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Cyberspace Effects on Civil Society

The Ultimate Game-Changer or Not?

It is a commonplace to say that digitization or, in broader terms, the emergence of cyberspace as a new arena of human activity, has profoundly affected the life of individuals, communities and societies. This article looks at the effects of cyberspace on one part of a democratic society, namely civil society. If it is assumed to make any difference at a societal level, it is logical to expect that one should be able to identify some kind of changes in the characteristics of civil societies, and through those, in society-state relations in general.

How to make sense of the cyberspace developments in relation to civil society? We use a very simple framework of analysis to tackle the question. First, we draw on the wide range of theoretical literature that discusses the meaning and role of civil society, distinguishing between four different and yet somewhat overlapping categories. Second, we combine this normative-typological discussion with the often-cited notion that the ongoing digitization of societies includes benefits and opportunities as well as downsides and risks to a variety of stakeholders (e.g. WEF, 2016).

The issue at stake then becomes what kind of civil society cyberspace enhances and, conversely, what kind of civil society it constrains. By homing in on Norway (and on Northern Norway in particular), representing one of the most digitized countries in the world with a strong and vibrant civil society, the framework of analysis is enriched with some illustrative data. However, it can arguably be applied and tailored to any society.

This article should be seen as an exploratory study, testing the framework of analysis, whereas a later more quantitative large-N study will follow. The data for the current study derives from three sources. First, in early 2018 we conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews in five non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the fields of human rights, children's rights and protection, humanitarian help, as well as environmental protection and advocacy. In most cases, the main interviewees were the leaders of the organization's national or local branch. Second, to confirm some of our main observations, in early 2019 we carried out a small-scale structured online survey of just over a dozen NGOs. The NGOs interviewed and surveyed were selected on the basis of their proven high level of activity and visibility. At the behest of the majority of the organizations, we follow the anonymity principle in this article. Third, we greatly benefited from a second-hand data source, namely the existing – and indeed rather abundant – research on Norwegian civil society, which we have carefully reviewed and reorganized according to our framework. We also refer to examples from other countries in order to illuminate the generic context.

Our preliminary conclusion is – somewhat surprisingly at odds with the general enthusiasm for digitization/cyberspace as the ultimate game-changer – that while the transfer of certain civic activities to cyberspace has contributed to some seemingly significant changes in the characteristics of Norwegian civil society, it is more a question of basic instrumental qualities (such as ways of communication) rather than intrinsic and structural transformation. This conclusion seems to be in line with some previous empirical research arguing that the effects of web technologies "are non-deterministic" when it comes to civil societies (Eimhjellen, 2019, pp. 137, 150).

Understandings of civil society

Civil society can be seen as a major component of society-state relations, and these relations in turn can be understood as the main ingredient in defining the socio-political system of any (post-)modern

state. Hence, if we argue that the emergence of cyberspace is constitutive as to the nature of civil society, it means moving from a mere technological understanding of cyberspace into much more profound questions concerning democratic politics and emancipation.

The nature, role and value of civil society can be interpreted in multiple ways. This discussion has deep roots in the societal and academic debates of the 19th and 20th centuries. No clear consensus is evident, however, and the issues at stake amount to a veritable battlefield of different conceptions.

Four types of civil society

Civil society's dual relation to the state is often used as the main defining element. Its virtue could be seen in its ability to act as an organized counterweight to the state, whereas one can also postulate the positive effects of civil association for a democratic state (Foley and Edwards, 1996; Patomäki and Pursiainen, 1999). In any case, civil society is not a uniform space of ideas and action. In order to open the 'black box', we have simplified the issue by dividing understandings of civil society into four categories.

Apolitical civil society. Some theorists, dating back to the teaching of such authorities as John Locke, and more recently Joseph Schumpeter, emphasize procedural democracy or classical liberal values. The main focus is on competitive elites that can be replaced by elections, while the politics between elections can be limited to elite bargaining (see Schumpeter, 1976; Held, 1996, pp. 157–198). In this concept of democracy, there is no need for a political civil society in terms of widespread participation outside of elections or pure party politics. Civil society thus consists mainly of private actors in the marketplace, characterized by their search for freedom from the constraints of the state. While not drawing on this Lockean-Schumpeterian tradition literally, those who in turn discuss civil society in terms of the 'third sector' (e.g. Hull et al., 2011; Smith and Lipsky, 1993) might, however, be classified in this apolitical category with the emphasis on a social-sector civil society rather than political participation. Other apolitical organizations such as hobby organisations (e.g. sports clubs) can also be added to this category. The third-sector school often sees the value of civil society in its role between the private market and the state, hence its name. Thus, civil society should take care of those social tasks and functions that neither the market nor the state is able, or willing, to deal with. This implies a highly (neo-)liberalized state, where state welfare functions are largely downplayed. As such, this kind of civil society coexists well *within the state* as a useful force that does not challenge the state.

Political civil society. The second category of civil society theorists, those who base their work on the classical ideas of John Stuart Mill (1993) and the more recent works of John Rawls (1973), is inclined to emphasize the need for more participatory models of democracy, with a focus on fairness and justice. Political civil society is an end in itself, guaranteeing democracy in practice. If there is no widespread participation, not only in elections and in terms of political parties but also in the form of political associations that monitor and can affect decision-making, there will be a de facto escalation of the concentration of privileges and power, leading to an unjust, undemocratic society. In this sense, a political civil society is always to some extent *against the state*. More radical civil society theorists go far beyond the mainstream understandings of Western democracy. Some envisage a post-democratic society based on informal, non-bureaucratic, dynamic and open communities, where politics is seen not as the technology of power and manipulation, but as one of the ways of seeking and achieving meaningful lives – politics from below or even 'anti-political politics' (Havel, 1988; cf. Brannan, 2003).

Transnational civil society. As a third category, we classify those theorists who go still further in their demands for political participation, promoting ideas of a global public space and transnational civil society. In terms of its attitude towards the state, transnational civil society is inherently *beyond the state*. By overcoming the national boundaries, state sovereignty and traditional international hierarchies erode, making room for a more cosmopolitan democratic order (Peterson, 1992; Lipschutz, 1992). While the sovereignty of states may not disappear, national borders become more

open, giving added room for transnational civil society activities that may advance transformative and mobilizing ideas, and exert pressure on state power and the international system (Keck and Siikkink, 1998, p. 217). Global governance indeed requires a force to bridge the gap between the supply and the need for global problem-solving (Florini, 2012). However, others argue that there is no single and unified transnational or global civil society. Global civil society itself is a field of political struggle and social confrontation, where a variety of ideologies and normative projects fight, sometimes literally, for their competing views of society. The social contradictions of the capitalist world order are reflected at the level of global civil society. Global civil society is not necessarily only defeating traditional state borders; in some cases it can even strengthen them, for instance in the form of the global growth of nationalism (e.g. Colas, 2005).

Uncivic civil society. There is, however, a fourth conception of civil society, or rather a kind of mutation or 'doppelganger' (Bob, 2011), namely uncivic civil society. Critics of the notion of an autonomous civil society have pointed out that civil society has been romanticized as an ideal sphere of freedom (Fine and Rai, 1997, p. 2; Whitehead, 1997). Yet civil society may include political movements, or non-political groupings with a political impact, which work against the integration of the political community and focus instead on the disruption of democratic politics and structures. This may concern racist, xenophobic, and jihadist groups, for example, or include criminal elements, such as malicious hackers, organized crime, the mafia, and terrorism. This is closely connected to the lack of social capital. If such traits as a high level of cooperation, trust, civic engagement and collective wellbeing define the civic community, the uncivic community is characterized by defection, distrust, shirking, exploitation, isolation, disorder and stagnation (Putnam, 1993, p. 176). Uncivic civil society does not necessarily challenge the state conception as such. It can, in corrupt and non-democratic states, even be the state's best ally and benefit from its protection. At the same time, it utilizes globalization to avoid state control. In democratic societies, this type of civil society, being an outlaw by nature, could perhaps best be described as *outside the state*.

Framework for analysis

While the aforementioned four conceptions of civil society are mostly at odds with each other, with some overlaps, it is also possible to see elements of each one existing simultaneously in societies. In practice, they form some kind of mix in different proportions that affects and constitutes society-state relations and the respective political systems.

While there are always several causal factors influencing the formation of societies, we focus on cyberspace-related phenomena in particular. Thus, from the above discussion, the following framework for analysis, shown in Table 1, emerges.

[Approximately HERE] Table 1: Civil societies and cyberspace – framework for analysis

Following the framework outlined in Table 1, we categorize our data and arguments, and summarize the findings in Table 2 at the end of the article.

Cyberspace and its effects

What are those mechanisms, caused by the emergence of cyberspace, that enhance or constrain certain civil society developments? What kind of empirical evidence we can gather to identify the developments?

The transformative power of cyberspace?

The term cyberspace was allegedly coined by William Gibson in his 1984 award-winning science fiction novel *Neuromancer*, where it is a virtual reality dataspace called the 'matrix'. Since then, the term has been used differently in a variety of contexts. While Gibson's matrix and reality were intertwined, the later definitions are often rather technological, duly missing the connection between the online and real world, or their coalescence into one reality. Hence, Merriam-Webster, for instance, defines cyberspace as the online world of computer networks, and especially the Internet. Other definitions may detail more elements belonging to cyberspace, such as intranet, social media, virtual reality, and so forth.

In our definition, we acknowledge the aforementioned *technological* dimension of cyberspace, but add two more dimensions found in the literature. The second is the role of cyberspace as a *medium for social interaction*. Real-life circumstances condition both the development and content of cyberspace, the latter functioning as a human extension of sorts (McLuhan, 1964), or a collective intelligence (Lévy, 1999). This genre of literature often sees cyberspace as having the potential to liberate societies from social and political hierarchies, at least in virtual reality. The third dimension, the other side of the coin, is what Dodge and Kitchin (2001, p. 13) argue is the real importance of cyberspace, namely its *transformative power*. Cyberspace facilitates a process of "restructuring, radically altering social, cultural, political, institutional and economic life". Gerbaudo (2012) similarly claims that cyberspace is not detached from physical reality. In the simplest fashion, many real-life social movements are organized in cyberspace, and still have a factual impact. More ambitiously, Reardon and Choucri (2012) note that activist groups' work in cyberspace has the potential to reshape world politics and promote international peace and democratic norms.

These three dimensions (technology, virtual social interaction, and the transformative power) of cyberspace are intertwined. While they together constitute our generic cybersecurity definition, the current research problem leads us, first and foremost, to investigate the level and nature of the *transformative* power of cyberspace in respect of different civil society models and their relative power.

Norwegian civil society

Combining the most up-to-date information from different sources and registers (Brønnøysundregistrene, 2019; Association of NGOs in Norway, n.d.), and depending on the different definitions, the voluntary sector in Norway with some 5.3 million inhabitants, consists of at least 50,000, and in some registers over 100,000 organizations. The majority are based locally, have no employees and very modest financial means. The major source, almost two-thirds, of funding consists of membership fees and sales, with perhaps one-third coming from central and local authorities, and the rest from private donors. In 2018, around 70% of the population notified their membership of one or more organizations, with almost as many actually participating in the activities annually.

Our small-scale interviews and online survey have revealed some general and rather clear trends (albeit initially uncertain due to the small sample), basically independent of the type of NGO. Practically all respondents agreed with the notion that the emergence of technology related to cyberspace/digitization (including the Internet, social media etc.) had "considerably" affected the organization. The activities mostly affected were internal communication, coordination and cooperation, as well as external communication and interaction with the general public. These were followed by such fields as member recruitment, all kinds of additional communication (e.g. with authorities), and fundraising. No organization reported that their basic goals, interests and priorities would have been the object of a major effect due to the emergence of cyberspace, although some saw it as having a moderate effect. By contrast, cyberspace seemed to have played a rather accentuated role in affecting organizational cultures and norms. An overwhelming majority of the organizations saw these effects as positive, and none viewed them entirely negatively.

Our observations support previous notions insomuch as ongoing digitization processes influence "communication structures" in particular, which will affect "how citizens are mobilized and how organizations operate in society" (Enjolras & Strømsnes, 2018, p. 3).

In order to examine these general remarks in greater depth, we will now utilize our framework to discuss the effects of cyberspace on the different categories of civil society.

Apolitical civil society

An apolitical civil society includes an understanding of the electoral model of democracy that emphasizes issues such as property rights, entrepreneurship and individualism rather than any need for collective political action. Entrepreneurship and individualism can be viewed as substitutes for a civil society that help to create individual or group identities that are not too closely connected to the state identity. While the concept of the third sector presupposes collective action, we see it in this context as encompassing an understanding of civil society that is mostly apolitical, putting emphasis on the social organizations working in between the state and the private sector.

Enhancing effects. Cyberspace has opened up new avenues for both entrepreneurship and individualism in terms of self-realization, having multiple direct effects on new products and services, and thus on start-ups (Kiškis, 2013). This trend is potentially breaking existing socio-economic (class) boundaries, and thereby also indirectly affecting broader state-society relations. In creating new class structures and layers, cyberspace may work against the privileged elite-based understanding of this kind of civil society.

As for individualism, the question is whether cyberspace enables an extended individualism – for example in terms of so-called YouTubing and other social media activities – or whether it supports the development of collective identities instead. While at first sight the answer is 'both', some research shows that there are cultural differences: Asian social media users are more collective-oriented, whereas US users cultivate their individualism (Seo et al., 2008). Yet it is claimed that even though social media can help create feelings of solidarity with distant others, it does not support the complex interactions needed for the construction of a cohesive collective identity (Kavada, 2014, p. 361).

Norway is traditionally a country where the Schumpeterian model of pure electoral democracy or a third sector civil society would not have a strong footing. The country is characterized by the highest level of welfare expenditure in Europe and has generally followed the so-called social democratic model no matter which parties constitute the government (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1990; Stryjan, 2006; Defourny and Nyssens, 2010). In addition to the traditionally large share of public ownership in businesses, business cooperatives in such fields as retail and farming have been strong in Norway (Salamon and Sokolowski, 2004; Pestoff, 2004; Hulgård, 2004). This half-collective entrepreneurship footing has been fruitful for new models of entrepreneurship in the post-industrial era, especially so-called social entrepreneurship initiatives, that is, a mixture of social and commercial objectives (Salamon and Sokolowski, 2016; Eimhjellen and Loga, 2016). The emergence of cyberspace has clearly contributed to the creation of this particular field of self-realization combined with the public good.

Lorentzen, Ingstad and Loga (2016) illustrate this by listing five of the most well-known social initiatives: Forskerfabrikken, Pøbelprosjektet, Forandringsfabrikken, Noen AS and Asfalt. The organizations are in diverse fields, including education, health, social services, and children's and young people's rights. All of these companies benefit from cyberspace opportunities. In the case of Asfalt, their business model consists of drug addicts or addicts in recovery selling magazines in the streets and receiving half the selling price. A mobile payment application is essential for this type of activity as Norwegians seldom carry cash. Similar innovative examples relying on digital technology are easy to find, such as farmer-owned cooperatives that use new information technology to better coordinate supply-chain and branding strategies (Engelseth, 2015); or digital resources for social

entrepreneurship concerning the market, industry, competition, e-learning, and so forth (Kavoura and Andersson, 2016).

Civil society as a genuine third sector between the state and the private sector has received less attention with regard to cyberspace effects. Some early research concludes that this sector has been slow to use new technologies to mobilize civic engagement (Barraket, 2005). In general, however, the third sector tends to use the Internet and social media as information and communication channels in much the same way as the for-profit sector, albeit less professionally (e.g. Van Hulle and Dewaelheyns, 2014; Guldbrandsen and Ødegård, 2011). Yet while almost all *national* organizations use diverse digital media and digital tools, only half of the *local* organizations reported likewise (Arnesen et al., 2016). However, some empirical research literature suggests that Internet communication nonetheless strengthens local third sector organizations as well. Eimhjellen's (2013) findings on local NGOs show that those using the Internet have a higher probability of achieving organizational growth than those who do not. They are also more likely to hold physical meetings and to arrange other face-to-face activities.

Our own in-depth interviews and small-scale online survey support the above findings. Although operating at different degrees of effectiveness, most of the NGOs reported using social media to disseminate information about their activities and to maintain constant communication with members and supporters, as well as for launching campaigns to obtain donations, organizing demonstrations, and so forth (cf. Enjolras et al., 2013).

Online groups active with regard to immigration and integration deserve particular attention. In the autumn of 2015, a great number of asylum seekers came to Norway. Provisionally established shelters, reception centres and other public institutions could not meet the needs that such a sudden crisis engendered. Facebook contributed to the mobilization of a large number of Norwegians in a short space of time (Særtrang, 2016). While some studies (Eimhjellen, 2014b) argue that the new technologies tend to reinforce the existing structures, norms and culture in organizations rather than create new ones, the opposite effect was witnessed by a Facebook group called "Refugees Welcome to Norway", which was created in August 2015; indeed, it became something of an organization or movement in itself (Særtrang, 2016, p. 55; Fladmoe et al., 2016). Our own research in Northern Norway also shows that cyberspace has become an arena for discussion, reflection and engagement around the topic of refugees and the role of civil society in easing their situation.

Constraining effects. Although cyberspace presents itself as beneficial for the third sector in many respects, some studies point to the challenges posed by social media in particular to organizations' strategy and management processes (Poell, 2014; cf. Macnamara and Zerfass, 2012). In Norway, organizations that do not use social media have highlighted that these platforms are resource- and time-consuming (Eimhjellen 2013). Hence, organizations with more resources will have a stronger online presence and potentially attract new members. To this end, web technologies may create further inequality. Eimhjellen et al. (2014) and Eimhjellen (2014b), as well as our own observations and interviews, suggest that smaller organizations and those with older members appear to be less likely to use social network sites than those with younger members.

The degree of technical proficiency necessary to administer web technologies has been identified as a constraint for some NGOs. Data shows that 71% of organizations recognized that the Internet had altered their communication patterns, whereas just 9.5% of the organizations reported that the use of web technologies had enabled them to genuinely disseminate information about their policies (Fladmoe et al., 2016). In our interviews, it was reported that the response rate of groups such as refugees and seniors could be rather low if information is disseminated and communication carried out only digitally. Thus, those who use the Internet infrequently might miss valuable information and be excluded from communication (Eimhjellen et al., 2014; Enjolras et al., 2013).

When the use of digital technologies and personal human contact are not in balance, some cultural misunderstandings might take place. Web technologies can be impersonal in the sense that the same

invitation or information is sent en masse. Trust, closeness and community feeling can generally be built mainly on the basis of a more personal approach and through several meetings. Regarding trust, the respondents from all of the organizations in this study pointed out that face-to-face meetings are still quite important: "When a person reads about our work online and signs up as a volunteer, they expect closer contact to us, they expect to see our faces and know that we are real, that our work, efforts and engagement are real […]."

Another constraining aspect of the use of digital technology for communication is related to security concerns. One interviewee from a children's rights NGO emphasized that sensitive information involving vulnerable clients cannot be shared via online platforms. Although the online channel would be easier in many ways, conventional forms of communication such as telephone conversations or meeting in person were preferred. The organization did not perceive cyberspace as a completely safe and secure arena. For instance, online information about the location of the protection centres where children were housed would constitute a risk, as such information could be misused.

Political civil society

Participatory democracy emphasizes the political nature of civil society. At first glance, it appears that the emergence of cyberspace has revolutionized the field, corroborated by a growing body of literature on the 'new public sphere'. This is also the case in relation to Norway, where 'eParticipation' is studied from this perspective (e.g. Johansen, 2013).

Enhancing effects. While cyberspace affects political civil society in much the same fashion as apolitical civil society, the difference is that this discussion often stems from the normative goal of social justice, inclusivity, and maximum participation (e.g. Schuler and Day, 2004). Many earlier studies argue that the potential for civil discourse in cyberspace is strong and that the specifics of cyberspace compared to face-to-face discussion might promote democratic emancipation – especially through disagreement and anarchy (e.g. Papacharissi, 2004). Referring to the Arab Spring of 2011, which originally augured success for anti-authoritarian movements, it was even proclaimed that the use of digital media in organizing popular protests marked the start of the (Huntingtonian) 'Fourth Wave' of democratization (Howard and Hussain, 2013). From early on, it was argued that digitized communication channels contributed to the 'politicization' of some NGOs (e.g. Zelwietro, 1998).

Norwegians are active in civil society but less so in politics. Statistics from 2017 show that only 7% of the Norwegian population above the age of 16 are members of party-political organizations, while only 2% consider themselves to be active members of such parties (Statistics Norway, 2017). As to political civil society, the use of digital platforms has nonetheless enhanced political engagement (Shehata et al., 2016; Svenson, 2016). The Internet and social media increase the level of engagement particularly for those civil society actors that are already involved (Enjolras et al., 2013). A 2011 study on young Norwegians aged 16 to 26 (Enjolras and Segaard, 2011), however, showed that about half of young social media users are politically inactive on social media, while only about 10 percent are highly active. Those who engage politically online are also engaged offline. A large-N survey by Eimhjellen and Ljunggren (2017) showed that around 25 percent of Norwegians using social media are participants in different kinds of political discussion groups, and the majority of them participate in one or several political activities outside the institutionalized political system.

Social media makes it possible to reach those segments of the population that would otherwise be missed (Enjolras et al., 2013). Further, the use of social media appears to be quite effective in creating and organizing events that physically mobilize people in the form of demonstrations, collections or donations (Arnesen et al., 2016). Facebook's ad hoc groups and similar initiatives also have the potential to enhance networked citizens' communicative power to raise societally and politically important issues on the public agenda and initiate changes in society (Sormanen et al., 2016; Enjolras et al., 2013; Eimhjellen, 2014a). This can have a direct impact on local communities in particular, while also becoming a meeting point between people and politicians in certain instances (Svenson, 2016).

The representatives of advocacy organizations that we spoke with reported using social media to create awareness about different political issues and to garner attention from the media and from politicians. Their belief in the power of social media and the Internet to help them influence political agendas can be summarized in the following statement by the leader of an environmental organization: "All you need is a computer and the Internet to change the world!"

Constraining effects. The negative effects of cyberspace on civil society mobilization has remained an under-researched or even neglected field, probably because the positive effects were taken as a given – until quite recently. The recent liberal debates about the downsides of cyberspace have focused on the legal and sometimes illegal use of social-media users' individual and group preferences for manipulating public opinion with the aim of influencing election results with so-called fake news. Stronger arguments proclaim that digitization threatens democracy through unregulated technology, artificial intelligence, election-rigging psychographics, and targeted and manipulative personal messages, leading to a possible dystopia (e.g. Bartlett, 2018). Marxists speak of digital capitalism, which destroys the traditional production mode, both the means and relations of production, and which is devastating for the working class at the same time. With digitalization, it is possible to eliminate employment relationships based on traditional collective agreements and to atomize the work into transactions where workers do not even know each other (e.g. Fuchs and Mosco, 2015).

Thus, after the initial optimism, a more pessimistic view seems to have emerged. Authoritarian states have managed to sustain their power in cyberspace, using the Internet for the purposes of surveillance and propaganda, often referred to as a 'digital dictatorship' in journalistic accounts. In democratic societies, on the other hand, a rather small circle of actors dominates political discussions even in cyberspace (Hansel, 2010). Some research has noted that social media has given rise to an era of 'personalized politics', which may undermine the traditional group-based identity politics of the social movements (Bennett, 2012).

The constraining effects can be understood as complex side effects of cyberspace, where the tactics of communication play a crucial role. Johannessen (2013), focusing on Norway, argues that there was originally an overly positive technological belief that simply introducing digitization would lead to increased political participation. He compares this development to that of the introduction of previous communication technologies, such as radio, TV and the early Internet, and points out that while new technologies do lead to change, new technology *alone* rarely leads to fundamental societal changes. Hence, what was deemed to be a revolution turns out to be part of evolution. Those who have benefited from the new social media arena are 'one-issue activists', previously rather apolitical. Steen-Johnsen, Enjolras and Kruse (2012), in turn, note that NGOs' social media practices in Norway are most often information dissemination rather than genuine interaction. While some critical comments exist on political NGOs' social media sites, and the organizations often reply, the discussion remains highly superficial and hierarchical.

Transnational civil society

Our third conception of a civil society emphasizes its cross-border, transnational or global dimensions. Intuitively, it would be precisely this type of civil society that should benefit the most from the global communication channel provided by the Internet. Some have even spoken about the 'death of distance', as communication via cyberspace has led to the collapse of the traditional spatial and temporal boundaries, leading to radical space-time compression. This surpasses the revolutions of previous analogue transport and communications improvements as it has not only reduced the 'friction of distance' but rendered it entirely meaningless (Dodge and Kitchin, 2001, p. 13). At the same time, the emergence of cyberspace has its upsides and downsides in much the same way for transnational civil society as it has for apolitical or political civil societies discussed above.

Enhancing effects. While a transnational civil society has long roots (Davies, 2014; Keck and Sikkink, 1998), the emergence of cyberspace, and especially the Internet, has taken this

transnationalization to a different level. The current global civil society is something of a by-product of globalization, which has been made possible by new communication technologies that help to create 'imagined identities' across state borders (Kavada, 2014). The movement of NGOs from the local to the global can be identified because cyberspace makes it physically and financially feasible for civil society actors to establish and maintain transnational cooperation (Willets, 1997).

Data shows that Norwegian NGOs benefit from social media platforms for keeping in touch with other transnational organizations (Arnesen et al., 2016). Our own preliminary Northern Norway findings illustrate the cross-border connections that might be established by digital technologies, especially with similar organizations in the Murmansk Region in Russia. This in turn has resulted in physical collaboration between these organizations. Cyberspace platforms are of particular importance for those NGOs that are national branches of INGOs (International Non-governmental Organizations).

Social media and emailing in particular have become a space for activists to make sense of complex technical information, and to connect with experts (Schroeder, 2016). Cyberspace and online communication have also acted as transforming agents for many consolidated organizations. The leader of one of the environmental organizations that we interviewed stated that before the widespread use of digital technologies, more trips were required to meet and work with colleagues at the headquarters of the organization in Russia. As he recalled: "Nearly twenty years ago, I remember travelling to Russia with the equivalent of 30 kilos of photocopies [of reports, scientific studies, press releases, etc.] in my suitcases".

Many INGOs, such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International, are so well-known for their Internet and social media professionalism, visibility and campaigns that they can be compared to transnational companies, with millions of subscribers to their social media channels. Greenpeace's executive director has even proclaimed that social media can help save the planet (CNN, 2010). Yet critics claim that many INGOs do not necessarily utilize cyberspace for the purpose of democratic deliberation but, due to their hierarchical structure, use it as an arena for one-sided information rather than for global dialogue (Roose, 2010).

Constraining effects. Although cyberspace enhances opportunities for transnational political participation and cultural expression, mistrust and scepticism towards the Internet as an appropriate or effective domain for civic participation have also emerged (Kotilainen and Rantala, 2009). The downsides are basically the same as those experienced by any NGO.

Some of the concurrent constraints relate to cyber security and the exchange of sensitive information through social media or other web technologies. Our interviewees from transnational human rights and environmental organizations expressed concerns about possible digital espionage while exchanging information online with other offices (located in other cities or abroad) about their legal strategies and new campaigns. One of the reasons why they only share sensitive information over the phone or through in-person meetings concerns the prevailing uncertainty over social media companies or web technologies having the right to store, disclose or use information on their sites or platforms at their own discretion.

While organizations such as Greenpeace reportedly have a good track record when it comes to attracting attention in social media for their campaigns, it sometimes misses the mark against bigger actors. A case in point was the organization's campaign against Shell oil and gas drilling in the Arctic. One of the reasons for this allegedly poor outcome was the sheer ignorance about big companies such as Shell. Another accusation was that by investing so many resources in online attention, Greenpeace gave the impression that it had taken its eye off what was actually taking place, thereby compromising or even jeopardizing its direct activism reputation (Yeomans, 2012).

Uncivic civil society

Uncivic civil society consists of a variety of actors. The emergence of cyberspace has brought this type of activity to a new level. One long-term impact might be social discontent and unrest, including

the loss of public confidence in the government, even if the actual damage caused by malicious cyber activities was minimal (Choo, 2011, p. 719).

Enhancing effects. The efforts of hacker groups, allegedly working on behalf of some governments, to interfere in democratic states' election processes and to manipulate public opinion have been everyday news for some years, forming a kind of grey zone in many ways (Schmitt, 2018). Added to this, the use of social media by extremist groups for communication and recruitment is a well-known ploy. Even a cursory search for literature on the theme of social media and terrorism results in numerous articles. In militant jihadist practices, for example, the targets of online recruitment are carefully selected and the methods highly persuasive, as Callimachijune's (2015) investigative journalistic account reveals.

When it comes to Norway, there is to date no evidence of any large-scale public opinion or election meddling through social media. However, the exploitation of cyberspace by racist, xenophobic or militant jihadist groups has occurred in Norwegian society as in most other countries.

A case in point is a group called 'Stop the Islamization of Norway' (*Stopp Islamiseringen av Norge*). The group, also known as SIAN, has had an active online presence since 2008, with nearly thirty thousand followers and supporters. The organization's self-proclaimed primary goal is "to work against, to stop and to reverse the Islamization of Norwegian society" and to "spread information about what Islam stands for, and about what consequences the Islamization of Norway will bring". Many of the images used by the organization portray all Muslims as terrorists. Facebook users supporting the group are quite active and are not averse to posting explicit hate messages against Muslims. The government, political parties, and individuals openly supporting immigration have also been targeted in online comments and images uploaded by SIAN members and supporters. Nonetheless, the organization considers itself democratic and transnational, and has openly expressed its wish online to cooperate with likeminded democratic powers in other countries that fight against Islamization.

According to the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST), much of the contact between individuals supporting right-wing extremism takes place over the Internet. Besides well-known groups such as SIAN, the PST estimates that right-wing extremism will largely be disseminated through unorganized and loosely connected networks that are spread throughout the country. The 2017 threat assessment (PST, 2017) reveals that although only a small contingent of the extreme right have become more organized, their radicalization and recruitment nonetheless intensified during 2016 and is expected to continue to grow. However, the 2018 threat assessment (PST, 2018) states that it is unlikely that right-wing extremists or left-wing extremists will commit terrorist acts, even if their activities increase both on- and offline. Instead, it is stated that jihadist ideology will pose the main terrorist threat to Norway in the coming years, and attempted terrorist attacks are seen as possible.

Naturally, the Internet also facilitates violent jihadism, although this activity is somewhat less overt than right-wing activities, and also often in the Arabic language, which renders it inaccessible to the general Norwegian audience. Lia and Nesser (2016) point out that Norwegian jihadism consists of several groupings with various backgrounds, whose methods also differ. The Internet has obviously played an important part in some jihadists' radicalization processes. A case in point concerns a certain Somali by the name of Dhuhulow, who had emigrated to Norway during his childhood to join relatives and whose "online postings in Muslim discussion forums display a sad story of loneliness and of a gradual turn to religious extremism". While surfing websites associated with al-Shabaab and al-Qaida, and listening to the sermons of Anwar al-Awlaki, Dhuhulow grew increasingly religious and politically radical. He did not radicalize all by himself, however. "He became acquainted with radical Muslims online […] When [one of them] called upon all visitors to a Swedish-based pro-Shabaab web forum (al-Qimma) to swear allegiance to Shabaab, Dhululow did so promptly". He was subsequently killed during a fight in Somalia (Lia and Nesser, 2016, p. 124).

Another group created a YouTube video, which was distributed just days before a public demonstration, "containing threatening language aimed at the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and even the Crown Prince". The demonstrators later came to be known as the Prophet's Ummah (PU), initially the name of a Facebook group used to mobilize supporters. "The group quickly became more organized with an identifiable leadership, an emir, spokespersons, religious study classes, public da'wa activities, a website, YouTube productions and PalTalk chatrooms" (ibid., p. 129).

Apart from political activity, cyber crime proper is also an issue. The Norwegian Police's Data Crime Strategy (Datakrimstrategien, 2015) approaches this concept through two broad categories. The first includes crimes that have technology per se as the target, and the other where technology is used as the main tool for crime. These are further divided into several categories. While a large number of cyber crimes remain unregistered, the available statistics show that more than 25% of Norwegian businesses have experienced undesirable security incidents in the past year, albeit without major costs being incurred by these incidents. According to the surveys, less than 10% of businesses exposed to attacks take the matter to the police, however (the Norwegian Business and Industry Security Council, 2016).

Constraining effects. The constraining effects in the current context naturally refer to those elements that would limit the use of cyberspace for malicious purposes aimed at harming or destroying democratic policy processes and fostering illegal and intolerant practices and opinions. This type of constraint is most clearly expressed in legislation and regulation. From the perspective of uncivil civil society groupings, the downside of using cyberspace, be it social media or encrypted communication channels, is that the very communication spaces can be infiltrated, monitored, hacked and traced back in forensic investigations by the authorities (e.g. IEEE, 2010) or activist groups (e.g. Bellingcat, n.d.).

When it comes to addressing the malicious use of cyberspace, Norway has made considerable progress, at least on paper. One can find a number of national strategies in this field, which expressly mention that one of the most important aims is to defend the country's democracy and its structures. In practice, these strategies focus on cyber crime proper rather than intolerance or violence-based groupings through cyberspace. It is a question of a rather centralized policy with decentralized implementation. To mention just a few of the related strategies, the Norwegian government's third and latest version of the National Strategy for Information Security (*Nasjonal*, 2012) is based on the idea that Information and Communication Technology is a cross-sectoral security challenge that has become critical for the normal functioning of society. While the overall coordination role rests with the government, the strategy follows the Norwegian so-called responsibility principle: the actor that has responsibility in normal conditions should also bear the responsibility in a crisis situation. In practice, the responsibility lies with the owner of a function, irrespective of whether it is located in the public or private sector. Larger security measures, however, are prepared in cooperation with the owner of the function and the respective public agencies. Four ministries, namely the Ministry of Justice and Preparedness, the Ministry of Government Administration, the Ministry of Defence, and the Ministry of Transport and Communications, are singled out as being particularly responsible for cyber security. The strategy duly outlines the actions that should be taken at a generic level, including developing a holistic approach towards cyber security; making the cyber security related to vital societal functions more robust; coordinating the cyber security measures in the public administration; developing the warning and response systems towards cyber threats; enhancing preventive measures; continuously applying resources to capability-building; and securing high-level related research.

The strategy was accompanied some years later by an Action Plan on Information Security (Handlingsplan, 2015), which covers only public administration, however. The Action Plan defines six main areas: management and control; risk management; security in digital services; digital preparedness; national common components (instead of each sector building its own security systems); and knowledge, competence and culture. In addition to generic strategies, individual administrative branches, such as the Norwegian Police, have their own cyber security strategies (e.g. Strategi, 2014; Datakrimstrategien, 2015).

To facilitate the fight against cyber crime, a Centre for Cyber and Information Security (NTNU CCIS) was established as a national hub for research, education and competence development. This is a public-private partnership with 26 partners from administration, industry, academia, and security. Its tasks include increasing Norway's cyber-security capacity, developing cyber-security competence in agencies, companies, and academia, and acting as professional support for the government in international discussions and commitments.

Conclusions

The aim of the current article has been to discuss the effects of cyberspace on civil society, focusing on Norway in particular, and to propose a framework for analysing the relationship between cyberspace and civil society. The framework is structured according to four different types of civil society, in relation to which cyberspace can have both enhancing and constraining effects. The findings are summarized in the framework presented in Table 2.

[Approximately HERE] Table 2: Cyberspace effects on civil society

Table 2, as tentative as it is, gives rise to some theoretical and practical conclusions. First, it can be concluded that the emergence of cyberspace has both enhanced and constrained Norwegian civil society in all its various forms.

Second, following from the above, cyberspace has not profoundly changed society in terms of the relative power of one type of civil society over another. Thus, its transformative power is rather limited in a more fundamental sense; digitization itself has neither democratized nor undemocratized societies (Norwegian society included) by changing the balance between different types of civil society modes, and through that the basic characteristics of society-state relations. Unlike some cyberspace theorists claim (e.g. Dodge and Kichin, 2001, p.13), our results do not support the idea of giving cyberspace the status of 'agency' in its own right – at least as long as the technology itself has not taken control in terms of different applications of artificial intelligence.

Indeed, another and perhaps more profound game-changer discussion in the literature (Selle et al. 2019; Eimhjellen, 2019; Enjolras & Eimhjellen, 2018; Bennet & Segerberg, 2013) is that digitally facilitated fluid, non-formal, decentralized and large-scale social communication networks will overcome traditional organization-based civil societies, in terms of *connective* versus more traditional *collective* action. This implies that civil society activity is increasingly moving into cyberspace in non-coordinated forms, and may subsequently transform society through its off-line spill-overs without any organized civil society. We can already see some signs of this phenomenon materializing in Norway.

Third, our theoretical framework appears to function well in structuring the multiple issues at stake. Yet it needs to be developed further, dividing its elements into indicators and sub-indicators in such a way that they are at least to some extent measurable in order to make empirically-based arguments on these issues.

Finally, this leads to our next step, namely to focus on developments in Northern Norway, looking at the same variables as those discussed above with a more advanced toolbox of indicators, including large-N statistics. The aim is to survey all of the almost 7,000 registered NGOs in Northern Norway (Brønnøysundregistrene, 2019). The overall purpose is for this to pave the way towards a more rigorous theoretical and methodological basis in the field of the current research problem.

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