Design of Digital Democracies - Performances of Citizenship, Gender and IT

Pirjo Elovaara
Technoscience Studies
Blekinge Institute of Technology
SE- 372 25 RONNEBY
pirjo.elovaara@bth.se

Christina Mörtberg
Department of Informatics
University of Oslo/University of Umeå
P.O. Box 1080 Blindern, NO-0316 OSLO
chrismmo@ifi.uio.no

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Abstract

The article takes its starting point in a number of Swedish IT-policies articulating the goals for the further development of the welfare state demanding and enabling active citizenship as well as enrolment of IT in the performance of this active citizenship. This article examines also how the active citizenship gets performed in a variety of sociotechnical arenas where people and technology co-exist. Does the notion of active citizenship turn out to a number of performances when it is translated to materialised technologies, such as Internet portals and web based services? The policies will be juxtaposed with a construction of agencies in the stories of citizens' design. In the final section, we will summarise the discussions taken place in the parliament of things and relate them to the problematisations of citizenship, gender and IT.

Keywords: Citizenship, Gender, Information Technology, Parliament of Things, IT-policies, Sweden

SETTING THE SCENE

In this article we invite to an experiment where voices of policies, people and technologies meet.

The boundaries between subjects (read people) and objects (read IT) must be transgressed, since there is a need to take into account the enrolment of technology as a delegated agency when citizenship of humans is performed in the building of digital democracies. The move from the parliament of people to the parliament of things (Latour 1993) is established. The figuration or metaphor of the parliament of things captures and gives space to voices of technology which often stay unheard.

The article is set out in three sections where both humans and non-humans act. The first session outlines the settings, context, and starting points. The second section presents the parliament of things at its three sessions. The sessions take place in two parts, A and B; in part A the context is presented and part B consists of authentic recordings. In the final section, we will summarise some of the discussions taken place in the 'parliament of things' and relate them to the problematisations of citizenship, gender and IT.

Comment [p1]: Section?

Entrance

The starting point is taken in current Swedish IT-policies (Bill, Prop. 1999/2000:125, 2004/05:175, SOU 2003:55, 2004:56) articulating the goals for the further development of the welfare state demanding and enabling active citizenship as well as enrolment of IT in the performance of this active citizenship. How is citizenship performed and on which notion of active citizenship is the Swedish policy documents based? How does active citizenship get performed in a variety of sociotechnical arenas where people and technology co-exist? Does the notion of active citizenship as presented in the policies turn out to a number of heterogeneous performances when citizenship is translated to

materialised technologies, such as Internet portals and web based services? These are all questions we are inspired by in this article. The policies studied will be juxtaposed with a construction of agencies in the stories of citizens' own design of IT.

Point of departures

Since the notion of citizenship seems to be one of the core issues when the Swedish IT-policies express their hopes and visions for the future society, we pose the question: how is citizenship enacted in the policies, and what kinds of active citizenship can we find in the policies?

As introductory questions for our investigation we ask if the understanding of citizenship is based on the rights approach which defines citizenship mainly as a status 'to be a citizen' connected to the formal equal access to the rights and benefits provided by the state (Lister 1997). Or, is citizenship in the IT-policies based on the second traditional way to understand citizenship as an activity, 'to act as a citizen' (ibid.) rather than (only) a static stable status?

Ruth Lister (ibid.) emphasises further the complexity of the notion of human agency, thus, how the agency of citizens is constructed and what are the arenas of agencies. In a Nordic context complexity or pluralism may be regarded as women's and men's numerous roles as citizens but also how the boundaries between the private and public has lost its gendered meanings (Siim 2000). It is not only gender but also other asymmetrical power relations such as ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, that are intertwined with people's agency or the interactions between humans and non-humans. The individual is placed or positioning her/himself in various positions, positions that give her/him rights and obligations to talk or not to talk. Consequently, agencies take certain forms since a person can be subordinated in one position and dominant in another (Mouffe 1992). Hence citizenship can be considered as an ensemble of subject positions whereby various forms of citizenship can exist at the

same time (ibid.). Is it, however, possible to speak of a unified and homogeneous citizen in the way, for example, the policies seem to do, if citizens are regarded as subjects who are constituted by an ensemble of subject positions?

The creation and performances of active citizenship, as formulated in overarching political hopes and visions, is strongly delegated to various materialised forms of IT in arenas based on human and non-human sociotechnical relations built on design, technical devices and systems (Haraway 1991). In the circuits of sociotechnical relations, actors with different experiences and knowledges meet to keep alive their dreams and also to confront various positions, such as the tensions between stability in the form of a consensus of reproducing existing agreements and definitions and instability as renegotiating and transforming these agreements. Humans' and non-humans' involvement and participation in the shaping of their futures and lives is a prerequisite, if the vision is to create a good life.

The guides

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is a methodological approach that provides an exciting perspective for exploring the complexity of information technology as stable and unstable practices by transgressing the dividing lines between humans and non-humans (e. g. Callon 1986; Law 1987). ANT perspectives suggest the focus should be put on the ongoing translations and negotiations between the participating heterogeneous actors. The main concern of ANT informed research has been to follow how processes and projects, understood as networks, are stabilised while the relations between the heterogeneous actors are constructed as every single actor is enrolled in the network. ANT provides methodologies to explore how seemingly stable networks are always a result of local and situated circumstances. In an ANT story 'all the actors we are going to deploy might be *associated* in such a

way that they *make others do things*' (Latour 2005:107). This will be a guiding principle in the parliament of things that will be set up in the following section.

Another guide is feminist technoscience that stresses the mutual dependency between human and non-human actors and how they are constituted in material-semiotic practices (Haraway 1997). In Donna Haraway's employment of technoscience we are permitted to articulate our impurity and complicity and approach the boundaries of what is permissible or sane. She brings accountability into technoscience by asking "...how things work, who is in the action, what might be possible, and how worldly actors might somehow be accountable to and love each other less violently." (Haraway 2003, pp. 6-7). Furthermore, Haraway points out that in technoscience there is disorder, surprises and hopes which open spaces to keep alive numerous voices, stories and actors.

One of the challenging feminist technoscience figurations is Haraway's cyborg (Haraway 1991), which is at the same time a powerful and mystical guide skilful in things that should bother the amalgamation of democracy and IT as well. The cyborg has practised uneasy but necessary boundary transgressions. It knows a lot about things that are possible and impossible at the same time as well as being both fact and fiction. The cyborg possesses a rich non-linear imagination and fantasy guiding our thinking of heterogeneity and necessary but difficult alliances of humans and non-humans. We are using performativity as activities or becomings (Braidotti 2003) and gender performativity is used as 'a kind of becoming or activity' (Butler 1990:112) that is repeated in interactive actions. Neither citizenship nor information technology is something pre-given but they are constituted as inseparable entities in iterative processes in material-semiotic practices.

THE PARLIAMENT OF THINGS

The parliament of things took place in three sessions with two parts; A and B. A secretariat was set up to take minutes of the sessions as well as to record the discussions. The participants were: the government represented by the current bills, reports and committees; citizens; information technologies (computers, broadband, modem, software, protocols); researchers. The secretariats minutes of the contexts are presented in part A and in part B the authentic recording is presented.

The first session

The first session is introduced by the participants reading of the latest Swedish IT-policies and focused on how active citizenship is performed. Then we move to another sociotechnical arena where we have an opportunity to listen to a conversation between a citizen and a Swedish National Agency of the Insurance Board.

Part A. Context: Dreams of citizenship in the Swedish IT policies

The Swedish governmental bill (Bill Prop1999/2000:125, 2004/05:175) reproduces and strengthens the idea of the state that takes care of its citizens by providing equal access to the services of the welfare state. This ideology, known as ‘folkhemmet’¹ (Hansson, 1935), has been the ruling social democratic ideology in Sweden since the Second World War and has roots that can be traced back to the 1920s. The main characteristic of the ‘folkhemmet’ ideology has been to build up a strong welfare system that guarantees social benefits, such as child care, health care and school education for every member of society.

The latest’s bills do not seem to renegotiate the relationship between the state and the citizens but it enforces the enactment of citizenship within the rights approach. Citizenship based on the rights approach defines it mainly as the status ‘of being a citizen’ connected to the formal equal access to the

rights and benefits provided by the state (Lister 1997). How does information technology get involved if it is considered from a rights position? Perhaps one of the key words is access: access to artefacts, to services, and to skills, to give a couple of examples. This becomes obvious in the current bills overarching political goal to create a sustainable information society for all where everyone should have access independent on gender, age, impairment, sexuality or ethnicity.

Democratic service development seems to be a strong message formulated in some of the latest IT policies in Sweden (e.g. SOU 2003:55, 2004:65; Bill Prop. 2004/05:175). When democracy is moved away from the political arenas, the main actors are no longer the politicians but the authorities. The communication between the authorities and the citizens is accomplished in the service dialogue about the quality of public services. Political visions and grounds are not the issue. This development in turn strengthens the position and role of the individual citizen as a user or a consumer of the services. The arena and goal of democracy moves to the democratic processes of the service development; IT policies have become a mean to “realise a result-oriented and practical IT policy ... for government and industry.” (SOU 2003:55). A citizen seems to be placed in a subject position that is not political but rather a skilled consumer and user of digital services. This tendency is reinforced in the report of the governmental committee (the 24-hour delegation). They have, in their representation of the government’s instruction, replaced the concept citizens by individual persons (SOU 2004:56 p. 55, 70).

Perhaps the most evident way of understanding the linkage from the rights perspective is to claim that IT will enhance access opportunities to the services and benefits of the welfare state and thereby enable the citizens to make use of these services and benefits. A lot of concern on the part of the government is put on taking care of the citizens, from school children to senior citizens, providing computer skills training and making sure that the essential IT artefacts are available either through private ownership or through public service channels. The great governmental project of building up

an IT infrastructure takes us back to the famous speech by the Swedish prime minister Per-Albin Hansson, who in January 1928 stated: “If Swedish society is going to become a good people’s home, we have to fight against class differences, we have to develop social welfare, we have to diminish the economic differences between people, we have to build up democracy and implement democracy also socially and economically.” (Hansson 1935). The connection and continuum to this ideology is existing and vivid. But now it is time to talk about ‘the digital people’s home’ (Sverigebylden).

We close part A, the context, in the first session and move towards the authentic recordings, Part B.

Part B The authentic recording from the first session of the parliament of things: “You search – I answer”

[I: The National Swedish Social Insurance Board Web Site. You: A citizen]

You: I would like to find some information about social insurance benefits.

I: It seems that you are a competent member of the society. You have found your way to me. And you possess the computer skills I demand. So far, so good. And your PC and Internet connection, are they in order?

You: Oh yes. Unfortunately, my PC does not want to use the broadband connection.

I: That’s bad, but I can enrol my modem friend. In that case, you will have to be satisfied with my text-based solutions. OK?

You: Well, do I have any choice?

I: No, actually, you don’t.

You: I hope you accept misspellings and Swedish that’s not always grammatically correct. I also wonder if I can use my mother tongue, Finnish, when I communicate with you.

I: It depends. If you are using my databases then your spelling has to be 100% correct. In addition to this, you also have to use the keywords I have chosen. Unfortunately, I only speak Swedish and some English.

You: Well, OK then...

I: Wait a minute. I forgot to inform you that you can use my categories and classifications when you look for information!

You: What do you mean by that? Please, give me some examples!

I: First, you have to decide if you want to choose the Internet for private persons or the Internet for employers. If you continue for private persons, you can: submit notification of a sick child, apply for temporary parental leave, notify about paternal leave, plan for withdrawal of a parent's allowance, apply for a temporary parent's allowance for paternal leave.

You: Do you only deal with parents? Is that all the services available? Are not all public services available via the Internet?

I: Well, let me say first that I think that all services that exist here and now, which we just can take as they are, and attach them to the web. It's not about creating new services, which probably wouldn't be my cup of tea anyhow, as service development is not my field. But because I am just a 'child' and at the beginning of my career and assignment, I haven't come further than this yet.

You: And I also notice that you make a difference between being a parent and being a father.

I: Well, I'm part of Swedish society, always striving towards gender equality, but where gender relations heteronormativity seem to be reproduced. There are parents and then there are fathers. Different rules and agreements. But I only follow orders. I do what I am delegated to do...

The second session

The second session of the parliament of things develops further the discussion concerning the notion of active citizenship focusing on what are the possibilities and limitations of participation formulated in the policies and how the participation is performed in a dialogue between a citizen and the technology appointed by the Swedish government.

Part A Context: Citizens as actors

The traditional ideology of the Swedish welfare state has been based, put in quite simplified and rough terms, on a view of the citizens as a collective. Consequently, the services the state provides have also been based on an ideology that does not support individual choices. The governmental bill from 2000 still supports the basic ideologies of the welfare state, but also contains signs of change. One of the changes in perspective is putting the individual citizen in focus and stressing the active role of citizens in developing the democratic functions of the state: “The development of the Internet opens up new possibilities for public control and dialogue, direct democracy and control by the citizens. The dialogue on these [virtual] arenas can change the possibility of the citizens to gain influence.” (Bill Prop1999/2000:125). Here, citizenship is no longer a question of being a recipient and user of the public services, but demands both being responsible for one’s own choices and activating one’s own opinions, claims and wishes. The message of the government seems to be that citizens can control more directly the functions, decisions and directions of the state. We are invited not only to be citizens, but also to act as citizens (Lister 1997).

What kind of individualistic turn is being suggested by the Swedish government then? Does the government want to listen to the voices of the individual citizens? Or is the agency a community agency based on individuals communicating and participating as a collective? Is the agency of the citizenship ‘expressly political and, more exactly, participatory and democratic’? Does the politics still involve ‘the collective and participatory engagement of citizens in the determination of the affairs of their community’ where we conceive of ourselves as ‘speakers of words and doers of deeds’ mutually participating in the public realm’ (Lister 1997, p. 24)? The current bill does not discuss which of these directions the Swedish government is pointing to when presenting the new agency of the active citizen.

Where are the virtual arenas where the active citizens can participate in and influence political decision making? Examples in the Swedish context are few and mostly materialised in creating web sites for consultation in questions articulated and framed by the municipal authorities. In northern Sweden, in the municipality of Kalix, the citizens have been invited to discuss and give their opinions about which of the suggested alternatives for the physical formation of the city centre they would prefer. The spatial planning of the city has also been in focus in the municipality of Ronneby, where the citizens were encouraged to express their opinions about the upcoming comprehensive plan (Elovaara 2004). In other municipalities, for example in Bollnäs and Sölvesborg, a web-based discussion forum has been created to facilitate discussions between politicians and the citizens (See SOU 2004:56 for other examples). Within the forms, rules and traditions of representative democracy, the “consultation model is to be developed in municipalities through practical exercises...” (Lundgren 2003). The evaluation of the IT politics is presented in the current governmental bill (2004/05:176). In terms of democracy and justice the evaluation shows that IT is used for searching and dissemination of information by citizens as well as decision makers. IT is, furthermore, used for dialogues between citizens and decision makers whereby the representative democracy is reinforced as well as citizens participation.

In session two, part A, citizens as actors were discussed, we close this in order to listen to the authentic recordings from part B.

Part B The authentic recording from the second session of the parliament of things: “Citizens participate – I say how and when”

[Government: The Swedish government. I: The Internet technology.]

Government: I have a proposal for you: “[Let’s] follow research and development of new technologies and methods within IT in order to promote a broad participation of the citizens in the framework of

representative democracy.” Your enrolment would be perfect because you already have experience to provide and develop information services to our citizens. I whole-heartedly believe that “Citizens’ capability to search for information, acquire knowledge and create dialogue on the Internet will be of great significance for the citizens’ participation in the political process in the future”.

I: Sounds interesting. But can I ask you to clarify a number of points before we carry on?

Government: What kind of clarification do you need?

I: You talk about being an active citizen in a representative democracy. Do you mean that representative democracy is the frame for participation?

Government: Yes. Our experiment must under no circumstances threaten our forms of representative democracy. However, the experiments may well provide an opportunity for us to revitalise representative democracy, because there are apparent problems: people are not that keen to take part in the political work or be active in the political parties.

I: Well, can you give me explicit examples of what you would like me to develop. What do you want the citizens to do?

Government: Discussion fora, consultation, pose questions to the politicians, chat, weblogs.

I: Peanuts. I think I can manage that.

Government: Could you give me a time schedule?

I: Well, it depends. Do you want to have unique, tailored solutions or would it be possible to re-use some of the solutions that are already tested and functioning in other similar contexts?

Government: Well due to our IT policy, a sustainable information society for all, we’ll choose the re-use alternative. I suppose it saves us both time and money? In order to keep our leading position among nations in terms of IT, it’s important to implement the services as fast as possible.

I: Let’s sign the business agreement!

Government: Well, I think we have to wait until Verva – Swedish Administrative Development Agency is well established; it started in January 2006 ...

The third session

In the third session the policies will be juxtaposed with the construction of identities and agencies in the stories of citizens' design of information technology in their everyday lives, also in a co-operation with technology.

Part A Context: Situated and local practices

Citizens intervene in the discussions in the parliament through experiments concerning technology and active citizenship. On the stage, we have women who are mostly invisible in the public arena, skills, software packages, citizens' dreams and the repertoire of technology.

The Women Writing on the Net (WWN) project at the end of the 1990s was a sub-project within the framework of the DIALOGUE project directed in Bologna in Italy, London, Lewisham in UK and Ronneby in Sweden. The overall aims of the Dialogue project were to further grassroots democracy by working with "empowerment", to conquer and redefine the public arena, to stop the drawing up of boundaries or dualism between public/private and expert/non-expert and to build virtual communities. The goal of working with "empowerment" within the WWN project was to encourage the participating women to redefine themselves: to become and act as insiders in IT contexts, as well as in society as a whole. By using their own experiences as a source of knowledge, the women were able to renew the value and strength of these experiences. The vision was to weave together the overall goals with the practical working methods and the individual elements of the project. Two groups, consisting of women with greater or lesser experience in using computers met once a week for one year to discuss, write and learn how to use and design the new technology. The aim was to create a virtual space for women on the Internet and to explore the writing process in terms of aim,

tool and method. The method of approach incorporated reflections and discussions about empowerment, democracy and representation of women. This created a more complex understanding of the values of the dominant IT discourses and revealed the “cracks” in and possibilities of feminist redefinitions of these values (Ekelin & Elovaara 2000). Let’s move to the authentic recordings.

Part B The authentic recording of the third session of the parliament of things

“You want to design – Do I want to collaborate with you?”

[You: A citizen. I: The Internet technology]

You: Hi there, do you want to do some experiments with me?

I: What kind of experiments do you have in mind?

You: There is so much talk about active citizenship nowadays, but when I look around at the web sites available, I feel a bit disappointed. Asking a question and sending it to a politician, that’s not my idea of democracy. I think that design must be both about technology and democracy at the same time.

Are you willing to join?

I: I am willing. You may find me rather mean when saying this, but I think you are a hopeless romantic, hanging on to old ideals. Hah. Remember that we are living in the 21st century – a century that belongs to strong, well-informed and well-educated individuals compared with the situation mainly in the 1970s. If society as a whole does not support collective work, how can you expect technology design to do so?

You: I am not alone in being accused of being too old-fashionedly political. . . Just listen to Donna Haraway. She says: “Rather, feminist inquiry is about understanding how things work, who is in the action, what might be possible, and how worldly actors might somehow be accountable to and love each other less violently” But she also reminds us not to believe that we can choose an innocent or pure position. There are differences, including differences in power.

I: I am very grateful that you asked whether I want to join your project. I am so often accused of being conservative, reinforcing the static, stable order of the society, making things complicated for ordinary people and so on.

You: I think you have the capacity to transgress many boundaries. If you consider how mobiltelephony has changed people's everyday lives. Evidently the change does not always come from the existing arrangements but from unexpected directions: namely technology!

In the sessions in the parliament of things voices of policies, people and technologies have meet. During the sessions the secretariat took minutes of the discussions, debates and negotiations that took place among the members. The summary of the discussions is presented in the following section.

DREAM WEAVING – A SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION IN THE PARLIAMENT OF THINGS

The tensions, ambivalences and contradictions between stable and unstable understandings and imaginations were obvious in the sessions. It is therefore time to publish some of the diffracted (Haraway 1997, 2003) notions in order to direct the content for the coming sessions of the parliament with a view to transforming the IT politics.

Paragraph 1 Amplifying representative democracy and citizenship

The democratic space where technology and the citizens are invited to act by the Swedish government is not unlimited. By contrast, the boundaries are quite strictly drawn. On the one hand, the dream of the active and participating citizen is inscribed and folded (Akrich 1992) in the technology. This dream is accessible in the latest government bills where Internet is considered to be the door-opener for public control, direct democracy and a way for citizens to gain influence. On the other hand, there is a script that underlines that the activity and participation should not transgress the stable and

ordered forms of representative democracy. The government aims to strengthen, amplify and reinforce one form of democracy and not to threaten it, i.e. to change it or replace it with alternative forms of political ruling and steering. To act and react but not to pro-act is the trajectory, because in the Swedish context it is quite obvious that “new technologies travel on old social relations”¹. The same combination becomes and has already become the trajectory of technology in cases where technology has accepted the government’s invitation and joined the democracy–technology enterprise. Fusions between the social and technical, in all their hybrid formations, tend to become solid and strong. Following the famous words of Bruno Latour “technology is society made durable” (Latour 1991), we can paraphrase and say that technology is representative democracy made durable. This can happen due to the dual process whereby both technology and democracy are black-boxed, in the sense that we do not query technology and democracy, and finally, even less seldom do we ask the hybrid ‘technologydemocracy’ if things could be otherwise.

Democracy in Sweden is not only politics, but also investments in the so-called service society (see e.g. SOU 2003:55). In the sessions subject positions such as citizenship, consumers, clients or individuals were created; in some contexts individuals replaced the concept of citizenship. The service society demands, however, competent members in terms of literacy. The first session of the parliament showed that the citizen was not able to use her mother tongue since the web pages were, apart from Swedish only translated to English. Generally, the public sectors web pages are only to a low degree translated to immigrant or minority languages; e.g. only 6 % of the municipal web pages are accessible in some immigrant language and 2 % in a minority language (SOU 2004:56). The citizen is no longer only the political citizen; the future citizen is a consumer citizen or an individual. The latest political documents in Sweden propagate digital services, such as applying for a day-care place or a building permit or filing a tax form on the Internet. But they also propagate for a more individualised citizenship such as customers or clients. What this will mean in the longer run for the society and the participation is a question for negotiations between the government, citizens and technology.

The revitalisation of democracy was one of the hopes expressed in IT-policies. The frame of representative democracy seems to limit the performance of citizenship. Furthermore, the humans (citizens) did not attach or act despite the interestment of the technologies. On the other hand, the sessions also made room for local agency and situated definitions of IT like the initiatives in municipality of Kalix and also the project Women Writing on the Net (see also Vehviläinen 2004). In the projects agencies were based on local voices, experiences and stories created in collective participation and commitment (Siim 2000).

Paragraph 2 Gender (equality) or Gender (equality) and multiplicity

The principle of gender neutrality dominated the authentic recordings. The participants in the parliament did although also discussed gender equality and the performance of gender and information technology. Gender equality has been an issue in Sweden since the 1970s and is today a policy area of its own. The government declares that from now on measures must be based on feminist perspective. By this is meant that there has to be awareness on power structure that implies to break the existing order.

In the beginning of 2000s a special governmental committee, in Sweden, investigated gender equality issues in the IT-sector. The discourse of gender differences dominated the outcomes of the committee. Their reports focused on the number of women in the IT-sector and how to increase them, to encourage women to choose technical educations and professions, and constructed women and men as uniform groups with different interests and skills.

Today gender mainstreaming is the strategy that aims at raising awareness and knowledge, and places the responsibility for gender equality at various levels (Runardotter & Mörtberg 2004). This is also underlined in the current governmental bill. The bill states, compared to what reported by the governmental committee in 2002, that the IT-sector is still male dominated as well as higher IT

educations. The suggested measures in the latest IT policy are action plans and mentor projects. The action plans should bring to light measures and initiative that results in an increased number of women in IT enterprises and leadership. The action plans should include search committees as a systematic way to highlight female candidates for the IT-sector. The aim of the mentor projects should be to encourage women towards leadership, managerial positions and networks.

In the current bill other asymmetrical power relations than gender is highlighted such as impairment, age and ethnicity. Inclusion and exclusion is on the political agenda in Sweden and particularly how to include immigrants. This is also obvious in the current bill. Another explanation of the move to other relations is that public measurements show that women and men's use IT almost to a similar degree. Gender and equality is positioned within the rights approach, that is, 'to be a citizen'.

Despite a variety of stories or subject positions the performance of women, men, girls, and boys, in IT-policies, seem to be uniformed categories in the IT policies. Gender researchers have showed how women and men use, design and are interested of information technology in numerous ways (Wajcman 2000, Mörtberg 2003; Vehviläinen 2004; Elovaara 2004). Meanings and representations of realities are negotiated within and through existing discourses. Thus, variety and diversity have had difficulties in the "fight" with more uniformed stories. The latter is probably a consequence of the dominating rights argument in the IT policies.

Yet various stories exist at the same time. If we consider gender performance in IT-policies and in gender research with the diffraction figuration, the effects appear. Haraway emphasises that: "A diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the *effects* of differences appear (Haraway 2004:98). The effects of the stories told in the IT-policies make the multiplicity invisible. Furthermore this stories risks to reproduce the IT-sector as a male dominated sector without any traces of variation or instabilities.

Paragraph 3 Rebels

Both people and technology seem to have a capacity and will to transgress the boundaries interwoven in the technologically embedded scripts (Akrich 1992). The scripts do not always work in the intended ways, as the story of the photoelectric lighting kit told by Madeleine Akrich (1992) reminds us. People may find unexpected ways to use technology, they may refuse to use technology and technology may strike. The strike and the fuel cells refuse to join the VEL project (Latour 1997; Callon 1986). We could also tell countless everyday stories of printers, networks and computer devices that simply do not work. One way to protest seems to be to step aside, strike, refuse, make resistance, to be out of order, or to break down. People can act in these ways too. Increased access does not necessarily mean an increase in usage of services or active citizens' as the stories of the Swedish trade union members tell (Olsson 2002).

Neither humans nor non-humans are fully accountable. Technology may use people in unexpected ways and vice-versa. One of the authentic recordings showed how the cooperation between technology and citizens skills is a prerequisite for the interactions. Equal access was an essential issue in the Swedish IT-policies. The protocols and programming languages of the World Wide Web do indeed co-operate with anyone who wants to use them (Hannemyr 2002). The non-humans actors seemed to offer unlimited possibilities. Possibilities that seem to be used in a limited way that might not be too suprising since the designers/programmers 'act and are inside *this* world, not some other' (Haraway 1997:97). The dialogue showed, however, how the authority limited the interaction since s/he had only enrolled forms for applications, notification of illness or parental leave. But, technology and people may find allies outside the governmental space of representative democracy, programming languages escape the boundaries of fixed agreements and move over to open source, professional programming practices are re-negotiated; e.g. the Women Writing on the Net.

Comments

The discussions in the parliament of things showed how the performance of active citizenship takes place through the loving and caring state, which is however a state and citizenship in transformation. But the sessions have also shown a variety of meanings of IT, citizenship and gender. In the parliament, the participants drew attention to how categories and classifications demand competent members of society. The choice of a category or class becomes meaningful by certain understandings being given higher priority than others. Stabilisation takes place in material-semiotic practices between human and non-humans. However, classifications and categorisations do not only structure and organise our worlds, science domains, disciplines, theoretical starting points or data material; they also create boundaries. The creation of boundaries intervenes in people's way of thinking as well as in what we can and cannot see, because concepts and categories are taken for granted and used as if they were "natural". As Susan Leigh Star (2002) emphasises: "Standards are standards, and they embody values, simplifications, and treaties".

Humans are integrated in the circuit of sociotechnical networks where the subjects are positioning themselves or are placed in a position depending on the relation in a certain situation (Haraway1991). Subjects create meanings in everyday practices, such as in design and use of technologies, but also in political documents. But, due to numerous stories with a variety of meanings and experiences in the IT-policies citizenship seemed to become a simplified and general concept. It is a necessity to use general concepts such as citizenship but it should be complemented with analysis of gender and other asymmetrical power relations to highlight how these intervene in the performance of citizenship. The simplification process takes part in negotiations and translations where things are sorted in and out (Bowker & Star 1999) However, categories are not stable or frozen since "there are always more things going on than you thought" as Donna Haraway says about how classifications and standards work (Lykke et al 2000).

Citizenship, consumers, clients and individuals were subject positions in the IT policies as well as in other sociomaterial relations. The question is: Are these positions expressions of pluralism and participatory democracy? We argue, however, for another kind of pluralism and participation, based on agencies created in the projects like Women Writing on the Net, in the KominDu project, and in local practices like in the municipality of Kalix. In this project citizens' agencies took place in alliances of human and non-human assemblages, where innovations always are an option but where accountability constantly has to be negotiated. In the parliament of things Haraway's cyborg can be one of the guiding figurations since it stands for the possibilities of further politics: "dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work." (Haraway 1991, p.).

Are the Swedish 'digitala folkhemmet' [the digital people's home] in progress, its promising intentions and trust in the state still obstacles in the creation of more active citizens despite an increased access as well as more widely possessed skills and competence in IT? Or do the continuous meetings between systems and IT designers, technology and citizens in local practices become the practice where the dreams are woven together through 'an artful integration' (Suchman 2002)?

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¹ The Indian researcher Vandana Shiva's explanation on how new technologies work in a lecture at Luleå University of Technology the 5th of March 1998.