The democratic deficit can be explained by the difference between the approaches of Gabriel Tarde and Emile Durkheim.

by Bengt-Åke Wennberg

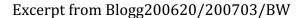Gabriel Tarde   MOT   Emile Durkheim

Emile Durkheim's approach leads to a reduction in complexity to something that seems more manageable but which in practice proves inappropriate in a social context that is fundamentally complex.

That is why a democratic deficit is emerging. A more constructive – but possibly more demanding – logic could be created if you were instead to take the approach of Tardes. In the following, I shall mention a few differences between the two with regard to the democratic deficit:

The existence of socially constructed structures

In order for people in their cooperation to be able to maintain the requirements of a good social context, structure, sustainable agreements, order etc. a certain predictability is required. In a Durkheim approach, it is considered possible to assume that the structure – the patterns – one can observe controls people's interactions with each other. Then the pattern is predictable.

The "good" structures could then be moved from one context to the other. They could also be decided by experts and leaders once they have understood the link between structures, regulations, appropriate choice of words and organization designs, etc. and the behaviors they believe are a result of these.

On the other hand, if you follow Tarde's approach, the structures are created by the people, groups, communities, etc. as they succeed in overcoming their difficulties of cooperation, thereby establishing structures and forms that make the collaboration that is being studied possible.

The good and inappropriate structures, shaped by the social interactions, contain an embedded knowledge that future generations can learn from. In structures which are constructed according to the Durkheim approach there is no such embedded knowledge.
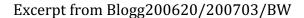
This was pointed out early on by Karl Popper (Popper 1945). Social systems are, in his view, not closed systems that can be constructed, but open systems that change themselves in the context of new circumstances.

Power, governance and influence

If you are caught up in the notion that the structure and organization structure govern the interactive interaction between people, you are forced to "get the people concerned" to follow the stipulated regulatory system, the program, the plan, etc. You have to check that they have understood and are motivated by of the set goal.

The 'subordinates' must then, in the same way as actors in a play, be part of the interaction patterns as they are prescribed. Deviations can be accepted as long as they do not jeopardise the joint operation. The initiatives taken must be within the framework of the commonly agreed ideology.

Tarde's approach follows a completely different line. People who live in a community and are interdependent need to develop an ability to create a co-operation that is at any time constructive and facilitating for

everyone – but which in any case does not make it difficult for some to achieve their own goals and ambitions.

This requires conversations and considerations between each other – seeking to bridge their differences – until one finds a form that meets the requirements of the individual as well as of the collective situation. Arrangements, structures and forms of cooperation are then formed that are sustainable as long as the situation does not change.
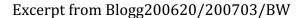
If the situation and conditions change, such talks and considerations must be resumed. The real knowledge then lies not in the structures themselves but in the *ability* of the actors concerned to understand the situation through their conversations and to shape the most suitable cooperation in it (Weick 1995; 2005).

Form of logic

Durkheim's approach is based on a technological logic. The desired control is calculated by turning the input persons into statistical units, objects, stereotypes, characters, etc. whose actions can be merged into configurations. Different events can then, like the weather, be simulated and predicted *if the participating individuals choose to follow and adapt to the patterns of actions and interactions given to them*.

Follow-ups and various evaluations can create increasingly sophisticated descriptions and configurations. The wide variety of possible combinations makes society increasingly bureaucratic and incalculable, which entails major obstacles for 'ordinary' citizens to engage 'democratically'.

Durkheim's approach is seemingly objective, scientific, neutral and universal, as is the case with technological logic. However, its neutrality has historically proved to be a misconception. People involved will interpret the structural elements according to each person's own different values and ideologies. Tarde therefore offers an approach that is more realistic and compatible with human nature and the involvement and involvement of actors in the social systems they create together.

Democracy through the election of parties

If you follow Durkheim's approach, the electoral systems must be subject to the fact that it is *the underlying ideology* of the established structure that is considered to govern interactive events. The electoral systems have therefore been designed so that voters elect representatives who have ideologies and values that are consistent with their own.

This has created a system of political parties that takes the starting point in that the ideology chosen by the majority should also have the power to decide upon important issues. The party however needs *all* the power in order to ensure the full impact of its ideology. This has historically been shown to lead to authoritarian and totalitarian governance and closed societies (Weil 1943).

Tardes' approach instead assumes that man has the potential within his community to build up an ability to jointly overcome different values structures, beliefs and ideological approaches. This becomes necessary every time new situations arise. If you have a collective access to this ability to create new interactive patterns you need not to rely on previous structures or a "strong leader".

If the "people" lose insight into the ability to exploit this ability – or are actively prevented from doing so – then they are forced to leave the responsibility for what happens to forces outside themselves. When they then have to rely on different forms of external governance, the Community risks falling apart and is a victim for totalitarian forces and authoritarianism.

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