DEMOK.pl – online direct democracy, including social rankings, rating politician's ideas and actions, and state's needs.

We all give half of our earnings to the state in taxes. In theory, these are the funds to support the state. Half of our income. Half of our working time. Half of our professional life. It seems to be a lot. So here comes a very simple question. Shouldn't a citizen have a say in deciding what happens with their money? Or to rate those who manage the money, that is the politicians?

Voting every four years for barely known candidates, randomly allocated to electoral districts, is not much of a right to vote.

It is a problem present in every country and that's why the idea of direct democracy is so popular in Europe. For this reason, one of the main goals of the DEMOK foundation is a creation of online tools supporting direct democracy processes and allowing every citizen to directly participate in state's affairs.

Political stock exchange

One of DEMOK's first projects was a system allowing the residents of Podkowa Leśna to anonymously vote in surveys and petitions, and to rate local councilmen and mayor.

Resident's evaluation is presented in a form of a ranking with marks between 0 and 100 points. It is the most interesting feature of the system. It resembles a stock exchange, but instead of stock quotes of companies, those of councilmen or politicians are presented.

How does it work? There are 10 criteria predefined in the system used to evaluate public figures. Specifying those criteria and their weights requires further discussion, given that some characteristics might be more important than others. Here are examples of said criteria: fulfilling promises, level of education, good manners, life accomplishments, separating public and personal affairs, engagement in public service and finally one's subjective rating of the public figure and a level of willingness to support them.

In every category a public figure can receive from 0 to 10 points which means they can get from 0 to 100 points in total from each evaluator. Such values were chosen so that everyone can easily calculate the percentage which shows how highly supported a given politician is.

Thanks to that feature, everyone can rate any politician, from Poland or elsewhere in the world (including historical figures), and not only those from one's electoral district. The evaluation can take place every day and not once in four years, and it can be changed – the system will remember the previous amount of points attributed to any given person but only the last rating will be taken into consideration.

Around 3 am every day, the system sums up all votes from the previous 24 hours, calculates the average rating of a given politician and publishes their current value.

Such rankings can motivate or keep the politicians in check, if they are regularly quoted by the media. Every time a politician does something right, their 'market value' will increase the next day and if they say something stupid or vote against their promises, they can be sure that they will go down in the ranking. The mechanism is very similar to that of a stock exchange – every good news about a company increases its value, every bad one decreases it.

Every citizen will get an opportunity to directly evaluate every public figure in the country. Maybe their individual rating won't be clearly visible but it will still be taken into consideration when calculating the average. The system will also give a possibility to observe how the rankings changed in time and whether the changes correlated with important events.

Personal engagement instead of statistics

Apart from politicians, it will be possible to rate the projects conducted by the state or projects which should be undertaken. Such rankings are continuous and can show how the opinions about a given subject change.

System founders do not aim to create another statistical tool or to replace market surveys, but to design a tool which will allow every interested person to state their opinion.

But who will become a user of such a platform? There have been many remarks stating that probably only certain people will be interested in participating in the project – those already politically active, political science students, journalists etc. Or that the platform will be dominated by a certain political option which could mean that the rankings won't be representative of the whole society.

Delegating voting rights – online parliamentary representative

To activate the greatest number of citizens, we decided, a bit paradoxically, to create a mechanism in our system which allows representative democracy, meaning that at first more politically active people would join in order to draw in the rest of the community.

An active user can ask their friends or family, who are not involved in the political or social actions, to set up their accounts in order to delegate their voting rights and their capacity to evaluate to the active user.

In this way, the active user can become a representative of their family or group of friends. And in view of how big a list of facebook friends can be, it should be fairly easy to convince more and more people to create accounts.

Each vote made by the activist will then have the weight equal to the number of people who temporarily delegated their right to vote to the activist. Acting as a representative for a group might be a very motivating factor. Thanks to social media, the group of people on behalf of whom such a representative votes can be quite numerous. Therefore the platform can become a way to train people to be more politically active, or even a place which gives a start to estimable political careers.

As project creators we hope that the people delegating their voting rights to activists will soon decide to vote for themselves and thus they will increase the number of active users and at the same time the number of citizens involved in social and political issues.

Democracy based on experts' opinions

The feature of delegating voting rights can be turned on when required, and enables users to delegate their voting rights in surveys concerning fields in which users are not specialists. If the user is not well acquainted with issues regarding health service or national defence, they can give their voting right (also temporarily) to the expert who they deem trustworthy as long as that person also sets up an account in the DEMOK system. This is again a representative democracy, but here we have a division into the fields of expertise because people should handle and decide on matters with which they are familiar.

Landscape of society

We also hope that even if the users want to stay anonymous, they will be willing to disclose some basic information about themselves (such as age, education, area of residence, maybe their career or political views). These data would permit to analyse voting patterns for different social matters, projects and politicians with regard to said data.

Online surveys can be everlasting

When analysing voting patterns, timeline can also be taken into consideration. The possibility to change a vote or to re-evaluate a politician is an important detail. Online surveys can be long-lasting, which allows new people to join at any time as well as lets

those who have already voted to change their decision. Such surveys can be presented on timelines, clearly showing the ranking's fluctuation, which in itself can be an interesting data to analyse.

Weighted voting system – a tribal-style democracy

The system presents many more opportunities for research. For example, an experiment about "weighted democracy" could be conducted to see what would be a result of a survey if users' votes had different weights, depending on, for example, age, education, taxes paid, number of children etc.

In today's democracy, every vote is equally important, no matter the person's life experiences. A professor of economy or an experienced entrepreneur's votes are equal to the vote of a person with little knowledge in social and political matters. However, this rule, which makes everyone's voting rights equally valuable and which shows respect to every human being, has not always been the obvious solution.

Humans have been living in more primal social structures, such as tribes, for hundreds of thousands of years. In such societies, although decisions were made collectively; they were voted only by tribal elders, often with a shaman or a chief as a central figure, and not by the whole group. The young could follow the discussions but were not allowed to participate in the decision making process itself. If everyone has the same voting power, no matter their experience or knowledge, there is a risk that the voices and votes of those who better understand certain issues will be lost in the sea of voices and votes of those less competent. Such a voting method makes the decision making process seem more random than informed. There is a slim chance of making a good decision in such a way, unless the specialist in a given field is able to convince others to vote like them.

It has to be stressed that this feature would be only experimental. Weighted votes are a subject that would surely become a social controversy, even though in the oldest and longest-lasting forms of human societies, that is in tribal structures (and later in families or clans), the voting power was never equal.

Risks of online democracy

A democracy based on online systems can be much more efficient, faster, cheaper, and most importantly continuous. An official referendum can cost from tens to hundreds of thousands PLN and its organization can last up to several months. An online referendum or a survey can be organized within a few days and cost a few hundred PLN, maybe even less. Safe online voting requires confidentiality and anonymous profiles but with real people behind them.

There is a risk of technical manipulations (for example as a result of hacking) as well as a public concern about such events taking place. To prevent that, a supervisory board could be established to make sure the system is operating safely and correctly.

Blockchain could provide a solution for these concerns, as it, by its very nature, makes vote manipulation impossible and at the same time it requires no centralized supervisory institutions. Such solutions are already being implemented to serve democracy in many countries, including Lithuania.

Education

How can we avoid the negative consequences of equal voting rights in today's democracy? The only way is probably to educate the society. Only a well-informed, resistant to manipulation person can make good decisions and, most importantly, choose good representatives. And that could be the main contribution of the DEMOK project to democracy – rankings of politicians which can help choose those who are worth of society's backing and can be trusted with public functions.

Educating and inspiring to actively participate in social and political life is a main goal of this project. Every survey or petition will be accompanied by an educational dossier, including reports and analysis, to help users better understand the topic before they vote. Raising social awareness in the main mission of the Direct Democracy Foundation. We firmly believe that our online systems can serve that purpose by providing people with a fun way to become more politically active.

Piotr Krupa – Lubański,   tel +48 511 423 975

https://www.linkedin.com/in/startuphub/

We encourage you to suport us. If you would like to support this project, please visit:

www.zrzutka.pl/demok

www.Podkowa.Demok.pl
www.Polityka.Demok.pl
www.fundacja.demok.pl