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Trapped in the Net? The Crisis of Liberal Democracies

Manuel Castells (1997) describes the state of political representation in present liberal democracies as being in a desperately changing situation. The social and political institutions, had been developed in industrial societies, apparently cannot cope with its duties, and the emerging new, networked society, at least now, causes serious disfunctionalities in the principles, methods and institutions of liberal democracies. Instead of political programs we see character murders, instead of choices between ideologies we see extreme personalisations, and instead of political discussion and arguments we are witnessing scandal politics. In Castells' theoretical frame, the fact that mediatised politics (Mazzoleni 2002) has trapped politicians, the media, the society as a whole, and the principle of democracy, is not an unfortunate accident but follows from the overwhelming structural change of societies based on liberal democracy.

But what kind of democratic structures – if any – will be able to survive in networked societies? How – if at all – are the disfunctions of present liberal democracies avoidable? No „good practice” examples are available to answer these questions yet. However, the model of complex networks (Barabási 2002) can serve as a theoretical frame. A model of functioning new system of institutions can be built on the supposition that complex networks have common features, and that industrial societies are transforming into network societies. In my paper I attempt to outline such a model. The relationship of the model and the reality will be illustrated by the short description of the present Hungarian political participants.

At the end, also the question arises whether the conditions and characteristics of the network society are something inevitably new? Or, similarly to linguistic communication (Sándor 2007), technical development drives back to an old, natural world, establishing the evolutionary layer of group organism?

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