

DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP – A CONCEPTUAL AND PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. *The modern global society is marked by the dominant effect of information technologies that produce fundamental changes in all segments of life. The impact of new media and the globalization process lead to changes on such a large scale that it could be said that we are dealing with a new type of society and culture. In the political sphere, as a result of desovereignization of countries, globalization and informatization processes new forms of citizenship emerge that are grounded in digital identity and new cultural practices. One of the key political actors in this contemporaneity is a digital citizen. The aim of this paper is to examine the concept of a digital citizen in the context of current changes permeating contemporary society and culture. In order to abstract key characteristics of this form of citizenship, it is essential to consider the transformation of the traditional concept of a citizen in digital society and culture, that is, in the new context which offers alternative ways of exercising civil rights and duties. We outlined dominant approaches in conceptualizing digital citizenship in social sciences and particularly pointed to the issue of polarization of normative and radical models of digital citizenship, in addition to the phenomenon of digital democracy. It appears that digital citizenship on the one hand provides an effective alternative to different institutional political processes (e-democracy, e-government or e-voting), while on the other, it offers the potential to practice one's political activism, to be better informed and to think critically about political issues.*

Key words: *Digital culture, citizen, digital citizen, digital democracy, new media.*

1. DIGITAL SOCIETY AND CULTURE

Under the influence of new media, the culture of modern society is transformed to such an extent that it could be said that we are dealing with a new type of culture - digital culture or cyberculture. As emphasized by Castells (2000), modern society is undergoing

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a transition to information society. The communication system society is using is intertwined with virtuality to such an extent that the line between these two worlds is disappearing, and the culture of real virtuality is created. On the other hand, there is also another, narrower type of culture of “Internet creators” (Castells 2003, 47) which is created in virtual space by transmitting the cultural pattern from “offline” culture to the Internet which comprises four layers: technical and meritocratic culture, hacker culture, virtual and communitarian culture and entrepreneurship culture. According to Gere (Gir 2011), digital culture is a type of culture created through a specific way of life focused on new technologies, as indicated by the term “digital” which refers to labelling discrete values, is used in technical science and is a synonym for electronic binary computers. Despite the fact that the term was initially used in the field of technical science, to speak about something digital nowadays is to “speak about a wide range of uses and forms of media enabled by digital technology, [...] in addition to other cultural and artistic responses to omnipresence of digital technology, such as cyberpunk novels and films, techno and post-pop music, “new typography”, net.art, etc.” (Gir 2011, 17, authors’ translation). While the use of the term “digital” refers to the technological aspect of the new phenomenon, the term “cyber” comes from fiction, from the cyberpunk genre, to be more precise. Cyberpunk first appeared in the novel by W. Gibson, “Neuromancer” from 1984, which would start the evolution of this genre in literature and art.¹ Bell (2007, 2) emphasizes that the use of the term “cyber” is an expression of *technostalgia*, of its own kind. “Cyberspace: it sounds like the future was supposed to be” (Bell 2007, 2). Contrary to Bell’s perception of nostalgia about the future, Kellner notes that cyberpunk is an image of capitalism with no boundaries in which megacorporations have absolute control, and that this is the literature intended for “jaded and satiated representatives of the computer and media age” (Kelner 2004, 498–499, authors’ translation).

It can be observed that these three terms: digital culture, cyberculture and real virtuality culture involve an interaction between society and new technologies, including new forms of sociality created along the way. On the other hand, Castell’s “Internet creator culture” or virtual culture is limited to the field of the Internet; it is a “kind of an Esperanto culture” (Robins & Webster 2002, 242), beyond space and time, which exists only in real time. Therefore, a narrow understanding of virtual culture may be limited to the culture of virtual space which includes all forms of communication, interactions and activities taking place on the worldwide web, including virtual reality. Virtual reality is a computer-generated three-dimensional audio-visual simulation of reality (Bell 2007, 19).

It is then legitimate to ask if modern age is a period of total dominance of (new) media over social life. As Castells puts it: “[...] a media has become so comprehensive, diverse and flexible that it absorbs the entire past, present and future human experience into the one and the same multimedia text – as in a single point of universe which Jorge Luis Borges termed *Aleph*” (Castells 2000, 400). Modification and even the deconstruction of meaning in modern society, which is becoming fast-paced thanks to the influence of the media, is particularly discussed in the works of postmodern authors. Poster (2012, 546) highlights that the action of media creates simulation culture where

¹ Cyberspace was described in the iconic quote from this novel: “Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding...” (Gibson according to Gir 2011, 182).

the identity and referentiality of the original is transformed, whereas Baudrillard (Bodrijar 1998) gives the new media the role of an ultimate perpetrator of “a perfect crime” – the destruction of reality. However, it is important to note that digital and virtual culture are dialectically interconnected – on the one hand, virtual culture is formed based on the user’s cultural patterns acquired in the offline world, while on the other hand, new social and cultural forms that are created in virtuality affect the real world. As suggested by Jones and Kucker (2000, 213), the Internet creates virtual culture; however this culture cannot, at least not for now, be separated from real life. Bell (Bell 2001) believes that making a distinction between cyberspace and cyberculture is a false dichotomy, since it is impossible to consider cyberspace outside of its social and cultural context. Sociological analysis of new media should not overstress their respective independence and ignore relevant problems of modern society stemming from the material sphere. Castells examines the problem of *digital global division*, by analysing three dimensions of inequality: having a computer and access to the Internet, the possibility to use the Internet, and the possibility of education via the Internet (Castells 2003, 272–284). Based on empirical analysis, the author concludes that digital division, although sharp in the beginning, declines when it comes to the first dimension, whereas it is still present in case of the other two dimensions. The possibility of education on the Internet is a particularly important element of global inequality as it increases the impact of class, gender and racial differences.

To conclude, an examination of new forms of culture should not deviate too much from its material roots that are oftentimes the source of new forms of inequality. Bell (2007) proposes a useful distinction between dimensions of cyberculture: a) the material aspect that includes evolution of new technologies and the area of cyberspace global effects which can be termed political economy of the cyberspace; b) the symbolic aspect which includes analysing the narrative of new technologies, their development and consequences such as cyberpunk and pop culture; c) the empirical aspect that includes interacting with new technologies in the course of which material and symbolic elements of cyberculture are merged, an aspect which is particularly present in computer-mediated communication (CMC). CMC is becoming more valuable with the development of new technologies and enriched communication which is no longer limited to text alone². One of the recent approaches in CMC study highlights the “hyperpersonal” aspect which indicates that in certain situations, CMC is socially more desirable than face-to-face communication, such as communication between people on different hierarchical levels, where the lack of signals provided by the social context is an extenuating feature (Jones & Kucker 2000, 216).

A notable contribution made by the Internet is seen in the establishment of virtual communities that can compensate for the loss of intimacy in traditional communities arising from the industrialization, urbanization and globalization in modern society. Studies show that the potential of online communities comes from two sources: open access and shared interests, which do not indicate maintaining emotional intimacy similar to that in traditional communities (Jones 2001, 34; Watson 2001, 168). In other words, communication over social media it is more likely to form weak than strong connections. Although virtual communities have proved to be quite different from traditional ones, and

² Emojis and initialisms flow from the sphere of the Internet into the culture of the offline world and are even listed in dictionaries: for example, the Oxford Dictionary in 2015 crowned the word emoji word of the year: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/11/17/for-first-time-ever-an-emoji-is-crowned-oxford-dictionaries-word-of-the-year/>

that it is highly unlikely that the Internet “will recreate the community *we once knew*” (Jones 2001, 21), virtual communities have a great potential to connect individuals in order for them to pursue shared interests, primarily in the field of politics.

In addition to digital inequality, the virtual sphere is not exempt from problems. The increased presence of *digital pollution*, that is, viruses and spam, leads to their normalization as associated consequences of CMC (Parrika & Sampson 2009, 3). As pointed out by Robins and Webster (2002, 242), virtual knowledge is self-referential as it is valorised only within cyberculture. Furthermore, in virtuality, knowledge is formulated through technocultural discourse as an expression of ideology of corporate globalization and “capitalism without conflict” (Robins & Webster 2002, 241). However, new media have a great potential to create change in society. Lull (2000, 3) notes that the Internet does not operate as a technological device, but as a means of communication, which grants users a symbolic power, eroding the structures of power and dominance in all segments of life: politics, economy and culture.

2. THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF CITIZENSHIP

A citizen is one of the most dynamic concepts in both political history and social thought. Its meaning underwent numerous historic and theoretical transformations, and to the present day a citizen has been understood and defined differently as part of theoretical models and within the framework of various (existing) political systems. The right to citizenship, according to Hanna Arendt (Arendt 1998), is a fundamental and universal human right, as it is a predecessor to all other (specific) rights of someone living in a state. From this perspective, citizenship is a bond between an individual and the state; hence, unless an individual is not enveloped with citizenship status, he does not exist, as far as the state is concerned. This can further be elaborated with the assumption that every man is necessarily a political being, and that citizenship is a mechanism by way of which this bond (between an individual and a political community) is achieved. The foregoing could be summarised into the thought that citizenship is a collection of procedural rules that make an individual a part of a political order (Podunavac 2001, 20).³

The evolution of citizenship can be traced back to ancient times and the classical age, that is, the rise of the Ancient Greek and Ancient Rome polis (Božilović 2014). Relationship patterns of that time between members of the polis and the state through a collection of human rights and duties laid the foundations of citizenship, and hence some thinkers believe that up until the 18th century very little novelty had been introduced into the concept of citizenship. The classical concept of citizenship in theoretical terms is most elaborated in Aristotle’s “Politics”, where a series of demands, formal and ethical alike, need to be met before citizenship can be achieved. Therefore, not just any person can be a citizen in this restrictive point of view proposed by Aristotle. Rather this is a small number of people, namely: free people (those who are not slaves), of male gender, owning a household and people employed in this household (based on which they are spared from duties in the world of material production) and who, in addition to all this,

³ Bryan Turner defines the term citizenship as follows: “Citizenship can be defined as a collection of rights and obligations which give individual a formal legal identity; these legal rights and obligations have been put together historically as sets of social institutions, such as the jury system, parliaments and welfare states” (Turner 2000, 131).

have proven their patriotic devotion to the polis through their status of a warrior/soldier (Aristotel 1970).⁴

Throughout history, citizenship status will not be this exclusively coloured as in the thought tradition proposed by Aristotle. Instead it will acquire a more liberal and more inclusive character. The modern foundation of the concept of citizenship was laid in the light of changes brought by the new age when theoretical debate about citizenship was rekindled. Liberalism dating from the new ages, emerges, so to speak, as an emancipatory school of thought which, through the elaboration of natural rights and proving the sovereignty of peoples, sees the citizen as a creator and the basis of a political community. Liberalism entails the idea that a citizen is the one who, through his formal and legal membership in the state, enjoys a collection of certain rights, which is why civic identity is here primarily understood in legal and formal terms, rather than political terms; citizenship is less of a collective and political mechanism and more of an individual and economic activity provided by the state (Podunavac 2001, 100). Therefore, the only supreme authority for liberals is the state seen as a legal mechanism enforcing general social rules.⁵

In terms of identity, after the revolutions, that is, as early as the 19th century, national identity gradually became a predominant connective tissue for citizens, setting aside all other particular identities of community members. It can therefore be said that from thereafter citizenship developed as national citizenship, and as such became a criterion for the allocation of resources and the basis of social solidarity. Three basic segments of life through which the citizen expresses his loyalty to political community (now a national state) are the family, labour, and the army, according to which three citizenship figures can be identified: that of a parent-citizen, worker-citizen and soldier-citizen (Turner 2000, 138). Inclusiveness of the new concept is primarily seen in the fact that this concept is now open for those groups that were excluded from the sphere of rights in all earlier citizenship traditions. Isin (2009, 375) sees such inclusiveness in the fact that ownership status (land) is no longer a criterion for inclusion, whereas women also become at least formally recognized as citizens (although the inclusion process in Western societies will reach deep into 20th century and is still ongoing).

The most representative 20th century theory which is a reflection of a society framed by a strong national state is the theory of citizenship by T. H. Marshall (1950). From his point of view, citizenship is a mechanism aimed at integrating individuals into society and strengthening the national state (see: Božilović 2014).⁶ For emphasizing the principle of nationality, Marshall was subject to a lot of criticism claiming that a concept of citizenship based on a national and state principle is exclusivist and that it leaves out a

⁴ Aristotle's considerations of the concept of citizenship indicate that the study of this phenomenon does not only involve consideration of who a citizen is, but also raises the question of who a citizen should be, which takes us from descriptive to normative ground (that of values and ethics).

⁵ The response to the liberal conception comes from an opposing philosophy – communitarianism of the 20th century. The basic idea of communitarianism is a conception that the collective identity is primary and overriding in a political community and as such is the basic connecting thread between individuals and groups. While liberalism, in the case of citizenship, focuses on rights, communitarianism focuses on duties (see: Božilović 2020).

⁶ In order to minimize social inequalities that destroy social tissue, the pattern of citizenship should be such that it builds a three-part system of civil, political and social rights that will include the traditionally marginalized group of the poor (this being the working class in industrial society) (more on this in Marshall, 1950). Therefore, it can be said that through his theoretical triad, Marshall proposes such a concept of citizenship he believes could be the key mechanism for achieving social justice.

great number of people from the segment of civil rights, making them non-citizens. National identity is too narrow a concept and the modern national state thus becomes hostile to refugees, migrants, minorities and other categories of people deprived of legal status, and all civil rights along with it. Criticism of this type was most consistently put forward from the perspective of civic republicanism. According to this viewpoint, each member of society should have the right to participate in political community, which should be granted to him by virtue of citizenship, regardless of his nationality. Civic identity overrides national identity and is shaped by participation and debate in the public sphere. Therefore, the public sphere is the basic ground for the “production” of citizens, civic virtue and ultimately, political community, according to civic republicanism.

That such essentialist criticism of the national concept of citizenship and its narrow framework proved justified was confirmed by globalizing social processes dating back to the 1980s. Citizenship focused on class inequality alone is questionable in the late 20th and early 21st century where conflicts are more often than not an expression of culture and identity (sexual identity, gay and lesbian rights, gender equality, aboriginality, environmental issues, etc.) (Turner 2000, 133). From these new identity-related practices demands for new civil rights arise for which the traditional concept is considered to be too narrow (Božilović 2012; Božilović 2017). Feminist, sexual, environmental, multicultural, minority and many other concepts are an expression of a new school of thought in the theory of citizenship. In addition to shifting conflicts to the ground of culture and identity, territorial borders of modern society are transformed as well, which brings in new considerations on the scope of citizenship validity, which is broader or narrower than the national state and speaks in favour of its desovereignization. This is what concepts of citizenship such as transnational, postnational, mobile, European, cosmopolitan, urban, etc. deal with. Relativization of spatial validity and new spatial boundaries of modern society are an introduction to the topic of digital society and culture, as a whole new world of social existence, within which the phenomenon of digital citizenship is found.

3. THE DIGITAL CITIZEN

As stated above, new forms of citizenship in modern society are formed in the context of globalization, multiculturalism and digitalization (Klaus & Lünenborg 2014, 197) and can thus be considered to be, in a broader sense, types of the so-called cultural citizenship, defined as:

Cultural citizenship is an essential dimension of citizenship in media society and unfolds under the conditions of unequal power relations. It entails all those cultural practices that allow competent participation in society and includes the rights to be represented and to speak actively. Media as a particular form of cultural production is both an engine and an actor in the processes of self-making and being-made, in which people acquire their individual, group-specific and social identities (Klaus & Lünenborg 2014, 204).

In this sense, digitalization of society and culture creates a whole new context in which citizenship is practised; therefore, its meaning is significantly transformed compared to the traditional conceptions mentioned above. As citizens, individuals no longer actualize themselves only within geographical territorial units (national states, supranational institutions and local levels) but also within digital space which contains numerous (digital) communities.

Therefore, it can be said that digital citizenship is a new kind of connection between an individual and the community which is materialized in the virtual/digital space. It is clear that it does not do away with traditional civic practices in the so-called offline world, it is rather a type of novelty, a supplement or an extension to human existence and traditional civic practices. The fact of the matter is that the physical (material) and digital space nowadays are deeply intertwined and that all our experiences take place in both, which is why some authors believe that dividing space into online and offline is inconsequential (Babović, Bajčeta, Veličković, Petrović, Stefanović, Cvejić 2017, 4).

De Moraes and De Andrade (2015) believe that the question should be posed about *who* the digital citizen actually is, in terms of ontology. The authors note that this is a hybrid being, formed as a result of interaction between digital and physical elements in the creation of functional identity. With the use of the Internet, users (ID) create a virtual environment and with time (t) their identity is also digitalized (e-ID) and changed under the influence of this new environment (Figure 1). This process includes three key elements: a) the absence of detachment from new technologies, b) spontaneity of development in a dual context; and c) mediation of new technologies in construction of identity (De Moraes & De Andrade 2015, 11). The newly created identity incorporates both physical and digital elements into a single identity, thus transcending the concepts of a cyborg or an avatar. These hybrid beings achieve the role of the citizen by reinterpreting information through both aspects of identity:

Where they act, as does any individual acting in any environment, the hybrid being reinterprets the dynamics of society through the lens of both localized and globalized contexts where national borders become less significant on one hand, but on the other hand, both localized contexts (i.e. the city, the home – namely the more intimate levels of the classical Greek ideas of economy), as well as globalized context (the global environment as precipitated by digital citizenship), inform participation in the decisions and directions of society (De Moraes & De Andrade 2015, 13).

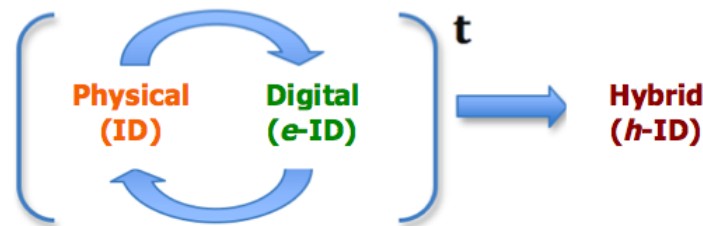


Fig. 1 Creation of hybrid identity in interaction between the physical and the digital (De Moraes & De Andrade 2015, 12)

As the digital citizen is a relatively new concept, there are still inconsistencies regarding its definition. In some views, a digital citizen is one who uses the Internet daily and effectively (Mossberger, Tolbert & McNeal 2008, 1). However, the question arises of whether it is enough for someone to just use the Internet in order to exercise their rights and duties pertaining to digital citizenship, since not every use of the Internet is necessarily political. Certain views focus on characteristics of Internet use that are specific and desirable for a digital citizen, particularly with the development of subjects and curricula for acquiring these skills and knowledge through education. According to one of the most influential such

definitions, digital citizenship “[...] can be described as the norms of appropriate, responsible behaviour with regard to technology use“ (Ribble & Bailey 2007, 10) and includes nine elements: a) digital access, b) digital commerce, c) digital communication, d) digital literacy, e) digital etiquette, f) digital law, g) digital rights, h) digital health and wellness, and i) digital security.

Gleason and Gillern (2018, 201–202) outline the following approaches as the most prevalent in the study of digital citizenship: a) the normative approach which emphasizes rights and duties in the context of ethical and safe use of the Internet, b) the participatory approach which stresses inequality in the possibility of access, c) connecting online and offline participation which empower one another, and d) creating new forms of political participation through online interaction and communication.

A study of 57 papers on digital citizenship published between 2003 and 2014 in the field of political science, education, and communicology identified four concepts of digital citizenship (Choi 2016): a) digital citizenship as ethics which entails safe and responsible use of the Internet; b) digital citizenship as digital literacy which regards the possibility to access the Internet, the knowledge and skills needed to use Internet services, and critical assessment of the reliability and quality of online content; c) digital citizenship as participation/engagement on micro and macro levels (to deal with socially relevant political issues and interest-driven use that is not necessarily political in itself; and d) digital citizenship as critical resistance which is close to and often intertwined with participation but is more creative and non-hierarchical. Of the forms above, the concept of critical resistance appears least frequently, in only 3 papers, whereas in the field of participation since 2009 there has been a dominant orientation towards individualized forms of participation (Choi 2016, 19).

Although concepts of digital citizenship that emphasize a critical attitude and active engagement in politics by using the Internet have appeared only recently and are still not that prevalent, this research approach is highly significant. As initially stressed, despite seeming independence, virtuality is based on material reality and hence it reflects social inequalities and other social problems. Thus, even the highest knowledge of hardware, software or Internet platforms serves no purpose unless it is accompanied by a critical attitude to both information available in virtual space and real-life events in a society. Schou & Hjelholt (2018) note that in recent research (although not to a sufficient extent) there is a shift in conceptualizing digital citizenship in the social and historic context with a focus on examining power and the relationship with the state apparatus. They go on to emphasize the necessity of abandoning the fixed model of the role and the status of the digital citizen and move towards a more fluid concept of its (re)construction in one society. Criticism of the normative and instrumental approach to digital citizenship leads to the formation of a new concept of *radical digital citizenship* defined as: “[...] process by which individuals and groups committed to social justice critically analyse the social, political and economic consequences of digital technologies in everyday life and collectively deliberate and take action to build alternative and emancipatory technologies and technological practices” (Emejulu & McGregor 2019, 140). These authors indicate that the digital cannot become a mask covering actual inequalities and that digital citizenship cannot be reduced to digital literacy. On the contrary, radical digital citizenship should include a critical attitude towards the consequences of technology and taking action towards the alternative emancipatory ways in which it is used.

4. DIGITAL CIVIC PRACTICES

Forms of digital civic practices are varied, as the so-called online space opens up many possibilities to “practice” citizenship. Thus, an individual as a citizen using modern technologies nowadays can exercise his economic, political or cultural rights and duties ranging from administrative procedures and consumption, to rights pertaining to healthcare and the education system, but can also resort to civic activism in the sphere of culture and politics alike. Digitalization of political practices introduces new concepts, such as *cyber-democracy* or *digital democracy* that can be defined “...as the pursuit and the practice of democracy in whatever view using digital media in online and offline political communication” (van Dijk 2013). Thus, in a broader sense, digital democratic practices may include a range of activities from civic-administrative activities (e-government) all the way to various forms of digital political activism on online platforms and social networks that can lead to rebellion or even revolution. In a narrower sense, digital democracy is conceptualized through the phenomenon of e-parliament and e-voting.

Firstly, regarding the digitalization of administrative practices, they can be classified under the term e-government which aims at a more effective communication between (local or national) governments and citizens and also a greater degree of transparency in the governing process. This is a new concept of government which no longer takes place only in government offices, but thanks to the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) becomes more accessible to the client (citizen) and enables him to satisfy his needs in a quicker and simpler way. Instead of offices, in front of city halls and other local institutions, kiosks or smart facilities are installed, and often all administrative procedures can be completed from home using a personal computer (Kingham 2003). In addition, it is believed that with the digitalization of government costs are reduced, as is the possibility of abuse and corruptive practices.

Electronic voting is a new form of voting practised in various parts of the world. This is a voting process in local or national elections using digital technologies, meaning it is possible to access this procedure remotely, most commonly from home. Electronic voting generally facilitates the voting process, primarily as this action takes a citizen less time than it normally does. It is particularly significant for people with disabilities or generally citizens who move with difficulty, but also for citizens living in locations that are distant from the voting polls. Another benefit of such voting is that the costs of voting organization are reduced, as it is necessary to engage fewer people for monitoring, ballot counting and other activities that are included in the organization of elections in the normal course of voting (Trechsel, Kucherenko, Silva & Gasser 2016; <https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/how-electronic-voting-works/>).

Nonetheless, there are some negative aspects of e-voting. Like with traditional voting, in e-voting there is a risk of many abuses and ballot manipulation, and consequently result rigging. In addition to hacking attempts that can affect the results and alter them, the validity of a voter’s identity is brought into question and the potential risk of other people voting on someone’s behalf is also noted. From a sociological perspective, e-voting may put certain social groups in an unequal position, since modern technologies are not available to everyone and this type of political decision-making may deepen the gap between lower and higher social classes, that is, those that have or do not have digital resources (Oostveen & Besselaar, 2003).

However, as democracy is a constant process and cannot be reduced to the act of voting in the elections, in addition to e-voting, digital democracy is shaped by other practices by

way of which citizens can participate in decision-making in a political community on a local or national level. Thus, worldwide, the number of websites launched by local and national political bodies is increasing and their aim is to mobilize citizens to participate in the discussion on issues of public interest. Online surveys are a frequently used vehicle for such activities, and an even more interesting form of new democracy is the establishment of digital parliaments where discussions and debates take place, as well as voting on the proposals put forward and crystallized in such democratic ambiance. The deliberation process involves different participants, from citizens, politicians, organizations of civil society and media which makes the entire political communication complete and public. Digitalization of democratic negotiations is usually seen in a positive light, as it is believed that this may strengthen the direct and participatory form of democracy. The use of digital technologies weakens or completely obliterates physical distance, and thus spatial distance stops being an obstacle for citizens to participate in the deliberation process on important social issues. Furthermore, ICTs enable citizens to be not mere “voters”, and thus exhaust their civic and democratic potential by voting in the elections, but to participate in the decision-making process and the creation of public policies primarily in the local community. Naturally, in order for the new formula for direct digital democracy to come alive, it is necessary to achieve other conditions, to first and foremost shake the citizens out of their indifference and interest them in issues significant for the community they live in, which is not to be neglected (Kingham 2003, 5).

In Serbia an initiative was also launched to introduce e-parliament in order to make the services and information provided by local governments more accessible to citizens. For this purpose, software was developed and it is available to all local governments for free. It is a digital platform consisting of two parts, one intended to electronically manage documents, while the other is derived from an open data approach and is aimed at making parliamentary documents (audio, video, text) accessible to the interested public.⁷ Thanks to the introduction of e-parliament, all sessions of local governments can be watched live or at a later time, as recordings are available on official websites. This opens up the possibility of making the work of the most significant institution of democracy more transparent, establishing a direct connection between citizens and their local representatives, and strengthening the monitoring function of the public over the parliament, which is a prerequisite for full democracy.

Naturally, all instances of digital democracy mentioned here are still sporadic and not widely spread. Globally speaking, e-voting has not completely come to life even in countries with developed democracy, mostly because of the shortcomings it is faulted for (see <https://www.pandasecurity.com/mediacenter/news/electronic-voting-may-not-be-100-secure-but-neither-traditional-voting/>). For example, 6% of world countries used to have e-voting, but it was revoked over time, and it is not used at all in 57% of world countries. According to data from 2015, e-voting is actively used in 21% of world countries, on either a national or local level, or both (<https://www.idea.int/news-media/media/use-e-voting-around-world>). Nevertheless, if we take into account that the future of society lies in digitalization, it follows that the future of democracy lies in digital democracy. This claim becomes particularly valid knowing that the generations to come who will be

⁷ In addition to connecting the public to the local parliament and administrative bodies in this way, the concept of e-parliament is valuable as it saves time and speeds up procedures, cuts costs, particularly the money spent on paper, fuel, electricity, and other human and material resources (<https://www.rs.undp.org/content/serbia/sr/home/presscenter/articles/2017/10/30/digitalni-lokalni-parlamenti-za-veu-efikasnost--utedu-resursa-i-.html>).

tailoring our future have lived with technology since they were born, which is why they are called digital natives.

CONCLUSION

The breakthrough of ICTs has led to the digitalization of social life,⁸ which enriched social theory in the sense that new concepts and notions were introduced. On the one hand, cyberspace opens up a whole new field of cultural practices and interactions. It creates a new kind of culture which is significant in itself, while on the other hand these patterns transform everyday life of users and the functioning of different social spheres. New forms of digital and virtual sociality, social networks and virtual communities have a great potential for forming and expressing digital identity, organizing social groups and carrying out numerous social processes. This potential is particularly significant for the political arena, mobilization of citizens for political activism, and formulating alternative ways of holding elections and other activities in a state.

As digitalization has impacted the area of civic practices significantly, there is more talk of a new type of citizen – the digital citizen. The paper showed that this is a new form of citizenship which, in a digital context, becomes an extension of a sort, a complement to the existing, traditional forms of citizenship. This means that the so-called offline civic practices are in no way revoked, but rather, an online space enabled new ways for an individual to express himself as a citizen. E-democracy, e-government and e-voting are just some examples of how political life is transformed in a digitalized framework. Moreover, in addition to institutional ways in which digital space is used to conduct political processes, the Internet is becoming a place where civic initiatives are launched, and it also acts as a vehicle for their organization, which can be the solution to the problem of political (non)engagement of citizens in the modern age. Cyberspace nowadays is a relevant field where political issues are discussed, and constitutes a significant factor in public opinion, with virtual groups and communities that enable connecting different people over common political goals, and the formation of causes and movements “from below”.

However, although the concept of the digital citizen is not rare in social study, it still appears to be insufficiently defined and rather fluid, which, can, to an extent, be interpreted as a result of manifold meanings that are attributed to the term citizen in general. On the other hand, it is a fact that the digital citizen as a concept is content-rich and pregnant, and points to a wide range of possible connections between individuals and a community in digital attire, which are displayed in the area of culture, education, bureaucracy, consumption, as well as politics, political activism and democracy. Altogether, it can be concluded that it is a complex concept that will branch into new dimensions with the rising digitalization of social life.

⁸ It should be emphasized that not all of entire social life is digitalized, as well as that there are numerous digital divisions and inequalities in terms of access to ICTs, and in terms of digital skills (Rubeša 2018).

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DIGITALNO GRAĐANSTVO U KONCEPTUALNO-PRAKTIČNOM OKVIRU

Savremeno globalno društvo obeleženo je dominantnim dejstvom informatičkih tehnologija koje proizvode korenite promene u svim sferama. Dejstvo novih medija i proces globalizacije dovode do promena tolikih razmera da može biti reči o novom tipu društva i kulture. U sferi politike, kao rezultat desuverenizacije država, globalizacije i informatizacije, javljaju se novi oblici građanstva, utemeljeni u digitalnom identitetu i novim kulturnim praksama. Jedan od ključnih političkih aktera savremenosti postaje digitalni građanin. Cilj rada je ispitati koncept digitalnog građanina u kontekstu aktuelnih promena koje prožimaju savremeno društvo i kulturu. Da bi se izdvojile ključne karakteristike ovog oblika građanstva, bitno je sagledati transformaciju tradicionalnog koncepta građanina u digitalnom društvu i kulturi, odnosno novom kontekstu koji nudi alternativne načine ostvarivanja građanskih prava i obaveza. Izdvojeni su dominantni pristupi u koncipiranju digitalnog građanstva u društvenim naukama i posebno je ukazano na problem polarizacije normativnih i radikalnih modela digitalnog građanstva, kao i fenomen digitalne demokratije. Pokazuje se da digitalno građanstvo sa jedne strane omogućava efikasnu alternativu za različite institucionalne političke procese (e-democracy, e-government ili e-voting), dok sa druge strane ima potencijal za iskazivanje političkog aktivizma, veću informisanost i kritički odnos prema političkim pitanjima.

Ključne reči: *Digitalna kultura, građanin, digitalni građanin, digitalna demokratija, (novi) mediji.*