The Net in the Hands of Citizens - A Study of the Internet and New Forms of Politics

The conclusions of the study concern the Net as a macro structure and its implications for the public sphere and new forms of politics. The position of the Internet is poorly understood if the whole range of networks is not taken into consideration. The question is about a huge technological system that consists both of separate, hierarchically constituted subsystems and of interlinked equal partners. Consequently, the Net has simultaneous but contradictory effects and ways of operation. From today’s angle the Net is rather an instrument than an autonomic actor but in the long term it will radically change the ways of perception and expression. Ecologically it may have harmful influences because it will speed up the most various kinds of human activity. From the point of view of the economy and administration it is a new guiding and controlling medium that can be also be turned against civil society. On the other hand, it is important as a public sphere, as an originator of new fora of discussion and as a creator of new conceptual spaces. It will markedly enhance freedom of expression and lead to new kinds of connections between people. From the citizen perspective it will serve as an instrument for gathering information and enabling social interaction. In this sense, the most important function of the Internet is nowadays not in the sphere of politics but in social bonds. The Net is part of cultural change where the cultural, communicative and media aspects of society get more prominence, so that its significance appears in these spheres.