CHAPTER FOUR

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE MODERNISATION PROCESS

Introduction

This chapter aims to recognise the modernisation process within the context of the role technology has played and the wider socio-economic and political changes that took place over the past years, particularly in South Africa. It examines the transitions in political culture in relation to the re-conceptualisation of the role of technology as a factor contributing to the modernisation process, while taking experiences from other countries into consideration. The chapter specifically looks at the modernisation of democracy through technology.

The process of modernisation in SA is closely related to the perspectives of integration and political strategies that have been defined as the "rationalisation of society", which claims the imposition of a specific form of social progress. (Feenberg, 1986). This process is also articulated by Marx's political revelation that originates from the growing rationalisation of society in terms of both technical progress and of his common understanding of society. Modernisation is being perceived as a process of transformation in the political culture that tends to establish new forms of governance and to redefine the links between state apparatuses and socio-economic structures.

In view of this analysis, this chapter examines the role of technology in the modernisation process, and how technology influences democratisation. It is argued that advances in technology reflect the wider challenge for modernisation in South African society. Some of the main features of this process are the changing links between politics and the economy, and the redefinition of political participation and liberal democracy. Furthermore, the chapter argues that modernisation is a contradictory process. There is no era clearly defined by 'modernity'. Tradition and modernisation coexist in a strenuous symbiotic relationship. In the context of South African political dynamics, however, political modernity coexisted symbiotically with the democratisation and the concomitant advances in technology. The chapter makes

reference to both scholastic approaches, as most of the background assumptions derived from the thought that helped to explain the causal relationship between modernity and technology.

The conception of political modernisation

The concept of modernisation emerged after the Second World War as a result of the global dismantling of European empires, and was seen as the development theory concerned with the development gap between the North and the South, and how best to lessen this gap so that the Third World could develop more rapidly and more successfully. It was during this time that humanities and social sciences were swept by a wave of technological determinism. If technology was praised for modernising societies, it was also blamed for the crisis it caused in culture. Whether interpreted in optimistic or pessimistic terms, determinism appeared to offer a fundamental account of modernity as a unified phenomenon.

This early period of the political modernisation phase is the central element of the early discourse, primarily of progress and control over both society and nature, which come together in the notion of the rational society. Rationality in society refers to what Feenberg (2003) calls "...the generalisation of technical rationality as a cultural form specifically, the introduction of calculation and control into social process with a consequent increase in inefficiency". Succinctly stated, it refers to the idea of man's ability to shape both the social and the physical world. This ability of man to take control of his environment is what in sociology is regarded as functionalism, which takes the form of an explicit evolutionist perspective with regard to sociology of development, as that of the modernisation process.

The modernisation process takes a bipolar view of the world, that all societies can be divided into two varieties, i.e. traditional and modern. An influential exponent of this dichotomy was economist WW Rostow. The modernisation process is driven by a number of different ideologies, which share the basic assumption that it is possible to outline the most desirable development of society. Rostow depicted five stages of sociological growth. The first of these stages is the traditional society, which is an astoundingly general category; it links together a vast diversity of different societies, ranging from stone age cultures to France on the verge of its revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. But he asserts that the similarities outweigh the differences

between them. (Rostow, 1960). These similarities include: 'pre-Newtonian' science and technology; a basically agricultural economy; and a rigid ascriptive system based on bloodline, kinship, etc. Until just before the industrial revolution that took place in Western Europe two centuries ago, all human societies were based on this form. This stage of development can be said to encompass all societies prior to the 17th century, which possess little of the structural characteristics that can be seen today.

Next come the preconditions for take-off. This stage is said to be often triggered by a stimulus from outside, such as imperial profit motives. It is characterised by an increase in trade, services, communications, and the beginnings of industry, especially extractive industries, such as mining. The economy becomes more specialised and interdependent, less localised, and self-sufficient. Rational science plays a more major role. An elite group comes to power, which wishes rather to re-invest its wealth rather than squander it. This is the period whereby a society begins to grow at a steady rate, both in quantity and quality. Essentially, the political, social, and manufacturing sectors are reformed to allow growth within all aspects of the country, and the society can be said to be emerging as a modern, market-oriented civilisation. The preconditions for this are various, but can be categorised as a general change in direction through all walks of society, toward the transition from a traditional to a modern society. The final two stages are natural extensions from the take-off: the drive to maturity is the expansion of the newly developed ideas and technology into other divisions of society, that is, a period of consolidation. Modern science and technology are extended to most if not all branches of the economy, and thus the range of leading sectors is widened, and the age of high mass consumption, which is a description of a period of further consolidation and advancement, and is as such not clearly separated from the 'drive to maturity' (Bell, 1973). Because of the high level of economic development, choices can be made about how the society works, and what its priorities are. Wealth can be channelled into individual consumption, as in the USA, or channelled into a welfare state, as in Western Europe, or social and political power. This is the final stage whereby the progress made previously has been fully filtered throughout the economy and culture, and is essentially the state of a country where little or no growth is longer necessary to maintain itself. (Rostow, 1960).

In simplifying the progress that has filtered through the economy and culture, the modernisation process assumes the fundamental proposition that people in traditional

societies should adopt the characteristics of modern societies in order to modernise their social, political and economic institutions. The main characteristic of modernisation is that of its simplicity, which dictates to the traditional society to recognise what is needed, from examination of other 'take-offs' to modernity, for their own culture to evolve. Having been modernised, the modern societies can assist in the evolution of the traditional society, which may not necessarily be the case. As a theoretical model, Rostow's perspective on modernisation is useful in that it is indiscriminate and unsophisticated as it requires little adaptation from one culture to the other. The basis of the concept is that the ultimate goal already exists and can be examined readily, and that this is what the developing country should strive for, hence the technologies that exist could easily be adapted to suit the environment in the developing countries. Although Rostow makes no attempt to isolate individual cases and discover the different ways to adapt the theory to suit the environment, the concept does provide the structure and ground rules to benchmark its applicability within the South African context. (Rostow, 1960).

Based on the foregoing, the South African model could also be depicted from other theories that are central to all modernisation and political development. These theories also present the notion that all societies have passed, or are in the process of passing, from a condition in which a bundle of related characteristics which can be broadly classified as traditional predominates to one in which modern characteristics predominate. A consideration of this series of changes as it relates to politics has been a relatively belated development in political science and rests on the work of social scientists concerned with the broader distinction between tradition and modernity. In its early development from the 1920s on, political science's lack of concern with change (Huntington, 1971), let alone with the modernising change from traditional to modern, can be traced to a number of factors. First, political science was concerned almost exclusively with relatively stable political systems, essentially those of Western Europe and North America. These had elements of change that could be studied, for example the rise and fall of particular political changes in balance of power between executives and legislatures, but did not seem to exhibit fundamental overall change. Political science also neglected fundamental change because its practitioners sought autonomy for their discipline by rejecting historical approaches, a

rejection reinforced by its adoption of behaviourism, which emphasised non-historical evidence such as surveys, interviews and observation.

The rise in modernity and hence in the study of political change, which became synonymous with political development, began in the 1950s as a result of the attempt of Western and particularly American political scientists to come to grips with the changes brought by the Second World War and, where Europeans ruled over dependent territories, the beginnings of decolonisation, in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America – the areas that were later to be described as the Third World. Political scientists studying Africa were in the forefront of this movement. Thus, for example, David Apter's study of "political institutional transfer in the Gold Coast" (now Ghana) was researched as early as 1952 and first published in 1955, before Ghana's independence. (Apter, 1955). It was essentially an attempt to explain and predict modernisation; the institutional transfer was from traditional to modern, independence, direct institutions, in terms of Weber's threefold typology of authority.

Apter was a pioneer in his attempt to explain modernity and political development. The work played a major role in first focusing the attention of political scientists on developmental problems. Almond and Coleman (1960) in their book *The Politics of the Developing Areas*, have laid some of the ground rules for the study of political development, notably a characterisation of the distinction between traditional and modern social systems and a functional model of the political system which, it was claimed, had universal applicability. Almond and his collaborators were by no means the only authors to construct models of political development on the basis of these static formulations.

At the most general level, the distinction between modern and traditional is equivalent to a distinction between what are considered rational approaches to social organisation, action, and goals, as contrasted with irrational approaches. Without a predominance of rationality, modernity cannot exist. Already a caution is warranted. Rationality is in the eye of the beholder, what is rational to the self–proclaimed modern man may be hopelessly irrational to the man he has labelled as a traditionalist. Almond’s characterisation of the rational/modern dichotomy rests on the pattern variables developed by Talcott Parsons but are part of a long tradition on political

thought. Three of these dichotomies are considered particularly relevant; ascription/ achievement; diffuseness/specificity; and particularism/universality. (Parsons, 1951).

In a traditional society in which ascriptive values predominate, individuals will – to take but one aspect of life – be appointed to high office because of their family caste, sex or age. In a society (modern) in which achievement values predominate, an appointment will be made on the basis of clear indications that a person is qualified to carry out a particular function through the skills he has acquired rather than the status he has inherited. Secondly, in traditional society where diffuse values predominate, there will be, for example, little actual specialisation of activities or actors or perception of such specialisation. The economic, political and religious systems will merge both in the theory and practice of participants. By contrast, in a modern society where specific values predominate, individuals will both perceive and act in the knowledge that there are clear distinctions not only between the political, religious and economic spheres but also, for example, between different aspects of the political, such as the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. Finally, where particularist values predominate (in traditional societies), there may be a sharp distinction between, for example, the rights and obligations of different sectors of the population. Only a few might for instance be free men or entitled to own property or to pursue certain occupations. In a modern society where universalist values predominate, obligations and rights applicable to one man will tend to be applicable to everyone. (Nwabuzo and Mueller, 1985).

It should be noted that the above three dichotomies are of course closely related. Universalism, for example, implies an orientation towards achievement values. Finally, to Almond, the dichotomy between traditional and modern is not intended to be a rigid one. No society, or its political system, is from this point of view seen to be entirely traditional or modern. Rather, all political systems are transitional systems. There is also a need to look at the functional model of the political system, which together with the traditional/modern dichotomy forms the basis for the dynamic elements of the model of political development.

Like the characterisation of traditional and modem societies, Almond's model of the political system is by no means original. Aiming to provide interconnected analytical

concepts that would be applicable to any political system – however primitive or advanced – the functional model avoids such formalistic terms as legislature, executive and political party, and certainly any explicit reference to the machinery or characteristics of any specific political system. Whether such reference is implicit is another question. The emphasis is on the functions that the system performs, and the core of the model is developed from David Easton's notion of the political system as having certain inputs. Almond's model can be simply categorised as the input/output process, where for example *Inputs* are socialisation and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, and communication, and *Outputs* are rule-making, rule-implementation and rule-adjudication.

The model is elaborated in Almond's work in collaboration with Powell, partly to counteract criticism that the original model was static and had conservative implications. Almond and Powell conceded that the earlier framework was suitable mainly for the analysis of political systems in a given cross-section of time. It did not allow for explaining developmental patterns, that is to explain how political systems change and why they change. (Almond and Powell, 1966).
In the model, the outputs are characterised in terms of their relationship to their environment: they may be regulative, extractive, distributive, symbolic and responsive capacities. Implicit in such categorisations is the notion that a successful modernisation process or political development depends on the ability of the political system to adapt its capacities to the changing national and international environment. Such a suggestion is unexceptionable; a political system, for example, must be able to organise the extraction of resources needed to fund its changing activities, or create symbols which encourage the populace to grant it legitimacy under changing circumstances, if it is to survive. Almond and Powell, and some other theorists, do not, however, rest content with a model of political change that is universally applicable, in time and space, if somewhat truistic.. In so far as the notion of a traditional society is at all useful, one could – using Almond and Powell's broadest notion of adaptation – conceive of modernity which, for example, rested on the creation of new forms of traditional organisation. If every society that is not predominantly modern is also predominantly traditional, then indeed this must have happened innumerable times in world history. However, the elaboration of the mechanisms of adaptation that Almond and Powell offer, makes it clear that they are

concerned only with the modernising phase of political change. The model they offer therefore warrants further examination. (Almond and Powell, 1966).

Given the reasons discussed earlier in this chapter for the rise in the theories and models of political development, it is hardly surprising that interest should focus on questions of modernisation. Modernisation was the avowed objective of most of the governments of the new states, an objective looked upon benevolently by the United States – the home of the modern – anxious to maintain or expand its own influence and foster viable political systems after its own image as a buffer against revolution. Most political scientists concerned with political development were American and, as critics were to point out, they not only took up modernisation as a process that should be studied and conceptualised in an objective manner, but often seemed in their enthusiasm to have assumed rather than demonstrated that modernisation was indeed taking place.

The concept of modernisation, itself dependent on the demonstration of substantive distinctions between traditional and modern societies and political systems, is also central to various models of political development by Almond and Powell, Feenberg, Beck, Apter, Parsons, etc. According to them, both the process of political development and its ultimate goal may be subsumed under the concepts of structural differentiation, subsystem autonomy and cultural secularisation. (Apter, 1965). They argue that the political modernisation process results when the existing structure of the political system is unable to cope with the problem or challenge which confronts it without further structural differentiation.

The political modernisation process

Contemporary society is in transition as a consequence of processes of democratisation and the effects of technological accessibility. These processes are said to aggravate a new stage in the political arena in which the general idea of the modern society is being redefined. This phase of political modernisation is a combination of debates on post-traditional and modernity. Some modernist theorists assert that contemporary societies show a new or intensified degree of political, economic and cultural life being strongly influenced by advances in technological

developments and other related developments at global level. Modernism proclaims multicultural and multiethnic societies and promotes the politics of difference, linking the local and the global societies in which identity is not unitary or essential, but fluid and shifting, fed by multiple sources and taking multiple forms. (Ray, 1987). Contemporary modernisation theorists understand change as an accumulation of and within modernity, in which aspects of technology and globalisation are put at the forefront. It seems as though there is no way to overcome the impetus of technology, but at the same time individuals have to enjoy and live with these consequences of modernity. Modern society is seen as a society that assumes to be at a stage of high or radicalised democracy. Essential here is the unintentional and unplanned transition from traditional society to modern industrial democratic society. This transformation to a modern democratic society is understood to be at a phase of development in which the combination of individual, social, economic and natural aspects, created by the momentum of technological innovation, increasingly supports the social and political issues prevalent in a democratic society. As political processes become modernised, society as a whole too can no longer rely upon traditional institutions, and the less it can rely on traditional securities, the more it seeks reliance on technology. (Kumar, 1995).

The concept of modernisation in the technological era

Over the last century society has witnessed a revolution in information and communication technologies that has moved much of the public discourse and agenda setting from the individual and community level to the mass level. As communication technologies and their use by people continue to evolve, there are indications that this trend is now reversing, with some notable globalisation exceptions. With computer-meditated communications, people are reclaiming their communications power from mass institutions. (Clift, 1997).

Studies in the theories of modernisation and technology have made great progress in recent years; they have, however, remained different in the nature and role they have played in society's economic and political sphere. The relationship between the two is somewhat complex, such that it is incomprehensible to make sense out of modernity without an adequate account of the technological advancements that make it possible, and that it is also difficult to understand how the technologies can impact on society without a reasoning of the larger society in which they develop.

Modernisation is premised on the key notion of rationalisation to explain the uniqueness of modern societies. Rationalisation refers to the generalisation of technical rationality as a cultural form, specifically the introduction of calculation and control into social processes with a consequent increase in efficiency. (Feenberg, 1986). But rationalisation also reduces the normative and qualitative richness of the traditional society, exposing social reality to technical manipulation. It depends on a broad pattern of modern development, which is described as the "differentiation" of society. The notion of this differentiation in society has common applications in the separation of real political issues like property and political power, religion and the state, etc. Modernity as a theory relies on the key notion of rationalisation to explain the uniqueness of modern societies.

Technology's influence in the modernisation process

In the past years, the subject of modernity has been recaptured in the humanities and social sciences, and has gained increased attention. What is striking in the existing literature on modernity is the ambivalent role played by technology in its analyses. Technology is often depicted as the engine of processes of modernisation and as one of the principal icons of modernity. It is the main motor-force of social change that is considered to be economic, more particularly technological change; and as such economic change is alleged to determine the most significant changes in social relations, values, or ideology, and political structure. (Nwabuzor and Mueller, 1985).

The role of technology in the modernisation process involves a complex relationship between its adaptations and how it is applied as an engine of the modernisation process. In terms of its adaptation, specifically the use of the Internet technology, technology seems to be a strong artefact for fast-tracking the modernisation process as it encourages mass interaction around the world due to its public openness and non-proprietary nature, in that there is nobody who can claim to own the protocols. Shapiro (1999:14) suggests that technology has been used to modernise societies, either from the traditional or authoritarian to modern democratic societies.

Democracy in the post-traditional societies in the late twentieth century was characterised by two major trends. The first being the transitions of traditional societies, mostly from authoritarian rule to democratic political system, which Huntington (1991) refers to as the Third Wave of the democratisation process. The

second trend has been referred to as the crisis experienced by Western democracy as a result of the lack of political participation and mostly the domination of democratic processes by special interests in political systems. It is argued that technology impacts on these trends in ways favourable to democracy. Technology has also played a role beyond enhancing the modernisation process within the context of national democracy by facilitating transnational networking, which scholars refer to as the globalisation of democracy.

Huntington (1991) defines democratisation as the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Democratic transitions involve two processes. The first is the non-democratic government that abdicates or is overthrown, and a democratic government is installed through free and fair elections. The second is rather a broader modernisation process that involves creating a democratic political culture. The latter process commonly commences before a democratic government is inaugurated, fast-tracking the democratisation process, and usually continues after the installation of a democratic government. The following are examples of how advancements in information technology play a role in the modernisation process and consequently in the democratisation process.

The role of information technology in modernising the democratisation process

The Internet has been cited as one of the most powerful artefacts that have been significant in influencing the democratisation process, particularly because of its capacity to be used as a mass media instrument. Originally designed around 1969, it has the potential to enhance opportunities for participation within existing political forums. Many commentators have pointed to the Internet's potential to create entirely new political spaces or to update those historical spaces that have been lost as a consequence of the increased complexity of social and political life. Thus, some have suggested that the Internet offers the potential to re-enact direct forms of democratic engagement amongst citizens through the medium of electronic 'town hall' meetings and even the recreation of something similar to an ancient Athenian public sphere. For those optimistic of the Internet's potential to re-engage citizens in face-to-face, or at least keyboard-to-keyboard, political deliberation, a number of high-profile experiments in the United States are repeatedly cited as examples of the way in which this aspect of communicative technology might develop. (Feenberg, 1986).

For instance, since 1995, the government in Korea has strongly pushed the construction of a National Information Superhighway and is putting its utmost efforts into moving towards an information society. With the wide provision of personal computers, which plausibly can be connected to online services or the Internet in Korea, people are getting plenty of domestic and international information. Information technology has enhanced the possibility that people can communicate with unknown persons around the world, exchange their ideas and experiences, and even develop their own curiosity about new information. The advancement of information technology has also led people to wish for better services and quality of life, and enjoy the rights of free expression.

Information technology and services augment the opportunities for developing public participation in, and awareness of, the political process. The online services played an important role in promoting openness of government. On the basis of a nation-wide information infrastructure, the Korean government at both central and local levels has been actively experimenting with electronic democracy to hear citizen's views on government policy and planning, government activities, and social issues. Public organisations have also been launching electronic democracy projects in many forms. Most of the projects are still in the infant stages of development. However, much attention must consistently be given to the creation of an enhanced information system which will enable the public to engage in an online dialogue with politicians and government officials and participate in government decision-making processes. (Lee and Cho, 1996).

In South Africa the government is setting up a government-wide call centre. It has phased in an electronic system, an e-government gateway, in which a directory of government services will be available. The government gateway project aims to enable the different government computer systems to communicate in order to fast-track service delivery and make services available around the clock. This is done in order to ensure that government goes to the people so that it sharply improves the quality of the outcomes of public expenditures intended to raise the standard of living. Recently the government initiated a Programme of Action which allows the public to track and comment on the government's progress. The Programme of Action is available in five 'clusters' by theme: 'Economic, Investment and Employment', 'Governance and Administration', 'International Relations, Peace and Security',

'Justice, Crime Prevention and Security', and 'Social'. The information on the implementation of the programme is made available every two months after progress reports have been submitted by clusters to Cabinet. The posting of information online forms part of the efforts to realise transparent governance in actual practice, and constitutes an element of the people's contract for a better life. (Brrows, 2003).

There is no doubt that all of the examples in the literature of attempts to re-engage communities in the politics of their locality, point to a number of ways in which information technology can lead to a genuine growth of social capital and the enhancement of local democratic participation. Today's technology can electronically support virtually every aspect of democracy so that, should the need arise for government to achieve more and more sophisticated levels of electronic democracy (e-democracy), focus needs to be driven towards sophisticated levels of e-government, such as online citizen services, which should include a companion progression to more and more sophisticated levels of e-democracy within and beyond its national borders.

Modernisation of democracy through the use of information technologies

Information technology, in particular the Internet, was originally designed around 1969 to allow the exchange of packets of bytes between computers; for a long time it remained restricted to the exchange of scientific data between scientists and secure information within the US government. In the 1990s it became a popular means of communication. In 1993 the US government opened the network to the industry, and the creation of the Hypertext Mark-Up Language (HTML) laid the basis for universal accessibility. Since then its growth has been phenomenal. A survey towards the end of 1999 suggested that 259 million people were now Internet users. Of these 111 million were in the United States, six times as many as the next largest figure, which was for Japan. The survey predicted that the figures would rise to around 490 million by the end of the year 2002. Another survey claimed that over 28 million people visited the Worldwide Web every day and confirmed that it was now spreading rapidly throughout the world and outside the US. As a means of communication it has the potential to revolutionise political activity as it offers the possibility of direct two-way interaction between the citizens and politicians. This has led to predictions that it will completely revolutionise government and democracy, even that the outcome will be a

new wave of democratisation worldwide, as authoritarian regimes find it difficult to survive and as established democracies are transformed. (Ferdinand, 2000).

The impact of the Internet has not been in politics only; it has also impacted greatly on business and society. It has already transformed marketing, procurement and recruitment functions of corporations in the United States. Now the impact is spreading to other parts of the world, partly through the socializing role of multinational corporations. At the same time the Internet has created opportunities for a whole host of new companies, principally dealing with information technology. Whilst making use of the Internet a core business function certainly requires the acquisition of technical skills, in other respects it may reduce the costs of entry into the marketplace for new companies. New companies may, for example, be spared many of the start-up costs of acquiring premises because they can deal directly with clients or customers. (Strommer-Galley, 2000).

The initial benefit of the Internet was its ability to reduce the costs of government administration. It has considerably speeded up communication with colleagues and clients. It has also reduced the costs of transmitting data. And business commentators predict that one of its chief effects will be to reduce the number of intermediaries between the original providers of goods and services, and the final consumers. This 'disintermediation' will challenge the traditional economic functions of wholesalers and retailers, agents, and so on. At least in theory it offers the prospect of more direct selling and more convenient buying. The more futuristically minded suggest a world with fewer large shops as people shop through the Internet, with fewer large offices, as individuals work from home, and fewer publishers, as writers, composers and performers distribute their creations directly through the Internet. They even suggest that the Internet will create a new paradigm of economics. (Ferdinand, 2000.)

Internet usage by people has increased; the Internet not only provides information services for others, it has become an increasing source of reference and has also modernised the education system as well as transforming other agencies that need to process large amounts of information. As a result, the institutions as well as individuals will be able to achieve much more from such usage. For example, the government of Finland has taken to the Internet for internal communication, and for diplomacy too. Previously the Finnish Foreign Ministry was unable to afford a

presence in a large number of countries or a large research staff. It did not have sufficient information about diplomatic issues in many parts of the world to be able to make a constructive contribution to developments. Now that it can rely much more on the Internet to keep abreast of what is happening around the world, it feels capable of a much more significant role in international diplomacy. (Ferdinand, 2000).

Given the modernisation process, the one kind of innovation that the Internet might bring to politics has been managerial expertise and improved service delivery. It has been linked with the assumption that most government departments, even in established democracies, are too dominated by outdated and out-of-touch bureaucracies. This viewpoint is expressed both by individuals and by companies that have a great deal of contact with government agencies. Whether it is welfare claims, or taxation, or planning applications, the experience of those outside the government was that traditionally the bureaucracy seemed to run their affairs primarily for their own benefit and to avoid embarrassment to the party in power, rather than for the good of the public.

Those who argue along these lines believe that the new technology will also open up the processes of administration to outside observers much more effectively than before. In so doing administration will become more transparent, and more amenable to democratic pressures. This will lead to a virtuous circle of increasing transparency leading to greater efficiency and then to greater democracy. This impetus has lain behind many of the proposals for reform at both the national and local levels, namely simply bringing administration closer to the people.

Others wishing to apply benefits to government through applications of the Internet have focused on local rather than central government. In many western countries, local government has suffered from popular apathy and/or official neglect. The Internet has offered an opportunity for improving local government services, and also possibly a new way for ordinary citizens to participate more directly in the decisions that will affect their wellbeing. In Europe there has also been an increasing interest in using the Internet to (re)create a new sense of community, especially at the local level. The European Commission has actively encouraged the formation of new networks of local authorities in various countries, which have achieved a pioneering success, for example the Civic Community network.

Technology and transformation in governments

Governments are usually traditionally orientated and move slowly due to the nature of their organisations and the duty to take all interests of society into consideration when undertaking change. For the moment a difference in cultures is occurring and there is a wide gap between what individuals and groups are doing online and what governments are currently capable of doing online, especially in their relationships with the public. The challenge of governments in a few years to come will be to set out mechanisms on how to embrace more of the public into the decision-making process. More importantly, governments, especially the elected bodies, need to take a leadership role in engaging the public in wide debate on how, or if, information and communication technologies can and should change the current dynamics of democracy. For a while many might argue that being online is essential for politicians to continue to get elected, yet the evidence does not point to this being a deciding factor at this time. The debate is a fluid one. There is a need for society to become partners in a debate on the nature of democracy in its very changed world, which will then lead to ways and means whereby information and communication technologies can be strategic tools for the democratic process. Governments are concerned about the decline in public approval of their institutions. There are tools available that can help reverse this attitude – it is now a question of how extensively these tools can be used to effect this change. As is evidenced in this section, it is becoming increasingly important to engage the citizen. Tools for consultation are still run from the top down but, if done properly, the goals of an interactive government and an interactive citizenry can be reached.

Democracy as practised now by many countries, is an evolving concept. The principles and practice of democratic ideals vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but underpinning all democracies are the underlying tenets of liberal democracy as evolved in the past two to three hundred years. There is representative democracy, and many electoral and legislative forms of this type of democracy, participatory democracy (practised in some jurisdictions, such as the town hall meetings tradition in the United States), and direct democracy (the closest example of this today being the practice of decisions of national importance by a referendum amongst the electorate). (Riley and Riley, 2003).

The following are but a few examples of governments that already exploit this e-democracy as technology to gather inputs from citizens and business to determine a course of action that could take society into a new form of democracy, which would reflect a wider voice of the public:

In Queensland, Australia, the website (www.qld.gov.au) gives citizens an impressive array of opportunities to interact with government. The "Get Involved With Government" choice links citizens to their representatives, to Queensland agencies, and to Parliament. The 'Queensland Agencies' link gives citizens background information on an issue, current law or proposed legislation, and invites direct citizen comments which go to the committee and then eventually to Parliament to help formulate policies and standards on a variety of legislative issues. The 'Queensland Parliament' link empowers a citizen to make a formal, direct request to Parliament in the form of an e-petition with the object of "persuading Parliament to take some particular action". Citizens can also review existing e-petitions and add their own signatures in a show of support, or express their objections. The site also surveys users about the e-petition process itself – a built-in quality control and improvement mechanism.

Likewise, the Scottish Parliament was an early innovator in e-petitioning. Citizens can create an e-petition or comment on or add their support to an existing e-petition – all electronically (www.scottish.parliament.uk/e-petitions/index.htm). The International Teledemocracy Centre, founded in 1999 by Scotland's Napier University and BT Scotland, aims to develop and apply advanced information and communication technology to enhance and support the democratic decision-making process. Their mission includes:

- Promoting the application of information and communications technologies (ICT) by governments and parliaments worldwide in order that elected members and supporting staff can conduct their business more effectively and efficiently.
- Demonstrating how technology can contribute to more openness and accessibility in government.
- Encouraging and assisting the public, voluntary organisations and business to participate in government through the use of technology. (Caldow, 2003).

In 2001 the European Commission adopted an "Interactive Policy Making" (IPM) project to improve the European Union's governance. Through its website, "Your Voice in Europe" (http://europa.eu.int/ yourvoice), the IPM collects and analyses citizen and business input to evaluate existing EU policies and to solicit consultations on new initiatives. The purpose is to make EU policy-making more transparent, comprehensive and effective, giving stakeholders an active role in the policy-making process. (Caldow, 2003).

To some extent, the same variable of organisational transformation has penetrated government. It began with internal organisation, but then gradually spread more widely to include government's relations with outsiders, whether businesses or citizens. Certainly part of the impetus for change came from businesses that had begun to adapt to the new technology and expected government to do the same. But in addition the US government recognised from early on the potential for the Internet both to increase the efficiency of its administration and also to reduce its costs. The government spends $25-billion a year on welfare, $27-billion on food stamps, ideas where to get job training, and the skills of the workforce further behind. It is an opportunity to use the power of information technology to fight the war on crime, to deliver social benefits to the needy; it is a secure and efficient manner while eliminating fraud and cheating; improves health care delivery, helps to find missing children, and to improve on privacy protection for all citizens – in short, to completely show how government delivers its services to its customers. (Ferdinand, 2000).

This possibility of enhanced efficiency through increased coherence government policies has attracted countries from around the world. Tony Blair's government in Britain, for example, has been much attracted by opportunities afforded by the Internet to provide 'joined up' government. A large part of the rationale for the 'third wave', for instance, rests upon the possibility of uncovering resources that can be diverted to the pool members of society, not by increasing taxes on the rich or public owners of industry, but because of the savings that can be achieved through increased efficiency. It was no coincidence that Demos, one of the think-tanks associated with New Labour (Ferdinand, 2000), has devoted quite a lot of attention to new technology, government and democracy.

In East Asia, the Malaysian government of Prime Minister Mahath Mohammed proclaimed the ambition of making the country as advanced as any in the West by the year 2020 on the basis of information technology.

Singapore set out a programme for putting all the population on information technology by the year 2000. And even a country such as China, whose leaders are suspicious of the impact of the Internet on their people and who prevent complete, free interaction with people abroad through it, has become converted to this ambition of putting China on line. Beijing announced that 1999 was the year when Chinese government was put "online." Even non-significantly, in addition to the efficiency advantages that attracted the Chinese government, and the perceived need to provide an IT environment that would invigorate Chinese businesses so that they could compete with Western counterparts, the official announcement also pointed to the increasing 'transparency' that going online would bring to the administration of any government. (Ferdinand, 2000).

The Chinese word "tou-mingdu" was the same as that used to translate "glasnost" before the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was probably not directed so much at increasing popular control over administration, as was the case in the Former Soviet Union, as at increasing the control of the centre over the periphery in China. The stubborn persistence of obscurity and deceit practised by lower-level officials in their dealings with Beijing in the post-Mao era no doubt explains the enthusiasm of the leadership there for the new technology. Nevertheless, greater transparency was also explicitly linked with democratisation, and would certainly be a precondition for it. (Bray, 2000).

There is a general movement towards easing accessibility to information both in the news media and by governments. News agencies are increasing the speed at which and the scale on which they provide information, while giving citizens greater control over the information they want. In the United States, the National Information Infrastructure (NII) Agenda for Action makes provision for easy and equitable access to government information, while in Italy a new law on the need for transparency underlies the creation of a civic network. (Bryan Tsagarousianou and Tambini, 1998). Government and the news media often work together by broadcasting the

deliberations of government bodies, such as the C-SPAN channel in the United States and Parliament Online in South Africa (Ferdinand, 2000).

In Amsterdam, the Netherlands, a project was launched in 1994 by an independent political-cultural centre, De Balie, and a group of former computer activists, the Hacktic Network Foundation (now called XS4ALL). A virtual city was constructed where information providers have different theme-based squares, for example an environmental square, a news square, a health square, a book square and a gay square. Each of these squares has eight buildings occupied by information providers and citizens can build "houses" (homepages containing personal or other information) between the squares. In the public spaces of the squares citizens can have discussions. The project aims to use the city metaphor, a true-life frame, to:

- initiate and stimulate public debate between citizens and between citizens and local government in electronic discussion groups;
- create a platform for distributing local government, public and administrative information;
- assist/support citizens and civic groups to post their information electronically;
- stimulate citizens' rights and obligations on the Electronic Highway and to look after the interests of consumers;
- provide opportunities for and connection between projects and information providers both nationally and internationally;
- develop instruments which would enable users to obtain access to information services; and
- maintain and expand contact with international community networks. (Francissen and Brants 1998).

The Amsterdam Digital City was such a success in terms of people registering as "inhabitants" and visitors, that there are today some 70 digital cities in the Netherlands. Despite the non-committal nature of discussion groups and the often racist or other bigoted contribution, the digital cities have become an Athenian-style

agora where people come to buy things as well as exchange ideas. (Francissen and Brants 1998 in Pretorius, 2001.)

E-democracy

Webster's defines democracy as "a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation". Putting an "e" in front of democracy means nothing more than using information technology tools to facilitate, improve and ultimately extend the exercise of democracy.

There are many interpretations of what constitutes e-democracy. This is primarily as a result of the fact that the concept is at the beginning stage and as such there is much confusion about what it encompasses and how to define it clearly.

Steven Clift is an acknowledged expert and leader in the worldwide e-democracy movement. He describes e-democracy as referring to "how the Internet can be used to enhance a democratic process and provide increased opportunities for individuals and communities to interact with government and for the government to seek input from the community" (democracy online http://www.dowire.org). Characteristics of the Internet which he feels support e-democracy are that it provides opportunity to participate in debates as they happen, participation is less limited by geography, disability or networks, and it facilitates the access to information and provision of input by individuals and groups who previously had not been included in these debates. For instance, in Scotland an organisation that specialises in e-democracy, the International Teledemocracy Centre, states its goal as "to strengthen democracy through the use of innovative ICT to deliver improved democratic decision-making processes, thereby increasing citizen participation – specifically through the use of electronic consultation and electronic petitions". (Riley and Riley, 2003).

E-democracy has both a tactical side and a strategic side. On the tactical side, information technology has advanced communication and the access to information is arguably better than in any other known medium. But something even more fundamental is at hand. The underlying core principle of democracy is an informed and engaged citizenry. Most governments get passing marks for "informing" citizens via digital communication. But the vast majority have a long way to go to "actively engage" citizens or to effectively exert global influence using digital media. These

elements comprise the most overlooked dimension of e-democracy – the strategic side. How can a government use digital media to both actively engage citizens and advance its public policies to the world community? Engaging your "own" citizens or constituents through digital media includes enhancing active participation in the law-making, policy-making, and legislative processes, all of which are influenced by a variety of forces, public opinion, debate, lobbyists, special interest groups, consultation with constituents, portfolio committee hearings, and expert testimony. The regulatory process, subsequent to enactment of law, follows many of the same communicative and collaborative patterns as law making. It should be noted that the ability to leverage digital technology by political parties, campaigns and candidates is also part of the equation. Voter registration, election or referenda voting, and on-going communication between constituents and their elected representatives, are equally integral to e-democracy. (Caldow, 2003).

Political mobilisation and action coordination using information technology

Another benefit of information technology is the ability of users to mobilise society in order to overcome the limitations of both time and space in their communicative strategies through the near-instant delivery of information to an almost limited number of end-users. Political mobilisation and action coordination as espoused by interest and pressure groups garner support through the use of information technology to force authorities to make decisions as prescribed by their demand. This use of technology is another way of entrenching political decision-making in the modern democratic political system. Near-instantaneous communication technology like the Internet makes it possible to put pressure on decision-makers to act promptly. Having direct access to democracy in the information era could also be a risky business as voters may at times make quick decisions about complex issues without having regard to their situations. In the political sphere, this has opened up intriguing possibilities for organisations seeking to mobilise and coordinate political action where previously the ability to effect such mobilisation and coordination in any systematic fashion required the use of mass-based support and the high of the print and broadcast media. The Internet offers a means to realise such activities without a significant drain on the organisation's resources.

In the US, within African American communities, the most prominent example of the use of information technology in aid of political mobilisation is perhaps that of the Nation of Islam and its organisation of the 1995 Million Man March. The event was the largest single political mobilisation of African Americans in history and made extensive use of the Internet to advertise its aims, coordinate the activities of organisers and disseminate information on arrangements to participants. These activities were structured through both a subscription-based electronic mailing list and the Nation's dedicated website for the event. While there is no analysis of the precise effect of the Internet's use in this instance, it is clear that the Nation of Islam itself has subsequently sought to expand its use of new communications technologies in the more recent development of its political strategy. The Nation is now at the forefront of implementing innovative technologies in the cause of political communication and education. Using audio and video streaming technologies, as well as more standard text-based information services, the Nation has an array of websites dedicated to different aspects of its work – including an online version of the organisation's Final Call newspaper; a health education website; a national student association website; an online study centre and a web page dedicated to links forged within the Islamic and African diasporas. In addition, the Nation of Islam has recently sought to exploit the potential of the Internet as a medium for political communication through a strategic link-up with America Online's Black Voices Internet site. This site, in conjunction with the Final Call Online, has featured live interactive 'chat' forums engaging Nation of Islam Ministers in debates with the wider public. (Lekhi, 2000).

The example of the Nation of Islam's enthusiastic and other interest and pressure groups' embrace of the use of information technologies as an integral part of their political strategy indicates the power of this new medium as an independent mechanism through which to channel the message of those on the political platform. And to the extent that it is effective in articulating its political programme to an increasingly sympathetic audience, these experiences offer a useful insight into at least one possible direction that might be taken by those who seek to exploit information technology's potential as integral tool of political mobilisation and communication.(Lekhi, 2000).

Information technology has made it easier for groups to organise on a local, national and global scale. Lobbying is more egalitarian because it is cheaper to mobilise

support for a movement. (Wright 1995:42). It is thus easier for those groups usually marginalised in the political process to convey their sentiments to their representatives.

The use of Internet technology by the pro and anti-democratic movements

Internet[1] is usually seen as the new medium with great potential for enhancing societal citizenship and democracy. (Chroust, 2000). Since the onset of the Third Wave of democratisation, rebel movements have used the information and communication technology to overthrow or counter non-democratic governments. Electronic media, like fax machines and video cassettes, were used in the mid-1980s in the Philippine revolution to spread disguised Western and Japanese news content to oust the Marcos regime, and in Panama the News Center in Washington D.C. used Apple computers to translate Western newspapers when President Noriega closed down independent radio stations and newspapers in 1987. These translated articles were laid out to look like news clips and faxed to businesses and corporations where they were photocopied and distributed by sympathetic distributors against the Noriega regime. (Ganley, 1991). However, the 1989 pro-democracy movement in China remains one of the best examples of how Internet technology was used to counter non-democratic governments during the early stages of the information revolution. Students made extensive use of video and audiocassette recording, photocopying, faxing and telephoning, and, for the first time, a vast computer network was employed to further their cause. An academic network linking US, Canadian and Mexican universities was connected to another academic network in Western Europe and a network in Japan and the Pacific basin. After the successful inter-connectivity it then appeared on the bulletin boards so that the Chinese students across the United States, Europe and Asia could post their outcries against the Chinese government. This technology also served as an organisational platform where pro-democracy supporters set up telephone, fax and letter-writing brigades. These were used to supply and coordinate news and messages, exchange Chinese fax numbers, keep lists of the dead and wounded of Tiananmen Square, make arrangements to lobby Washington, mobilise international public opinion, and arrange to get equipment for communication to protesters.

[1] While reference is made to the Internet in this chapter, it should also be noted that the Internet incorporates a broad range of information and communication technologies which may include computing and telecommunications.

(Bumbaugh 1990). The coverage of the Tiananmen Square events by television and radio both in China and abroad added to the effective mobilisation of public opinion and support for the pro-democracy movement.

In his research on silent revolutions, covering 43 societies in four continents, Ronald Inglehart writes that modernisation is characterised by an interlink process of industrialisation, urbanisation, mass communication and, following Max Webber, by rationalisation of all societies' spheres with a dissolution of traditional ties. Modernisation is also marked by the increasing significance of non-materialistic needs, such as demands for political participation or for the protection of natural resources. (Inglehart, 1997).

There are also other examples, like the Free Vietnam Alliance, and the Cambodian pro-democracy, where the Internet is used as a medium to discuss prohibited subjects such as corruption and military or government misconduct, to inform and mobilise public opinion both domestically and abroad, and to organise campaigns against the government. (Eng, 1998). In some cases the Internet is not so much used as a tool for insurgency, but more to focus attention on low-intensity, regional conflicts between people and their government. In Chiapas (Mexico) the Zapatista movement does not have any hope of overthrowing the Mexican government, just as women whose human rights were grossly violated in Afghanistan could not overthrow the Taliban even by mobilisation through the Internet (Afghanistan was a feudal agrarian society with few industrial production enterprises and public services and in 1994 the Taliban marked the revenge of the traditional village against the modern city). Their Internet activities can, however, draw attention to local conditions and problems and if they mount enough international pressure, their governments may be forced to address their problems. (Lutz, 1999).

The neo-Nazis also use advanced technology in their internal and external communications to react to the challenges of a second wave of modernisation; they attack the process of globalisation, worldwide 'dollar-imperialism' and the threat of racial inundation, while at the same time they demand the protection of natural resources against interest of profit and the equal participation of women in the national struggle. (Chroust, 2000).

The Internet has several distinct characteristics that make it suitable for dissident purposes. Firstly, it is possible to hide the identity of the dissident. In the case of Kosovo, Anonymizer (a US IT Company affiliated with human rights organisations) set up the Kosovo Privacy Project, which allowed Serbians, Kosovs and others reporting on the situation in Kosovo to download tools to hide their identity when e-mailing, accessing information or joining discussion groups. Secondly, the Internet has all the audio-visual qualities of television, radio and newspapers combined. For example, in Belgrade an independent radio station's transmitter was linked to a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) satellite and transmissions were re-sent from there all over the world, including to 35 other independent Serbian local radio stations. Thirdly, encryption technology, which can be downloaded for free from the Internet, makes it difficult for dissident messages to be intercepted. In the case of Belgrade, tunnel encryption was used to hide the radio channel, making it invisible from the outside. Fourthly, key to the Internet's ability to further dissident causes is the fact that it is not mass media in the traditional sense of "one-to-many" like newspapers, television and radio, but "many-to-many". It allowed friends and family to report on their situation from Kosovo to relatives and acquaintances abroad. These means of communication are often seen as more credible information sources than Western media reports. (Time International, 1999).

Cumulatively these characteristics of the Internet make it a difficult medium to bring under government control. Governments can try to block access to certain sites (for example, the Chinese government has blocked access to such sites as Human Rights Watch, the *New York Times* and *Playboy*) or to require anybody who signs up with an Internet Service Provider (ISP) to register with government security agencies. In China unregistered Internet cafes are shut down and monitoring equipment is installed on all of China's major sites. (Pomfret, 2000). Similarly, in Burma (Myanmar) unauthorised possession of a computer with network capability is punishable by as many as 15 years' imprisonment. These efforts are, however, not insurmountable challenges. It is for example still possible to access prohibited sites periodically as the dozens to hundreds of 'hits' received from China each week indicate. Furthermore, Chinese Internet surfers reportedly get around the electronic barriers by linking up to computers outside of China. (Dobson, 1998).

Conclusion

The understanding of modernity and technology have both presented intriguing debates in social sciences and made strides in political discourse. This chapter has demonstrated how they overlap in their concerns, since it is imperative to understand modernity in order to have regard to an adequate account of the technological developments that make it possible. For how can one study specific technologies without an understanding of the larger society in which they develop?

The concept of modernity relies on the key notion of rationalisation to explain the uniqueness of modern societies. Rationalisation, as the generalisation of technical rationality, reduces the normative and qualitative wealth of the traditional social society, exposing its reality to technical manipulation. Rationalisation depends on a broad pattern of modern developments in technology.

Technology indicates the social complexity of the multiple actors involved with its creation, and the consequent richness of the values in other social phenomena.

Over the last years there has been a transformation in communications that has moved much of the public discourse and agenda setting for society at large. With these information and communication technologies people are reclaiming their communications power and are geared toward building citizen-based efforts that work to ensure that the shift toward communication increases their capacity for participation in democracy, and that the strategically organised use of information technology by citizen-based efforts makes an important contribution to improve democracy. To begin with, information technology holds the potential to raise awareness about political process, of which the ultimate benefit could be a more democratic society – a society where more people are able to hear and listen to each other, have a public voice in agenda setting, and have an increased ability to contribute toward the resolution of public problems. It is generally held that if parliaments and other elected bodies do not institute reforms to develop e-democracy mechanisms there will be severe political consequences, such as the non-election of political candidates seeking office who do not use online technologies to deal with the

voters. These views are based on the belief that the technology-inclined society expects its leaders to communicate with them in this new generation's medium of use.

These arguments assume that there are a host of citizens arming themselves with the tools to have a direct influence on legislative and policy development, and who also have the will, resources and desire to engage in the emerging e-democracy process. Citizen-based electronic democracy (e-democracy) has been able to create the online public spaces for interaction among citizens and organised interests that are for the most part only focused on using electronic communication to further their own goals. In a simple sense, there is a creation of an open and on-going arena for public expression, development of opinion, and accountability.

This chapter has illustrated how e-democracy in the context of information and communication technology is explored as a subset of the greater, and more important, philosophical topic of democracy itself. It set the support for an appraisal of whether or not e-democracy can be an extension of representative and liberal democracy, consequent to the modernisation process as practised in most countries today. It is evident that e-democracy practices, such as online consultations, enhance the modernisation process in the current system whereby the policy governs society, and continues to have limited and controlled inputs from the citizen, as such presenting a new form of democracy. These are pressing issues for modernised governments as the new technologies are contributing to the creation of faster communications, the sharing of information and knowledge, and the emergence of new forms of modern societal cultures. It has also been demonstrated that the political mobilisation and action coordination by members of the society and of pro and anti-political movements as networked communities have quickly evolved through the Internet. They are increasingly using the new technologies to organise themselves so that their voices can be heard, and to develop tools to attempt to influence government policy and programmes at political level.

As modernisation is not static, there are different schools of thought as to whether information and communication technologies will change the nature of democracy, or

if it will simply result in an extension of the democracy we now practise and understand.

The important issue at hand is that there should be a vigorous debate and discussion about the nature of democracy and how technologies can be used to produce a more engaged and interactive society. To make significant changes that would draw the public more widely into the process requires commitment and change of attitude. Cost factors also come to bear on this, as well as the question of how to engage people for their input and opinion. This raises an even more fundamental question of whether the public wants to be more engaged in government, or do they simply want the opportunity to make their views known? And if governments do engage the public more frequently into public debate over issues of the day, how often do they do this? What mechanisms will be available to facilitate this process?

The challenge of governments in years to come will be to set out mechanisms on how to embrace more of the public into the decision-making process. More importantly, governments, especially the elected representatives, need to take a leadership role in engaging the public in wide debate on how information and communication technology can change the current dynamics of democracy. There is a need for society to become partners in an issue on the nature of modern democracy, which will then show the way to how the information and communication technologies can be strategic tools for the democratic process. For instance, governments are concerned about the decline in public participation in the democratic political process. Officials in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom are seeking ways to combat voter apathy, especially because of the declining engagement amongst young people. Some argue that this is rather a political problem, and that there will not be significant shifts to new forms of democracy or participation by the citizenry because of information and communication technologies. They suggest instead that the new information and communication technologies will serve only to strengthen existing democratic institutions, but not dramatically change the legislative bodies of public sector institutions. There are tools available that can help reverse this attitude – it is now a question of how extensively these tools can be used to effect this change.

There is a suggestion that the evolution of e-democracy could take society into a new form of democracy, which would reflect a wider voice of the public. But there is no clear vision of what such a democracy would entail, and how it would differ from current practices or reflect the overall society.

In the current system of democracy, elected officials, and the institutions adopted from this system, have been governing as usual in the interests of society. So the question is: will information and communication technologies and the tools that continue to be developed enable people to have access to more information and to communicate better with government? This is often a negative if there is too much information or a lack of organisation or critical skills to assess the importance of the information that can then be turned into knowledge. Both these abilities could be a result of the rapid modernisation of societies as a result of the emergence of these information and communication technologies.

Technology is one of the mediums and a driver of the modernisation process, bringing in new and important trends in society to the extent that they are driven by new ideas, conceptual constructs that contain innovation, and creativity. It facilitates change, its access and usage result in enlightening evolutions because societies organise and administer themselves, but they are never the driver of ideas, only the facilitator. Original ideas come from the mind of one person or from collective debate which then drives philosophical, cultural, societal, organisational, and administrative change. Thus the use of information and communication technologies for the purposes of e-democracy principles, as articulated to date, is only the beginning, and simply a driver on the road to possible new forms of democracy. It is how it is being used as a medium and the way in which society frames the debate that will result in these new forms and an extension of the current structures of democracy.

It is apparent that technology is having some impact on both governments and society, which will bring society to a possible new level of a system of democracy that will reflect its increasingly changing culture, built on the strength of the forms of democracy that have been developed over the past years.

Lastly, when the modernisation process has taken effect and society being at least democratised, a democratic political system must ensure that democracy functions as expected. In order for it to function properly, society must have access to information technology. The advantages of the technology include the fact that information can be accessed from almost anywhere, communications between citizens and the government can be made easier, and that both citizens and the government can enjoy cost advantages if the new technology is employed correctly. More extensive use of government information is possible, without limiting benefits to any one member of society.

Information technology gives the authorities a very powerful tool to strengthen the rule of law. Information technology can – and will – affect democracy in a political system. It is important to note that the benefits of information technology in reinforcing democracy depend, to a great extent, on what facilities citizens have, i.e. computer literacy and access to computers. An increased amount of governmental information available through the new media will not reinforce democracy if there is neither common computer literacy nor easy access to computers for each and every citizen. Instead, the gap between those who have and those who do not have good access to information will increase. Authorities must guard against this in an effort to provide equal access to information technology. Information technology should be able to give citizens an equally better chance to exercise their rights as information provides the basis for decision-making by voting. Information technology will enable citizens to get closer to the ideal of an informed choice. A democratic state should attempt to guarantee all its citizens full and equal access to such technology and the options it offers.