

AN E-DEMOCRACY APPLICATION: DO NOT LET MY DREAMS OF AN IDEAL UNIVERSITY STAY ONLY IN MY DREAMS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to describe and discuss data gathered from a project titled “Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams”, which is an e-democracy application developed and implemented in light of the current e-democracy literature using Facebook and Twitter. The aim of the application is to develop ideas that would contribute to establishment of future higher education institutions bringing together relevant stakeholders. The project has four phases: (a) Launching, (b) Online interaction, (c) Evaluation (d) Sharing/Implementing the results. Current paper describes the structure and implementation of the application developed, and evaluates experiences on facilitating participation and interaction throughout the process with data gathered from the researcher’s diary, meeting notes, online social networking sharing, and interviews. Data showed that there are some barriers to implement e-democracy applications at higher education level in Turkey. Results highlight that developing and implementing e-democracy applications is critical to improve participatory democracy for higher education institutions in Turkey.

Key Words: E-democracy, digital culture, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

The digital culture inescapably continues to transform the society in many ways. One of these is a hope for revitalizing direct-democracy, e-democracy. It is a concept that facilitates the realization of participatory democracy. The only thing that differentiates the concept of e-democracy from the traditional notion of democracy is not the letter E, preceding the word ‘democracy’, but it is the contribution made by the letter itself (i.e. E) towards self-realization of the concept of democracy. This contribution seems to assign a key meaning to the concept in respect of realization of social transformations in the near future. At this stage, another significant concept, or more precisely institution is higher education. In the historical process, institutions of Higher Education have continued to be important institutions that have impacted the quality and form of social life. Consequently, e-democracy should not be seen far from being a source of social transformations of higher education institutions. This is why, these two concepts, e-democracy and higher education, which are likely to affect and transform each other in the immediate future are discussed together within this research. Presently, institutions of higher education remain inadequate in meeting expectations. In order for institutions of higher education to be able to respond to the expectations of the society and the requirements of our age, it is urgently needed that a radical transformation must take place in these institutions. That e-democracy can be utilized as an important tool to this end forms the main idea of this current study.

Higher Education Institutions’ Need for Transformation

The main purpose of this study is not only to evaluate the existing structure and operations of higher education institutions, but also some of the concepts that require transformation in higher education will be discussed in the context of the current structure. Some of these concepts include concepts that have been discussed over the years, in particular for the last ten years. Mostly, it is dealt with, within the framework of current problems, why higher education institutions have failed to meet expectations. For instance, the problems can be sorted as the increase in the number of students, the withdrawal tendency of government sources from higher education, disparities in access to higher education and so on. These factors can easily be linked with the need for transformation in higher education. In addition to these factors, some factors which appear to be more

unstraightforward, but are likely to form the basis of transformation in higher education will be mentioned here in brief.

Internationalization

Internationalization has been one of the crucial concepts that affects the structure of higher education institutions, especially after the 1980s. In recent years, it has been observed that initiatives have increased towards attracting international students at a large scale rather than attracting students from a limited number of organizations that enable the circulation of students between higher education institutions (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011). Internationalization comes to mean, from now on, more than student mobility (Marmolejo, 2011). Restriction of share of higher education institutions' directly benefitting from government sources around the world gives rise to higher education institutions' adoption of a commercial perspective on the internationalization of higher education institutions, and causes tendency to attract international students. Globalization and internationalization are factors that play key roles in higher education institutions' taking on a commercial dimension. So much so that this competition has stimulated higher education institutions' initiatives for collaboration on such issues as exchange of students and staff, offering joint programs and conducting research with international partners. The concept of globalization can be considered as a concept that aims at eliminating the negative perceptions generally associated with globalization in the world; however, whatever it is, universities' processes of creating international joined initiatives for competition requires the formation of a system that necessitates the use of participatory democracy, accordingly the effective use of e-democracy.

Massification

Higher education institutions, in one sense, are institutions that accredit individuals' obtaining qualification in any vocational area. In this sense, the effect of population growth in the world shows that more attention will be paid to higher education, with the increased interest of individuals in so-called white collar jobs and jobs that are associated with a more qualified higher education diploma. Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009) pointed out that massification is one of the leading factors that trigger higher education reform and transformation. Calderon (2012) speculates that if the demands continue to increase at this rate, it appears that there would be more 520 million people demanding of higher education by 2035 around the world. It seems inevitable that attempting to meet this intense demand with a limited number of higher education institutions, and limited infrastructure and resources has a number of alarming implications. In order to reduce negativities to the least possible degree, and increase the quality of learning environments, reasons such as the establishment of relations between different contexts are the factors that highlight the need for effective use of e-democracy in higher education management and instruction.

Globalization, Competition and Technology

Considered from the perspective of higher education institutions, it is not possible to think about globalization independently from internationalization. Globalization represents the international system that shapes many of today's societies. It refers to the integration and interaction of business world, cultures, politics and intellectual components at an international level (Wood, 2012). As the global economy sees the world as a single and large market, it has led to an increase in competition in education, particularly in the context of universities, as has been the case in many domains. While this competition has led to an increase of quality of the competition, development of technology and its use in different areas on the one hand, it has been criticized on the grounds that it has ignored human values with the influence of competition. In this sense, globalization has gained a more political meaning. Therefore, educational institutions opt to use the concept 'internationalization' instead of 'globalization' with an eye to highlighting the positive aspects of globalization (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011). The basic formula to survive in the global economy is to produce technology and effectively use the produced technology again during the process of competition (Narula, 2003). Described as an evolution in the history of the Internet, Web 2.0 is one of the important developments caused by this competition, following the arrival of WWW. There has been a transformation to web technology that requires simple, purpose-built user interaction rather than personal, static web pages (Şendağ, 2008). In addition, Web 2.0 has not only acquired a version number itself, but also enabled many other fields to acquire version numbers, such as e-learning 2.0, and research 2.0. This fast transformation experienced in technology has led

to emergence of the concepts named as deprofessionalization, and a reduction of the controllability of the amount of academic knowledge produced towards a particular subject area. However, e-democracy, a potential candidate to be a leading factor among the invisible agents in the path of surviving in the global competition, seems to be a concept that will become increasingly important in near future. Higher education institutions have to efficiently use e-democracy that enables the operation of the shared wisdom and negotiation process in order to think in multi-dimensional ways and make the right decisions in a world where knowledge changes and is transformed rather quickly.

E-democracy in Higher Education

Before discussing the concept of e-democracy, it would be useful to mention the concepts of e-voting and online discussions help explain what e-democracy is indeed not. E-voting, in its most general sense, is the process of voting in an electronic environment. Although e-voting is a process of decision making, generally the options voted for are not designed, and negotiated and discussed by the participants themselves prior to voting. As for online discussion, it is individuals' involvement in a discussion occurring in an online environment within the framework of a specific topic. Here, the participants are not required to reach any decision on the given subject, and even if certain decisions have been made, the prerequisite of implementation of these decisions might not be a matter of question. E-democracy can be thought of as a problem solving tool that makes use of e-voting along with online discussion. While e-voting brings the political aspect of democracy to the fore, the online discussion is more like a discussion of specific phenomena in a limited setting by a limited number of participants. Another issue concerned with what e-democracy is not relates to e-politics. E-politics is the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in political processes. The use of e-democracy in this meaning is just a tendency towards associating democracy with the regime of the state. According to Şendağ (2010) "democracy should refer to any kind of negotiation, agreement, and human interaction such as representative-citizen, citizen-citizen, and representative-representative. In this sense, ICTs are the most contemporary facilitator of these negotiations, agreements, and human interaction processes. Briefly, e-democracy is involvement in every part of the community in the decision-making process through ICTs (p.1684). This definition emphasizes the administrative aspect of e-democracy. However, e-democracy as a way of life can be used as a method of decision making regarding how to live together in the workplace, the neighborhood, and the city. This case is associated with the concept of governance. While mentioning the national and global scales of the governance, Uçkan (2003) emphasized the necessity of making applicable decisions by grounding the governance on all parties' consensus. This circumstance indicates that e-democracy has a relatively comprehensive meaning. Within this sense, e-democracy requires contextual factors and participation of stakeholders of decision making in the process, their interaction during the process, and discussion of raised ideas. This interaction must generally result in reaching a decision.

Şişman (2006) specifically expresses the importance of participatory democracy in the school management, by highlighting the need for the participation of parents, students and all other stakeholders in decision making processes. When considered from the perspective of higher education institutions, the significance of participation of principal stakeholders, viz. students and academics, in decision-making processes has been in the main ignored up to the present. This occasion stands as an important barrier to realization of the expected transformation in higher education. It seems that e-democracy that facilitates the realization of participatory democracy for materialization of the anticipated transformations in higher education is likely to gain more significance in the short run. For this reason, it is fairly vital that various aspects of e-democracy applications should be studied by performing e-democracy applications in the higher education.

Theoretical Framework

In general, it can be reckoned that there is no need for a theoretical framework for the implementation of e-democracy, and the stakeholders already discuss their problems, especially in online social networking sites. For example, Caldwell (2004) considers such activities as sending e-mails, writing e-petitions to administrators, and participations in forums and surveys within the framework of e-democracy. However, authorities' power to impose sanctions on the subject of paying attention to these views (due to lack of reconciled opinions) cannot be said to be high. These tools which only make citizen-administrator interactions possible can be effective with respect to very specific topics; however, there is a necessity for structured e-democracy applications in

which all stakeholders come together for the formation of negotiated ideas with the power to impose sanctions in matters concerning the public. There are two basic reasons why efforts are made to formulate e-democracy applications. First of all, it is to enable a participation that includes all the stakeholders at the highest level, and secondly it is the necessity of all ideas to be discussed through keeping the interaction among the participants at the highest level, which is the most distinctive characteristic of e-democracy applications that distinguishes it from citizens' individual interaction with administrators. These two processes should be combined by means of an effective moderation and a decision needs to be reached by voting the consequential opinions. Models that support this framework can be found within the relevant literature. Nair's (2007) proposed 'digital democracy' model was used in the e-democracy application performed within the scope of this study. Nair (2007) elaborates on four stages required for the realization of digital democracy: (1) Information sharing: sharing of wide variety of information that is related to topics generally concerned with the process of decision making, (2) Listening/Consultation: citizens' getting feedback from the public institutions, (3) Online discussion: stakeholders' negotiation of the subject to be decided on in various ways, (4) decision making: making such a decision that represents all views proposed. In this context, an e-democracy application, entitled "Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams" was undertaken in this present study. In this application, it is aimed to arrive at decisions by discussing ideas that will shape the future of universities in Turkey. To this end, the application has been carried out in four stages. (1) Introduction: the stage where stakeholders were invited for participation by setting up digital platforms and determining the objectives and framework of the application, (2) Online interaction: the stage where stakeholders negotiate their views, (3) Evaluation; the stage where decisions were made based on the evaluation of the results, (4) Sharing the results /Application: the stage where the application is carried out by sharing the obtained report of results with the individuals. In order for participatory democracy to be properly realized, there is a need to keep the interaction in online environment at the highest level among participants by encouraging all stakeholders to participate in the process as much as possible. Therefore, the experiences endured with respect to the matter of enabling participation and interaction in the application, 'Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams', and are shared in this research.

Problem Statement

New digital technologies offer new opportunities for the revitalization of participatory democracy. The concept 'e-democracy' emerged in this sense is put to work in order to facilitate participatory democracy. There are a variety of transformations occurring in higher education institutions in the world, with the effect of technology. In this context, e-democracy that may render the thinking and decision making process active seems to take on a rather significant role in the near future. For this reason, in Turkey, there is a need particularly for the reconfiguration of higher education institutions and particularly the effective use of e-democracy during this configuration process. Moreover, there is a need for the assessment of applications for the use of e-democracy by investigating its various aspects, and the developments that will contribute to promoting participatory democracy culture in higher education institutions. Within the justifications specified in this study, an e-democracy application, entitled 'Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams' was carried out. The application developed was evaluated from the perspective of its ensuring participation and interaction. Answers to the following questions have been focused on for achieving the objective of the research.

1. What are the experiences regarding the provision of participation in the e-democracy application, "Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams"?
2. What are the experiences regarding the ensuring of interaction in the e-democracy application, "Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams"?

METHOD

The research adopts a case study design in which qualitative data gleaned through various content and document analyses and interviews are analyzed. In case studies, an event or situation is analyzed to be able to identify its different aspects by collecting various data (Willis, 2008). In this context, the e-democracy application 'Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams' has been investigated with its various aspects in line with data obtained from content analyses and interviews.

Participants and Settings

After coming up with the idea of 'Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams' project, a project web page, Facebook page and group, and a twitter account were created. An introductory text was written and sent to several public and private institutions by e-mails. The purpose of the project was to encourage participation of all public institutions and organizations, private sector and citizens, especially the Council of Higher Education in the project. However, it was observed that about 90 % of the participation in the project were from the universities, and of that participation, more than 90% were constituted by university students. The project was officially launched on November 20, 2012. Facebook group was used more actively in the project. More than 3,000 people became a member of the group. Members generally preferred sharing their dreams of the future universities by means of Facebook group. Similarly, discussions were largely held within this group. Twitter and Facebook pages were not much preferred by the members. In the study, the comments sent to the group were analyzed in picking themes related to higher education. The project team is comprised of ten people, with eight senior undergraduate students, one graduate student and a faculty member. In the evaluation of the process of conducted e-democracy project, seven meeting protocols attended by a team of 10 people, and researcher logs kept during the project, and the data obtained from 15 members who joined the project through social networking sites were used. Eight out of 15 participants were undergraduate students, one was administrative staff and six were members of university academic staff.

Instruments

The research instruments, used as the source of data in this research, were composed of researcher diaries, seven meeting protocols attended by the research team, and interviews carried out with 12 participants. Researcher diaries, meeting minutes, and the interviews done with participants were used in the evaluation of e-democracy application in terms of participation and interaction. In the researcher diaries, the number of the participants, number of comments, the characteristic of the participants and the progress in relation to the comments made on the social networking sites were noted down. In the meeting protocols, it is mentioned that which steps should be taken to comply with the adopted model, what steps have become successful and what steps have failed before at each step of the application of e-democracy. Information on brain storming relating to what can be done to make each step more effective is also kept in meeting protocols. A semi-structured interview protocol was used in the interviews with the participants at the end of the application. Participants' general views on the project, their reasons for making or not making comments regarding their dream university, their overall views on democracy and the main obstacles to democracy in the country, and their opinions on whether the project has reached its aims were probed and their responses were recorded with a voice recorder. The data obtained were transcribed for analysis by means of electronic media.

FINDINGS

Participation

The following steps were taken in order to ensure the participation of stakeholders in the project:

1. Project introductory text and an invitation card were created.
2. Project web page, Facebook page, Facebook group, Twitter account were created.
3. It was decided to make an announcement of raffling a tablet computer off.
4. The introductory text and invitations cards were emailed to academic and administrative staff in Turkey.
5. The 10-person project team invited their Facebook friends to participate in the project.
6. Posts have been shared on Facebook and Twitter which ask participants to invite their friend on their Facebook and Twitter profiles.
7. A brief description of the project was aired on TRT Antalya radio.
8. A promotional video was shot.
9. Several public and private institutions have been invited to participate in the project via the Internet.
10. The famous journalist, author, broadcaster and actors were contacted by emails to announce the project publicly.
11. Various media and television companies were contacted regarding the introduction of the project.

The first step in effective implementation of e-democracy is to ensure the participation of all stakeholders in decision-making. Since it is not always possible to ensure this participation, the above steps were taken in order to be as much inclusive as possible in the study. The issue searched with the highest priority in regards to participation was concerned with which of the above steps were more effective. On this issue, meeting protocols and social network analysis have provided important data. While the number of group members was around 100 when the participation was tried to be ensured with an introductory text and e-mails on the first 15 days of the project, the number of members of Facebook group has reached a figure of around 3000 in a month after our friends in our profiles and their own friend groups were encouraged to invite their friends to participate in the project. Those who left the group are not included in this figure. During the study, it was seen that the efforts except for this Facebook group were not that much effective. Particularly, efforts to access the celebrities have been fruitless. Similarly, we could not get a result in our efforts to reach various media and television organizations. Apart from this, the participation of a small number of members in the group was achieved owing to e-mails and introduction of the website. As participation in the project was provided mainly through the profiles of Facebook friends, Facebook group was intensively used in the project. Throughout the entire project, while there were 50 tweets shared on Twitter, there were roughly 150 posts on Facebook group and comments made on these posts. On the Facebook page, however, there were almost no posts shared or virtually no comments made except for the project team's introductory shares. In this context, it was clear to see that Facebook group came into prominence in the sense of ensuring participation in the project. In the same way, one of the most important issues mentioned in the meeting protocols was that the tablet computer which was planned to be given as a gift within the scope of the project was not encouraging enough to convince students to take part in the project. In general, students stated that a specific amount of monetary award or a gift/money card would have been more effective than a tablet computer to encourage participation.

Interaction

The most important feature that distinguishes an e-democracy application from e-voting and that can be described as the heart of e-democracy is particularly stakeholders' discussion of the issue with its various aspects through interacting with each other. In short, all possible opinions should be discussed in detail and with its various facets prior to proceeding for voting. Therefore, the creation of an effective platform in e-democracy applications is relatively crucial. When researcher diaries, meeting protocols, and posts shared on the group were analyzed, it was found that one of the most challenging issues faced by the team was ensuring interaction.

On the first days of the project, the 'Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams' group appeared to be a platform where members shared their views rather than a platform where members were involved in discussion. For the purpose of igniting discussions, discussions were conducted within the framework of several topics, such as management and leadership, education and instruction, infrastructure and social activities in my dream university. However, these practices that lasted about two weeks were concluded to be not very much effective in terms of increasing the interaction and discussion, and thus they were terminated. Similarly, some faculty members were asked to write reflections that talk of their dream universities in order to increase the interaction. Only two faculty members provided texts, and their responses were shared on social media by publishing the texts on the project blog; however, this could not contribute to occurrence of the expected discussion platform. Another initiative done in order to increase the interaction was 'my dream university videos', in which various videos were shot with people who spoke of their dream universities and shared again on social media, but the expected dynamism was not obtained. Another application, 'comment of the week', carried out with an eye to increasing the interaction, remained again ineffective. In spite of the fact that the application called as 'provocative questions' by the project team seemed to be more effective than other applications with respect to ensuring interaction, one or two members called 'discussion facilitators' by the project team naturally facilitated the activation of discussions and turned out to be more effective than all the other initiatives seized by the project team. Nevertheless, the discussions triggered by these members took place among only a few members, and with the passivation of the discussion facilitators, the discussions came to an end. The discussion facilitators' being successful drove us to the idea

that the discussions might be triggered by some of the project members by taking on a discussion facilitator role. However, such initiatives did not arouse the same effect as the discussion facilitator naturally did.

One of the most striking points from the perspective of interaction was the scarce number of posts shared, and discussion according to the number of members in the group. Only around 100 members out of a total 3,000 were engaged in sharing posts and discussions. In the interviews done with the participants, the reason of this issue was tried to be sought and ascertained. All 15 participants mentioned that the project entitled 'Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams' was significant, and in general they used such descriptors as 'useful', 'functional', 'interesting', 'important for the next generation' and 'helpful' by touching on the need for a transformation in the universities in Turkey. However, two undergraduate students out of eight noted that they took part in sharing posts, and while three of the remaining six academic and one administrative staff reported their engagement in sharing posts, four of them remarked that they did not involve in such activities. Those undergraduate students who did not involve in the study put forwards some reasons in their own words, by writing their non-participation was thanks to the reasons that "in general what I have already thought has been already written", "I thought my views would not be taken into account", "a matter of personality, as I am shy", and "I do not use social networks frequently". Academic staff, likewise, explained their non-participation by making the following remarks: "a personality matter... I cannot express myself easily", "an individual case, I am not someone who can express him/herself well on social networks", and "the others already shared what I had to say". Participants' reasons for non-participation could be categorized under three headings in general:

- The belief that their views would not be taken seriously
- Personal/reasons related to personality traits
- Their thoughts' being already voiced by the others

As the fact that the participants' perception that their views would not be taken into consideration is an important issue, moving from whether a general perception regarding the possibility of our views to be not taken into account by the authorities might be true, the participants were posed a question, worded as "do you think the views/ideas generated within the spectrum of the project would be taken into account by primarily the council of Higher Education and other official and authorized organizations". Various utterances were made by undergraduate students: "I do not think they would respect..." articulated only one of the undergraduate students, and seven of them told "I do not think they would pay attention" or "I hope they would do so" or "A little more pressure needs to be put on them to consider such views/ideas". Only one of seven academic and administrative staff said "I think they would take them into account only if the results reach up to them", six participants had a negative attitude towards this matter. Consequently, it was noticed that only two of the 15 participants had positive views on this matter, and that there is a general perception among administrative and academic staff with respect to the fact that "their views are not taken into account by the authorities".

The issue that how participants describe their personalities, who cited their personality traits as reasons for non-participation, were put under investigation, as well. It was found that they were inclined to describe themselves in the following ways: "I am not that much sociable", "I do not like taking the lead in any kind of task", "I am not a man of action", and "[I am] quiet, calm and introverted". Some of the participants uttered that their views had been already voiced by other people, and thus they shied away from expressing their views separately. It was found that the number of this group of people who we referred to as "silent followers" as the project team was dramatically high. It was anticipated that this group would participate in the questionnaire in which the ideas raised as a result of the project were voted. However, the ratio of participation in the questionnaires invalidated this prediction. This result drove us to investigate whether "a negative perception might be effective in respect to participatory democracy and the formation of democracy in the country". In fact, the main objective in participatory democracy is to discuss opinions and ideas with all details as well as expressing them, and talk over the views that we agree or disagree with by justifying the underlying reasons. In the introductory text of the Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams' project and shared posts by the project team on the group, this case was continuously underlined. However, it is emphasized that participants' negative perceptions towards participatory democracy and the general understanding of democracy in Turkey would lead to the belief that it is not possible to operate a true

democratic process. With this in mind, the participants were asked what they understood by the term participatory democracy, and what the barriers are in regards to the level of democracy, and actualization of the democracy in Turkey. In this context, undergraduate students defined participatory democracy in the following statements as: "The public's views being conveyed to the authorities", "People's having a say on the functioning of the state", "An organization that everyone could say their opinion freely", "A functional democracy where public opinions come at the forefront, a debatable environment is created, and that does not deviate from the principles of democracy" and "People's active involvement in the government affairs". It might be said that undergraduate students perceived participatory democracy more as a form of communication of government authorities to communicate with public, and public's reporting their views to the state/the authorities. This situation, for the result of this application to be paid attention, led to a belief that "the authorized individuals are required to be involved in the process".

In this context, if the participations of intuitions particularly such as the Council of Higher Education, university rectors and administrators had been ensured, and the participants had been informed about this circumstance, it would have been possible to increase the participation. However, the project team's efforts have been fruitless to involve the authorities. Students, in general sense, brought up some obstacles standing ahead of actualization of the Turkish democracy. It was also put into words that there were also some problems in representing the opinions. For example, a student expressed his/her view saying that "I think participatory democracy would not be effective in a country where people are convicted due to their writings/comments". Students keyed out the obstacles to the development of our democracy as "economic reasons", "lack of education", "being full of oneself and selfishness", "inability to empathize with others" and "ignorance". These negative perceptions towards the development of democracy might have led to the idea that the project would not be fruitful, and this accordingly might have resulted in an adequate level of participation in the questionnaires.

Academic and administrative staff, however, defined participatory democracy as "individual's having a say in the governance of the society and living area in which she/he resides, and in the regulations likely to be done in that living area", "a concept that I heard for the first time" and "it means freedom". One academic described participatory democracy in the following ways: "Participatory democracy indeed requires that people could always have a say and be shareholders in the management and governance of any location. Participatory democracy is an understanding that advocates this in fact. I manage the factory but by taking the views of many people into account, ranging from my wife to workers and to my drivers; now that the factory belongs to us, we can manage it together. It is because when people believe their views are taken seriously and changes are made based on their views, they will widely adopt such an institution. Now, you, as my boss, make me feel as if I were a shareholder of the factory, I would then switch off the lights when I saw them on in the factory. I consume the water more carefully. I pay more attention to my shift. I back up my boss more outside the factory. I highlight my brand value more. The issue of adopting is quite significant. Namely, these descriptions come to my mind directly as far as participatory democracy is concerned". "If we are talking about democracy, this should be participatory; the minorities should have a say, everyone should be able to express their views freely". In academic and administrative staff's expressions on participatory democracy, the perception of "communication with the administrator" appears to be strong. In addition, these statements essentially reflect participants' perceptions towards the conception of sine qua non or ideal participatory democracy. However, it was found that the participants considered the level of democracy established in practice insufficient. In this regard, participants generally touched on some problems encountered as obstacles for actualization of the democracy, and they pointed out that we move towards becoming a democratic country, and time is needed for the establishment of the democracy culture in the country. Also, the primary factors that hinder the actualization of democracy in Turkey were stated to be owing to "nepotism", "superficial knowledge", "the lack of democracy culture", "failure to adopt the existence of different voices", "fear culture", and "non-adoption of democracy as a lifestyle in the education system and family". In this context, these negative perceptions were considered to be the important factors that account for participants' low level of interaction.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Weeks (2000) argues that politicians fail utterly, as they cannot manage to resolve the public's problems by consensus. Today, the most effective way of ensuring that consensus is resort to e-democracy applications. The "Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams" project is an e-democracy application carried out in this sense. Within the scope of this study, experiences and efforts that were done to ensure participation in the e-democracy application and to increase the interaction among the participants were presented. To this end, it was observed that participants showed an interest in the Facebook group the most, and that it was quite efficient to invite friends on Facebook profiles to the group, and encourage such friends for inviting their own friends to the group in terms of increasing the number of participants. This case gave rise to the Facebook group's being more intensively used compared to the Twitter, YouTube and Facebook pages. Based on these results, in the e-democracy application to be carried out in the future, Facebook groups can be actively used. Ensuring participation to the Facebook group was much easier than other social networks. This might be due mainly to the fact that Facebook enjoys more users than Twitter and YouTube. It was seen that the tablet computer which was proposed to be raffled to one participant among those who shared their views within the scope of the project for the purpose of increasing participation was not very effective. It is therefore suggested that promotions should be decided in such e-democracy applications where higher education students largely take part in by investigating the target participants' tendencies towards such promotions.

Participatory democracy is a form of governance. It is a process in which participants reach a decision by negotiating any subject that concerns themselves. This process may pertain to family, class, school, workplace, neighborhood or the city. What bears importance here is to create a healthy interaction for the sake of formation of an effective negotiation process. For that reason, various activities were undertaken in the "Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams" project to ensure interaction. These can be enumerated as determining thematic issues, asking proactive questions, my dream university videos and the comment of the week. Data indicated that none of these activities became as affective as the participants who were called 'discussion facilitators', and activated all-natural interactions by stimulating several discussions. According to these results, the presence of discussion facilitators in such platforms was considered to be important in respect of encouraging and promoting other participants. Therefore, it is highly recommended that participants who have high debate tendency and skills should be convinced to participate in e-democracy applications that will be carried in the years to come. According to the findings, the reasons for participants' avoidance of their views can be classified under three categories: (a) the belief that their views will not be taken seriously, (b) reasons related to personality traits, (c) their views' being already shared by others. The belief that their views would not be taken seriously might stem from the perception that their views are not taken into account by the authorities. This perception may be interpreted as a barrier for important stakeholders of higher education, namely students, academic and administrative staff to be involved in interaction in such e-democracy applications. Furthermore, the findings revealed that participants conceived of participatory democracy as 'the administrators' way of communication with the public'. In this context, it is expected that ensuring participation of the council of higher education and/or university administrators in the process in such projects would increase the level of interaction. Dealing with this issue in future studies to be done in higher education in great details will contribute to the field and development of participatory democracy. Those participants who put forward their personal traits as reasons for non-participation in sharing were found to describe themselves by using such descriptors as calm, quiet, introvert, one who does not like shining out. Again, these issues can be further dealt with in more detail in future research. Participants' excuse that they did not engage in sharing their views in the process of e-democracy, as their views were already posted by the others was in general associated with a negative perception towards functioning of the established democracy. According to the findings, both students and academic and administrative staff underlined that while there were positive developments with respect to the establishment of democracy in the country, these developments were not sufficient enough in point of actualizing democracy, and time is needed for democracy culture to come about in the country. In this sense, they pointed at economic problems, lack of education, ignorance, nepotism, intolerance of new ideas, and fear culture as the main factors that render the development of democracy difficult. No matter how participants expressed their belief in the significance of

the project “Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams”, negative statements voiced towards democracy above might have negatively affected the belief that the project could be effective. And this might be thought of as one of the major factors of insufficient levels of interaction.

In conclusion, such important concepts as globalization, internationalization, massification, competition and technology in the world make the occurrence of transformations in higher education essential. It is projected that the institutions which establish participatory democracy by managing e-democracy in an effective manner will successfully perform this process of transformation. Thus, performing e-democracy applications is regarded as considerably crucial on the subject of transformation of higher education in Turkey. The findings obtained in the project “Do not let my dreams of an ideal university stay only in my dreams” undertaken for this purpose demonstrate that there are promising developments as regards the provision of participation in e-democracy applications in higher education in Turkey as well as that some barriers stand against that provision. It is recommended that e-democracy applications should be effectively made use of as a problem-solving and decision-making mechanism in higher education in order for individuals to be able to acquire the culture of participatory democracy and transform that culture into their professional and family life in Turkey. However, the issue of whether e-democracy will be effective in respect of performing the expected transformation in higher education in Turkey seems to be determined by only implementing the decisions taken at the end of such projects.

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