly more positive way: "In the beginning it was a very harsh language that was used [online] But over time [...] there is shorter distance between the good eloquent posts [...] So in that way, it has contributed to the development of the debate culture" (CP). Furthermore, the description of the citizen changed from someone who could provide valuable knowledge on local issues to someone who could manage local issues by themselves. A candidate for the 2014 elections for parliament, thus, argued that local matters were best decided by local residents: "The citizens of the small communities could decide for themselves how their communities, small communities, should be developed [...] Instead of deciding this a couple of 1,000 km away [by legislators in the national parliament] [...] I do not think it is a national parliamentarian's role to micro-manage" (CP). Finally, the obstacle for greater citizen political engagement, participation, and responsibility was no longer understood in terms of the citizens themselves. It was not political disinterest, cultural preferences, or inherited clan hierarchies that kept citizens from engaging in politics. After the protests, the cause of lack of political engagement and ownership was understood as the unwillingness by legislators and public administration employees to give up power to the people: "Can people have more political responsibility? Why, yes. Absolutely! The question is whether they are allowed to" (MMB2).

Conclusions and Policy Implications

The process of constructing eDemocracy in Greenland is ongoing. Legislators and public administration employees change their visions for eDemocracy as political events unfold and as new technologies are taken up. It is, therefore, difficult to decide when to begin the analysis and when to stop and draw conclusions. It is possible, though, to trace the processes by which eDemocracy is being constructed. Following ANT's account of action it has been argued in this article that one must trace the associations among a wide range of actors through which these visions are being produced. Drawing on Foucault's discourse/power analysis it was argued that one must analyze the power effects that these concrete visions imply and bring forth the circumstances that make specific visions necessary. By doing so it is possible to derive the conditioning discourse. Employing this method the article has explored how legislators and public administration employees envision eDemocracy in Greenland.

From the eDemocratic visions of legislators and public administration employees—incoherent and inconsistent as they are—we can piece together a common and conditioning discourse that constructs and legitimizes eDemocracy as a way to facilitate participation among citizens, legislators and public administration through dialogue and instructional polls. As such, citizens are given greater possibilities for participating in and influencing

politics than they have in the conventional democratic setup. Legislators or public administration employees, however, are to set the agendas and formulate the topics and all political decisions reside in the hands of the legislative bodies formally representing the public. Their vision is integrated into and reproduces the power strategies of legislators and public administration employees, and affords legislative bodies the prime political and visionary authority. It gives the public administration rational authority in order to ensure efficient and sensible acts. And finally, citizens may help legislators represent the populace and help public administration employees enact rational legislation. They can do so through public polls and by informing them on local matters.

These visions are, however, continually informed by new events and new technologies. The protests against the plans for the new parliament building and against the government, thus, seems to have caused changes in how legislators and public administration employees describe both themselves and citizens' political capacities and therefore the prospects of eDemocracy. In addition, the possibilities for alternative means of online political participation challenge the conventional roles of legislators, public administration employees, and citizens. Because it is technologically possible to make a public matter of political deliberation and decision-making, the conventional representative authority of legislative bodies is put into question. Similarly, the possibilities of online political participation challenge the rational authority of the public administration. As a consequence, legislators and public administration employees are required to make a case for their privileged positions under these technological circumstances. They need to consider the technological possibilities that have destabilized the status quo in the first place. They cannot just be ignored.

This attests to the fact that the actors find themselves in a situation where no stable regime of eDemocratic discourse is identifiable. To use the words of Collier (2009, 95) legislators and public administration employees find themselves "amid upheaval, in sites of problematization in which existing forms have lost their coherence and their purchase in addressing present problems, and in which new forms of understanding and acting have to be invented." This does not mean that the democratic institutions (the parliament, the municipality boards, and the public administration) have lost legitimacy. It means that the possibilities for political participation have been multiplied by the Internet, and that legislators and public administration employees find themselves in the midst of these changes. The Internet has sparked a debate among legislators and public administration employees on how democracy ought to be practiced and which roles citizens, legislators, and public administration employees ought to occupy. This is very significant insofar as the conditioning discourses on eDemocracy construct and legitimize new relations of power. The long term effects, however, depend not only on how eDemocracy is envisioned by legislators and public administration employees: the eDemocratic visions will only impact democratic practice in Greenland to the extent that they are put to practice and structure the way citizens participate in politics. And the protests already discussed suggest that citizens do not necessarily agree or comply with the eDemocratic visions laid forth by legislators and public administration employees.

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