

Interfaces of Political Participation: Challenging the Analysis of Communicative Spaces

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<https://communicativespaces.org/>

We use maps, digital methods, geolocate data to understand how people talk, communicate, interact, and live together, and simultaneously around specific and particular phenomena: the city, a festival, a cultural movement, a social political reaction.





Petition

Revoke Article 50 and remain in the EU.

The government repeatedly claims exiting the EU is 'the will of the people'. We need to put a stop to this claim by proving the strength of public support now, for remaining in the EU. A People's Vote may not happen - so vote now.

[Sign this petition](#)

6,015,562 signatures

[Show on a map](#)

100,000

Opening politics to direct citizen participation is a double-edged operation that aligns the communicative infrastructures with the governmental executive political sphere of participatory citizenship.



European
Citizens'
Initiative



Russia has opened to participatory spaces (Demushina, 2016).

Currently three active portals link citizens direct participation with the legislative process:

<https://www.roi.ru/>

The Russian Public Initiative allows citizen legislative initiatives on federal, regional and municipal levels.

RF N 183, 2013.

Expert group for cases >100k

Established 2012

<https://петиция-президенту.пф/>

First, the Presidential website collects initiatives at a federal level.

Does not require personal identification.

Success depends on Parliamentary action.

Established 2007

<https://www.change.org/>

The third platform Change.org is currently the most active with more than 5000 petitions a year.

Does not require personal identification.

Success depends on Parliamentary action.

Established 2007



Democracy ?

Public Space // Öffentlichkeit (Hannah Arendt).
Public Sphere (Habermas)

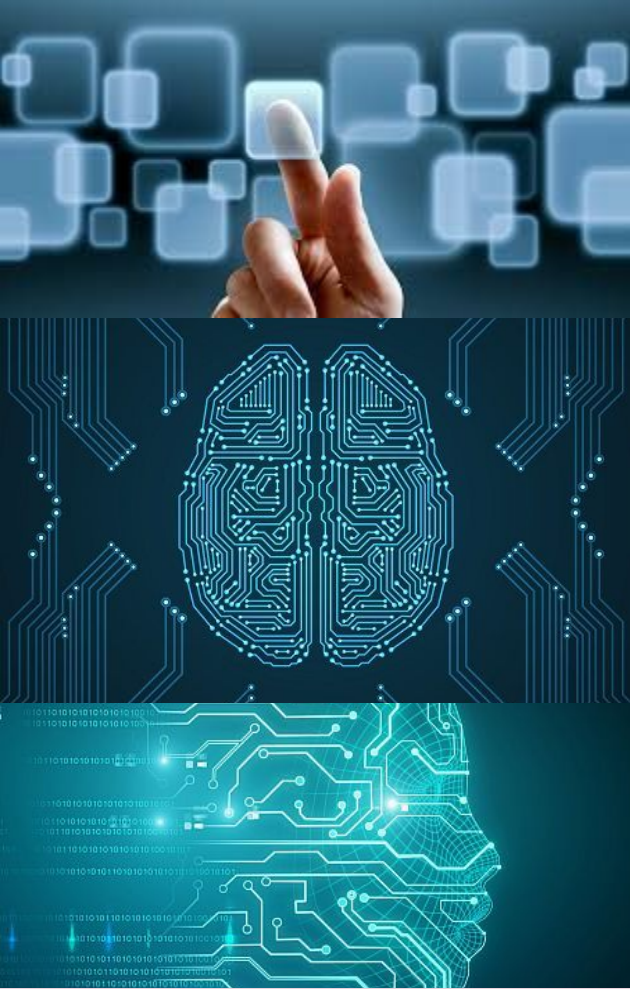
Conditions of possibility for public discussion.

“Democracy has to be grounded on a notion of open and accessible **communicative spaces** that enable debate negotiation struggle and (dis)agreement”

(Philip Schlesinger, 1999)

Governance of communicative spaces

The political implications of spatial and social (in)justice. The circuits across which communication flows, and the notion of a shared open (accessible) area.



Governing Communicative spaces: Meta-Interfaces (interface of interfaces)

“The promise to deliver interaction spaces where apps, smart objects, and mobile computers blend flawlessly into the environment **is a promise to deliver a smart, networked, participatory, and open future”** (C.U. Andersen & S. Bro Pold. 2018, p.10)

But,

the new platforms of a cultural metainterface are built on a capitalization of net culture. (...) the metainterface industry is based on a “semio-capitalism” that involves also consumption. What people look at, read, listen to, and so on, becomes data that can be used to anticipate user behaviour.

Governing Communicative spaces: Meta-Interfaces (interface of interfaces)



In other words, (...) **the metainterface is a loss of ownership and privacy.** This is of political importance, but it also relates to what writing and reading is and becomes, as a partly nonhuman activity.

“The interface itself is no longer a consumer product that can be bought or sold in a traditional sense but is a networked streaming service that is financed by the capturing and inscription of user behaviour”

(C.U. Andersen & S. Bro Pold. 2018, p.12)

What is our goal?

Analyse the digital citizen initiative platforms as
meta-interfaces and Communicative Spaces

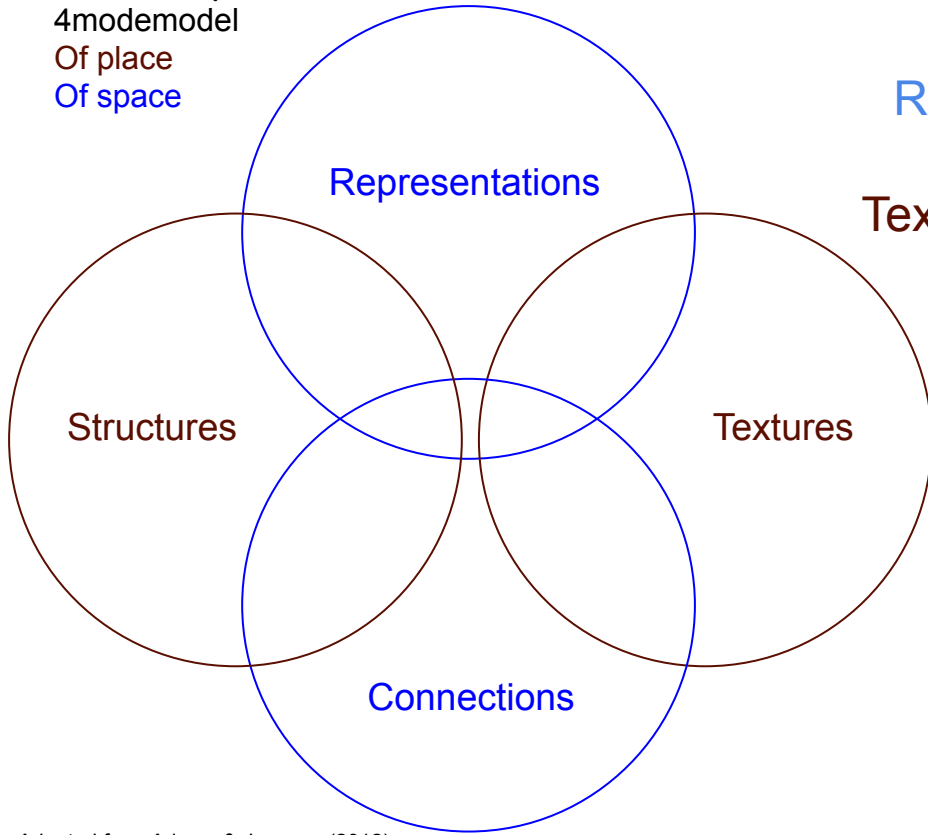
(developing/testing the model)

Analysis of the Communicative spaces

4model

Of place

Of space



Representations: multiple conflicting emerging understandings and narratives.

Textures: the symbolic load of the place on their own alters the conditions of the debate.

Structures: Inequalities and power relations between those (un)able to connect.

Connections: the imaginary territory of the possibilities of interaction.

Adapted from Adams & Jansson (2012)
In Rodriguez-Amat & Brantner (2016)

Representations (and agency)



How are the platforms described (by third parties), used (by participants); and how do they work (as agents/actors) to shape the (conflicting) understandings of the public debate ?



Questions to ask:

a) What are the prevalent contents and the recurrent topics, what is understood as politically relevant? (Narratives);

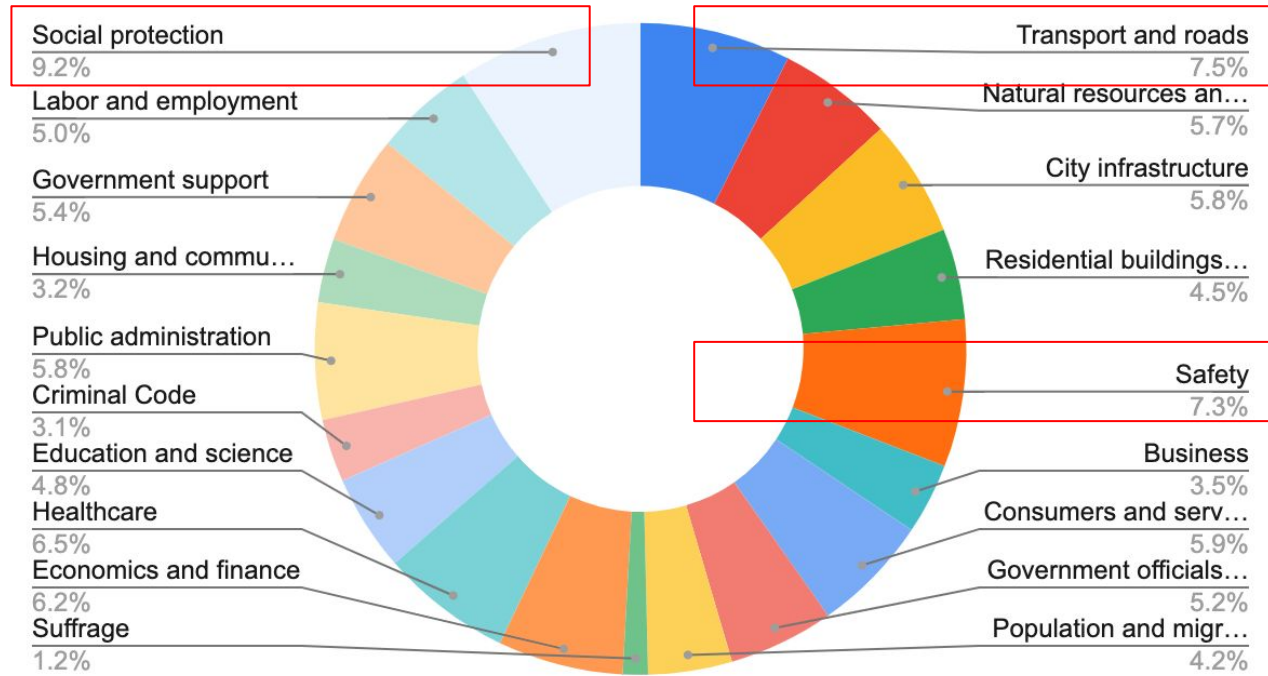
b) What types of actors do the platforms distinguish? (Actors);

c) How much participation had the petitions? What is the success rate? (Diffusion and reach).

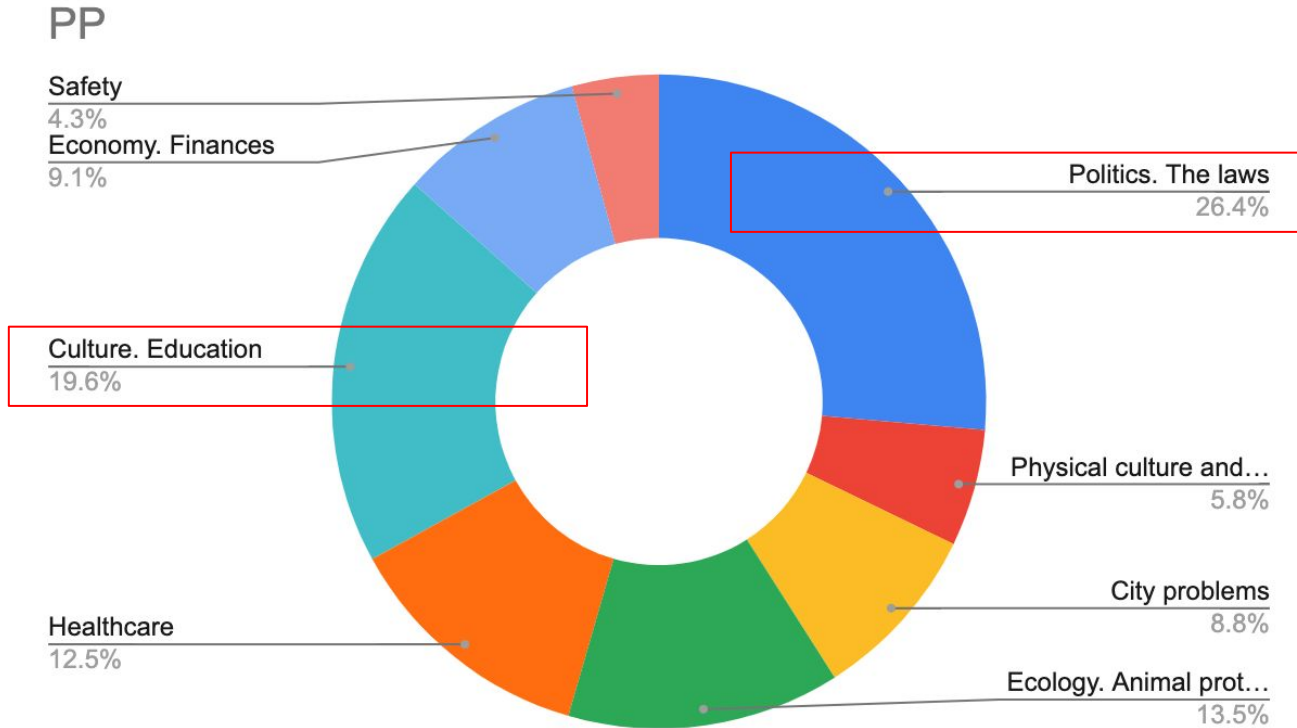


Representations

ROI

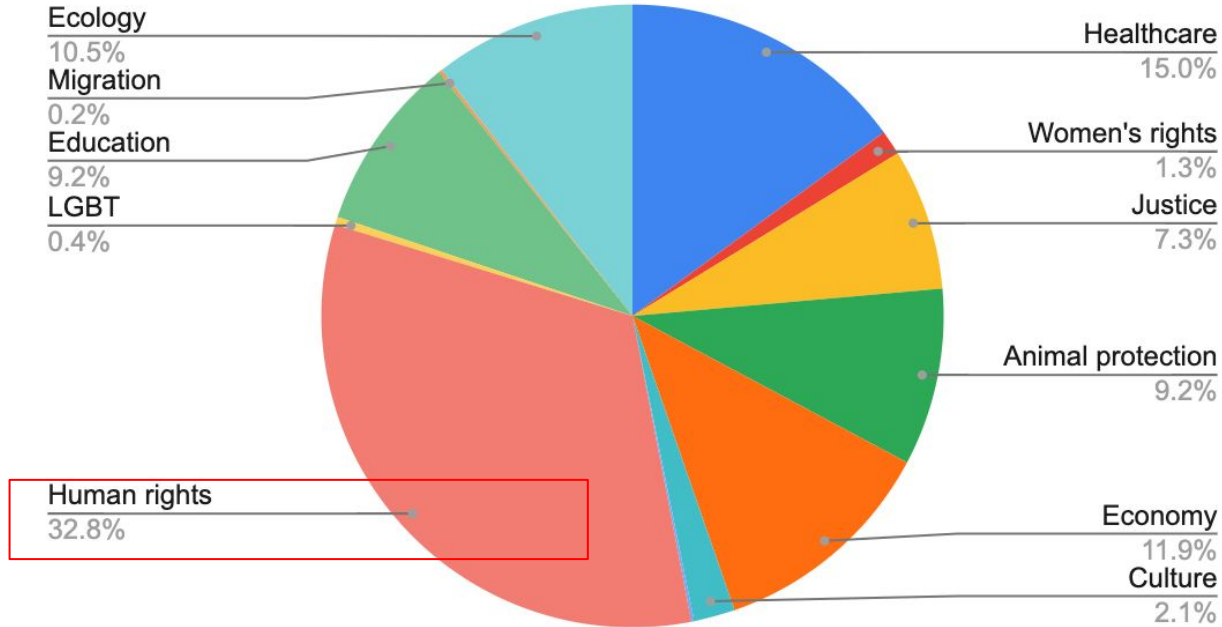


Representations



Representations

Change.org



Textures



The symbolic charge of the site in which interactions happen. Some precedents identified as textures include the communicative value of places on their own.

Questions to ask:



d) Who owns the platform and where is this platform hosted? (Ownership);

e) When was it established and why? (Symbolic capital);

f) What ideological or political attributes does the platform have? (Attributes).




Textures




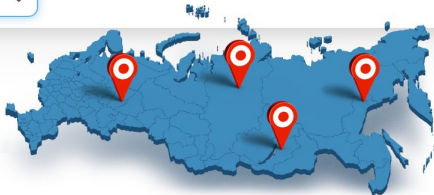
<i>Ownership</i>	<i>Symbolic Capital</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Non-profit organisation.- Private but known owner (linked to the Gov-t)	Established for Putin's presidential campaign. (sign of Internet Freedom)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Hosted in presidential website (no longer connected to it)	Product of Medvedev's liberalisation agenda
Private organisation, servers in the USA	Links to Russian Gov-t not known

ROI

Регион не определен ▾

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Мобильное приложение ROI, предустановленное в каждый продаваемый мобильный телефон	последний голос в 15:13:08	Отменить закон, запрещающий оставлять автомобиль ближе 200 м от берега реки или водоема	последний голос в 15:13:07
Уровень инициативы: Федеральный Всего 178 голосов		Уровень инициативы: Федеральный Всего 496 голосов	
Пенсии чиновникам сделать зависимыми от размера средней пенсии по России	последний голос в 15:13:01	Создать 40 миллионов рабочих бюджетных мест	последний голос в 15:12:46
Уровень инициативы: Федеральный		Уровень инициативы: Федеральный	



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ПРЕЗИДЕНТУ

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Сайт петиций Президенту России Владимиру волнующей вас теме. После проверки модели выразить свою точку зрения, когда другие воз

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286 784 556 человек уже подключились. [Победы каждый день.](#)

Создать петицию

ПОБЕДА

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ПОСОБИЕ
ЛОУ



С 1 июля пособие по уходу за ребенком-инвалидом будет увеличено

769 тысяч человек поддержали родителей детей-

Structures



What kinds of (communicative) inequalities do the platforms set ?
(un)equal access, barriers, transparency, direction and channeling of information

Questions to ask:



g) What mechanisms are there to disable or enable participation to the citizens? Are the contents moderated? (Access and Moderation);

h) What data will be collected from the participants? (Privacy and Transparency).



Structures



<i>Access and Moderation</i>	<i>Privacy and Transparency</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Russian language, Version for visually impaired. Registration through Russian e-government system (18+) - Petitions published after moderation (up to two months) - Singular votes collected for a year, a vote is permitted once 	<p>Login through the system of e-government</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Russian Language - No registration required for voting: vote permitted every 24h with no log-in - Petitions pre-moderated, comments not 	<p>Comments after login from 19 social platforms</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many Languages - Registration required - Author can chose vote target - Petitions not pre-moderated 	<p>Login with Google and Facebook accounts (asks for photo when publishing)</p>

Connections

What theoretical possibilities of interaction do the platforms allow? What factors are there that multiply the spread of connections (social media sharing, media coverage, social relevance, timeliness/historicity...)



No engagement facilities on platform.



Free online legal consultations/support












Concealed sharing options (through request of donation)

Questions to ask:

- i) Does the platform facilitate the sharing of the initiative across social media platforms? (Shareability);*
- j) Does the platform incorporate spaces of participation (such as comments, support, fundraising)? (Engagement).*

Connections - Shareability

							other
	X	X	X				
	X	X	X	X	X	X	
	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Conclusions

- Platforms are interfaces planted as a way of sorting the gap between the society and government.
- They can be considered as communicative spaces.
- The model is a useful qualitative tool (can be further developed).
- The analysis has shown that the three platforms are not neutral.
- All three platforms appear disconnected and limited in their capacity of fulfilling their expected role.
- The signs suggest that the platforms were never established as a real instrument of political participation, but rather as one-directional interfaces from power.



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