NEW MEDIA AND DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION: THE BULGARIAN ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT AND ITS PERCEPTIONS OF THE DIGITAL POLITICAL SPACE

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Abstract

The debates around the concept of "digital democracy", although extensive, remain at the normative level, seeking for the extent to which digital technologies can improve the current democratic practices. At the same time, various political agents – from parties to social movements – already make use of the political potential of digital media in order to search for better political representation within the democratic system.

In this context, the current research leaves normative discussions aside and focuses on the Bulgarian example, answering the question: "How does the Bulgarian environmental virtual community perceive the digital political space in which it participates and how does it imagine its possibilities of political representation?" Applied to the online communication of the recently developed Green movement in Bulgaria, a qualitative content analysis shows a search for a more direct form of democratic representation in which digital technologies themselves are seen as a representative tool, shortening the distance between power-holders and citizens.

At the same time, the research tries to overcome the difficulties of applying qualitative content analysis to data collected from online social media. The results show that the application of the method is both achievable and appropriate.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Although Internet and digital technologies at large have not yet produced a significant change in the institutional or technical ways in which we practice democracy (e.g., Schmitter 2011, Trechsel et al. 2003), their existence has influenced an optimistic wave, visible both in the work of academics and in the activity of citizens in the Western countries. It provokes both groups to think over the mechanisms of the democratic system and to seek for new democratic possibilities within the framework provided by the information revolution. In this context, political science has the potential to go beyond normative theory and to examine the way in which both the existence of new technologies and the societal change provoked by them influence the concepts of practicing politics - and democracy in particular – as understood both by political elites and by citizens.

While much of the debate around the political effects of digital technologies is still at the normative level, the current research tries to fit in a more empirical paradigm, examining the perceptions of politics of newly emerging "virtual communities" (Daniel 2011a), and how these perceptions are related to the offline activities of these communities. The example is the recently emerged ecological movement in Bulgaria in the 2000's, consolidated around the environmental problems, but owing its existence and popularity just as much to online communication.

Series of protests have been organized in Bulgaria after 2006, and they have been organized by young people, exclusively with the help of Internet, Facebook and forums. Throughout the last years, literally thousands of young people managed to coordinate themselves online in order to protest for various causes, starting from protecting nature parks and continuing with anti-governmental demonstrations. Many of these events, especially in

the early years, were done without any prior organization, taking the form of spontaneous

flash-mobs, leaving the impression of something temporary, insignificant, or occasional;

these actions usually happened with regard to a particular governmental decision, and were

performed illegally. However, they were by no means occasional; the on-line mobilization

continued for several years (actively in 2012, still) and found its offline political expression[1].

More than thirty non-governmental organizations have appeared since the beginning of the

protests and, together with other institutions, some of them formed a civic coalition named

"For Nature in Bulgaria to Stay". In 2008, a new party - "The Greens" - emerged as "the

political wing" of the coalition – after the words of the founding member of the party Boyan

Yotsov (Lyutskanova 2011, 93). It organized its electoral campaign for the 2009

parliamentary elections exclusively through the Internet (more important, through non-formal

channels such as Facebook and forums, and not through on-line advertisement). At the

elections, the party failed completely. Despite its great online popularity (Lyutskanova 2011,

96), it collected less than one percent[2], being unable to mobilize the thousands of young

people whose actions led to its creation – not even as volunteers for its campaign events.

Nevertheless, the movements, the party and its campaign – unique for Bulgaria with the

exclusive use of online technologies and with its extremely low budget - became a

phenomenon that caught the attention of several researchers in anthropology and media and

became the ground for two books on the new youth in the country - "New Media and New

Youth" (Dichev and Spasov 2009) and "New Media – New Mobilizations" (Dichev and

Spasov 2011), the second one dedicated exclusively to the new forms of political

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[1]

And not only offline. The culmination of "virtual" political action in January 2009 was the website
http://feelfriendly.com/ (not active anymore), which presented a photo of the Parliament house with
protesting "smileys" at the front. The site called that everyone not able to join offline protests in front of the
parliament should join online by visiting the web page and staying there. The "virtual protest" counted more
than 13 000 people (simultaneously), and more than 120 000 unique visits.

[2]   0.52%, or 21,841 votes (Central Election Commission 2009).

mobilization, resulting from the rising popularity of digital media in Bulgaria.

Although these books are important with regard to the subject of this thesis, they point at a rather different direction, studying the various aspects of youth solidarity from an anthropological perspective. From the perspective of political science, the current research focuses on the way in which the possibilities given by new technologies change the perceptions of the relationship between the authorities and "the people". Illustrated in the rhetoric of the virtual community, I try to understand the *structure* of the representative claim[3] (Saward 2006) of the Bulgarian environmental movement. Are there any political structures which can satisfy such a claim? What is the 'gap' in traditional political space which forces such claims? In this sense, this thesis does not focus on party politics, and not specifically on the reasons for the success or failure of the political party "The Greens". The real focus is on the possibilities for democratic representation beyond the current political status quo, as seen through the eyes of the virtual community which was the backbone of the new party, and which later did not see itself as represented by this party.[4]

The development of Internet and the boom of Web 2.0 applications can be seen as a 'dislocator' of political representation – political communities can already emerge and search for representation despite the lack of a particular geographical location or physical contact to consolidate them. In this sense, the Bulgarian environmental movement is both a political and a virtual community. Virtual communities, following Ben Kei Daniel (2011b, 3) differ from geographical communities in a wide set of characteristics, among which the easy and non-geographically connected membership, continuous online interaction, spatially disembodied communication, and virtualization (virtual relationship) prior to actualization

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3   I find Michael Saward's term "representative claim" (first used in Saward (2006) and further developed in Saward (2010)) especially important, as it goes beyond the simple idea of interests and implements aspects of culture and aesthetics, helping to understand also "non-electoral" (Saward 2006, 297) forms of representation. This, however, does not move the focus of this thesis away from *political* representation.

4   One of the things the data did NOT show was that "The Greens" are seen in any way as representing the interest of the environmentalists.

3

(moving the relationship to the offline, or physical, world).

Research question

In order to understand the specificity of the described situation, one should approach it from the perspective of a non-functioning model of political representation. Despite some democratic deficits of the Bulgarian society, the thesis still discusses the search for political representation in a democratic environment. It deals with popularly elected governors (a Parliament which itself elects a Government), and the intimate relationship between representative and represented which is typical for the democratic system. This relationship has its moral aspects – simply said, the representative has a duty, she is accountable to the represented (in fact, accountability is exactly the expression of the relationship between representative and represented), and there are institutionalized mechanisms for the represented to hold the representative responsible for her actions. The virtual community raises a claim for the representation of ecological interests because these have been (or have been seen as) constantly neglected by the democratically elected governments. This claim remains "unheard" and takes various other forms – NGO's and a political party appear.

The research question to which this thesis will present an answer is:

How does the Bulgarian environmental virtual community perceive the digital political space in which it participates and how does it imagine its possibilities of political representation?

The answer to this question is sought through several descriptive hypotheses, intending not to build causal relationship between various factors which can influence the perceptions of the environmentalists, but rather to see how these perceptions look like in the context of online communication. For this reason, I conduct a qualitative content analysis of some of the

4

communication channels of the Bulgarian ecological movement in two time sections. The first section, describing the first spontaneous actions of the online activists, is presented in the analysis of seven personal *blogs* from 2007 which played a significant role for the popularization of the green cause. The second section, describing the most recent condition of the green movement, is presented in the analysis of five Facebook event pages and three Facebook groups in 2012, concentrated around the most recent acts of social contention. With the research, built in this way, I illustrate two slightly different pictures of the ideas of political representation as seen by the green activists. The research shows, however, an overall call for democratic representation based on a more direct form of democracy where digital technologies and Internet in particular are seen as a channel which can provide effective political representation by improving the possibilities of communication between citizens and power-holders.

The choice of qualitative content analysis serves a secondary goal of the current thesis. As discussed in the later chapters, this method, although widely recognized by media researchers, has been neglected in the studies of online social networks (blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Because the method is appropriate for the research question whose answer is sought here, it will be both interesting and useful to face some of the problems which the chosen type of data poses before the procedures constructing the qualitative content analysis. Therefore, in the methodological and in the analytical chapter the thesis moves slightly away from the research question in an attempt to illustrate the process of applying qualitative content analysis in the research of online social media, the problems which have appeared from this choice, and the extent to which a decision has been found to these problems.

5

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses aim to show various aspects of the research question and to answer it from the perspective of the already described "non-functioning model" of political representation. Their formation is based on the "promises" that new technologies give to the democratic debate – more deliberation and a closer relationship between representative and represented through the easier communication provided by the Net.

The initial hypothesis tested is whether *the members of the environmental community see the traditional channels of political representation as discredited. For this reason, substantive representation of interests can only be achieved through increased civic participation*[5]. This hypothesis reflects a general trend of disappointment from the political system, born out of, or related to, the "professionalization" of politics and the general decline of trust in democracy, which is also accompanied by the decline of political parties. The Bulgarian case, however, offers also a "local" explanation, related not to the disappointment of the democratic system, but to the not-enough-democratic Bulgarian elite. The party "The Greens" illustrates this trend – it presents itself as a part of a more "real" democratic political life than the one currently present - and a more "European" one[6]. "The Greens" see themselves as devoted to the values of parliamentatianism and democratic tradition (Greens 2008, 2011).

Why exactly the green interests would form such a community? A simple second hypothesis, deriving from the first one, would be that *the interests of this newly emerged*

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[5] It is important to know that the channels of political representation in Bulgaria are quite limited. Aside from the political parties and the parliament, trade unions are very weak, and lobbying (as a legal method of representing interests, and not as an illegal corruption practice) is not a legally (and normatively) arranged procedure.

[6] Although this connection between democracy and European values is not so popular across Europe anymore, the words "Europe" and "democracy" always go together in the Bulgarian public space, as if both are synonyms describing an unrealized utopia. The leading political party, which won the last parliamentary, local and presidential elections, is called "Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria" (GERB) – although it would have probably won these elections with any other name.

community are perceived as constantly neglected by the official representatives. Therefore,
the traditional channels of representation do not work particularly for these interests, and not
as a whole. A counter-factual argument here is that if these interests were defended by the
official representatives, the new ecological community would have not existed in the political
sense. The "hunch" which leads to this second hypothesis is that the green movement
represents a trend towards much more issue-oriented politics – it does not protest against
political ideologies as such, but toward the representation of particular issues in the political
debate. This logic would allow the environmentalists to see the green interests as
underrepresented while at the same time accepting the system of democratic representation as
a whole.

While the existence of such a perception is hypothetical in this research, it is visible in
the work of other researchers who worked on the topic. Radosveta Krastanova (2012) devotes
a part of her analysis "The Green Movement and the Green Parties in Bulgaria" (2012) to the
"challenges" that the post-transitional political situation poses before the Green movement. In
order to explain the context of the civil mobilization, she describes in detail various cases of
illegal (or illegitimate) close relationship between politicians and members of the business
elite that provoked the reaction of the civil society and led to protests. It is, of course,
doubtful that the people would have protested if these cases did not exist; what is important
here is that one can notice in her work the perception of constant irregularities in the sphere
of ecology, and how it is directly related to the issues of social mobilization.[7]

The third hypothesis claims that *the Internet, due to its deliberative and communicative*
qualities, will be seen as a mechanism for "real", "true" or "most accurate" political
representation by the members of the environmental movement. This hypothesis aims to unify

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[7]   The author herself is an active participant in the events described (Krastanova 2012, 41). Her opinion as an
      activist or as an academic is not representative of any trend; however, it gives me reason to seek for a
      similar perception of the environmental problems throughout the communication of other activists.

the characteristics of the environmental community being a *political* and a *virtual* community at the same time. In relation to the first two hypotheses, I expect that the environmentalists would see the Internet as a place "free" from the "sins" of traditional politics, where they can achieve the "better", more effective form of democracy. This hypothesis most of all expresses the idealistic view of the influence of digital technologies on the democratic process.

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This work will continue as follows. The next section will present a literature review on the issues of political representation and the role of digital technologies, and how the present research fits in the overall academic framework on the topic. Then, I will elaborate on the methodological issues – the appropriateness of the chosen method and the problems which it may face; the data selection and justification. The third, analytical chapter, will elaborate on the process of creating a coding scheme for the content analysis and on the data coding. It will provide the results from the hypothesis tests and the various contexts in which the topic of political representation appears in the online discussions in the two examined periods. Later, the chapter will give a report on the methodological concerns of applying qualitative content analysis to online social media. The last section will conclude the thesis by outlining the main findings and presenting questions for further investigation.

Chapter 1. Literature Review. Theoretical Justification

In the past twenty years, together with the development of information and communication technologies (ICT), the literature on the field and its intersection with social sciences has grown enormously and has taken various directions. The aim of this chapter is not to describe all trends of this intersection but to show some general trends which are important with regard to the current thesis; some problems of normative and empirical concern, or, as called by Hacker and Dijk (2000), some "issues of theory and practice".

1.1. Between "Digital Citizenship" and "Digital Divide"

As stated by various authors (e.g. Hacker and Dijk 2000; Hubert and Caremier 2000; Chambat 2000, 272; Donk et al. 2004), free information exchange is a key characteristic of functioning democracy. Information is essential for the existence of a critical public sphere, and, as such, for the development of democratic institutions based on the enlightened idea of reason (Habermas 1991, Keane 2000, Garnham 1990, Moe 2009). Here, the role of media is to serve as the field in which a critical debate can potentially happen – and hence the media, especially in its early (and idealized) versions, is seen as a public space (different from "public sphere" - on the difference see Papacharissi 2004) which is a crucial factor for the development of the critical public.

On the other hand, due to the market development of modernity, representative democracy has been widely implemented as the most suitable form of democratic governance (Constant 1988). Although alternative forms of choosing a representative had been widely discussed in the past (Manin 1997), in contemporary democracies the voting procedure has become the main tool for selecting democratic representatives. The voting procedure itself

9

presupposes a relationship between the representative and the represented, in which the possibility of the citizen to vote serves at the same time as a means of protecting his own interest by rewarding or punishing the representative through voting. Here, the role of information is again crucial (Mansbridge 2003): the representative is obliged to search for the best possible communication[8] with the represented in order to receive his or her approval. This is the other role that media plays – it ensures the constant communication between the representative and the represented, and hence, if we assume that "good democracy" is the one that manages to satisfy the preferences of the voter, then good communication increases the quality of the democratic process.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that the development of ICT, and especially the Internet, has initially been strongly supported by the pro-democratic academics, and since the 2000's its democratic potential has been constantly seen through the lens of skepticism. Rarely one questions the potential of the Net as a fast, cheap, and enormously varied source of information. In this respect, its main characteristics which would potentially improve the democratic quality include the possibility to deliver information to *most* of the people, regardless of their social status; to allow for easier control over the politicians, and hence, for a better democratic representation; to serve as a basis for better, well-argued debate on the political agenda. Hacker and Dijk (2000, 1) define digital democracy as "a collection of attempts to practice democracy without the limits of time, space and other physical conditions, using ICT or CMC [computer-mediated communication – S.O.] instead, as an addition, not a replacement for traditional "analogue" political practices". This definition, although created by cyber-skeptics, well expresses the hopes which the term "digital

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[8] "The best possible communication", of course, looks in one way from the point of view of the representative and in another way from the point of view of the represented. However, the lack of communication is usually treated by the represented with no less mistrust than the information about "bad" representation.

democracy" comprises. The introduction of the communication revolution is compared with the revolution after the invention of the printing press (Chambat 2000, 259; Mossberger et al. 2008, 3), and with the Industrial revolution (Castells 1991). The most often stated advantages of the new technologies, however, are mainly with regard to a new vision of direct democracy. As the ICT give the citizens the (theoretical) possibility to express their opinions on the political issues in a fast, cheap, and effective way, the ideas of "instant polling" have caught the attention of both academics and politicians (Jankowski and Selm 2000, 150; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2003). The idea of direct democracy, neglected for a long time, suddenly received surprising attention, due to the deliberative potential of the Internet[9] (Jankowski and Selm 2000, 150). Seen as a supplement to the existing democratic practices, various mechanisms of "increasing" the democratic potential of the European Union have been examined and proposed (Trechel et al. 2003). As the cyber-optimists Caremier and Thebault say, "A desire for a more participatory democracy, closer to the real concerns of individuals, is gradually emerging".

This optimism, however, often has been criticized by different scholars. Early criticisms point out that the Internet is a privilege to a small group of people. While in Western Europe and the United States this is doubtfully valid any more, the difference between the "East" and the "West" in the beginning of the 2000's is bigger than expected (Horvath 2000).

In this respect, Jan van Dijk (2000; 2005) identifies four major problems that create significant information "gaps" with the invasion of ICT. He also claims that these problems *widen* the information gaps with time. The first concerns the lack of basic skills and "computer fear" and leads to the isolation of the elderly people. The second – the lack of access to computers and networks, leads to an increasing differentiation between the "young,

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[9]   As I will discuss later, this vision is also shared by the citizens, and it plays a key role in the mobilization of new social movements (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 239-40).

11

well-trained, the relatively rich" (Dijk 2000, 170) from the West and the rest. The third gap concerns the "user-friendliness" of the software – the easier it is to use, the more privileged are the already described groups. While this is barely of any importance more than twelve years after Dijk's study, the fourth problem looks incredibly valid. The author examines different kinds of political participation, starting from responding to an opinion poll and finishing with running for a seat, and discovers that the increased political participation requires significantly more technical skills than its simplest forms, such as responding to an opinion poll.

Similar criticisms are expressed in other studies. Coming back to the already mentioned possibilities for direct democracy – as this is an important point in the current thesis – Nicholas Jankowski and Martine van Selm (2000) test the possibilities of ICT to satisfy the three "core claims" of digital democracy, as formulated by Rosa Tsagarousiano: obtaining information, engaging in deliberation, and participation in decision making (Jankowski and Selm 2000, 151). Studying discussion groups and participatory websites in Holland, they conclude that the "three promises" are only partly fulfilled, generally giving advantage to the stereotypical young male "surfer in cyberspace" (Jankowski and Selm 2000, 161). In the same spirit of skepticism, Mossberger et al. (2008) present a concept of "digital citizenship" based on the classic work of T.H. Marshall. Defining digital citizenship as "the ability to participate in society online" (Mossberger et al. 2008, 1), the authors oppose it to the concept of "digital divide" (developed extensively by Pippa Norris, 2001), claiming that the usage of new technologies is already a necessity for participation in society, but technologies themselves do not always ensure the equal possibility for participation.

While a significant part of the literature has been dedicated to the "promises" of digital democracy, the discussion around it remains at the normative level. Various empirical studies

and experiments have been conducted in order to test these "promises"; to test whether digital

technologies allow for more transparency in politics (Nixon and Johansson 1999), or whether

the Internet has allowed for more and better civic participation in the political debate. The

main assumption of most of these studies, however, is the theoretical possibility of ICT to

"improve" the democratic debate[10], and consequently, the inequality between the holders of

the information and the ones struggling to get access to it. The influence of technologies on

the structure of this debate, however, is often mentioned but rarely studied. Is it possible that

technologies change the way in which we seek for democratic representation? How does the

potential of Internet change our perception of the connection between "the people" and "the

power" - as the fundamental connection that constitutes the democratic regime? These

questions, vaguely mentioned with regard to the concept of digital democracy, represent the

essence of the current MA thesis. As I will try to show in the next section, their importance is

often demonstrated as a justification for studying digital democracy, thereby opening a gap in

this research area. The current work does not have the potential to fulfill this gap completely;

however, it is there where it finds its place.

1.2. Digital Democracy and Political Representation

As noted in the previous section, the introduction of ICT, which goes together with the

concept of "shrinking" space and time, is often related to a more direct form of democracy.

Sometimes this is a direct call for the regular use of on-line referenda in everyday political

decision making, while often it is just a proposition for a better connection between

representative and represented, mainly in terms of communication and accountability. Both

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[10]   In a recent text, Philippe Schmitter (2011), following Robert Dahl, tests whether ICT can be seen as a new revolution in "Real-Existing Democracies" - and finds this assumption false (for now). The main weakness of his analysis, however, remains the same assumption. He actually tests how ICT change the way we *practice* democracy "now", and does not find any significant difference. But does it change our perceptions and expectations?

lines, however, argue that digital democracy goes together with a shift towards issue-oriented policies, and not fundamental political ideologies.

Many authors who have worked in the field of digital politics warn about the declining legitimacy of representative democracy. Following Graham Murdock and Hannah Arendt, Sinikka Sassi (2000) notices that the system of democratic representation has helped the development of an oligarchic political elite, thereby creating a significant distance between ordinary people and politics. The citizen, not attached any more to communities, social groups or class interests, has no incentives to participate in political life. From this perspective, the emergence of the Internet gives the possibility for new cultural groups, such as social movements, to "invent" new discourses of political appearance: "... the principle of representation has to some extent given way to the possibility of participation, although the new activities have not yet much influenced the institutional forms of politics" (Sassi 2000, 98). Moreover, the Net has the possibility to increase the interest in politics by bringing it closer to everyday life (Sassi 2000, 99).

This critical view on contemporary democracy is shared by Pierre Chambat (2000, 262), who claims that with the mechanism of representation through voting people delegate power to elite social groups. The crisis of representation, according to him, is forced by the growing social individualism. In this manner, ICT create a possibility for a democracy without representation where citizens have the possibility to deliberate freely in order to achieve "public democracy" instead of "party democracy" (Chambat 2000, 269). Nonetheless, until now, virtual communities remain "online", since they do not have the instruments to transform deliberation into action. Still, Chambat claims that new technologies can serve as an important tool for the mobilization of social movements – both through coordination and through the possibility to consolidate the collective identities of such groups

14

(Chambat 2000, 271-2).

As stated earlier, the main points with regard to political representation and ICT are two. On the one hand, there is the claim for direct political participation, "neglecting", or at least supplementing the presently existing mechanisms of representation. On the other, it is often underlined that new technologies are a good tool for amending the representative mechanisms by improving the communication between politicians and citizens. These two positions are also normative. What I want to test in this thesis, as stated in the introduction, is the way in which the very digital media is seen as an adequate representative mechanism, and the way in which its possibilities shape a specific representative claim. This assumption is best described by Hubert and Caremier (2000, 32). They mark a double "crisis" of the system of representation – a "functional" aspect, with regards to the growing distance between politicians and citizens, and a "legitimization" aspect concerning the "alternatives" of parliamentary representation. As a result, media and opinion polls are often seen as better representatives of the population than the officially elected MP's[11]. While still advocating for the traditional form of political representation, the authors claim that the ICT give the citizens the possibility to "discuss, debate, take action and intervene in public affairs... and to look for people who genuinely represent them" (Hubert and Caremier 2000, 43).

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[11]   The concept of "better" representation brings back the debate about the normative side of political representation (Rehfeld 2008). It is possible that the media and the Parliament are both representatives in different aspects of the term. However, we are used to thinking representation in the categories of "good" and "bad". In this respect, the concept carries the burden of democratic normativeness.

15

1.3. Theoretical Justification. Information Society, Social Movements and Digital Technologies. The Place of Eastern Europe

1.3.1. Information Society and Environmental Movements

This thesis wants to answer the question: how does a particular protesting community perceive the "digital" political space of which it is part? While the previous section tried to identify the gap in the literature on digital democracy which makes the current research, if not irreplaceable, then, at least possible, this section discusses the theoretical presuppositions which give legitimacy to my hypotheses.

While the word "crisis" probably exaggerates the decline of trust in representative democracy and the disappointment with political elites, it will not be too much to say that a fundamental social change has started since the 1970's, and has gradually developed – by coincidence or not – together with the development of information and communication technologies. The "information society" - a term used by all authors cited from the beginning of this chapter – is perceived as the societal form following from the development of ICT[12]. In this respect, if there is a change in the perception of political representation, caused by the effects of ICT, a research on this change should find it in a particular societal form in which such a change can be expressed.

Many authors from the ones mentioned above – and not only - state the significance of ICT for social movements (Chambat 2000, 272; Dijk 2000, 45; Hubert and Caremier 2000; Mosca and Della Porta 2009; Donk et al. 2004). First, new technologies give the possibility for fast mobilization; second – in the tradition of representation – they allow a dialog between the movements and the political power; and, finally, they help building collective identities

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[12] See also Castell's "network society" (1991), on the importance of networks in the information age, and Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2002) on the influence of Internet on everyday life.

through communication. From this perspective, social movements – and especially social movements with strong virtual presence – appear to be an appropriate agent in which such a new perception of democratic representation is visible. Environmental movements appear to meet both conditions – they are often considered a part of the "information society"[13] and they are regular users of the digital space as a source of mobilization. Furthermore, they are a typical representative of the shift towards issue-oriented politics, as they are consolidated around the ecological cause. For this reason, when analyzing cyberprotest, Donk et al. (2004) use the environmental movements in order to demonstrate the possible approaches towards social movements research: the *resource mobilization* approach, studying the organizational structure and linkages between the agents; the *political opportunity structure and political process* approach, studying the structural conditions and the interactions between individuals and structures; and the *ideology/identity/persuasion* approach, studying the core values and perceptions of the movements (Donk et al. 2004, 10-12). Doubtlessly, the current thesis takes the third approach. It is important, however, to remind that the subject of interest of the study is the very perception of representation – and the environmental community is just the "body" in which this perception finds expression. Otherwise, the framework of digital democracy would have been unnecessary.

1.3.2. How Eastern Europe Fits the Debate

The necessity of research on Central and Eastern Europe in the field of digital technology has been widely recognized (Franda 2001). The region – just as in many other cases – has a twofold role.

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[13]   See, for example, the early – and full of pathos - comparison between the industrial and the information society by Yoneji Masuda (2004, 17, 20): "(...) In the information society, *citizen movements* will be the force behind the social change; their weapons will be litigation and participatory movements (…) The spirit of information society will be *the spirit of globalism, a symbiosis in which man and nature* can live together in harmony...". Although the Bulgarian green movement is sometimes more nationalist than globalist, the information society model is doubtlessly attractive for explaining its behavior.

The development of ICT for mass usage has started much earlier in the United States and Western Europe (Rogers and Malhotra 2000). This different timing, together with other transitional factors, has contributed to the development of a significant technological gap between the post-communist countries and the rest of Europe and North America (with the significant exception of the Baltic countries). The gap is, of course, most visible in terms of generation difference and the difference between urban and rural population (Lengel 2000, Iordanova 2000). At the same time, many of the countries in the region are still considered in various phases of transition, i.e., not completely democratic, which makes studying digital democracy even more interesting.

On the other hand, the lack of state intervention in the 1990's has helped some of these countries to develop an amazing informational infrastructure in the urban areas (Lengel 2000). This is how Bulgaria and Romania, although lagging behind in indicators such as percentage of the population using Internet, are among the countries with the highest quality and speed of Internet connection in the world – and at the same time, at some of the lowest prices (Arnaudov 2012). These factors, together with the already mentioned division between urban and rural areas and young and elderly people, suggest that there is a possibility for very high participation of young people from the big cities in online social life. While this relationship can only be tested with a well-built comparative analysis, the described factors give the researcher some reasons to point at one of these two countries.

The case of Bulgaria is seen as even more noticeable. Laura Lengel (2000, 9-10) describes the country as the "designated "Silicon Valley" of the Soviet Union" (Lengel 2000, 9). The country was the local leader in the computer industry. According to the author, the fact that many "students of the Soviet computer initiatives" (Lengel 2000, 10) have now created their own companies suggests that in this particular country the access to computer-

18

mediated communication would be easier compared to other countries with similar economic indicators.

The green movements have also played an important role in the region, especially during the 1980's, when environmental movements were the first opposition groups in Bulgaria (Krastanova 2012). There are similar cases in most Eastern European countries (French and Worldwatch Institute, 1990; Frankland 1995), most of whom have resulted in Green parties, playing significant role in the early transition. The Green parties at this time are seen as an alternative to the traditional political parties in the West, revolutionary "with their "new" organization, new issues, and new strategies" (Frankland 1995). While this is an important point with regard to the current study, it will be a mistake to see the new Bulgarian Green movement as a continuation of the opposition movements twenty years ago[14]. Although there is some variance in age, most of the new "Greens" were barely born in the end of the 1980's, and their parents had entirely different motivation to join protests. The "new" Greens are to be understood as a break-up with the "old times"[15]; a generation brought up in the years of transition, which faced the development of ICT personally, thereby having a significant technological advantage in comparison with their parents.

1.3.3. Social Movements and Democracy

From a theoretical point of view, this thesis owes a lot to Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani's explanation on the contribution of social movements to a new concept of democracy (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 239). According to the authors, citing Claus Offe and Herbert Kitschelt (Kitschelt 1993), social movements constantly question the democratic order as such while advocating for an ancient form of direct democracy which excludes the

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[14]   A mistake made by Krastanova (2012).
[15]   This claim looks speculative. However, it is this discontinuity which best explains the fact that the green protests were the first public forms of civil dissatisfaction since the generation that carried the economic burden of the heavy transition stopped protesting in 1997.

representatives. The very existence of social movements presupposes a direct form of punishing or rewarding the power-holders; desire for a system in which the power-holders are subject to constant revision by the citizens.

> However, movement organizations do not usually aim at abolishing the existing political parties, nor do they seek to found new ones; they demand the democratization of the old politics and institutions, parties, and trade unions, and they propose the constitution of alternative, open public spheres where different positions can be developed, analyzed, and compared on an openly-stated ethical basis... (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 240)

This claim is in line with another characteristic of direct democracy, also mentioned by the authors – the issue-oriented debate. While questioning the very functioning of advanced democracies, social movements as agents of change turn their criticism toward particular issues. This makes it possible for the members of a movement to present themselves as anti-political, or at least non-political, while performing purely political actions.

In Della Porta and Diani's view, social movements are capable of illustrating an important theoretical connection – direct democracy is often related to deliberative democracy[16]. Another significant contribution of the social movements is the possibility to articulate the argument of deliberation as publicly valid (ibid., 241).

Following the lines of this review, it is important to understand Della Porta and Diani's description of the contemporary social movements in the context of digital technologies. What makes the current research important is exactly this connection. The possibilities given by ICT can be seen as a valid reason for the deliberative claims of digitally active social movements. From this point of view, the problems that concern the researchers working on digital democracy are the same which produce the political discourse within social movements – a "better" democracy (translated in terms of higher civic participation, higher control over the power-holders, and a higher level of public debate) is seen as possible with

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[16] On the legitimacy problems of deliberative democracy, many of whom present a valid criticism against social movements, see the great article by Parkinson (2003).

the help of ICT. From here, what I expect to see from the political talk of the Bulgarian green movement is a call for more issue-oriented, high quality deliberation, paradoxically dressed in the "non-political" clothes of the green cause. The Internet, which carries all this potential, is seen in these expectations as a "politically free" space which allows for better crystallization of interests, i.e., for higher level of deliberation – and this perception can also be explained with the denial of the state to prioritize information infrastructure, as described by Lengel (2000, 9-10).

A final theoretical remark is needed in order to avoid confusion. The issue-oriented debate definitely allows a particular community (or, in this case, a social movement) to present itself as non-political, to the extent to which it does not represent a coherent political ideology. However, such a debate cannot be an explanatory reason for such non-political image. This phenomenon can be understood if we take a step aside from politics and try to understand the social movements as cultural movements which manage to consolidate a particular cultural identity by means of mobilization (Melucci 1996). This explanatory model well fits the ideas of information society, as described above.

This chapter aimed at making the connection between digital democracy and the role of social movements in explaining the hypotheses of the present thesis. The next chapter is much more technical. It gives an overview of the methodological approaches toward digital media, and their relationship with the research question; then, it points out the limitations of qualitative content analysis, especially when used for digital social media research.

Chapter 2. Research Method

2.1. Studying Digital Media Content

In the studies of digital media, two streams of methodology are differentiated, depending on the research question and, respectively, the chosen research design. The first approach is inspired by the view that the digital environment carries characteristics differing from the ones possessed by offline communication. For this reason, various methods used in "traditional" research have been adapted for the use of the specifics of the digital environment. Such methods, usually called "virtual methods" (Hine 2005), concentrate on questions treating the digital environment as a reflection of the offline environment. Recognizing, however, the difficulties before representative sampling online (Walejko 2009) – an absolutely necessary condition for a quantitative study – the proponents and developers of virtual methods have concentrated on qualitative research, developing asynchronous interviews (Kivits 2005), online ethnographic and anthropological fieldwork methods (Hine 2000; Paccagnella 1997; Guimaraes 2005), such as participant observation in digital environment, etc. Another branch of this first approach is based on the idea that the digital space has given birth to some unique units of research which do not have an offline equivalent (hyper-links, threads, tweets) – this has led to the expansion of "digital" methods (Rogers 2009), such as online issue crawling, trying to grasp the uniqueness of the digital there where virtual methods cannot do this.

The second methodological approach has concentrated on the use of "traditional" research methods, both quantitative and qualitative, in a digital environment – surveys, interviews, quantitative and qualitative content analysis, etc. This approach is useful as long

as what concerns the researcher is not the digital environment as such, but some characteristics of the off-line social world which are, at best, reflected in digital communication. This is precisely the case of the current thesis. What provokes my interest is not the way in which digital technologies as such – with their immanent qualities - change the perceptions of political representation, but the way in which their existence and the "myths" around them - in fact, the very idea of digital democracy - possibly produce a particular vision of the "good" political representation to the extent to which it is possible.

The current research, then, is based on a qualitative content analysis of digital media sources; namely, the channels of communication of the Bulgarian environmental movement in the beginning and in the current stage of its development. These are, respectively, personal Internet blogs and Facebook pages and groups. In accordance with the research question, using the (available) communication channels of the green movement would give the researcher the possibility to see the perceptions of the community towards digital democracy in their emergence in the very communal dialogue.

2.2. Qualitative Content Analysis in Digital Media Research

Content analysis, widely recognized for studying large quantities of media text (Deacon et al. 114-131; Macnamara 2005), is by no means a new method particularly for digital media research. Various authors, such as Weare and Lin (2000) and Susan Herring (2004; 2010) have contributed to overcoming the difficulties which particularly the Internet creates for the content analysis researcher – the great quantity of information, its "chaotic" character (Weare and Lin 2000, 273); the various "types" of data (text, videos, music, pictures); and the problem of research ethics concerning the extent to which the available information is opened to the researcher. Concerning the first type of problems, there are no universal decisions; it is

23

only the particular research question which can justify the chosen design, data sampling and unit coding issues. With regard to the research ethics concerns, I have chosen an approach already practiced by Scheidt & Wright (2004), who cite authors of weblogs directly and without their personal permission. I do this for several reasons.

I treat the content published in the examined blogs and Facebook groups as public content allowing reproduction for the purposes of research because: 1) it is free, non-password-protected, and, especially in the case of blogs, it is opened for republishing with reference to the particular blog; 2) it contains no personal information and no information of private character (personal life stories or any kind of "delicate" material); 3) all the data used serves public purposes – it shows individual opinions on a question of *public* interest.[17]

While content analysis in general has continuously provoked the methodological interest of digital media researchers, one of its particular branches – namely, qualitative content analysis – has often been neglected – particularly when it comes to studying "social media", or social networking websites such as blog networks, Facebook, Twitter, and others (Parker et al. 2011).

Qualitative content analysis, following the definition of Philipp Mayring (2000, 2), is an "approach of empirical, methodologically controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytical rules and step by step models, without rash quantification." Following procedures of systematizing the textual data which are similar to the quantitative content analysis (identifying coding units and creating an "objective coding scheme" (Berg 2001, 238) in a systematic way in accordance with the aims of the study and the research question), qualitative content analysis does not require that "the data are selected

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[17] "Public interest" is by no means a definition of the researcher or a normative category prioritizing environmental issues. The very Internet users studied here, namely, the formal and informal members of the Bulgarian environmental community, perceive the question which engages them as a question of public interest, and they participate in this community exactly because of this perception.

using random sampling or other probabilistic approaches, so as to ensure the validity of statistical inference", which would make it suitable for applying various statistical techniques and making inferences, but rather "produces descriptions or typologies, along with expressions from subjects reflecting how they view the social world" (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009, 2). The aim of qualitative content analysis, in this respect, is to preserve the advantages of quantitative content analysis in terms of replicability and validity, while at the same time allowing for a qualitative interpretation of the results and in-depth understanding of the context of communication (Mayring 2000, 3).

These definitions of the method and its applications make it particularly appropriate for the current research question, whose answer in fact consists exactly in the "description" (Zhang and Wildemuth 2009, 2) of a particular view of the social world (namely, the perceptions of the ecological community of the possibilities of political representation given by new technologies), developed and expressed in the process of communication. By applying a universal coding scheme to the data sources – Facebook pages and user blogs – the current research identifies the themes (implemented into codes) and contexts in which the political ideas of the environmentalists mix with their perceptions of the technological conditions making their communication and mobilization possible. In this sense, the qualitative content analysis puts the accent not on the agents of speech – *who*, *in what way, and to whom* is talking, but rather on *what is said*, and what patterns of meaning can be identified in the very content of the information (see Riessman 2008, 53-54). These patterns, then, can find their explanation in the theoretical framework. The structure of the analysis is presented in the next chapter.

However, as stated earlier, the method has been neglected particularly in studying social media discourse, such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs. In fact, Parker et al. (2011, 3) claim

that rarely one can find any qualitative content analyses for this type of media content[18]. While Parker et al. do not give any particular reasons for this oversight, they point out that the difficulties which social media present to the researcher are not much different than the difficulties which web content in general produces and which have been mentioned by some of the authors quoted above (Herring 2010; Weare and Lin 2000; and others; see Parker et al. 2011, 4-5). These difficulties consider mostly the very procedures of data collection and data aggregation, just as the very analysis. First, web content is ephemeral, and often changes within very short time limits; second, defining a context unit and unit of analysis is hard due to the various forms of information and their volume – from a hyperlink to an entire web page; third, defining a coding unit is problematic, due to the various types of media content which are seen in one particular unit of analysis (pictures, text, video, sound); fourth, the volume of information is huge, and it has the tendency to grow over time (Parker et al. 2011, 5). Social media present all these difficulties to the researcher, but in even grater scale, because the information is managed not by one person (a web designer, or an administrator), but by various users who interact in the social networking websites, sharing content of different types. **First**, people can change the information they share very fast, adding new posts or deleting old content (depending on the possibilities of the web platform). **Second**, at the same time, the very web platforms often have unclear borders – Facebook and Twitter applications are already attached to every website, allowing immediate publishing without visiting the platform. **Third**, users not only upload different types of media content, but also link to other users' links and uploaded materials in a scale much greater than before. **Fourth**, thousands of users now upload various information in periods of time as short as an hour or even less.

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[18] Discourse analysis is, in this respect, a much more recognized method for studying digital communication (see Mautner 2005).

26

2.2.1. Testing Qualitative Content Analysis in the Current Research.

Adapting the Method

These problems give legitimacy to a second (indeed, secondary) aim of the current study: to test the application of qualitative content analysis to online social media, and to identify the particular problems emerging from this application. Doubtlessly, this second purpose of the research derives mainly from the appropriateness of the method with regard to the chosen research question; nonetheless, it is this appropriateness that serves as an argument for the test of the method. Led by the research question, in the current thesis I try to avoid these four problems, or live with them, where they do not constitute a significant loss for the study. As a sacrifice, the external validity of the research faces some limitations. Reflections on the application of the method are included as a subsection of the analytical chapter.

With regard to the second problem (the first will be discussed later), choosing the particular units of analysis was guided by the specifics of the online communication channels of the observed social group. As I explain in detail in the next section, I have taken "snapshots" of two periods in the online existence of the Bulgarian environmentalists – one in 2007 and one in 2012. In the earlier case, it is blogs (or weblogs) that played the most important role in online communication; in the second case, Facebook – a social network barely used in Bulgaria in 2007 – is the most significant source of information and, respectively, a tool for social mobilization. Hence, I have chosen to analyze seven blogs from 2007 and eight Facebook pages and groups from 2012. These two types of social media have differences in the form of the content, and these differences are reflected in the analysis, although they do not play a significant role in the research.

The third problem – the decision on a coding unit – was again dictated by the purposes

of the research. I have tried to identify particular themes in the form in which they can be seen in the online publications. Hence, the initial idea was that a coding unit (a theme) could physically constitute of text (from several words to a whole paragraph), an image, a video or sound material. However, this work was significantly facilitated by the chosen data, where videos and sounds were rare, and pictures were exclusively connected with text paragraphs and were hence coded together. Finally, the coding unit of the current analysis is a theme, defined by a particular expression of opinion and its context (see the description of the coding scheme in the next chapter), and physically consists of text with varying length and an image connected to it where appropriate.

The first and the fourth problem are related to each other. The ephemerality of the Internet content, together with the vast amount of information available, significantly limit the replicability of the study. There is no guarantee that the same blogs and web pages will look in the same way when a user (or a researcher) enters them again. In this respect, a helpful approach was to concentrate the data selection along particular events. As I describe in the next section (data description), the analysis of the environmental community in 2007 and in 2012 is based on chosen protest campaigns in the two years. First, this significantly limits the periods in which information is published, making the data amount more visible and feasible for analysis. Second, it concentrates the information around particular topics (the protest campaigns). A particularly important result of this concentration is that users would put less effort in changing the information which they have once published. While general discussions and private web pages would stimulate users to constantly revise the way in which they represent themselves, pages and discussion groups concentrated on particular events would limit the user activity to presenting only their own participation in the protests, and would hence increase the probability that the information will generally remain

28

unchanged.

In addition, in order to increase the chance of replicating the research, once the data period and the analyzed units were chosen, "snapshots" (image print screens) were taken from all the examined web pages, so that the various stages of coding during the research and the potential recoding by other researchers is done over a "constant", non-changing material.

As a consequence of all of the above, the results of the research are limited only to the particular time periods and, much more important, only to the representation of the particular events in focus.[19]

A final remark considering the application of qualitative content analysis in the current case is that the reliability of the research, despite all efforts, is limited by the impossibility for intercoder reliability tests – the research is done by one person, namely, by the author of this text.

The next, longer section, will introduce the issues of data selection and description, and the first part of the analytical chapter will present the coding procedures and the very coding scheme.

2.3. Data Selection, Justification, and Description

The Internet channels for social communication have become so diverse that there is hardly any possibility for the researcher to grasp even a small part of all the possible data on a current event. This is even more true for the communication channels of social movements, or even for much smaller virtual communities, whose communication goes through blogs, personal websites, forums, social network profiles and pages. Such a variety places

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[19]　The most significant limitations on reliability and validity come in fact from the very essence of qualitative research, which, despite all efforts, remains significantly influenced by the individual interpretation performed by the researcher. According to some authors, qualitative researchers do not necessarily have to engage with claims for reliability and validity (Krippendorf 1980; Miller 1995). This research was done without the relief which such arguments provide, although I take into consideration the epistemological underpinnings of this point of view.

significant restrictions on the possibility of the researcher to achieve any representativeness of the online communication.

Taking into account these differences, the current research has focused on two periods which relatively well illustrate particular moments of the presence of the green movement on-line. The first one is an early protest action that receives much media attention in the summer of 2007, while the second focuses on the present (2012) active campaigns against the new Law on Forestry and the campaign against shale gas fractioning. The comparison of these two periods, however, does not give me the possibility to make conclusions on any causal relationships, since they are quite different – and such relationships are not the intention of this thesis. The idea is to have two parallel "snapshots" of the green movement – one at the beginning of its "online" formation and public existence and one in the current moment. The context of these "snapshots" is very briefly introduced below, namely with the intention to explain why the two moments are related to the research question.

2.3.1. Blogging about the Strandzha protests

In the summer of 2007, two campaigns started, which later, when the environmental cause got institutionalized in NGO's, received the names "Save Irakli" and "Save Strandzha" (Krastanova 2012, 19-20). The first campaign aimed at the preservation of a wild beach from the intention of investors to build hotels near it, while the second was provoked by the decision of the High Administrative Court that the Strandzha mountain, which had been announced as a protected national park in 2005, should be excluded from the list of protected territories. The case of Strandzha, the earlier of the two (in time), provoked protests through online mobilization in which several thousand (between 1 and 3 thousand, depending on the media source) people participate in the first week of July. Although the number is not great,

the protests grabbed the public attention – they happened spontaneously, blocked the car traffic, and attracted sympathizers with folklore music and games. The participants were young people, mainly from Sofia, or studying in Sofia (this is not the case with the protests later). This is in fact the beginning of a series of protests on environmental issues, and, although the first ecological organizations are created much earlier, the protests long after this will be considered "spontaneous". As a journalist from a big daily newspaper put it, "The authorities will sooner or later understand that after Strandzha 2007 politics will not be the same" (Stoynev 2007).

The police reacted to such small protests quite violently. Around ten people were arrested, the others were brutally driven away. Most of the information from the first protest came to the attention of the media due to a group of bloggers who posted lots of pictures on their personal pages[20]. In about a week, one of the bloggers, a web designer announcing himself as Michel (or *optimiced*, as the name of the blog – www.optimiced.com), was called by the police for examination. He then understood that his blog had been examined with the suspicion that it provokes public disobedience, and he was warned. The information about this spread immediately online and led to series of protests, including as main issues the protection of Strandzha and the freedom of speech.

The first "snapshot" follows seven blogs from this period, mentioned in Appendix 1 (*optimiced's* blog is also in the sample). These constitute the most visible part of the blogosphere which devoted materials to the protests, and were the ones that got the attention of the media. I find them particularly interesting for the current research due to the role they played in the digital public sphere in Bulgaria when it was still in its early years. I have examined only the posts of these seven blogs which were dedicated to the ecological topic –

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[20]   On the division between personal and political blogs see Tremayne (2007).

and these posts include mainly the Strandzha protests and the Irakli protests later the same year (most of the posts on the Irakli protests mention the case of Strandzha). Hence, I have taken into account the whole 2007 (although there are only occasional posts before June). In some of these seven blogs, there are only a few posts; in others, they are more than 20. Because many bloggers at that time work in web design, photography, search engine optimizing, and similar professions, these are the other most common topics (not analyzed). The material – all posts with the comments – is altogether 250 printed pages, of which, however, a significant part (around 40 percent) consists of pictures. The text has been coded in the format of the blog page (it has not been moved to a word processor or cleaned from formatting). The comments are also a relatively small part of the material. Such blogs are usually well moderated by their authors, so many comments which are not related to the topic of the discussion can be deleted. Unfortunately, this is not the case with Facebook groups and pages.

2.3.2. "Facebook"-ing about the Forests

The first half of 2012, just as the summer of 2007, is significant for the eco-movements with two battles – for the forests and against the shale gas. As the data showed, many participants in protests disagree with mixing the two topics.

In December, the Bulgarian Government received an offer from the American energy giant "Chevron Corporation" to start exploring the Dobrudzha region (close to the seaside) for the existence of shale gas underground. After continuous protests, the Government signed a moratorium forbidding research using the fraction technology. Later on, the moratorium was partly changed, which provoked new protests.

At the same time, a law had been passed which allows investors easily to change the

32

statute of forest lands and, consequently, to lumber big forest massifs without special permission. The passing of the law is often publicly related to the friendship between the prime minister Boyko Borissov and the president of the Bulgarian ski federation, Tseko Minev, whose company also holds the ski lifts in three of the four big ski resorts in Bulgaria, and who is the main investor in one of the biggest Bulgarian banks, First Investment Bank. Minev is accused by the green activists of being personally interested in the law which would allow his company to build new ski tracks. The law, discussed in the fall of 2011, was then postponed. As a result, Minev's company, "Vitosha Ski", publicly declared that the currently existing lifts won't work during the winter "because of the legal impossibility" and "the lack of perspectives for development" (Vitosha Ski 2011). Since then, the law has been changed several times and is prepared for new voting.

The mobilization around the "forest" issue was chosen because it would well illustrate the late stage of the development of the environmental movement. Right now, all such events, although coordinated through the Internet (mostly Facebook groups), are organized by the coalition of environmental NGO's "For the Nature in Bulgaria to Stay". At the same time, the party "the Greens", created in 2007 and registered in 2008, also has initiatives, and could be a potential partner of the coalition in the organization. In other words, this "late stage" is already richer with various political actors, institutionalized, though, only to a certain degree. Meanwhile, the online communication has changed too. The Bulgarian blogging space is much richer, but also much less environmentally oriented. While some of the bloggers that played important role in 2007 are still active, participate in the protests and write about them, their websites are not the main source of information anymore – and neither do they receive the same attention from traditional media.[21] The main mobilization channel is now Facebook;

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[21]   In this respect, it is worth mentioning that, outside the environmental protests, the Bulgarian blogosphere now consists of much "bigger" players, some of whom created platforms for online deliberation and civil control. A good example is the website http://politikat.net which follows the extent to which politicians

many forums, including the forums of some of the biggest environmental web pages, do not even exist anymore.

Hence, the current campaigns dedicated to the forests – and, by necessity, to the shale gas case (as I will explain below), well reflects both changes – in the green movement and in communication. The current research does not have the potential to prove a relationship between these changes and the potential changes in the perceptions of representation. It, however, claims that these should be taken into account in the research design[22].

In the current research, I wanted to concentrate on the protection of the forests. In it, the green movement is easily differentiated from the "other citizens" who oppose the shale gas research. However, a significant part of the online communication examined here was also related to the protests against the shale gas fractioning. On the one hand, this is due to the big media attention that this topic received (since neither the Government nor the Parliament reached a consensus there) – the "forest issue" received most of the media attention due to the protests. On the other, the online communication, especially in its massive forms, often takes directions going far away from the initial topic. And, finally, "For the Nature" tried to put the two campaigns together in order to get more attention.

The systematically analyzed data used here consist of the Facebook pages of the most popular events with regard to the demonstration campaign – the protests with the attractive names[23] "What Will You Cut Off, Dear MP's – the Forest or the Corruption?", "Plovdiv Decided to Protect the Nature", "Let's Save the Forest from the Law", "Let's Save the Forest – Let's Save the Country", and the less provocative "National Protest Against the Shale Gas

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fulfill the promises given to the media and the voters.

22   In fact, it is very hard to conduct a strong long-term comparative research in the sphere of digital technologies, due to the massive changes in the channels of communication. At the same time, the information on the Internet has the characteristic of disappearing just as fast as it has appeared.

23   In Bulgarian, all of these are rhymed and have a humorous note.

34

and the Forestry Law". At the same time, the Facebook groups of three organizations have been taken - "For the Nature in Bulgaria to Stay", "For Vitosha" (the mountain near Sofia), and the political party "The Greens". The groups are examined since the beginning of 2012, and the pages – since they exist on Facebook (from February till May, depending on the group). The web addresses of the groups are in Appendix 1. All these create a rough print body of around 500 pages (with all the pictures and other materials); however, the postings from which data have been coded are probably less than 80. Again, the coding has been made in the original format of the pages, so that it is easy to differentiate the various speakers and postings.

With regard to the research question – how does the Bulgarian environmental community perceive the digital political space of which it is part – the data selection gives the possibility to see the community in two phases. The first is more "spontaneous", "unorganized", not politically represented, smaller in range. The second is more massive, more disperse, it has more official organization "from above", which makes the communication even easier. There are no people arrested any more, and the route of every protest is well known and announced in advance. Considering the process of data selection a part of the research itself, these two patterns can be interpreted as showing something which is sometimes referred to as the "institutionalization" of social movements (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 243-244; Saunders 2009), which start as spontaneous groups and then create an internal hierarchy which would help them coordinate their actions. This research does not have the potential to discover the differences in the very movement – this would need, the least, much better developed research literature on the particular case. Still, such a "cycle" pattern is important for the more general understanding of the perceptions of the community in the two periods.

Of course, choosing particular protest events carries the risk of suggestion – it is not hard to assume that protesters would criticize the political status quo, and would then easily confirm the first hypothesis of the research. This presupposition, however, is only partly true. A social movement by necessity criticizes politics. Yet, there are different ways in which this can be done, and these nuances give the value of the current research. The protesters may criticize the particular political elite or the system which produces it; they may criticize the political ideology proposed by the political elite, or they may criticize the system of representation; finally, the protesters may disapprove a political line towards the environmental issue, taken by one or more consecutive governments, or they may disapprove they way in which the political system underestimates the value of the environment as a whole. In this sense, what justifies the current approach is, on the one hand, theory, and, on the other, the aim of the research. This is why in the theoretical part I sought for a connection between theories of digital democracy and research on social movements – because this similarity in the attitudes of social movements has not yet been registered. It is the *zeitgeist*, the "spirit" of digital democracy that justifies the search for nuances there where it is expected that the social movements would be unsatisfied with the political status quo. The coding scheme, as described in the next section, takes into account these queries and elaborates on them, developing descriptive categories for the various types of dissatisfaction, based on the theory.

The next chapter is analytical. It will introduce the coding procedure used to systematize the data, the extent to which the descriptive hypotheses have been confirmed, and the various contexts in which the themes appear; finally, it will try to fit these contexts in the theoretical framework from chapter 1.

Chapter 3. Analysis

This chapter starts with an explanation and justification of the coding scheme used in the analysis – a substantial part of the analytical process. After this, the chapter introduces the two time cases. The analysis of each case starts with a brief description of the coded data based on frequency distribution tables, so that the initial hypotheses serving to describe the field can be confirmed or rejected. In the second part of each section, based on the coded text, I interpret the various perceptions of politics and technologies which appear in the data.

3.1. Coding

A universal coding scheme has been used for both cases – 2007 and 2012. The two forms of communication produce quite different text output. Blog posts are significantly longer (typically half a page or sometimes more); the same is valid for the comments on the posts; blogs – especially personal blogs, as the case of the current ones – often appear to be more "candid", as they represent something like a public diary (Tremayne 2007, Kline and Burstain 2005). On the contrary, Facebook posts are very short (one, two sentences, sometimes even several words). This makes the context of the Facebook discussion much more important for understanding the meaning of a particular phrase – however, in many cases Facebook posts are just "shot" on the wall without any real context, provoked just by the topic of the Facebook page. The users who comment are significantly more than in the case of the bloggers, and some of them post a message once or twice and never appear again. As a result, the coded units in the first group are significantly longer than these of the second. Nonetheless, the main topics of the current blog posts and the Facebook pages are similar. The usage of a universal coding scheme helped recognizing some nuances which dominated

one or another form of posting on the similar topics.

The coding scheme was developed on the basis of the hypotheses during the first reading-through of a part of the material, and was later modified several times in the process of open coding. Following Saldana's "hypothesis coding" guide (2009, 123), it was developed in a way that would allow the researcher to see the relation between the comments which can be perceived as confirming the hypothesis and the ones which can be interpreted as its rejection. At the same time, it tried to grasp various nuances of each particular theme.

The scheme (Appendix 2) is tree-shaped and has 9 categories. The topics are situated around three main groups – political representation (CHANNELS); environment and politics (NATURE); and Internet and politics (INTERNET). The first topic identifies the way in which the users talk about the mechanisms of political representation – in the context of the data, these are political parties, government, NGO's, and the traditional media (as a mechanism of connection between the decision-makers and the citizens). It is related to the test of the first hypothesis – *traditional channels of representation are seen as discredited; more civic participation is needed in order to achieve substantive representation of interests.* The first code – ALL CHANNELS – includes opinions stating that: all traditional channels of representation are discredited; alternative forms of representation should be sought for (increased civic participation but without mentioning particular collective institutional agents); various forms of direct democracy (referenda, petitions, or other forms of including citizens in the decision-making process) should be implemented. It does not include any of the above when it is in particular relationship to the issues of environment. For example, a claim that "all politicians and NGO's are corrupted" falls into this category. Denials of "politics" as a whole fall into this category. A claim that "Politicians privilege business but neglect environment" is *not* coded here. The second code – BAD PARTIES – includes similar

statements but points directly towards the political elite and the local authorities (not mentioning civic organizations) – "parties do not work in our interest; whoever is in power, it doesn't matter," or "NGO's represent us better" are coded here. Again, when the statement concerns only environmental issues, it is not included. The third code – OTHER CHANNELS – includes all other statements with regard to the political system such as "we should change this Government" (disappointment with the current rulers but not with the political system) or attacks against particular politicians, without mentioning their institutional position (a particular politician is not seen in the context of the party or the system, but as an individual, a businessman, etc.). Statements related only to environmental issues are not mentioned here. The idea of the three codes is to identify three different visions about the "current" system of political representation. The first is the most "radical" view, according to which the power-holders are a result of the political system as such, and hence every (mediated, not direct) connection with them is inappropriate. The second, more moderate view is that the system of political representation needs the extensive help of organized moderators, such as the NGOs, trade unions, and other representatives who can influence the decision-making process but actually represent the consolidated public opinion with regard to particular issues or between election cycles. The third view sees the problem not in the political system, but rather in particular individuals or in the imperfection of its implementation (for example, politicians are not bad because they are politicians but because they have private interests, and the laws are not respected; the system itself is good but it is not organized the way it needs to be). The predominance of the third category of opinions would reject the hypothesis.

The second hypothesis states that *the environmental interests in particular are being neglected.* It is related to the theoretical assumption that, because of the essence of the

39

information society, the easiness of communication and the possibilities to transfer information very fast and cheap, people tend to consolidate their interest around particular issues, and not around broader political problems. Following Della Porta and Diani (2006), we should expect that social movements think politics in particular practical categories; following Jankowski and Selm (2000), this can be interpreted as a possibility (and reason) for a claim for more direct democracy. The second theme, hence, includes two codes. BAD NATURE identifies opinions about the political system, political elite, or the system of representation (similar to ALL CHANNELS and BAD PARTIES), which describe particularly the environmental topic as neglected or abused by the politicians who privilege other interests. The second code – OTHER NATURE – identifies all other opinions regarding environment and politics – it includes, for example, opinions stating that it is individual responsibility of people to protect the nature or to raise claims for its protection before their governments. It also includes positive statements about the activities of the political elite towards the environment ("in country X the parliament voted for an important water protection law, we can force our parliament to accept one too", etc.). The confirmation of the second hypothesis comes in two steps. First, the two codes in this theme are compared. The predominance of OTHER NATURE will automatically reject the hypothesis. Then, if BAD NATURE prevails, it is compared with the result of the first hypothesis – if the first hypothesis is rejected, the second is also rejected automatically (which is obvious from the very hypothetical claims).

The third hypothesis states that *the Internet, due to its deliberative and communicative qualities, will be seen as a mechanism for "real", "true" or "most accurate" political representation*. The third theme in the coding scheme then - INTERNET - is subdivided into four codes. It represents four possible groups of opinions on the perception of digital

technologies as a tool for representation, all of them closely related to the "promises" of digital democracy. The first code – I-MOBILIZATION – includes positive statements about the possibility for fast off-line mobilization achieved through digital communication. The second category – I-DIRECT – includes positive statements or discussions of the possibilities of on-line petitions, on-line referenda, and easier participation of citizens in the decision-making process with the help of new technologies. It also includes the view of Internet and social networks as adequate substitutes for the representation system ("when the politician doesn't know how to do his job, he blames the blogger"; "Internet is the place where our interest is really represented") or as an instrument which helps to adequately aggregate public opinion ("no politicians really listen to the bloggers, and I am happy that people who think like active citizens meet on-line". The third category – I-DELIBERATION - includes statements that see the Internet as a place for better, more informative discussion. It also includes statements which see the Internet as a free media (compared to the corrupt state or private-owned media), or as the more adequate one (faster news, more correct information, more possibilities to understand what really happened – not because of political influence, but because of the technological possibility). Finally, the fourth category, I-INEFFECTIVE, includes all negative perceptions of the Internet as a tool for representation. The most common criticism[24] which would appear in this category is that online actions do not have a real result on the political decisions (i.e., "real protests happen offline". The code also includes statements illustrating the "digital divide" - such as "you do not distribute information elsewhere and my mother, who wanted to come to the protest, does not read Facebook". All other negative perceptions of the relationship between digital technologies and political representation fall into this category. The prevailing of I-INEFFECTIVE should be interpreted as a rejection of the third hypothesis.

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[24]   See, for example, Morozov (2011).

The meaning of the discussed hypotheses, nevertheless, cannot be understood without looking into the depth of the cases of the categories – and indeed, this is the essence of the second part of the analysis. While the first part of each section only illustrates in numbers the extent to which the hypotheses can be confirmed, the second section discusses the results in accordance with the theory and with examples from the data. The idea is to see how the messages construct "patterns" which lead the discussions of particular subjects. The resulting description is highly interpretative – it searches for the relationship between these patterns and the theoretical justification of the research question, and for the "local" context which would help the understanding. It goes deeper into the various "perceptions" of the environmental community in accordance not with the frequencies with which these categories occur, but with the context that justifies them as a reference to the theoretical framework.

3.2. Blogs, Environment, and Grassroots Political Enthusiasm: The Protests from 2007 and the Bloggers' Ideas of Representation

Blog posts usually take the form of a short narrative about an event or an opinion which often provokes a discussion. Depending on the style of the blogger, they vary in length between several sentences and one-two pages. This allows for the coding of larger segments of data – the coded units are usually four-five sentences (see coding sample, Appendix 3). As a result, the coded material is more lengthy, but smaller in numbers. The comments on every post also vary significantly in length. Typically, a blog post has 2-3 comments of about a sentence or two. However, in some cases more than 10 (relatively) lengthy comments follow the same post, producing a real "conversation". One should take into account that often the people who comment are also bloggers; some of them, as one can see from their discussions,

even know each other – which has probably contributed to the fast spread of information (a fact not acknowledged by the "cyber-optimists" in the data).

3.2.1. Hypothesis Tests

Table 1 shows the distribution of coded units along the different coding categories.

	Channels of Representation			Nature & Politics		Internet & Representation			
	All Channels	Bad Parties	Other Channels	Bad Nature	Other Nature	I-Mobilization	I-Direct	I-Deliberation	I-Ineffective
Total	**25**	**12**	**4**	**10**	**2**	**3**	**7**	**10**	**2**
75	**37**		**4**	**10**	**2**	**20**			**2**

Table 1. Distribution of coded units along the coded categories, 7 blogs from 2007. The last row with the totals indicates the sums which are compared for the purpose of hypothesis testing.

Bloggers and their "guests" in the summer of 2007 speak significantly more about politics and representation than about the nature in whose name they protest. 37 of the coded phrases represent particularly bad perceptions of the political elite as a whole or the parties as representatives of the civil interest, while only four times do the users mention any alternatives within the existing system; at the same time, the opinion that the particular problem of the system is the environmental issue has been expressed only 10 times (out of the 12 in which the topic was raised). These results are in confirmation with the first hypothesis but reject the second. The possibilities of the Internet as a tool for mobilization, direct democracy and deliberative debate are discussed 20 times, while new technologies are mentioned only twice in a negative context, discussing the impossibility to change the political space by staying only on-line (as the case with the blogger Michel, *optimiced.com*, *July 7th, 2007*). This significant difference is in line with the third hypothesis – the Internet would be seen as a tool for better representation of the political interests. Below follows an in-depth discussion of these descriptive results.

3.2.2. Perceptions of Politics

The most often seen type of comments discusses the problems of the political elite the way it is now or the way "it will always be". Many users share the opinion that the problem is systemic, and it is not the particular parties that should be blamed about that; the very system of mediation between the authority and the citizens does not work. This predominance of opinions, which is in accordance with the expectations of the first hypothesis, is well illustrated in the words of the blogger *ArcaneLore* who, describing lively a peaceful meeting for the protection of Strandzha mountain from the previous day, finds that the best thing about the event was the variety of people who shared ideas and thoughts on the protest without reaching any "vulgar extremes, so typical for all politicized events". A discussion starts whether there has been a previous government which had worked better for its citizens. The case is the right-wing prime minister from the years 1997-2001, Ivan Kostov, during whose administration Bulgaria received an invitation to become a member of the European Union. *ArcaneLore* is clear:

> I am against the communist idea (…) because the negatives of the aspiration toward communism are also the negatives of every contemporary political system. The fact that we are in the EU now is not a significant advantage to me; neither do I think I should support the reforms. (….) People either do the things the right way or do politics" *(yasen.lindeas.com, July 20th, 2007)[25]*

The "top secret" context in which the first protests of 2007 appeared – mobilization happened through limited e-mails, phone messages, and blogs, at that time totally neglected by the authorities, partly justifies the general discontent with all institutionalized forms of representation - the political parties, NGO's, or other forms of organization, which are seen as enemies both of the particular cause and of the country as a whole. In another post, this time unprovoked by another user, the same blogger (*ArcaneLore)* who was not able to go to a

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[25]   Although I have done my best to translate all citations as correctly as possible, I take full responsibility for the mistakes that could occur from bad translation. S.O.

meeting the same day, expresses his satisfaction with this "secrecy" of the protest events:

> I understood yesterday about today's protest. I am glad that the information is spread so late and that nobody has started eavesdropping for information or to report to media or authorities. It is also good that the protest stays informal and spontaneous. All attempts of parties (for example, the Green Party)[26] and various NGO's (ecological unions) to take some official advantage with their support fail. And that's how it should be. With such "support" from a party or a union, no idea in Bulgaria has ever succeeded. *(yasen.lindeas.com, July 10th, 2007).*

Another blogger – *optimiced* - was asked by a guest-user why people have to protest after the decision of the court, instead of going to elections. The blogger replied that for some time, he does not believe in the "system of voting" anymore, because "it works for itself, and not for the people":

> We, the people, the electorate, have no control on whom we can vote for. Parties take care of that. And they, believe me, do not think about you when they prepare their lists – for MP's, for government, for mayor, municipal counsils, etc.... The parties take care of themselves. And of their favorites. This is why the system does not work very well. At the moment at which I go before the ballot box (if I go), I have no choice. I have a list of candidates whom I have to vote for. I often do not like any of them, but there are no others...(*optimiced.com, Michel, July 2, 2007*)

Although the system of representation is denied as problematic and the political elite is seen as a constant problem, there is no general denial of democracy as a system. Quite the opposite – the Bulgarian political system (sometimes the European) is seen as *not democratic enough*. The politicians, in the words of *semkiibonbonki*, "tolerate and stimulate the overstepping of the laws, crossing over human rights and digging in the base of the democratic values". The same blogger is rather skeptical about all forms of denial of the democratic system. She issues a blog post about an event organized by the People's Global Action group in 2004, after which a group of Balkan youngsters, "anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist groups or individuals", tried to create an action network. "Unfortunately", they were not very "fruitful", due to the "expected" lack of clear ideas (*semkiibonbonki*,

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[26] The blogger talks about an old Green Party from the beginning of the Transition who went into Parliament with the anti-communist parties in the beginning of the 1990's. The new "Greens" did not exist yet at that time – they appeared later the same year, and registered the party in 2008.

September 14, 2007).

The trend is, then, towards a more "pure" form of democracy (working, with rule of law, but democracy, and not an alternative form of governance), which can be understood in several directions in the Bulgarian context. On the one hand, the easiest way – and best fitting the theory of this research – is to see it as the one that "contributes" to "democratic theory" (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 241). Without denying such interpretation as valid in this case, another explanation possibly contributes to this vision. In 2007, Bulgaria got accepted as a member of the European Union, and Europe was seen as a "disciplining" factor. This is why an information bulletin about a protest, cited in *semkiibonbonki*, explicitly reminds that the Bulgarian case violates both Bulgarian and European laws.

These early stages of the protests logically presuppose such a radical criticism towards all forms of mediation between the "power" and the "people" (the protests from 2012 show a different picture). The blogger *Yovko* (*yovko.net*) starts with a report from a protest in order to share his general disappointment of the political elite, which, in his view, was not felt in the same way by the politicians. *Yovko* is confused because he does not see the alternative. The flash-mobs are an effective short-run tactic, but cannot be an effective mechanism for policy-making. He sees a problem in the very system:

> The fact that no party was brave enough to appear there as such shows the total crash of the political system in Bulgaria. The parties lost their role of representation of the mass, their role of emanation of the ideas. They have closed in meditating on their navel and, regardless of whether they are in opposition or in the governing coalition, they lost entirely connection with those who authorized them with their power. (*yovko.net, July 20, 2007)*

As there is no clear alternative, the call is for more civic participation, expressed best in a "spontaneous protest" (*optimiced).*

46

3.2.3. Perceptions of Environment

The initial expectation was that the environmental movement would orient toward the particular issue of the protection of the nature as unrepresented, instead of criticizing the inappropriateness of the whole system. In this sense, the fact that this hypothesis was rejected appeared surprising at the beginning. Nevertheless, the bloggers are not a representative sample of the population of the movement. It is rather more important to understand this in the context of the circumstances. First, 2007 is a very "political" year in Bulgaria, as it entered the European Union at this time. The perception of the European Union as a controlling organ or a possibility for political change appears several times during the coding and it appears always in the discussions around the political system as a whole. As the example of *ArcaneLore* showed, the Union is seen by the political optimists as a new hope (although the blogger himself claims that this is not a significant advantage). Second, the new green movement had just appeared, and the small, although "noisy", flash-mobs from 2007 can be seen as the starting communal events which very much contributed to its consolidation. In the later period, this communal sense in which the environment unifies the people can develop much more. At the same time, the protests face problems with the police and provoke tension which moves the focus away from the environmental issue and closer to the relations "citizen-authorities", which is, indeed, politicization of the debate. *Gatchev* explains that during a protest that failed due to the lack of people, an officer tried to provoke the citizens by being rude. He is disappointed that he was not present at the protest personally:

> A policewoman came shouted something. Who are those people, why are they there. I was not there, otherwise I would have answered to her: "I am the Taxpayer, and the Voter. Your employer. I am here in accordance with my right to be wherever I want. Who are you, and with what right are you giving me orders? Legitimize, as the law says! My blog cries to have your name written down in it." (*Gatchev.info, March 23rd, 2007*)

47

Where the topic of the neglected environment appears as the main problem of the political system, it is related to the fact that the environmental problems are "urgent", while the system of representation does not respond to the immediate claims of the citizens. *Michel* (*optimiced.com*, July 2, 2007), shares this opinion. A user comment by *wanderingnew* in the same blog sees the protests as the only legitimate way to protect the environment because the system just doesn't allow any alternatives:

> For sorry, I don't even vote any more (…), because one way or another this is the only possible expression of my citizen's will, but there is NO sense, NO, NO, NO! For sorry, I don't even see the effect of the peaceful protests, in this state without laws, moral and order – I guess eco-terrorism is the only option. (wanderingnev, optimiced.com, July 2nd, 2007)

In this context, it is only the European Union that can protect the interests of the Bulgarian nature. Here, one of the readers of *gatchev*, who denies the Bulgarian political parties altogether, delegates his trust to the NGO's who have the potential to work with the European institutions and to represent the environmental interests. The NGO's are "more educated, they are active and naturally sincere, because, as a rule, they are young" (*gatchev.info, Delibaltova)*. Such delegation, however, is rare in the bloggers' case.

3.2.4. Perceptions of the Internet as a Tool for Representation

Table 1 showed the three patterns in which the topic of digital technologies, and, more precisely, the Internet (other technologies do not appear), is seen as a tool for better representation of interests. As the first subsection showed, the common perceptions of alternative democratic models are a trend toward more civic participation. In line with the promises of "digital democracy", the third hypothesis which the analysis confirmed – that the Internet would be seen as an adequate tool for political representation, a form of "pure" politics - was operationalized in three topics – Internet as a tool for better and easier direct democracy and increased civic participation, Internet as a tool for easy and fast social

48

mobilization, and Internet as a tool for better, informed and equalized deliberative process.[27] The most often seen perception was the one of Internet as a deliberative tool and tool for better, faster information receiving (media). This could have been expected, as bloggers are the ones that probably take the most advantage of these qualities of the Net. They are, in the words of Mossberger et al. (2009, 1) the active "digital citizens", using technologies as a means for participating in society. Second, the timeframe of the data is also appropriate for a confirmation, because the media information about the protests in 2007 actually came through the blogs and the open license of the photographs there. The bloggers realize this advantage and do not miss the opportunity to state it. They initiate a project called "zabraven.com" ("forgotten.com") which has to serve as an information tool for the events that provoked the protests. In a comment in *gatchev's* blog, *Veni G.* describes the project, quoting *dzver*, the administrator: "The goal of the project is to be and to serve as public consciousness and civil memory. Let us know the facts, the events..." *(veni g., gatchev.info, September 30th, 2007).*

The second vision of the Internet – as a tool for more direct democracy – is expressed in accordance with the often made comparisons with Habermas's public sphere. Right after the blogger *Michel* was called by the police (see chapter 2), *ArcaneLore* publishes a long article about the role of Internet as a substitute for traditional media (written by himself – *yasen.lindeas.com, July 15, 2007*):

> Real self-regulated publicity exists only on the Net and only the blogs as the most dynamic and at the same time personal part of this Net can move the public processes in our days. Not the [traditional] media.

Users recognize - and promote - the possibilities of the network as possibilities to

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[27] Della Porta (2009) represents a deep study on these deliberative trends in the internal organization of social movements, particularly the Global Justice Movement. The appearance of the general concept in the context of social movements is developed earlier by Kitschelt (1993).

realize their claims, otherwise expressed with the disappointment from the system, and at the same time clearly make the connection between the two things. The Net is generally better, non-politicized, effective tool for communication and debate (*gatchev*) which empowers citizens (in their own perceptions) and shortens the distance between them and the power-holders.

The third view – the Internet as a tool for mobilization for collective action – appears rarely in this part of the data, although the very sample represents such a usage of the network. *Michel*, for example, the blogger who most often provokes the others' will for action, never expresses this idea with regard to the Web. A possible explanation is that, although mobilized collective action is related to civic participation, it is a much less "institutionalized" form of participation. The Internet is seen by the bloggers as a sort of publicity, and mobilization is a way to instrumentalize this publicity by putting it into action – and this is a rather different type of activity.

3.3. Facebook and the institutionalization of the debate: The protests from 2012 and the "people's voice"

When discussing the series of protests for the protection of the forests, the main difference which has to be taken into account is the appearance of *institutionalized political agents* that organize the protests and meetings. The main agent in this case is the coalition "For the Nature in Bulgaria to Stay" (briefly "For the Nature"). As we will see, the new party - "The Greens" - avoids representing itself as a party during the protests. However, many of its members, who are also members of various green NGO's, actively participate in the organization of events[28].

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[28]   A good example is Andrey Kovatchev, director of the NGO "Green Balkans" - one of the biggest and oldest in Bulgaria (Krastanova 2012), and also a member of the coalition "For the Nature".

3.3.1. Hypothesis Tests

Table 2 shows the distribution of coded units in the Facebook groups and pages among the coded categories.

	Channels of Representation			Nature & Politics		Internet & Representation			
	All Channels	Bad Parties	Other Channels	Bad Nature	Other Nature	I-Mobilization	I-Direct	I-Deliberation	I-Ineffective
Coded units	**23**	**43**	**20**	**36**	**10**	**14**	**11**	**6**	**7**
170	**66**		**20**	**36**	**10**	**31**			**7**

Table 2. **Distribution of coded units along the coded categories, three Facebook groups of institutions and five Facebook pages of protest events from 2012**

The first hypothesis stated that the members of the environmental movement perceive the traditional channels of representation as non-functioning. Hence, the codes ALL CHANNELS and BAD PARTIES should prevail over OTHER CHANNELS. This hypothesis is confirmed. 66 coded units of the first two categories were found altogether. Only 20 coded units belong to the third category.

The second hypothesis stated that specifically the environmental issues are seen as unrepresented more often than the system as a whole is unrepresentative. While altogether the environmental problems were strongly perceived as unrepresented (36 coded units describing the environmental issues as particularly unrepresented and only 10 coded units blaming factors different from the representation system for this), the hypothesis is rejected when compared to the 66 codes in the first category – again, it is not the environment that remains unrepresented, but civil interest in general.

The third hypothesis states that the environmentalists would see the Internet as a tool for better representation of interests. This hypothesis is confirmed. Only 7 coded units present

51

the Internet as ineffective tool for representation of interests against 31 units presenting different forms of representation for which the Internet could serve.

Before moving to the discussion of the three groups of perceptions, I will briefly explain the importance of the institutionalized agents present in the late period.

The existence of an organization coordinating the events has a twofold effect. The first is that such an organization becomes a "partner" with whom the official power holders can negotiate. While "partnership" can be sometimes very problematic for the power-holder, it has a disciplining effect by necessity[29]. Protests are always official, with predefined routes and known locations, which potentially reduces the effect of the protest in terms of attention from the media and the citizens, but it also reduces the risks of such actions (people arrested, public dissatisfaction with the cause). At the same time, it allows "legal" communication and has the potential to ensure significantly more people – something that *optimiced* was dreaming about.

The second effect concerns the communication in the channels of mobilization, which potentially influences the object of study. As a result of the same "disciplining", the communication is kept within some limits. This is very visible in the way in which the administrator of the group "For the Nature" moderates the debate. Most messages are positive, the very administrator always uses a language which, although questioning the political elite as it is, never questions the system in general; the posts are oriented toward the particular events (protests, meetings, etc.), and are intended to provoking maximum participation (distribution of messages and presence at the events):

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[29] This can be true regardless of the approval of the members of a movement. i.e., it is quite possible that the organization is not widely recognized as a "representative" of the movement, but there is no active disapproval of this representative claim. According to Andrew Rehfeld's theory, the most important agent who makes the act of representation possible is the audience, recognizing the representative as such. In this case, it is the Government. See Rehfeld (2008).

Hello friends, it is very important to participate today, so that there are forests tomorrow! With regard to the discussion of the Forestry Law tomorrow, I ask each of you to send an e-mail to the MP's from the parliamentary commission of agriculture and forestry..." (Administrator, *"For The Nature"*).

The same behavior is visible in the other groups - "For Vitosha" and, as expected, the Facebook group of "The Greens"[30].

Finally, it is important to remind that Facebook messages are very short, sometimes only a few words, and often have no particular context, but rather express an emotion or attitude toward the topic in a very direct way. This is why many citations in the following analysis are short and non-contextualized – this is how they appear in their original expression.

3.3.2. Perceptions of Politics

The first hypothesis - that the members of the environmental movement perceive the system of representation as non-functioning - was confirmed. However, here, unlike the case of the bloggers from 2007, the perception that the parties in particular are the main non-functioning element of the system is much stronger than the idea that the mediators between citizens and authorities should be removed (43 against 23 coded units). This can be explained with the presence of NGO's and other agents that can serve for the aggregation of civil interests. "For the Nature" and other organizations take the role of such mediators, while "The Greens" are in a problematic position – the problems of the representative system are particularly the political parties.

The same "disciplined" rhetoric which is typical for the administrators is not always

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[30]   While a green party may be able to win more votes exactly by publicly denying the existent political order, just as the nationalist parties do, "the Greens" are trying to enter the group of the European Greens (Greens 2011), and, as shown in the introduction, they represent themselves in a European and democratic tradition. Although the Bulgarian green electorate is potentially able to appreciate rebellion behavior, this would be an uncomfortable strategy with regard to the international position of the party.

53

used by the other members of the groups. Politicians are "leeches" that "suck from us, from the nature, from whatever they find" (*Zori Yordanova, "What Will You Cut Off"*), "bastards in white suits" (*Strahil Geshev, "What Will You Cut Off"*), "no government thinks for the future, all of them act on the principle "steal today, whatever is left from us" (*Dimitar Petkov, "Plovdiv Decided..."*). These opinions are without a particular context or deeper discussion which would have probably reduced the temper of the rhetoric; they are provoked by the "peaceful" messages of the moderator. A user in one of the groups reacts to a short message stating that "It is not the time for joint actions now": "If by "joint" [action] you mean that the protests are joined by parties, I agree – no, it is not the time, because they only divide us..." *(Georgi Sheremetov, "Save the Forest from the Law").* In a discussion about the upcoming protest in Plovdiv, one user denies "politics" as a whole:

> I just want to say that the protest is not political but social. The presence of politicians is highly unwanted, so that dividends are not drawn by people who have sold themselves in one way or another! *(Ivan Stoqnov, "Plovdiv decided...")*

The Facebook group of "The Greens" looks in a different way[31], but it sends the same message. The members of the party are asked why they do not carry flags at the protests. One of the party members, *Yordan Dimitrov*, is disappointed because they are afraid not to be accused of "politicizing" the protest and being "paid".

3.3.3. Perceptions of Environment

Although the second hypothesis - that users see the environment as the most strongly unrepresented issue - was not confirmed, this perception appears much more often than in the case of the blogs from 2007. Here, 36 out of 170 coded messages describe such perceptions;

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[31] The group "The Greens on Facebook", having more than 4000 members, serves more as an internal forum used by a limited number of party members. Many of the other group members also join the other events and pages; nevertheless, they rarely discuss. The discussions are situated around new technologies and international "green" events. Information about protest actions and meetings are regularly posted but very rarely discussed – the same users do this in the other groups.

in the case of the bloggers, the number is 10 out of 75.

In general, the talk on Facebook is very strongly oriented towards the particular problems that need to be solved. In contrast with the blogs, political ideas beyond the context of current environmental problems are rarely discussed, and do not provoke much dialogue.

The most often use of the nature is as a national symbol, and as such, it builds a distinction between the corrupt elite and the citizens. The citizens are identified with the country, the nature, and the nation; hence, the politicians "steal" the environment which does not belong to them:

> If you don't want to be guests in Bulgaria, come today at 18.30 at a protest against the attempt of the government to give the Homeland as a present – are we ready to protect Bulgaria? (*Administrator, "For the Nature"*)

In this sense, the nature is perceived as a factor of collectiveness; a "common belonging", although limited within the state borders. One of the meetings is called "Do not steal the only resource of Bulgaria", and the discussions go around the Bulgarian national heroes in their role of citizens: "Come on, is this what Levski and Botev[32] gave their lives for... So that now we are under parliamentarian slavery!" (*Petya Viki Vasilevi, "National Protest against the Shale Gas"*).

3.3.4. Perceptions of the Internet as a Tool for Representation

The third, confirmed hypothesis, stated that the Internet is perceived as a tool for better representation of interests. The digital media here is seen in two main functions – as a mobilization tool and as a tool which allows better citizen participation in the decision-making process. The fact that mobilization occupies more of the attention, compared to

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[32] Bulgarian national heroes from the nation-building period of "national Revival" in the end of the 19th century.

deliberation in the case of bloggers, can be explained with the function of the chosen Facebook pages which have an explicit mobilizing function. The two categories of perceptions often go together, legitimized by the view of the Internet as a "clear space" which allows for discussion not influenced by politicians. In a dialogue about a call for civil control over the discussions with regard to the shale gas fractioning, a user concludes: "To all of this, transparency should be guaranteed through Internet..." (Edi Ruman, *"Save the Forest from the Law"*). In a similar manner, two users discuss a future protest:

> Wassilena Ahtchieva: I won't be able to come, but I hope to see you and to hear on the TV, and, mostly, the noise!
> Vili Marinova: Don't you hope to see us on TV :) Follow the uncensored media – Internet! *(National Protest)*

It is also the alternative media, because the others are "corrupt", "censored", and serve the interests of the enemies of the nature: "The media manipulations reached the bottom..." (Neli Arabadzhieva, *"For the Nature"*). As a consequence, its role is perceived as crucial for the mobilization of protest groups.

Internet as a tool for better representation, in this sense, is this time not explicitly stated (unlike the case of the blogs). It is, however, seen as a channel of representation as long as it is clear, unpolitical, unbiased media, unlike the other media channels, such as television and the press. "Direct democracy" here most often appears very unclear, but the Internet carries the potential to increase citizen participation significantly.

In conclusion, the visions of democratic representation in the Facebook groups and pages are similar to the ones that could be seen in the blogs, but constitute quite a different image. Unlike bloggers, Facebook users do not perceive the environmental protests as a political action. They claim that the protests are "non-political" and see every form of politics as bad. A more direct form of democracy, in terms of increased civic participation, the use of petitions and referenda, is sought for, but is barely expressed. Instead, these tools are seen as

a way to protect the nature from being destroyed.

While the bloggers in 2007 discussed the potential change in the political system, Facebook users in 2012 radically deny political parties, but delegate their trust to civil organizations.

They see the nature as a unifying symbol, as a relationship with the nation, while the bloggers described nature as something much more personal. A picture in the group "For the Nature" presents the national flag (white, green, red) without the green, because the forests are destroyed. The nature, the nation and the citizens are seen as the same thing, and by their actions they liberate themselves from "parliamentarian slavery"[33]. The role of Internet here is again the role of a tool which better represents the civil position, mostly because other media are corrupt and censored. Since the traditional channels of representation are blocked, corrupt, monopolized by the old party elite, the Internet appears to be the non-politicized tool for representation, "the only one left, where everyone can be a media" (*Kalin Vasilev, "What Will You Cut Off"*). As there is no vision of politics, the political debate is more situated around the ecological issues, and the political decisions are more often seen as anti-environmental. While the bloggers discussed the possibilities for a better functioning democracy which would protect the environmental cause, the Facebook users do not discuss a better system at all.

3.4. A Conclusion on Data Analysis

The analysis of the data successfully showed how the often postulated promises of digital democracy form the perceptions or representation of the environmental activists. The general claim in both cases was that the Internet, a place "clear from politics", can achieve better results in the representation of the interests of the environmentalists.

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[33]   See also Vaysova (2011).

However, some significant differences appeared which can be explained with the different type of organization that the movement has in the two stages of its development (Saunders 2009). In the beginning, when there are no organizational structures, the "ideal" form of democracy comes through direct communication, and this is why new technologies are seen as so important. This "ideal" excludes any mediation between the citizens and the power-holders and is similar to the "ancient" form of direct democracy mentioned in chapter 1. In 2012, technologies play a mobilizing role much more than the role of a field where interests are aggregated, and representation is seen as possible through collective organizations of "non-political" character, such as the NGO's. This significant difference is best explained in purely practical terms – the ideal political system, imagined by the green community in 2007, is still not available, and it does not present effective mechanisms through which policies can be developed and applied. Thus, mediators appear as a compromise between the ideal direct democracy as the "best" option and the system of representation through political parties as the "worst" democratic option. In this new value order, the question appears whether technologies play a role greater than just a communicative tool in an otherwise classic political system – while in 2007 their role is to be the very field on which interests are aggregated.

The second consequence from the organizational restructuring (in fact, "structuring") is that the communication in 2012 is oriented much more directly toward the particular problems of the environment. It is hard to measure the extent to which this behavior is dictated by the leading organizations, as compared to the extent to which it *creates* these organizations. In any of the two cases, such issue-oriented discourse legitimizes the civic organizations as the agents through which the power-holders communicate with the voters. Thus, in fact the institutionalization of the debate strengthens the status quo of the political

system. While the *immediate* effects on the Bulgarian environment may be bigger, the criticism toward the political elite is canalized in the environmental debate and hence does not offer an alternative political path.

3.5. Methodological Reflections

Based on Parker et al. (2012), Herring (2004; 2010) and Weare and Lin (2000), the methodological chapter pointed out several difficulties in analyzing social media discourse which emerge especially when content analysis is applied. These concerned the problems of selecting a unit of analysis; coding unit; ephemerality, quantity and concentration of the information analyzed. This section briefly summarizes the extent to which these difficulties actually appeared in the current research.

3.5.1. Issues of Ephemerality, Quantity and Concentration of the Information

In the process of choosing research data, the temporal character of information on the Web indeed presented some difficulties. An important personal blog from 2007 – *Nabludatel.info*, often cited by media and other bloggers, does not exist any more, just as various forum pages that would give additional data on the mobilization process in 2007. This fact limited the possibilities for data selection. Indeed, the chosen blogs provided more than enough information for analysis, and, luckily, appeared to be the right material for the research. However, some forums, web pages, and other materials from the early years of the digital environmental movement may have played significant influence on the research design (the links to many of these forums are still present, but the very pages are nonexistent). Nevertheless, this is not a problem of the particular method, but rather on every

59

attempt to study the "past" condition of the digital environment. This could have been avoided by combining the content analysis with another method, such as interviewing participants in the first protests – but this would have resulted in a different type of research, even if it would have tried to answer a similar research question.

The problem with the large quantity of data which could hardly be summarized was successfully solved with the choice of particular protest campaigns, on the one hand, and with the careful selection of Facebook pages for analysis, taking into account the protests as they happened, their organizers, and their representation in the media. The resulting body of information was consistent, concentrated around the topic, giving clear picture of the events and the participants in online discussions, and, most of all, appropriate for coding in accordance with the chosen method.

3.5.2. Issues of Selecting a Unit of Analysis

In this sense, the chosen data provided no significant difficulties. The biggest problem is that web pages – be they blogs or Facebook pages and groups – consist of various links to other pages. The researcher, then, needs to choose "where to stop" - is the unit of analysis only the blog? Or the blog and all pages to which it leads? Or the posts by other bloggers on the same topic, to which a particular blog points? In an attempt to overcome this problem, a conservative approach has been chosen: the data analyzed is only the *visible* data on the web page. In other words, external links are not taken into account by themselves; however, if a particular link has a recognizable text content (a sentence, words, or recognizable meaning), or a visible image attached, the link itself is considered a part of the web page (although it is not followed). The same tactic has been chosen for analyzing Facebook pages and groups. It can be summarized that the unit of analysis included all the *visible* material on the particular

web page, be it a blog or a Facebook page.

While this approach represents a data reduction, there is no particular argument why it would be inappropriate for the particular research. Another study, much more involved in the technological process of data production would meet significant difficulties here. As Parker et al. (2011, 5) have suggested, information can be published through a variety of platforms (e.g. various web pages aside from the main platform) and devices (mobile phones or desktop computers; tablets, etc.). These differences, however, have no influence directly related to the aims of this research, and cannot be said to have resulted in a significant change.

3.5.3. Issues of Selecting a Coding Unit

The problems of selecting a coding unit derive from the different types of content which can all be seen in one unit of analysis. These problems were successfully solved with the choice of a "theme" as a coding unit which includes all various content types in a universal interpretative scheme, where the appropriateness of the coded unit with regard to the theory and the research question plays a role much more important for the analysis than the type of content itself. Additionally facilitated by the very data, where different types of content always appeared surrounded by text and were coded together, the selection of a coding unit and the application of the coding scheme to the analyzed material did not present any difficulty for the research.

3.5.4. Conclusion on the Methodological Reflections

The application of qualitative content analysis to social media presented less difficulties than expected. The main problems that this type of data presents to the analytical procedures were relatively successfully overcome; however, by limiting the external validity of the

research through applying the analysis to particular events of mobilization. The most serious problem, then, was the ephemerality of the online data, making the research harder to replicate. This problem, nevertheless, is not new to qualitative research.

Without doubt, the research question and the aims of the research were very helpful in overcoming the data problems. In this sense, these problems would play a much more significant role in a research where the very online communication is not the object on which the analysis is conducted, but the very subject of study. One must not forget that most of the research quoted above was done by social scientists working in the field of communication studies, and not in political science. Nevertheless, the application of qualitative content analysis to social media discourse can be considered successful, and the problems presented by the literature appeared to be greater on paper than in the very research process.

Conclusion

The present research concentrated on the way in which the imagined qualities of digital technologies provide a particular view of political representation which, in the eyes of the Bulgarian green community, would work more effectively than the system existing at this point. In order to describe this view in details, the research tested three descriptive hypotheses, searching to distinguish the disappointment from the political elites, the focus on the environment as an example of issue-oriented politics, and the Internet and digital technologies as a tool for better political representation. In two different periods – 2007 and 2012, and in two different types of social media – blogs and Facebook pages and groups – the first and the third hypotheses were confirmed, and the second was rejected, thereby shaping the image of a "better" democracy which is wished to be much less representative and much more direct; characterized by constant control over the politicians and the decision-making process. This control is believed to be possible only through the use of the "liberating" technologies – tools for free, uncontrolled deliberation and social mobilization, and not so much through traditional means of direct democracy such as referenda or groups for deliberation. Surprisingly, this image is not situated particularly around the environmental topic or around the solving only of a particular problem, but appears in a broader discussion (although narrower in the case where the environmental movement already has its own political institutions) of the mechanisms of political representation.

Although the results do not present a radical surprise to anyone familiar with the problems of the Bulgarian political life – general mistrust in the political institutions, and even a more fundamental lack of working institutional mechanisms, which itself results in bad relationship between representative and represented – the current thesis shows that

alternatives are not only wanted, but also actively sought for. The biggest "losers" of this process are logically all "old" representational agents, even when they try to satisfy the "requirements" of the represented - "The Greens" are a good example for this, despite their attempt to present themselves as such an alternative.

In methodological terms, the current research tried to ensure a high level of internal validity and replicability. Its external validity, however, was limited both by the chosen research design – a qualitative study of one particular country – and by the application of the chosen method – a qualitative content analysis of online social media. In addition, the chosen approach of hypothesis testing, although giving the possibility for comparison between cases in future, does not help to move to a deeper discursive level which would reveal the "hidden" layer of the online communication. What relations are produced in communication, and what relations are reproduced? A discourse analysis will be more appropriate for answering this question.

The current research, then, can be useful in future in at least two ways. First, it contributes to the understanding of digital technologies not just as a source of "mechanical" changes to the developing political environment, but as a concept (not just an academic, but a civil one) which itself affects this environment. This, doubtlessly, is much less than enough to say whether there is any revolution in the democratic practices, whether such a revolution will occur at all, or whether it will be caused by new technologies. A more modest, but probably more correct conclusion is that it helps to understand new actors in the political field, such as new virtual communities, through their lifestyle practices (such as online communication) even when they do not discuss politics as such. Starting from a particular problem which in fact is problematic for their way of life, they frequently try to alternate the political system – although often with modest success.

64

Second, the research gives an idea on the internal development of the green movement, and how the political debate changes together with this development – from the spontaneous flash-mobs in 2007 with traffic blockades, to the coalition of NGO's which legitimately negotiates the conditions of every protest. This raises the question: to what extent does the virtual community continue to be a "real" virtual community now (following Daniel 2011b), when in fact a great deal of the communication activity is regulated by organizational structures? On the one hand, the organizations, which regulate not only the protests, but also the Facebook debates, bias the communication in the politically desired direction, thereby being the "offline" regulatory body of the green movement. On the other hand, however, it is still only through online communication that the green community exists as a whole, and which give the possibility for offline action.

A possible future research can, most of all, serve to improve the external validity of the current study, either by applying a comparative perspective to several similar cases – not rare around Europe - or at least by replicating the study to another case. At the same time, a further theoretical development of the methodological concerns expressed here can help overcoming the difficulties which social media sources present to the researcher. These problems, here taken mainly as "technical" obstacles, carry the potential to question the epistemology of studying the digital space – how is knowledge produced in a digital environment, how long does it last, how "true" is this knowledge, and, most of all, how researchable it is? This is only a small set of the many research questions which a deeper methodological analysis on the current case can reveal. With the development of online politics – both in Bulgaria and on a more global scale – these questions will continue to carry both academic and civil potential, and their answers will influence both the study of democracy and its practice.

While studying the relationship between digital technologies and politics is more than thirty years old, it appears that it is still in its beginning – in fact, technologies appear to develop much faster than research on them. In this respect, the current thesis appears to be just the basis for future study even in its much more limited field – virtual communities and democratic representation. Nonetheless, its particular focus, placed in the broader context of debates on technology and politics, grasps tendencies which have value in time and, thus, by trying to fulfill a gap, opens a door for future investigation.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Blogs, Facebook Pages and Facebook Groups examined in the thesis

Blogs from 2007.

ArcaneLore: http://yasen.lindeas.com/

Gatchev.info: http://www.gatchev.info/blog/

Ghibli's Place: http://ghibli.wordpress.com/

LeeNeeAnn: http://www.leeneeann.info/blog/

Optimiced: http://www.optimiced.com/bg/

Semki I Bonbonki ("Seeds and Bonbons"): http://semkiibonbonki.blogspot.com/

Yovko In a Nutshell: http://yovko.net/

Facebook Groups from 2012.

"For the Nature in Bulgaria to Stay": https://www.facebook.com/forthenature.org/

"For Vitosha": https://www.facebook.com/zavitosha/

"The Greens on Facebook": https://www.facebook.com/groups/29422629856/

Facebook Pages from 2012.

"What Will You Cut Off, Dear MP's – the Forest or the Corruption?": https://www.facebook.com/events/261834447239306/

"Plovdiv Decided to Protect the Nature": https://www.facebook.com/events/377737078928936/
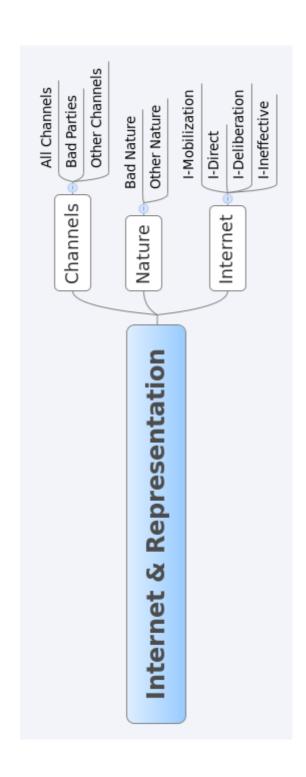
"Let's Save the Forest from the Law": https://www.facebook.com/events/171968802920080/

"Let's Save the Forest – Let's Save the Country": https://www.facebook.com/events/225812070848275/

"National Protest Against the Shale Gas and the Forest Law": www.facebook.com/events/300972103321799/

Appendix 2. Coding Scheme

68

Appendix 3. Sample Coded Data

Grigor Gatchev – A Weblog

(Personal – mostly in Bulgarian. English readers, please check the "In English" category.)
« Писането: Опаковането на подаръка
И пак за досиетата, и пак… »

ИраклиРезорт

Прочетох чак днес в блога на lk0 записа за ИраклиРезорт. Поне час не можах да си намеря място от бяс.

Bad Nature

Че въпросните… (не ми хрумва подходящ епитет, всяка псувня би била по техен адрес с нищо незаслужена похвала) са отмъстители, не е трудно да се сети човек. Че са таланти в съчинителството на пловни – също. Но да те нарекат "замърсител", при положение, че си изчистил района, който иначе те е трябвало да почистят, е впечатляващо. Почти като обвинението после, че си бил бил шофьора на камион, който те от кумова срама са пратили, да отчетат мероприятието ти за свое.

Знаем ги какви са още от момента, когато измамиха и насъскаха собствениците (и им придадоха "инструктори" за подкрепа) в мероприятието с моторните триони. И когато наведоха утайката им на мисълта, че е ОК да бъдат запалени палатките и окрадени вещите на първите пристигнали за почистването. Само че ги знаем само съпричастните към чистотата на природата, и опазването на най-красивите места на България от превръщане в бетонна джунгла, която след няколко години ще трябва да бъде разрушена, защото никой не иска да я погледне. Но унищожената красота няма да се върне.

Време е да го разберат и другите. Всички други, които биха искали да почиват в комплекс, стопанисван от подобни хора. Или да купят жилище, построено от тях. Нека си правят изводите дали искат да подкрепят с парите си такава кауза. А ако са прости и материални хорица, поне да се сещат какво ги очаква в този "рай". За да няма после писци из медиите: "Не знаехме, че ще ни измамят!". За да има кой после да каже: "Ние направихме каквото можахме, за да ви предупредим."

Има ли желаещи да съберем пълна и точна хронология на събитията около Иракли? Заедно с точните имена на извършителите й – от обикновените резачкаджии, през фамозните шефове на проекта, та до конкретните инвеститори и други замесени мутри и престъпници. Заедно с точен списък на мръсотиите и подлостите им, и към еколозите, и към всички останали. Заедно с подробно описание как и с какви средства са "лобирали" забраната за строителство да падне, и кой точно е бил машата (тоест, гушнал паричките). Хем ще попълним проектосписъка на политическите трупове, който също е крайно време да направим.

И не само създаването. Когато там запристигат било туристи, било купувачи, да потърсим мнението им. Зная – лекетата винаги осмърдяват каквото правят, те просто не могат иначе. Не е нужно да подбираме само лошо – спокойно можем да кажем всичко за тях, лошото ще е достатъчно повече от доброто. Всичко, което показва истинското лице на "Иракли Резорт" – минало, настояще, и база за изводи за в бъдеще. Истината. Само истината. Без подбиране или нагласяне. Без емоции и преувеличения. Просто истината – систематизирана, подредена, удобна за четене.

И да я изложим в Интернет. Ако се опитат да я свалят – да я пуснем на стотици места, включително из чужбина, и да добавим подробно описание на опитите им. Да я преведем на английски, немски, френски – нека и чужденците знаят какво се крие зад примамливите рекламни листовки, които ще почнат да получават. Нека четат, и си правят изводите.

И да се погрижим Гугъл рейтинга на тези описания да се вдигне далеч-далеч над сайта на въпросния "резорт". Не е трудно – достатъчно е просто да поставим в блоговете и сайтовете си по някой линк към него. Нека всеки, който ги потърси, да открива най-напред описанието ни. Мълчим ли си – лекетата, които ни клеветят, ще пият шампанско за наше здраве. Нека кажем истината.

Има ли желаещи да помогнат за идеята? Ако да – спретваме някъде едно уики, за лесен и удобен достъп, и се заемаме.

This entry was posted on Sunday, September 30th, 2007 at 1:40 am and is filed under Daily. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.

I-Deliberation

21 Responses to 'ИраклиРезорт'

1. *Daggerstab* Says:
   September 30th, 2007 at 2:39 am

Шествие Какво ще отсечете, господа депутати? Корупцията или гората?

Like · Comment · Share · April 10 at 10:17pm

15 people like this.

Write a comment...

Borislava Boteva
т.е. бих се присъединила, ако бих разбрала навреме.. и съм сигурна, че не съм само аз.. съжалявам, но страшно ви куца организацията.. :((
Like · Comment · April 10 at 7:55pm

Svilen Ovcharov likes this.

Георги Стоев Г-жо Ботева, човек ако иска да дойде ще намери начин. Не чакайте някой да ви организира. Следете инфото във ФБ, намерете си подходящите приятели, които да ви пращат събитията.
April 10 at 10:10pm · Like

ЗаДаОстанеПРИРОДА - www.forthenature.org Госпожо Ботева, оценяваме критиката и ще приемем всякакъв съвет за подобрение на организацията. Пишете ни на лично съобщение или тук, защо според Вас много хора не са разбрали за събитието? Ние имаме страница, на която публикуваме всичките си събития и също още няколко страници ни подкрепят, публикувахме го и в медиите (дали те го публикуват е друг въпрос), какво според Вас пропускаме?
April 10 at 10:14pm · Like · 1

Zornitsa Lazarova Хубаво е да има критика, но нека спрем да говорим във второ лице и нека спрем да търсим вината у другите. Никой не е професионален организатор на протести, всички са доброволци и правят каквото могат, пък и се учат в движение (поне доколкото знам). Трябва всички да полагаме усилия в името на общата кауза.
April 11 at 12:37am · Like · 1

ЗаДаОстанеПРИРОДА - www.forthenature.org Така е, Зорница, не сме вие и те - всички сме ние! Ние срещу онези, които съсипват и унищожават природата!
April 11 at 1:30am · Like · 2

Borislava Boteva ок, според мен проблемът е, че инфото за протеста се пуска един-два дни по-рано. До Георги Стоев: не можеш да разчиташ хората постоянно да ровят в нета и да проверяват дали ще има някакъв протест. В крайна сметка идеята не трябва да е не да се съберат само тези, "които са намерили начин", а ВСИЧКИ, на които им пука.. (родителите ми например не висят във фейсбук, а медиите.. няма да ги коментирам ##) ако разбера за протеста поне една-две седмици преди тва, бих напринтила флайъри и постерчета например и бих ги разлепила.. p.s. и критикувам, защото ми е супер болна темата, не за друго.. успех на всички ни..
April 11 at 12:07pm · Like

Svetlana Lukova Lukova Не е вярно - не се пуска два дни предварително. Аз знам за протеста от поне една седмица! Но се интересувам. Факт е, обаче, че има и такива, които биха подкрепили подобно действие, но информацията по една или друга причина не е достигнала до тях. чНо като цяло имате право - нужна е повече популяризация! Хубаво е да се достигне и до другите, които не се ровят и не само да се достигне, ами и да се влезе в сърцата им!
April 11 at 6:37pm · Like · 1

Write a comment...

I-Mobilization

I-Mobilization

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