



Can A Multimedia Dialogue Approach Close the Gap between Politicians and Citizens?

Prof. Jan A.G.M. van Dijk
University of Twente
Department of Communication



Universiteit Twente

*de ondernemende
universiteit*

Key Questions of the Forum

- Is it possible to improve the general interest in politics of the citizen on the basis of the existing civil interest in 'single issue politics' ?
 - **My answer: THAT WILL BE DIFFICULT**

Single issue politics is a case of scale reduction in the network society: individualization, fragmentation and retrenchment;

However, there is also scale extension: the socialization and globalization of affairs: 'the world may never have been more free, but it has also never been so interdependent and interconnected'.

The Network Society (1991- 2005), p.1



Key Questions of the Forum

- There are two candidates to bring together scale extension and reduction, individual and collective interest: the **market** and the **forum** (public sphere). Today we discuss the second option.
- Can this be done by the interactive multi-media dialogue approach (combination of old and new media)?
 - **My answer: MAYBE, BUT THERE IS NO EASY TECHNICAL FIX TO BASIC POLITICAL PROBLEMS**



Key Questions of the Forum

- Does this multimedia dialogue approach jeopardise or strengthen the existing representative democracy?

My answer: It will strengthen it more than the Internet with teledemocracy alone; it is able to help insert direct democratic means into the representative system

- Is there an added value for international co-operation to solve this problem?
 - **My answer: OF COURSE.**



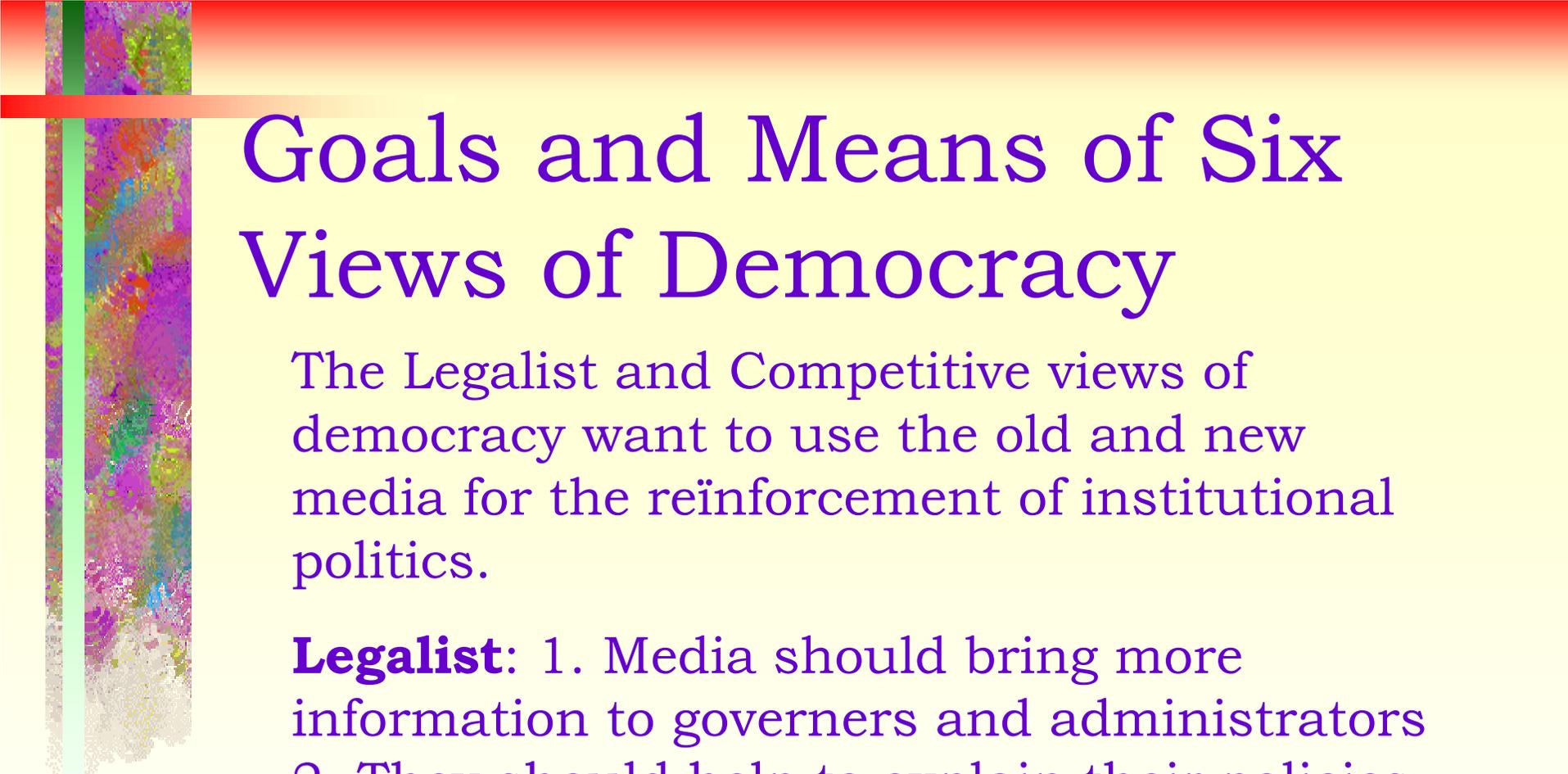
Views of Democracy and Concepts of Communication

There are at least six views of democracy with different ideas about the use of old and new media in the communication between politics, the public administration and citizens.

From: Jan van Dijk, *Digital Democracy, Issues of Theory and Practice* (2000)

Goals and Means of Six Views of Democracy

Goals Means	Opinion Formation	Decision Making
Represent ative democracy	Pluralist Participatory	Legalist Competitive
Direct democracy		Liber tarian Plebiscitary



Goals and Means of Six Views of Democracy

The Legalist and Competitive views of democracy want to use the old and new media for the reinforcement of institutional politics.

Legalist:

1. Media should bring more information to governors and administrators
2. They should help to explain their policies
3. They should support a (perhaps) small and effective state (including surveillance)

Competitive:

1. Media should back the support of political leaders (campaigns)
2. Used in information campaigns



Goals and Means of Six Views of Democracy

The Pluralist, Participatory, Libertarian and Plebliscitary views want a socialization of politics (spread into society).

Pluralist: 1. Media should support the organizations of society with a pluriformity of channels and opinions 2. Media should support networks within and between the organizations of civil society.

Participatory: 1. Media should support as much participation in opinion formation as possible (both quantitative and qualitative) 2. Fear of social exclusion in media.

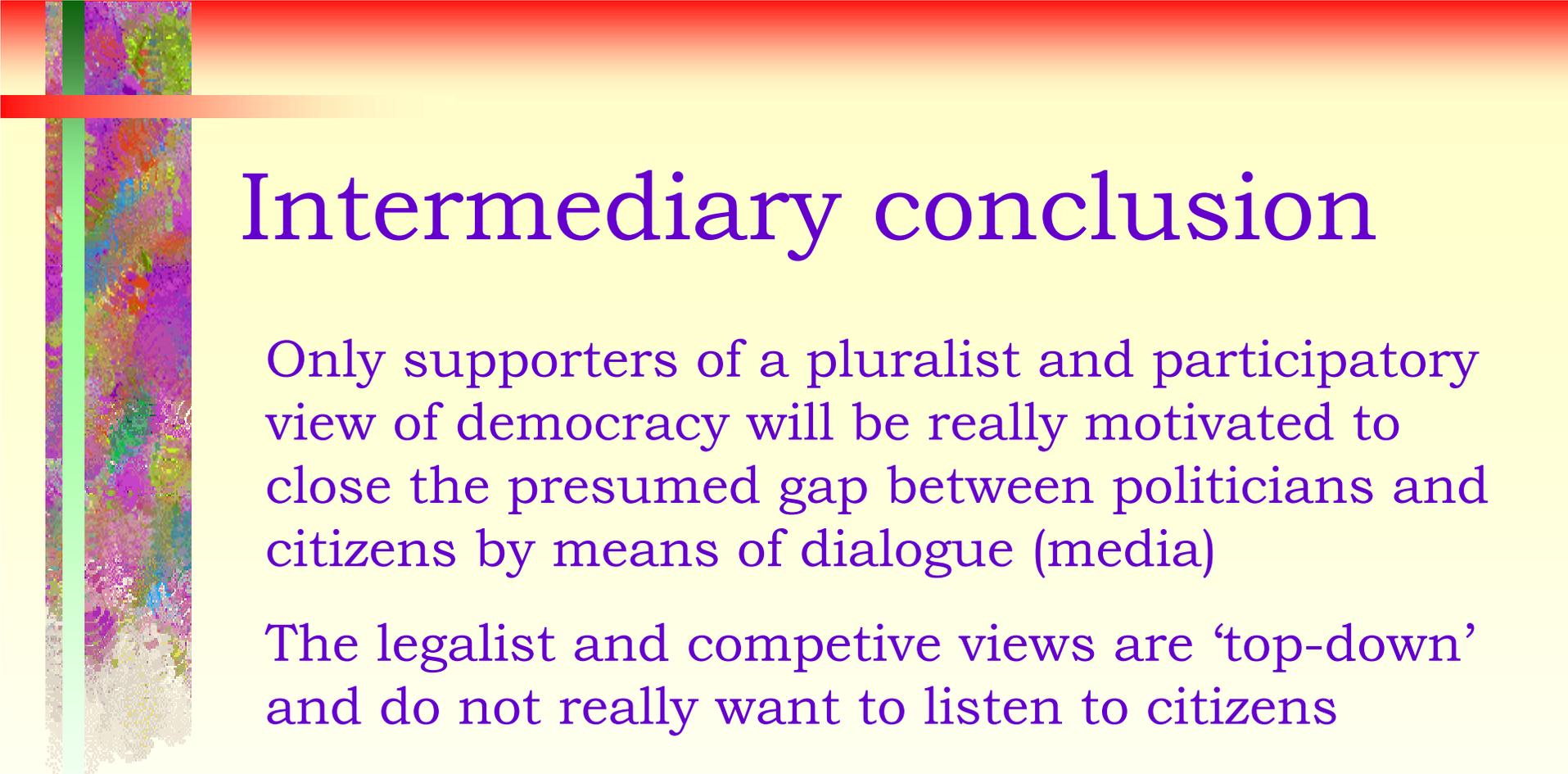


Goals and Means of Six Views of Democracy

The Pluralist, Participatory, Libertarian and Plebliscitary views want a socialization of politics (a spread into society).

Libertarian: 1. Media should be the autonomous means of individual and collective users; 2. With them citizens are able to bypass official politics and create their 'own' political reality.

Plebisitary: 1. Media should serve as direct democratic means to feed decision making in the political system: telepolls, telereferenda, online fora with conclusions etc.

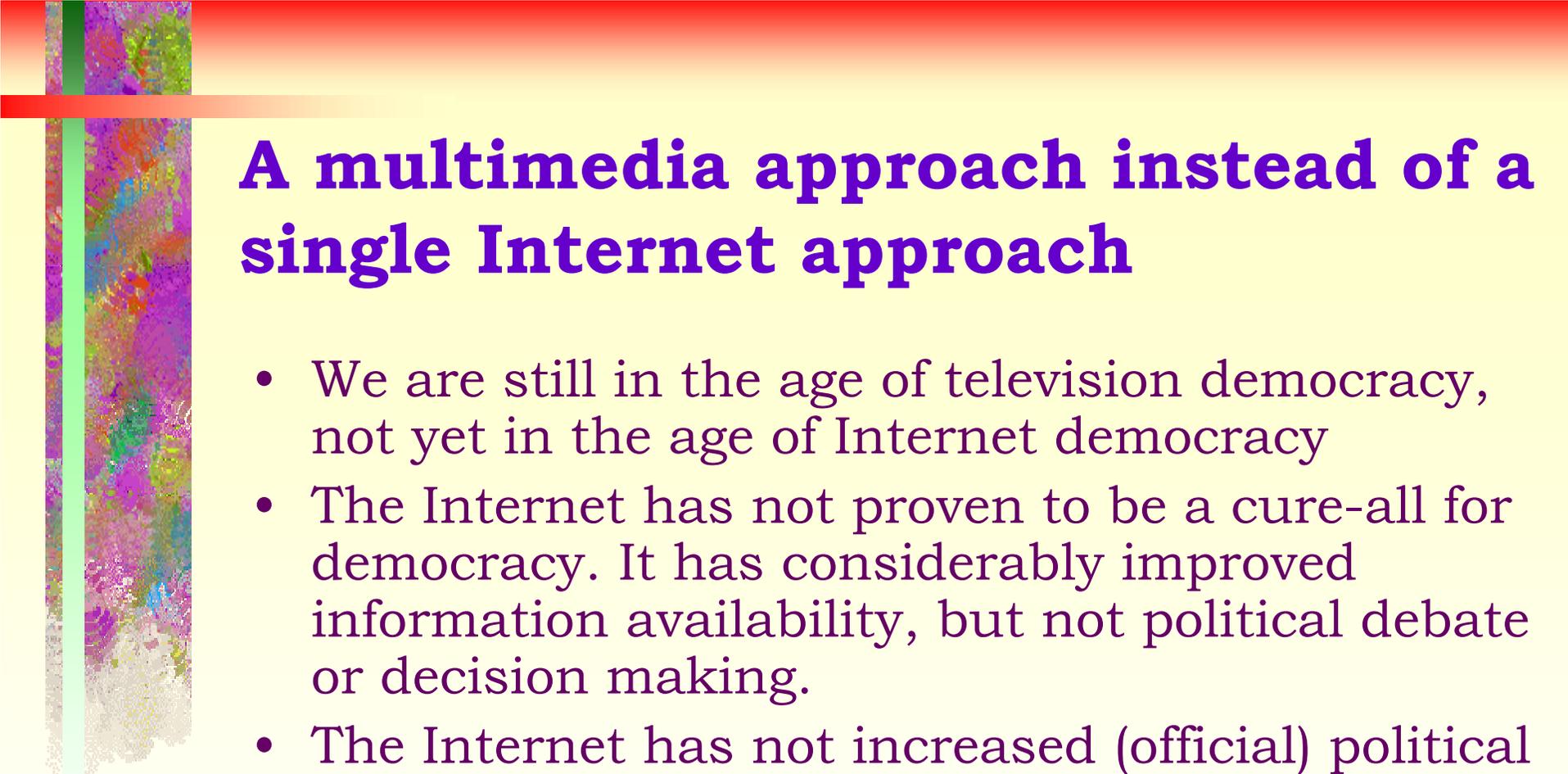


Intermediary conclusion

Only supporters of a pluralist and participatory view of democracy will be really motivated to close the presumed gap between politicians and citizens by means of dialogue (media)

The legalist and competitive views are 'top-down' and do not really want to listen to citizens

The libertarian and plebiscitary views are 'bottom-up' and they do not really want to listen to politicians; they are supposed to be irrelevant or they should simply follow televotes and tele-opinions.



A multimedia approach instead of a single Internet approach

- We are still in the age of television democracy, not yet in the age of Internet democracy
- The Internet has not proven to be a cure-all for democracy. It has considerably improved information availability, but not political debate or decision making.
- The Internet has not increased (official) political participation with minor exceptions (some young Internet lovers and tools such as voting guides).
- The Internet will not ‘swallow’ all other media in the process of convergence. It will become a public switch of several digital media, many of them private and closed.



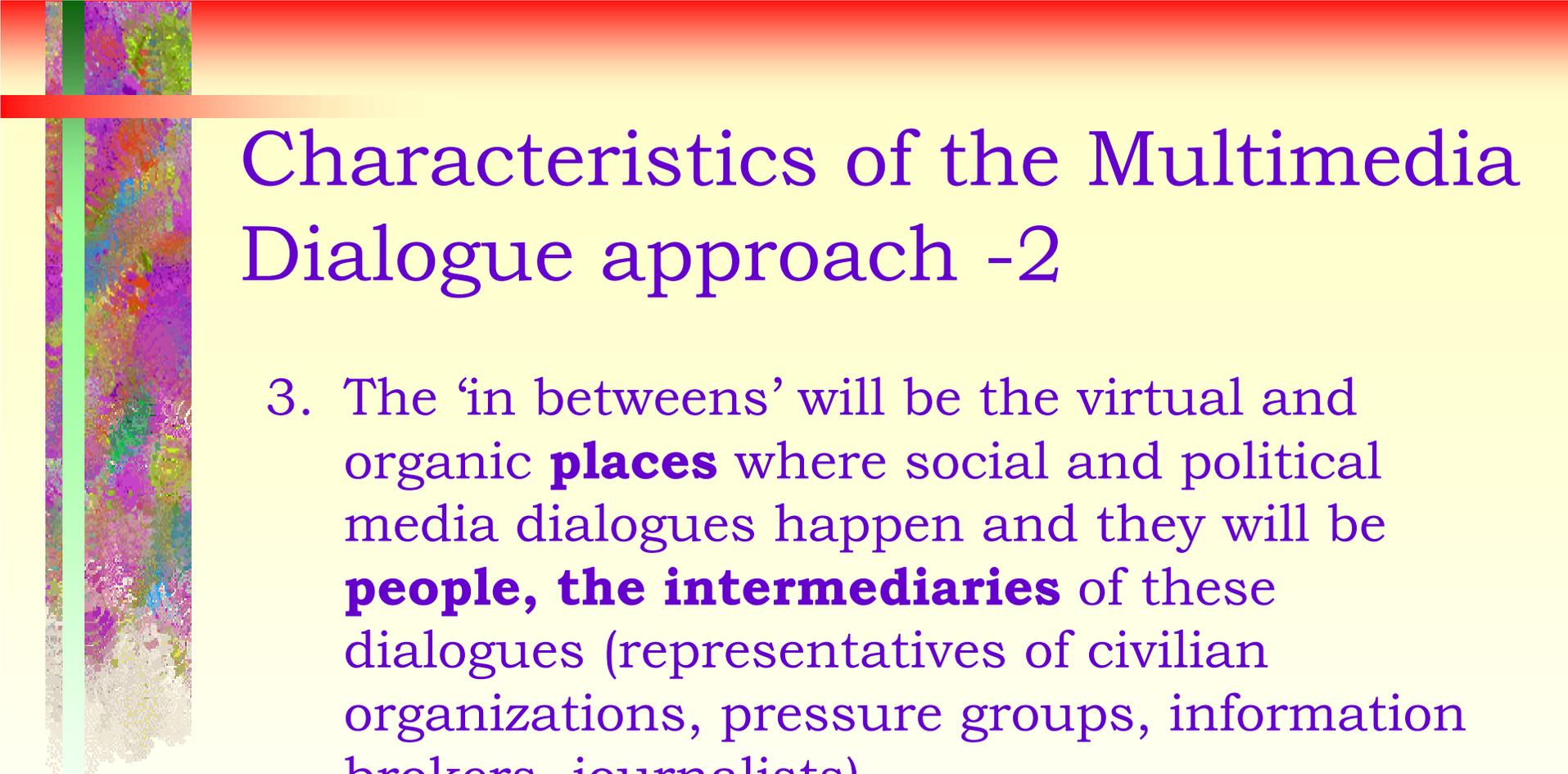
A multimedia approach instead of a single Internet approach

- The Internet has considerably more strengthened the political elite than those not participating in politics. The digital divide in terms of digital skills and the use of political Internet applications is widening, not closing (Jan van Dijk, *The Deepening Divide* (2005))
- Old media will remain, be it in digital shapes and linked to each other and the Internet. Every medium has its own strength and group of users.



Characteristics of the Multimedia Dialogue approach

1. All mass media will be used for political dialogues to reach everyone. They will be increasingly linked by means of the Internet
2. Politicians and citizens will meet somewhere 'in between' : citizens are less and less likely to go to politicians and you simply cannot expect from politicians that they continuously communicate with individual citizens by email, chatboxes, online fora and traditional meetings.



Characteristics of the Multimedia Dialogue approach -2

3. The ‘in between’s’ will be the virtual and organic **places** where social and political media dialogues happen and they will be **people, the intermediaries** of these dialogues (representatives of civilian organizations, pressure groups, information brokers, journalists).
4. These places and people are increasingly overlapping: a mosaic of different but thematically similar public spheres is appearing.

→ picture

Broadcasting

The Press

Opinion programs and pages

ITV discussions

The Internet

Public contributions: 'public and civic journalism'

Online forums

Telephony

Messaging, chatting

Discussion Meetings/ 'the street'

Bro = media

● = fora

— = multimedia links showing overlap





Characteristics of the Multimedia Dialogue approach -3

5. In these overlapping fora the politicians and their communication managers will meet the citizens and their intermediaries to connect increasingly different worlds. The politicians will have to show how they deal with the complexity of current affairs: what choices they make and why.

The citizens will have to show their problems, interests and opinions. Among others with direct democratic means online.