

Grassroots Political Parties in Sweden

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Direktdemokraterna



Abstract

This paper provides evidence that a new form of participatory political party—the ‘grassroots party’—has emerged in Sweden. Grassroots parties provide platforms for citizens to participate deliberatively or directly in the policy-making process. To identify them, interviews were used to see if the parties met the theoretical description of a grassroots party. Two such parties have been elected to office in Sweden, while another has contested elections and a fourth aims to. Additionally, by providing empirical examples of grassroots parties, this paper compares the theoretical description with real life examples and refines the definition of a ‘grassroots party.’

Keywords: e-participation, eDemocracy, grassroots politics, political parties.

I. INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are changing the way political parties operate. Driven by desires to be competitive and modern, political parties have been early adopters of the ICTs [Norris, 2003]. But how have political parties been using ICTs?

Technology is often treated as a force that will automatically transform politics into more participatory forms [Norris, 2003]. "ICT is often simplistically coupled to direct democracy, ignoring the need to be more specific on democracy" [Sæbø and Päivärinta, 2006]. However, while some political parties may use ICTs for participation, there are other possible uses such as for campaigning, internal communications, electorate analysis, etc. In fact, empirical evidence indicates campaigning and internal communications dominate—participatory applications are limited [Löfgren and Smith, 2003].

Because adoption of ICTs for participation is limited, this project investigates whether any political parties embracing ICTs for direct citizen participation exist (defined as 'grassroots parties'). Thus, my research question is:

- **Are there real examples of grassroots parties?**

To answer this, I use [Löfgren and Smith, 2003]'s models of political parties. Their model is useful because it describes current parties (mass and cartel parties), as well as theoretical parties (consumerist and grassroots parties) from an ICT-perspective. While [Löfgren and Smith, 2003] present empirical evidence for the existence of other political party models, empirical evidence of grassroots parties is lacking.

Political parties are important because they link citizens to government. Periodic election of political parties is the primary way citizens engage in representative democracy. Thus, political parties' perspectives on democracy are key factors affecting citizens involvement in democracies. Identifying emerging party forms tells us about possible directions of democracy.

Moreover, this study is important because researchers frequently only investigate government-sponsored e-participation systems. This paper adds to knowledge of citizen-initiated e-participation. [Rose et al., 2007]

Political Party Theory

Cartel and mass parties are the current forms of political parties in Europe; consumerist and grassroots parties may emerge [Löfgren and Smith, 2003].

Current party forms

Mass parties unite members of an interest group and pursues policies favorable to them. Campaigns are dependant on energizing a volunteer base. Mass parties dominated Europe in the mid-20th century, but have been in decline. [Löfgren and Smith, 2003]

Mass party's ICTs focus on internal participation. Websites allow members to join and participate in the party; however, they "attract those groups and interests that the party already represents" [Löfgren and Smith, 2003]. Because mass parties are disappearing, "evidence from empirical studies indicates that parties are not using technology to reinvent mass participation but instead for improving campaign efficiency. Party websites rarely include two-way interactive channels and where parties have internal computer communication systems they do not necessarily embrace the wider party membership" [Ward et al., 2002]. Even when internal e-participation platforms are present, "the use of conferencing systems to support a top-down dissemination of strategic campaigning information contradicts assumptions that such systems are a pure manifestation of a classical mass party model" [Löfgren and Smith, 2003].

Cartel parties are successors to mass parties. The cartel party de-emphasizes members; instead, professional campaigns captivate a variety of voters. The cartel party subsidizes its activities through government funds. It becomes a 'catch-all party' that can appeal to any group. Evidence indicates this is the dominant form of European political party. [Löfgren and Smith, 2003]

ICTs support professional campaigning by improving internal communication, organization and publicity. Interactive applications are controlled by party leadership and used to monitor public opinion or influence the public's political agendas. [Löfgren and Smith, 2003]

Emerging party forms

Consumerist parties may become the successor to cartel parties. The consumerist party views citizens as consumers of government services. The parties monitor citizen wants to create tailored messages and policies. A consumerist party does not need members, but depends on paid professionals and temporary activists for campaigns. Consumerist parties are beginning to emerge in Europe. [Löfgren and Smith, 2003]

The party uses ICTs to campaign professionally and analyze public opinion. User profiling and databases target appropriate policies. eConsultations allow citizens to voice concerns; however, they participate in an unequal way as consumers, not developers, of public policy. [Löfgren and Smith, 2003]

While others are incarnations of representative democracy, **grassroots parties** are participatory. The party is not strictly geared to seeking office, but instead promotes citizens' participation. Any citizens may be 'members;' in fact, they aim to have everyone participate. [Löfgren and Smith, 2003]

ICTs enable deliberation to enhance citizen participation and decision-making. Citizen-to-citizen discussion may be held completely online. Citizens use ePetitions online and alert others to issues. eVoting allows citizens to directly make decisions. [Löfgren and Smith, 2003]

II. METHOD

Grassroots parties are new and unresearched so qualitative methods are needed. In-person and email interviews were the primary methods (described below). I used [Hall and Hall, 1996] to plan my research, [Seidman, 1998] to guide in-person interviews and [Bourque and Fielder, 2003] for email interviews.

Cases

Within Sweden, four small political parties (Knivsta.Now, Demoex, Aktiv Demokrati and Direktdemokraterna—see Table 1) have formed. I selected these parties as potential empirical examples of grassroots parties because of their claims to combine participation and ICTs. None of these parties had been studied before¹.

Knivsta.Now (Knivsta.Nu)²

Knivsta.Now formed in Knivsta municipality of Sweden from an activist group called Knivsta2000. Knivsta2000 separated Knivsta from the municipality of Uppsala because the government was unresponsive. After the secession, a political party was formed to ensure the new municipality remains responsive to citizens.

Knivsta.Now is now the third largest party in Knivsta [Valmyndigheten, 2002/2006]. The party promotes a transparent municipality that involves citizens. However, as the party is not part of the governing majority, creating the intended participation has been challenging. In particular, difficulties integrating in-person participation with online participation has led to steady de-emphasis on online participation. "I think it has changed, we have been more like a normal party, because when we are on those meetings, [municipal council] or [committee] we sort of do what all the others so. It's very difficult to keep on track and say, 'No, we don't want to do it that way.' We are not the ones setting the [agenda]" [Åhlander, 2007].

Demoex

Demoex formed in Vallentuna municipality out of high school discussions on democracy. "Though the advertising campaign was small and cheap, it was enough to win the first [direct democracy] mandatory in Europe" [Norbäck, 2004]. The party binds its elected representative to vote in the council according to the results of citizens' eVote. Participation in their system is low, possibly due to the unlikelihood of the party's one representative casting a deciding vote. Nonetheless, Demoex managed to nearly double its votes in the last election.

¹ Demoex and Knivsta.Now are briefly mentioned (but not studied) in a discussion of eDemocracy models [Sæbø and Päiväranta, 2006].

² Their Swedish name is Knivsta.Nu (a domain name). They preferred the English translation Knivsta.Now during interviews.

Aktiv Demokrati

Aktiv Demokrati formed out of computer science university students' discussions. The party contested the Swedish parliamentary elections in 2006. While they received few votes, they managed to get on national television and in newspapers to spread their idea of more participative democracy. Any representative they elected would be bound to vote according to citizens' eVote like Demoex.

Direktdemokraterna

Rather than contest elections, Direktdemokraterna has built an e-participation system that allows citizens to vote directly on policies similarly to Aktiv Demokrati and Demoex. They hoped building a prototype would encourage citizens to consider more participatory democracy. Now that the prototype is complete, they aim to test it by contesting university elections. However, they have not yet done so and remain a discussion forum.

	Knivsta.Now	Demoex	Aktiv Demokrati	Direktdemokraterna
level of government	municipality	municipality	national	maybe university, maybe national
elections 2002	11.5% (840 votes)	1.7% (261 votes)	∅	∅
elections 2006	12.3% (982 votes)	2.9% (471 votes)	~0% (81 votes)	∅
founded by	out of activist group	high school debates	university computer science students	programmer
webpage	knivsta.nu	demoex.net	aktivdemokrati.se	direktdemokraterna.org
representatives	4 of 31	1 of 41	none	none
interview method	in-person	email	email	email
interviewees³	4	3	4	3
interview detail	4½ hours; over 30,000 words	nearly 5000 words	over 8500 words	nearly 6000 words

[Valmyndigheten, 2002/2006]
∅ = not applicable

Interviews

In-person interviews are an ideal method for investigating new phenomenon, but only Knivsta.Now is located in one area and regularly hold in-person meetings, so email interviews were conducted with the other parties. Phone interviews are another option, but I decided written email interviews allow more time to consider responses in a second language. I expected my respondents would be motivated to take additional time writing, as it provides an opportunity to promote their ideas.

I asked different questions to match the parties' activities. Each set of questions were arranged into five categories: 1) Beginning: party founding, joining, early activities and changes 2) Operation: democratic system, party organization, roles and activities 3) Relations: relations to citizens, media and other political parties 4) The future: strategies, plans and goals 5) Reflections: mistakes, frustrations, obstacles and successes. After the initial responses, I conducted follow-up interviews to delve deeper. For Knivsta.Now, I prepared questions, but interviews were open-ended.

After transcribing the in-person interviews, interviews were coded and organized by themes and then analyzed as explained below. Details on the number of participants and depth of interviews is provided in Table 1. When quoting the interviews, I make grammar/spelling/punctuation corrections to improve readability. I gave interviewees the option of a pseudonym, but few opted for this.

Other data

While interviews were the primary sources of data, additional sources included party websites, forums, manifestos, constitutions, videos, campaign materials, wikis, member essays, news articles and academic publications. Whenever possible, English versions of materials were obtained, otherwise the Swedish versions were explained by the party members or other native Swedish speakers.

³ I also met more members of Knivsta.Now when I attended one of their meetings. With Demoex, there were two actual interviews; however, one member turned out to be very peripherally related. Additionally, a paper written by a founder on their experiences with Demoex was analyzed as an interview. Robert Wensman is active in both Direktdemokraterna as well as being a founder of Aktiv Demokrati. However, in the interview we primarily discussed his experiences with Aktiv Demokrati and the interview is analyzed as such.

Operationalization

[Löfgren and Smith, 2003] provide both a table of differences between each party model and textual descriptions that I coded and analyzed to produce an operationalization of each model (mass, cartel, consumerist and grassroots party) (Table 2).. The operationalized aspects were identified as present or lacking in each party to determine which models match the cases.

The lack of definitions of terms used in the table and inconsistency of terminology made this challenging. For instance, sometimes cartel party is called cadre or demo-elitist party.

The operationalization is divided into three areas (forms of democracy, roles and political techniques) with each area having several aspects. 'Areas' are for organization and have no special meaning; 'aspects' are based on the analysis of [Löfgren and Smith, 2003].

Table 2: Operationalization of Party Typology				
	mass party	cartel party	consumerist party	grassroots party
Democracy forms				
linkage	representative and participatory	representative	representative	participatory
democratic form	pluralist/deliberative	pluralist/liberal	liberal	deliberative/direct
legitimacy	pluralist competition; mass memberships	election of representatives	representation of policy preferences and provision of quality services	citizen participation in policy formation
democratic values	empowerment through party membership	quality representation	individual rights	citizen deliberation and direct decision-making
Roles				
citizens' role	party members	voters for representatives	service consumers	decision-makers
citizens involved	a defined interest group	any citizen	any citizen	any citizen
membership	members with privileges	members with few privileges	temporary supporters	open and loose participants
number of members	high membership:voter ratio	low membership:voter ratio	no members; only party elite	no members; every citizen can be participant
representatives/elites	subordinate to members	independent	independent	subordinate to citizens
Political techniques				
political discourse	political elites confront others in the media; party members deliberate in meetings	political elites confront others in the media	political elites confront others in the media; citizens in policy consultations	citizens deliberate online
information flow	bi-directional (biased) elites ↔ members	unidirectional elites → voters/members	bi-directional (biased) elites ↔ consumers	multi-directional citizens ↔ citizens
election campaign	mobilize membership	hire professionals	hire professionals	means of promoting participation
ICT applications	eMembership support ⁴	eElectioneering ⁵	eElectioneering and eConsultation ⁶	eParticipation ⁷
role of ICTs	complementary	complementary	essential	essential

Democracy forms

This area is operationalized into *linkage*, *democratic form*, *legitimacy* and *democratic values* aspects.

Linkage “centres on the intermediaries or political mechanisms connecting voters to their leaders... [there are] four different forms of linkage of relevance to political parties: participatory, where the party facilitates direct citizen involvement in government activities; electoral, or representative, where the party can be controlled by the citizenry

⁴ May include eDeliberation/forums for member discussions, alert services/information provision for mobilization, web services to run membership organization (sign up, paying dues, etc.), electioneering website catered to party's interest group, etc.

⁵ May include electioneering website, message targeting, voter/supporter databases, campaign organization and information dissemination, limited consultative applications, etc.

⁶ May include extensive consultative applications to monitor policy preferences and improve services, etc.

⁷ May include eVoting, eDeliberation/forums, ePetitions, anonymous virtual identities, alert services for mobilization, other direct/deliberative e-participation applications for eEmpowerment, etc.

through elections; clientistic linkage, where the party is a channel for the exchange of votes for favours and or services; and, finally, directive linkage, where the party is an agent on behalf of the government to control citizens' behavior, via coercive and educational methods" [Löfgren and Smith, 2003].

Democratic form refers to the form of democracy the party embraces. In pluralist democracy interest groups compete for resources through elections and lobbying; in deliberative democracy citizens participate in policy discussion; in liberal democracy representatives' powers are limited by a constitution defining rights and rules; in direct democracy citizens make policy decisions.

Legitimacy refers to how the party legitimates itself. Mass parties legitimate themselves through pluralist competition and participation of a large membership; cartel parties through election of representatives; consumerist parties through representing consumers' policy preferences and providing quality services; and grassroots parties through participation of citizens in policy-making.

Democratic values is based on [Löfgren and Smith, 2003], in particular their "dominant procedural norms" and "political nexus" descriptions. It refers to the primary democratic value, or goal, the party promotes (Table 2).

Roles

This area covers *citizens' role, which citizens are involved, the role of membership, number of members and representatives/elites' role.*

The **citizens' role** is a party member in mass parties, a voter in cartel parties, a consumer in consumerist parties and a decision-maker in grassroots parties.

Citizens involved refers to the parties' target group. All the parties target any citizen, except for the mass party which targets a defined interest group.

Membership refers to the role of members in the party. Mass parties have distinct members with participation privileges within the party. Cartel parties have members, but they have few privileges beyond that of any voter. Consumerist parties have no members, only temporary supporters during elections. Grassroots parties also have no members—participation is open.

Number of members varies from high in mass parties, low in cartel parties, to essentially none in consumerist and grassroots parties.

Representatives/elites refers the independence of the party's leadership. In mass parties, they are subordinate to members; in cartel parties leadership is independent to make its own decisions, even when this decision is not supported by citizens or party members; consumerist parties also have independent leaders, though they are interested in citizens' policy preferences; in grassroots parties, leaders are subordinate to the citizenry.

Political techniques

Political discourse, information flow, election campaign, role of ICTs and ICT applications make up the technique aspects.

Political discourse refers to where, by whom, and in what form political communication occurs. In mass parties, political elites confront other parties/interests in the media, while party members deliberate in local meetings. In cartel parties, the political discourse takes place between political elites confronting others in the media. This same discourse takes place in consumerist parties, but citizens also voice policy preferences in consultations. Finally, grassroots parties allow all citizens to deliberate online.

Information flow refers to the direction and balance of the political discourse. In mass parties, there is bi-directional communication between elites and members, but the information flow favors the elites. Cartel parties have a uni-directional information flow from party elites to party members/voters. Consumerist parties have an unbalanced bi-directional information flow between elites and policy consumers. Information moves multi-directionally between citizens in grassroots parties.

Election campaign refers to electoral strategies. Mass parties mobilize the members to win the election. Cartel and consumerist parties hire professionals, paid for with government funding or donations, to run the campaign. Grassroots parties' primary goal is not to elect representatives, but to promote citizen participation. Winning an election may be one strategy, but losing while encouraging others to extend participation is also viable.

ICT applications refers to applications used. Mass parties use membership supporting applications; cartel parties use electioneering ones; consumerist parties use electioneering and consultation applications; while grassroots parties use applications for citizen participation.

Role of ICTs refers to how essential ICTs are. For mass and cartel parties, ICTs complement the membership organization and election campaign respectively. ICTs are essential to consumerist parties' professionalized campaigns and consultations, and to grassroots parties' participation systems.

III. RESULTS

For overview of results, see Table 3.

Democracy forms

Linkage

A participatory linkage to government is present in **all the cases**. For instance, Demoex states, "It was important to me to take some kind of measure that could provide people in my hometown with an instrument of participating in political decision-making. Traditional parties don't to my opinion" [Westlin, 2007]. Knivsta.Now is just as explicit, "If you speak about the models of democracy, I think our model is more the participating democracy" [Lundberg, 2007]. Aktiv Demokrati rejects representative linkages, "It occurred to us that the current democratic system did not seem very up to date with the current world. We found no reason why we should let some group of people called 'politicians' make a lot of decisions on behalf of us when we could just as well make them ourselves" [Wensman, 2007]. As does Direktdemokraterna, "In the long run, the goal is to replace the indirect democracy with the direct democracy" [Fennö, 2007].

Democratic form

Direktdemokraterna, **Aktiv Demokrati** and **Demoex** are forms of direct democracy. For instance, Direktdemokraterna aims to provide "direct democracy through a direct democratic party" [Lönnfält, 2007] while Aktiv Demokrati "[formed] the political program without putting values other than direct democracy in it" [Martin Gustavsson, 2007].

Knivsta.Now promotes deliberative democracy. "We say that, 'Voting, it's not the most important thing in the democracy. The most important thing is the dialogue in the society'" [Eklund, 2007].

Legitimacy

For grassroots parties, legitimacy comes from citizen participation in policy-making. **All the parties** expressed their aim to develop this participation—it's a key issue. "[Before Knivsta.Now was elected to the municipal council] maybe we had an idea that we would have, not hundreds of people, but *lots* of people coming to our meetings... but that isn't easy" [Lundberg, 2007]. For legitimacy, the parties need this participation in policy-making: "We [Direktdemokraterna] are not that successful. Not many people come to our platform to discuss political issues" [Karlsson, 2007].

Legitimacy in mass parties also comes from participation, but this participation is the mobilization of an interest group. All the parties reject this "because we're non-political, at least, non-ideological" [Hermansson, 2007]. Thus, including diverse citizens is a goal, "All kinds of people: homeless people, ordinary people, lower class, middle class, upper class, right wing, left wing, liberals, environmentalists, philosophers, engineers, programmers, medical doctors, Christians, Buddhists, you name it!" [Martin Gustavsson, 2007].

Democratic values

As **all the parties** are deliberative or direct forms of democracy, it is not surprising that the key democratic value is "citizen deliberation and direct decision-making."

However, "quality representation" also suits **Knivsta.Now**. This "means acting in the interests of the represented, in a manner responsive to them. The representative must act independently; his action must involve discretion and judgment; he must be the one who acts" [Pitkin, 1972]. A quality representative independently determines what to do by weighing citizens' input against the wisdom of the representative's greater knowledge. The representative must justify conflicts between their decision and citizens' wishes [Pitkin, 1972]. As Knivsta.Now is less directly democratic, their elected representatives should be quality ones. "[We need to discuss with citizens] because those people who are close to what it's about, they have important things to say to our politicians so we make good decisions" [Lundberg, 2007]. However, Knivsta.Now values "citizen deliberation and direct decision-making" over "quality

representation". When known what citizens want, they should follow that (in conflict with the "quality representation" ideal). "We will just check 'What do the majority of people of Knivsta want?' and then we will vote like that. But, it is difficult to do that in practice" [Lundberg, 2007]. Knivsta.Now's democratic value best fits the grassroots party.

Roles

Citizens' primary role

The most important role for citizens in **all the parties** is as decision-makers. They are more than just voters, "Four years of corrupt rule with no ability to influence is too long time. The citizens must be able to influence more than that" [Aktiv Demokrati, 2008b]. There aren't special differentiations between party members and other citizens: "We want every citizen to be able to vote at every point of an issue... Demoex is a kind of civil rights movement" [Norbäck, 2004]. While the parties let citizens pick policy preferences, they are expressing these preferences as decision-makers.

Citizens involved

All the parties target all citizens. "Our basic idea is that all citizens from different parts in the society should be able to influence important issues" [Aktiv Demokrati, 2008b].

Membership

Membership is loose and open in **all the parties**—whoever shows up and participates is a 'member'. "It's more open for everyone. You don't have to be a member of a party, you can just come down on Saturday and tell whatever you want" [Åhlander, 2007].

Number of members

All the parties, fit into the "no members; every citizen can be participant" category. An Aktiv Demokrati member claims that while "I am officially president of the party, but that is of no importance because of the direct democracy by the members within the party. I feel equally responsible for results as any other Swedish person with the knowledge of our party. I just do what I can and hope others will do the same." [Martin Gustavsson, 2007]. Hearing about the party makes you as much of a 'member' as the official leader, as long as you participate.

Representatives/elites

Aktiv Demokrati, **Demoex**, and **Direktdemokraterna** make representatives subordinate to citizens. In each party, any citizen can vote on policies and the party's representatives must follow the results.

Knivsta.Now also follow this philosophy, but they have no formalized system. Moreover, deliberation may not produce unanimous citizen perspectives—party representatives have independence to make decisions. Still, when the party knows the citizen viewpoint, they are subordinate to it. For instance, they would end support of a primary campaign issue if the majority of citizens stopped supporting it⁸.

Political techniques

Political discourse

[Löfgren and Smith, 2003] expect political discourse to occur online in grassroots parties. **Aktiv Demokrati**, **Direktdemokraterna** and **Demoex** concentrate citizen-to-citizen discourse online.

However, **Knivsta.Now** does not concentrate discourse onto their website. They aim for pervasive deliberation throughout various channels, but party meetings are the main discourse arena. However, members indicate this is not ideal, "The idea with the party was that you could engage in the way that suits you. If you want to do it at one o'clock in the morning, the middle of the night, you can do it from your computer. Then you can meet as well, but not only meetings" [Åhlander, 2007]. Also, some discourse occurs in policy consultations so fits under several party models.

⁸ I asked them what would happen if they discovered a majority of citizens stopped supporting an "All Activities House."

Information flow

All the parties fit into multi-directional citizen-to-citizen discourse. For instance Aktiv Demokrati says, "Today's representative democracy builds on 'one to many' communication and therefore doesn't use the full potential of the 'many to many' communication made possible by the new technology. It is time to use the technology better!" [Aktiv Demokrati, 2008b].

Election campaign

All the parties' best fit office-seeking is only a "means of promoting participation."

For instance, **Knivsta.Now's** goal is to win enough seats to set the council agenda as "there's not time for [citizen participation] often because we get the post from the majority, maybe two weeks before the meeting? We can have it. We can put it on the website. We can make links and you can read about it. Then getting people motivated to participate" is tough in such a limited time span [Lundberg, 2007].

The parties do not need to win an election to increase citizen participation. "The traditional parties have been sort of forced to take contact with the citizens. We've forced them to do that." [Åhlander, 2007]. Particularly for **Aktiv Demokrati**, election campaigning's purpose is spreading the concept, "I think the most fundamental changes in society are driven by viral spreading of appealing ideas... The best strategy would therefore be patience" [Wensman, 2007].

Direktdemokraterna's strategy is divorced from election campaigning. Although referring to themselves as a party, they have not officially formed one. "Campaigning was already being done by others like Aktiv Demokrati. I did not see that strategy working" [Lönnfält, 2007]. Instead the strategy was to build an e-participation system in the hope that seeing a prototype would inspire people politically.

ICT applications

All the parties fit in the grassroots party eParticipation applications⁹.

For instance, while Knivsta.Now is interested in deliberation, their site allows all to participate, not just members. Thus, they fit better in grassroots parties' eDeliberation than mass parties'.

None of the parties use ICTs for professional eElectioneering.

eConsultation applications may suit **Knivsta.Now** to some degree; however, their consultations would be more empowering than consumerist versions.

[Löfgren and Smith, 2003] thought that grassroots parties would involve "the relevant actors assembl[ing] in 'cyber-space' and encounter[ing] each other as equals in a virtual world. The scope for prejudice is significantly reduced as visual social cues are concealed and replaced by new self-produced identities" [Löfgren and Smith, 2003]. However, anonymous virtual identities are rejected. For instance, forum posts use people's real names, [Demoex, 2007b] pictures [Aktiv Demokrati, 2008a] and legal identification¹⁰ [Aktiv Demokrati, release 7]. They also would like "a better webpage that looks more like a community site" [Wensman, 2007] that I interpreted as meaning social networking with personal info. Knivsta.Now claims the lack of "visual social cues" and anonymity damages trust: "We think that meeting the people is important. You can't only exist, and you can't only get people to trust you only on the internet" [Lundberg, 2007]. Direktdemokraterna's system comes closest to expectations by displaying little personal information, but this may not be to develop identities. Members claim it blocks identities, "I find the simplistic design appealing compared to the 'community'-style because it gives less space for personal identity-shaping (with picture, gender and age showing everywhere) and more space to discussion" [Karlsson, 2007].

Role of ICTs

ICTs are essential for **Demoex**, **Aktiv Demokrati** and **Direktdemokraterna**. For instance, when I asked what offline activities are important for Demoex [Westlin, 2007] responded, "I don't understand this question. Have we had any?... We gather to have coffee once in a while."

⁹ The systems are analyzed in detail in [Ovid, 2008].

¹⁰ Each Swedish citizen has a government issued 'person number'.

However, ICTs are complementary to **Knivsta.Now**. “We are not an internet party. We are a local party and we think internet is an important part of communication with people” [Lundberg, 2007].

Table 3: Results				
	mass party	cartel party	consumerist party	grassroots party
Democracy forms				
linkage	representative and participatory (all)	representative	representative	participatory (all)
democratic form	pluralist/ deliberative (Knivsta.Now)	pluralist/liberal	liberal	deliberative (Knivsta.Now) /direct (others)
legitimacy	pluralist competition; participatory mass memberships	election of representatives	representation of policy preferences and provision of quality services	citizen participation in policy formation (all)
democratic values	empowerment through party membership	quality representation (Knivsta.Now)	individual rights	citizen deliberation and direct decision-making (all)
Roles				
citizens' role	party members	voters for representatives	service consumers	decision-makers (all)
citizens involved	a defined interest group	any citizen (all)	any citizen (all)	any citizen (all)
membership	members with many privileges	members with few privileges	only temporary supporters	only open and loose participants (all)
number of members	high membership:voter ratio	low membership:voter ratio	no members, only party elite	no members; every citizen can be participant (all)
representatives/elites	subordinate to members	independent of citizens	independent	subordinate to citizens (all)
Political techniques				
political discourse	political elites confront others in the media; party members deliberate in meetings (Knivsta.Now)	political elites confront others in the media	political elites confront others in the media; citizens in policy consultations (Knivsta.Now)	citizens deliberate online (all)
information flow	bi-directional (biased) elites ↔ members	unidirectional elites → voters/members	bi-directional (biased) elites ↔ consumers	multi-directional citizens ↔ citizens (all)
election campaign	mobilize membership	hire professionals	hire professionals	means of promoting participation (all)
ICT applications	eMembership support	eElectioneering	eElectioneering, eConsultation: (Knivsta.Now)	eParticipation (all)
role of ICTs	complementary (Knivsta.Now)	complementary (Knivsta.Now)	essential (others)	essential (others)

Key: Bolded categories fit the parties in parenthesis.

IV. DISCUSSION

The Swedish parties studied in this paper fit the grassroots party type (Table 3). Thus, for the research question, “*Are there real examples of grassroots parties?*” we can conclude that there are parties with a radical new stance on democracy. However, one’s definition of a ‘political party’ may change which parties are “real examples of grassroots parties.” If a group needs the intention of contesting elections, than all are. If official registration as a political party, or the contestation of an election is necessary, than all but Direktdemokraterna are. If successful contestation of elections by winning seats is necessary, at least Demoex and Knivsta.Now are real examples.

[Löfgren and Smith, 2003] suggest “there are no European parties, for example, following a pure ‘[cartel]¹¹’ strategy, or a ‘grassroots strategy’, instead, they embody elements from a variety of constructed strategies.” As the authors expected, Knivsta.Now has some elements of other forms of party; however, Demoex, Aktiv Demokrati and Direktdemokraterna fit purely into the grassroots party.

¹¹ They use the term ‘demo-elitist’ here; however, I believe this may have be an alternative term (possibly from an earlier draft) of ‘cartel’, as demo-elitist is not a strategy they present in their model.

Reflections on the theoretical model

Not only was the theoretical description of the party models extended in the operationalization stage, but after applying the operationalization we can ask if there are differences between theoretical expectations and the empirical examples.

Deliberative versus direct democratic forms

The description in [Löfgren and Smith, 2003] is ambiguous about deliberative versus direct democratic forms. Within these parties is present a deliberative form of grassroots party (Knivsta.Now) and several direct forms (Demoex, Aktiv Demokrati and Direktdemokraterna). The parties have many similarities, but this difference is worth further investigation. Perhaps there are two related models of grassroots parties: deliberatory parties and direct democracy parties¹².

Offline discourse

[Löfgren and Smith, 2003] indicate that “new ICTs are of prime importance to this party strategy since they facilitate a new public sphere in which deliberation and the creation of new identities is conceivable” and that their political nexus is “deliberative electronic discussions, consensus.” Thus, I operationalized the political discourse as occurring online. However, while quality of interaction online is improving, eDeliberation is still in its infancy. ICTs cannot yet compete with the quality of face-to-face deliberation. Are grassroots parties by definition solely directed towards ICTs? If we include other channels of citizen-to-citizen deliberation, Knivsta.Now fits the model better. Grassroots parties are still distinctive from the member-to-member discourse of mass parties, and ICTs could still be essential channel.

Anonymous virtual identities

Contrary to [Löfgren and Smith, 2003]’s expectations, not only are anonymous virtual identities not an important aspect of grassroots parties, the parties discourage them. Knivsta.Now sees anonymity as a challenge to be overcome before online deliberation reaches trust and quality requirements. While future grassroots parties may encourage anonymous virtual identity development, responsible deliberation and decision-making may be lacking in an anonymous environment. Senator On-Line, an Australian grassroots party that emerged in 2007, also rejects anonymous virtual identities: “It wouldn’t be anonymous. In fact, the idea would be to ensure it wasn’t anonymous. Because, if people make a comment they should be prepared to stand behind their comment I feel. So, it would definitely not be anonymous” [Sarkissian, 2008]. Anonymous virtual identities can be excluded as a defining aspect of grassroots parties.

V. CONCLUSION

There are three empirical examples of the new form of grassroots political party in Sweden alone. There may be four if Direktdemokraterna officially becomes a party and competes in elections. These parties continue to spread—one new party has developed in Australia and one may be currently forming in Italy [Ovid, 2008]. These parties have an exciting new take on democracy that may develop in the coming years. In future elections, we may find ourselves not simply voting for who we think might be suitable leaders, but what kind of participation we want in our democracies as well.

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¹² For further discussion, see [Ovid, 2008].

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