Exploring Change.Org as a Digital Heterotopia: A Foucauldian Approach

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Abstract

Technological developments and especially the Internet have shaped the understanding of culture and society. New forms of politics, economy, business and trade have emerged with digital culture. Digital communication tools have provided effective platforms for people not only to communicate with each other, but also to organize against societal problems. In this context, digital activism has provided opportunities for non-physical gatherings and new modes of organizing. As an e-petition platform, *Change.org* including various campaigns worldwide, is one of those effective digital activist platforms. Although there are several studies analyzing *Change.org* as an effective digital activist platform, the extant literature does not include studies that focus on the platform as a heterotopic site. In this context, the current study aims to find out how to understand *Change.org* as an example of digital heterotopia based on Michel Foucault's approach. Descriptive case study analysis was selected as the research technique and four categories were identified to analyze the case in a detailed way. The study revealed that *Change.org* can be considered as an epitome of digital heterotopia which reflects and creates the alternative spaces at the same time, and juxtaposes several spaces, events and issues in a single space with its own community rules.

Keywords: *Heterotopia, Digital Heterotopia, Digital Activism, Change.org, Case Study Analysis*

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Dijital Heterotopya Olarak Change.Org: Foucaultcu Bir Yaklaşım

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Öz

Teknolojik gelişmeler ve özellikle İnternet, kültür ve toplum kavrayışını büyük oranda şekillendirmektedir. Dijital kültür ile politika, ekonomi, iktisadi faaliyetler ve ticaretin yeni biçimleri ortaya çıkmaya başlamıştır. Dijital iletişim araçları, sadece kamuların birbirleriyle iletişim kurmaları için değil, aynı zamanda toplumsal sorunlara karşı örgütlenebilmeleri için de etkili platformlar sağlamaktadır. Bu bakımdan, dijital aktivizm fiziksel olmayan toplulukların ve yeni örgütlenme biçimlerinin ortaya çıkabilmesi için imkân sunmaktadır. Çevrimiçi imza kampanyası platformu olan ve dünya çapında birçok kampanyanın başlatıldığı *Change.org* en etkili dijital aktivist platformların arasında yer almaktadır. Literatürde *Change.org*'u etkili bir dijital aktivist platform olarak inceleyen birçok araştırma bulunmasına rağmen, söz konusu platformu heterotopik bir alan olarak tanımlayan bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma *Change.org*'un Michel Foucault'nun yaklaşımından temellenen bir kavram olan dijital heteretopya olarak nasıl incelenebileceğini ortaya koymaya amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma yöntemi olarak betimsel vaka incelemesi yöntemi kullanılmış ve analiz için dört kategori belirlenmiştir. Çalışma; kendi topluluk kuralları ile birlikte alternatif alanları aynı anda hem yansıtan hem de üreten, farklı alanları, olayları ve konuları tek bir yerde bir araya getiren *Change.org*'un dijital heterotopya örneği olarak değerlendirilebileceğini ortaya koymuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Heterotopya, Dijital Heterotopya, Dijital Aktvizm, *Change.Org*, Vaka İncelemesi

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The term Web 2.0 has been a phenomenon by the 2000s as a new Web experience. This new experience of reading and writing at the same time is different from the previous system (Web 1.0) which was read-only. It has led the Web to become an environment for mutual communication, information sharing and dissemination.

Web 2.0 is a technology that enables digital platforms to be participatory for the users who can not only consume, but also produce the content (Darwish and Lakhtoria 2011, 204). Therefore, the digital platforms such as Websites, blogs and social media tools should not only be considered as the catalogues for information sharing of issues or events, but also as places in which connections and relations can be established (Lllia 2002, 327). For Scholz (2010, 24-25) contrary to what is believed, Web 2.0 is not the first platform used by individuals to share their thoughts or to express their ideas. Since its emergence, the Internet has been providing a platform for public voices. In this context, four historical milestones can be aligned for the development of participatory digital technology. First milestone was the adaptation of "network mail" on ARPANET in the 1970s. Second one was the success of the Mosaic Web browsers as "window into cyberspace" in the mid-1990s. The following milestone was the formation of social media in the 2000s. The growth of the

use of Web-enabled mobile phones can be considered as the final phase in the development of participatory digital technology.

The Internet and Web 2.0 technology has triggered the development of e-government systems at the local, state and national levels. In such way, citizen participation has turned out to be an online activity. Online civic participation has changed the decision-making arenas and has reorganized the activities of non-profit advocacy efforts, interest groups and social movement organizations (McNutt 2018, 10-11). In this context, the multiple networks, which enable citizens and activists to connect on the common platform, have also transformed the use of mobile phones. The mobile technology creates an opportunity for identity construction and politics and provides networking sites for diverse communities to create solidarity (Kahn and Kellner 2004, 89). Nowadays, activist organizations prefer to conduct technology-powered advocacy methods rather than use physical venues. Online advocacy techniques such as e-mail/text campaigns, Website strategies, e-petitions, social media campaigns, mapping and online fundraising have supplanted the traditional methods including lobbying, community organizing, economic boycotts, traditional media campaigns, electoral effort and civil disobedience (McNutt 2018, 11).

Although the definition of the social movement is not explicit, it is commonly understood as: a) networks of informal interactions between diverse actors (individuals, organizations and groups); b) ties of solidarity based on shared beliefs and purposes; c) social change ending up with political and cultural conflicts (Kavada 2010, 102). Based on these characteristics, the Internet and digital communication tools are being used as the platforms by activists to establish connections and to organize around specific issues and purposes. The abovementioned technology-powered techniques are mostly employed at individual and organizational levels. In this respect, digital activism should be understood within the context of the digital technology use in each activist campaign and political, social and economic conditions in which the technology is used. While the use of digital technology is related to infrastructure including the networks, code, application and devices forming the physical structure of digital activist practices. In the same manner; economic, social and political conditions are important factors, which impact the way activists use this technology (Joyce 2010, 2).

There are many studies (Lee and Hsieh 2013; Clark 2016; Jackson 2018; Turley and Fisher 2018; George and Leidner 2019) that analyze digital activ-

ism in connection with the rights of disadvantageous groups and advocacy activities. In particular, social media tools are considered as effective platforms in conducting such activities.

Change.org is also widely used for digital campaigns. *Change.org* is known as one of the largest e-petition platforms in worldwide. It was founded in 2006 in order to form a social network for non-profit purposes. More than 300 million people from 196 countries use this platform (Huang et al., 2015). Since e-petitions are essential for online political participation, *Change.org* has become the most popular and useful platform for the users (Teblunthuis, Shaw and Hill 2017, 324). Online petitions via this platform have been playing significant role for governmental and societal changes worldwide. E-petitions reduce the cost of participation, dissemination and organization, and encourage the users to launch a campaign and to gain support from others. Simply, the users spend only five or ten minutes to register on the website to reach their goals, instead of spending time and effort for physical participation (Noshokaty, Deng & Kwak 2016, 1979).

Change.org is mainly analyzed as an effective e-petition platform for digital activism in the literature (Huang et al. 2015; Teblunthuis, Shaw and Hill 2017; Noshokaty, Deng and Shaw 2017; Halpin et al. 2018; Minocher 2019); however, those studies have not conceptualized the platform as a *digital heterotopia*. In this context, the current study aims to find out how to understand *Change.org* as digital heterotopia and what its main dynamics are. The heterotopias are self-induced, unplanned physical and mental spaces. They are worlds within worlds reflecting the outside. In this context, the conceptualization of Change.org as a digital heterotopia can be directive and seminal for the further digital activism research. It can contribute to understanding those sorts of online platforms as not only Web sites but also systematic structures providing virtual communities and networks for struggling with various social issues. Via the online platforms, people feel free to express their ideas upon issues and to react to social or political happenings. As stated above, the social movements are formed and conducted in these digital heterotopias in our age. In this context, research questions are as follows:

RQ1: How can digital heterotopia be conceptualized?

RQ2: What are the main dynamics of *Change.org* as a digital heterotopia?

RQ3: What are community rules of Change.org that should be followed by the users?

RQ4: How does *Change.org* create and reflect the alternative space?

RQ5: How does *Change.org* juxtapose different places, events and issues in a single place?

After a descriptive case study analysis will be employed as a research method, based on those research questions; Foucault's (1986) term *heterotopia* will be examined theoretically. And in the final section, *Change.org* will be analyzed under four specific categories. In doing so, the implementation structure will be evaluated within the scope of digital heterotopia. Since the term digital heterotopia is related to understanding of the selected platform holistically, general functions of Change.org were analyzed under the specific categories tied to heterotopia. Campaigns were only given as the examples for the related categories to be understood in detailed way.

Conceptualization of Heterotopia and Digital Heterotopia

The term heterotopia is originated from anatomy studies. It was defined as the displacement of an organ or a part of the body from its normal position (Sudradjat 2012, 29). It was used to describe the body parts, which can be either out of place, missing, extra or tumors (Hetherington 1997, 42). In the original meaning, heterotopia is like a tooth in the skull, a fingernail in the hand (Smith 2014, 18). Although heterotopia has become popular by the French thinker Michel Foucault in social sciences, according to Beckett, Bagguley and Campbell (2017) the study of Haeckel in 1905 can be considered as the inspiration for adoption and adaption of the concept. While heterotopia was defined as "gradual displacement of organs or tissue from its original position", heterochrony was explained as displacement in time, in sequence in which organs appear, such that there is acceleration or slowing in their appearance" (Beckett, Nagguley and Campbell 2017, 171).

Influenced by its original meaning, Foucault attempted to define the heterotopia in a book titled *The Order of Things*, in radio broadcasts, and in a lecture titled "Out of Spaces" presented to a group of architects in 1967 (Johnson 2006, 75). In the preface of *The Order of Things*, Foucault defined heterotopias as textual spaces, which undermine the language in the text. To be more precise, "they shatter or tangle common means" and "they destroy syntax in advance." Therefore, heterotopias dissolve the myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences (Foucault 2002, XIX). In 12-minute radio broadcast, he illustrated the concept with reference to children's imaginative games like pitching a tent, playing games on or under the covers of the parents' bed. Such

inventive plays produce different spaces for them. These spaces reflect and contest in the parallel time. On the track, Foucault points to a number of these "counter-spaces" such as cemeteries, brothels or prisons (Johnson 2006, 76).

Foucault (1986) specifically focused on the term heterotopia in the lecture titled "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" in a detailed way. He tried to explain heterotopia in comparison with *utopia*. Utopias are defined as sites, which are devoid of real places. These sites are directly related to or have inverted analogous with the real spaces of society. They are perfected forms of society; however, they do not exist in reality. Differently from utopias, there are also places formed in the founding of society. They are real places / counter sites and exist in every culture and civilization. Those places are outside of all places and can be called as heterotopias. The heterotopias function like mirrors on which I can see myself but the image on the mirror is not the real me. In short, it is a placeless place. Put it differently, it is a virtual place that opens behind the surface which reflects my own real visibility to myself (Foucault 1986, 3-4).

Differently from utopia, heterotopia reflects a juxtapositional and relational space including incompatible spaces and causing paradoxes. A mirror is a metaphor for utopia due to the absence of image that we see in it. On the other hand, it is also heterotopia because it is a real object showing our images (Sudradjat 2012, 29). Heterotopias are locatable in physical space-time compared to utopias; however, they also exist "outside" society like utopias. To define a space as a heterotopia requires some expulsion from "mainstream" society and its habits. It might also contribute to stability of the society (Saldanha 2008, 2082-2083). As can be noticed, the definition of the term is not clear or consistent. In order to understand the base of heterotopia, Foucault (1986) alleged six fundamental characteristics:

1. There are various forms and spatial types of heterotopia;

2. Heterotopias have accurate and determined functions in society which can make heterotopias function in various ways;

3. The heterotopias can juxtapose several spaces and sites in a single real place;

4. The heterotopia is also such a heterochrony, which refers to linkage of slices in time for the sake of symmetries;

5. The heterotopic sites are not freely accessible like public spheres. There are certain permissions and gestures that should be followed for the entry. There are also heterotopias which prioritize the purification activities like hammam of the Moslems or Scandinavian saunas;

6. The functions of heterotopias unfold between two extreme poles; on one hand, they create a space of illusion exposing real space, on the other they create a real space which is much more perfect and meticulous compared to ours (Foucault 1986, 4-8)

Since the heterotopia is not easy to understand comprehensively, Sudradjat (2012, 31) exemplifies heterotopic sites as: *ship* (it is a piece of floating space, a placeless place. It has own rules in its space); *cemetery* (it is also a heterotopia because it provides an illusion to its visitors that their departed relatives still have existence and status); *gardens* (they are also as illusions reflecting an ideal nature and smallest parcel of the world); and *museums* (there are disparate objects from different times in a single place. Therefore, museum is the palimpsest and continual accumulation of time).

According to Hetherington (1997, 40) an alternative social ordering is performed within heterotopia. In other words, heterotopic spaces are the places where a new way of ordering emerges as opposite to mundane idea of social order. In this vein, heterotopias can be understood as spaces that exist in relation to each other. These spaces mirror, invert and respond to other spaces. They have different functions such as ritualism (sacred sites or churches), leisure time (resorts, gardens) or deviation (old people's homes, hospitals) (Witteborn 2014, 74).

In conceptual understanding of heterotopia, digital media can also be considered as the tool including the "mirror effect". More clearly, digital media provides platform for individuals to exist in the place which is isolated from physical space and time. In addition, the multiple media tools provided by these platforms allow the users to involve in online and physical worlds simultaneously (Göker 2017, 172). They constitute and link competing spaces like politics, individual demands and entertainment through online interactions and network (Witteborn 2014, 76). The ambiguous duality (real world and virtual space) of digital landscapes enables those digital platforms to be reconsidered as heterotopia (Lin and Yang 2020, 1222). On the other hand, digital heterotopias can also be understood as cultural memory spaces that juxtapose different spaces like online and offline, experts and amateurs, sci-

ence and popular culture. In this context, social media tools are the best examples for creating virtual communities and social networks to bring people together to communicate, discuss and share their ideas. Social network sites can juxtapose several places in a single place and explore diverse events synchronically in real time (Komalova 2018, 44).

Besides being an e-petition site, as a networked media platform *Change.org* can be considered as a good example of digital heterotopia in terms of juxtaposing several spaces and locations in a single place, which has its own rules to follow, and exists "outside" of mainstream society. *Change.org* also provides a participatory platform for the users to share, discuss or defend the societal problems. In accordance with the main characteristics of heterotopia by Foucault (1986), *Change.org* unfolds between two poles: on one hand, it creates a space of illusion that exposes real space, on the other it creates a space that is another real space in which it is easier and useful to reach the masses to raise awareness and to conduct campaigns. In this context, this study will analyze *Change.org* as an epitome of digital heterotopia by focusing on the main dynamics of the platform. The structure and functions of this platform will be examined through case study research.

Methodology

The case study is defined as "a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings" (Eisenhardt 1989, 534). A person, a campaign, an organization or a cultural/historical/political phenomenon can be chosen as a case. Generally, case study research is used to analyze the chosen case/cases in a detailed way. However, through case study research, researchers can build theories, which is one of the case study research's strengths (Eisenhardt 1989). Therefore, case study research is not a sample as many studies tend to regard it as such; it is a research strategy per se (Yin 2003).

The case study research comprises both single case studies and multiple case studies. While single case studies aim to comprehend the case in a detailed way, multiple case studies aim to reveal differences and similarities between the chosen cases. Therefore, the number of cases is determined by the research questions of the study. In other words, research questions lie at the heart of a case study research. After the research questions are formulated, the data should be collected. Different data collection methods, such as "documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant

observation, physical artifacts" can be used in case studies (Yin 2003, 86). By this means, case study research provides a methodology to comprehensive data about a case / cases.

All case study researches allow the researcher to understand how the selected case functions. In this context, case study should not be considered as only a data-gathering technique, but also a methodological approach which includes several data-gathering techniques. Although there are several designs of case study analysis, the most commonly used types are exploratory, explanatory and descriptive techniques. Descriptive case study analysis is the most effective one to employ in social sciences. In descriptive case studies, a researcher should detect the unit of analysis which is compatible with theoretical framework (Berg 2001, 225-230). In this line, after research questions are identified and the data is collected, the findings of the analysis are interpreted (Kumar 2011). In addition to common characteristics of case study analysis in descriptive case study, unity of analysis and the related research questions should address the specific theoretical proposition properly. Most importantly, the logical connection should be formed to identify the analysis categories. In such way, the findings can be scrutinized in much more descriptive way (Yin, 2003). To this end, first theoretical proposition was determined as connection between Change.org and Foucaldian concept heterotopia in the scope of digital heterotopia. Then, the specific categories were identified based on the theoretical framework. The findings were analyzed under the related categories in descriptive way.

Findings

In this study, the case of *Change.org* was chosen through the purposive sampling and it was regarded as an epitome of digital heterotopia due to its characteristics. In order to analyze *Change.org* as a heterotopic site, four categories were identified based on Foucault's approach: *General Structure, Community Rules, The Mirror Effect,* and *The Locus of Juxtapositions*. Within the category of "general structure", the study will focus on the general structure to understand how the platform works. The category of "community rules" will examine the specific rules of involving in this platform. In the category of "the mirror effect", the study will argue that *Change.org* reflects and creates alternative options in society. In the final category titled "locus of juxtapositions", the study will put forth that *Change.org* provides a platform for different, even clashing ideas.

General Structure of *Change.org*

Founded in 2006 by Ben Rattray, *Change.org* is "the world's largest platform for social change" (Change.org Impact Report, 2018: 3). As a Public Benefit Corporation (PBC) and a charitable Foundation, campaigns are financed only by the members and campaign participants who promote the petitions (Change.org Impact Report, 2018: 22). With 265.786.771 million users (registered and unregistered) all around the world (see Table 1) and more than 25.000 campaigns per month, *Change.org* has enabled 603.903.062 online signatures to be appended (Change.org Impact Report, 2018: 5)

Table 1: Distribution of Registered Users by Country

Country	Number of Registered Users	Percentage %
USA	60,587,415	27,8
UK	17,167,035	7,9
Brazil	17,131,100	7,8
Spain	14,587,757	6,7
Russia	14,304,914	6,6
India	12,842,341	5,9
France	12,399,827	5,7
Turkey	11,945,973	5,5
Mexico	9,582,691	4,41
Italy	8,905,105	4,1
Canada	7,285,302	3,3
Argentina	6,561,163	3
Germany	6,002,997	2,8
Australia	5,894,081	2,7
Indonesia	5,410,783	2,5
Colombia	3,099,291	1,4
Thailand	2,872,805	1,3
Japan	1,697,572	0,8
Total	218,278,152	100
Source: Change.org Impact Report. 2018.		

Change.org aims "to empower people everywhere to create the change they want to see" and "to create civic participation" (Change.org Impact Report, 2018: 3-7). *Change.org*'s strategy is "to help create more responsive systems of decision-making" (Change.org Impact Report, 2018: 7). As it is implied by its mission and strategy, *Change.org* believes that the world needs "social and

political systems" to make people change the world. In this respect, *Change. org* claims that it has created a circle including empowering, mobilizing and engaging people for societal change, which is defined as "people-powered change" (Change.org Impact Report, 2018: 8). *Change.org* provides a platform for campaigners to reach people and decision makers to start petition on any specific issue.

By giving voice to people and making them campaigners, *Change.org* provides a platform for people to participate civic initiatives. Everyone can start an online petition free of charge. According to *Change.org*, every minute a petition campaign attains its aim and in 196 countries, 64.459 petition campaigns have reached their goals[1]. While *Change.org* lists successful campaigns with a title of "prominent campaigns", the platform also lists the campaigns which need contributions to achieve their goals. Hereby users and visitors can see what campaigns remain on the agenda and what people want to change.

Community Rules

Access to the heterotopic sites are without constraint; that is, people should follow rules for access (Foucault, 1967). As heterotopic spaces, *Change.org* has its own rules that campaigners and users should follow. First of all, users need to have access to Internet and the related technological tools (e.g. mobile phones, PCs or tablet computers) in order to register and start a petition on the platform. People can start petitions about any topic they want to propose for the public and political agenda. However, *Change.org* has developed "Community Guidelines" for the users to agree and to follow.

In "Community Guidelines", *Change.org* classifies the points that users can do and cannot do. In this respect, *Change.org* tells campaigners to choose a campaign topic, to offer the resolution to the problem and to explain how the campaign will bring about a change in society. After this step, users specify the decision maker related to the campaign topic and share the campaign with their acquaintances by the help of social media. At this point, *Change. org* requests campaigners to be open to different worldviews that might come out during the campaign and to listen the others. The campaigners can share developments about the campaign with the supporters regularly and the supporters can comment and share their own ideas on the website. However, *Change.org* claims that it will not excuse "hate speech, incitement to violence/ the glorification of violence, impersonation of other people, violation of other

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1   https://www.change.org/impact (accessed 10 August 2020).

people's privacy, bullying, gratuitously graphic content, content that may be harmful to children, spam and illegal content" (Change.org Impact Report, 2018: 25). By prescribing community rules, *Change.org* doesn't assent to human right violations.

In case of a violation of the guideline, users can report the violation and *Change.org*'s "User Safety Team" does what is necessary for the situation after the violation is confirmed. In the case of a violation, users' access can be even restricted. "Community Guidelines" are uploaded on a regular basis and the campaigners should follow the rules in order to conduct campaigns.

The Mirror Effect: Reflecting and Creating the Alternative

As heterotopic sites are virtual places reflecting the outside, *Change.org* functions as a mirror which reflects society's needs. By mirroring the people's demands, *Change.org* also proposes an alternative to the existing society. In other words, *Change.org* pictures ideal form of society by demonstrating people's demands. Although *Change.org* is a virtual space in which people put signature to the campaigns, those virtual campaigns can end up with real results. By using *Change.org*, people can bring forward an issue that they demand to change into the public agenda and they also push the governmental institutions or corporations for changing their attitudes towards the issue. By this means, *Change.org* encourages societal change about any topic.

In Impact Report 2018, *Change.org* makes a list of the most popular campaigns of 2018 including economic fairness, health & disabilities, women's rights, animal rights, environment &plastics and lastly children's rights (see Table 2). The number of campaigns launched about a topic shows that people demand change in those areas. In this way, *Change.org* functions as a mirror on which society sees itself. According to Change.org Impact Report (2018) people demand economic fairness the most, which shows that people around the world are in accord with each other in terms of economic injustices and health services. People also demand authorities to take action about women's rights, animal rights, children's rights and environment. In a way, Table 2 functions as a picture of an alternative society.

Table 2: The Most Popular Campaign Topics of 2018

Campaign Topic	Number of Campaigns
Economic Fairness	28,395
Health and Disabilities	19,965
Women's Rights	16,203
Animal Rights	13,922
Environment and Plastics	13,713
Children's Rights	6,172
Source: Change.org Impact Report.	

One can look at the topics of the campaigns and see that people around the world call for societal and political change in those areas. In this way, one can picture an alternative society which protects human and animal rights and is environmentally-conscious. Thereby, ordinary people not only participate in the public debates by expressing their opinions, but also they become driving force of the social change.

In *Change.org*, petitions are addressed to governmental institutions or corporations which are forced to take action to change unfair practices. The more people sign, the more the campaign public pressure is created, and the more decision makers actualize the people's demands. While campaigns raise awareness, people participate in the discussions and institutions/corporations respond to the campaigners. Although *Change.org* does not occupy a physical place like a parliament or an assembly, and people do not come together in real spaces, but campaigns have real outcomes in real life.

For instance, in 2019 "Pass the Preventing Animal Cruelty (PACT) Act" was launched.[2] Prior to the campaign, although the act titled "Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture (PACT) Act S. 654" was unanimously passed in the Senate, it was not a federal law. After the House of Representatives changed, Sdyney Helfand started the campaign addressing to U.S. House of Representatives, U.S Senate and Donald J. Trump. The campaign demanded the Congress to pass the act and the campaigner successfully appealed to people by saying that if they signed the petition, they would help stop animal cruelty in

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2   https://www.change.org/p/pass-the-preventing-animal-cruelty-pact-act (accessed 10 August 2020).

the country. After over 860.000 signatures were signed, the law was signed, and it is known as "the first general federal animal cruelty law in US history."[3]

In Australia, campaign titled "Disability is no Reason for Deportation. Let Our Little Adyan Stay in Australia" also achieved its aim.[4] Adyan's parents started the petition after the Department of Immigration and Border Protection refused their application for permanent residency due to Adyan's disability. After 32.059 signatures were signed, Adyan's family was granted permanent residency in Australia.

Besides, campaign titled "Straws Suck! Ban Single Use Straws Across the UK!" was launched by 9- and 10-years old children in 2018.[5] As a class, kids argued that plastic use destroys the marine life and unless the usage will not stop, by 2050 the number of plastics will outnumber the fish population. In order to strength their claim, they reminded that some companies lessened the usage of plastics and some countries promised to ban the straws. With 108.874 signatures, the UK government made commitment to ban plastic straws.

In Turkey, after 20-year old Özgecan Aslan who resisted rape of a minibus driver was brutally murdered, a campaign titled "#ÖzgecanYasası"(The Özgecan Law) was launched in *Change.org* in 2015. With more than one million signatures, the campaign was even at the parliament's agenda, that is, some members of the parliament made the legislative proposals about the case to the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (Aktaş and Akçay 2019, 325-326). Even though the law has not been passed yet, the campaign provided the demand for abolition of the abatement of punishments in the cases of feminicide to be known as "Özgecan Yasası" (*The Özgecan Law*) by the public (Aktaş and Akçay 2019, 307).

The Locus of Juxtapositions

Although *Change.org* acts responsively towards violations, hate speech and incitement of violence; it also celebrates diversity and the right to freedom of speech. If *Change.org* determines that a reported campaign does not violate

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3   https://www.change.org/p/pass-the-preventing-animal-cruelty-pact-act (accessed 10 August 2020).

4   https://www.change.org/p/disability-is-no-reason-for-deportation-let-our-little-adyan-stay-in-australia (accessed 11 August 2020).

5   shttps://www.change.org/p/michael-gove-straws-suck-ban-single-use-straws-across-the-uk (accessed 11 August 2020).

the "Community Guidelines",[6] the platform does not implement censorship. Rather, *Change.org* encourages users to launch counter campaigns if they are offended by any campaign. Indeed, *Change.org* states that launching a counter campaign against the campaigns is the best way to respond to insulting campaigns.[7] *Change.org* believes that in every petition campaign there can be opposite parties and being on different wavelengths about a campaign is the best aspect of an open-minded platform.

Change.org provides a synchronic platform for campaigners and supporters because campaigners can launch various campaigns regardless of their country or time zone. In *Change.org* there are different campaign topics such as human rights, animal rights, health, economic justice, social policy, local issues, environmental issues, women's rights, family, criminal justice, entertainment, immigration, food and education. Opposite parties can launch campaigns in *Change.org*, which comes to mean that *Change.org* is a locus on which different topics and worldviews from all around the world is juxtaposed in a single place.

For example, opposing campaigns about "The Council Of Europe Convention On Preventing And Combating Violence Against Women And Domestic Violence" in Turkey epitomize such juxtaposition. Recently, the convention signed by the Republic of Turkey in 2011 has been brought to the political agenda by the conservatives claiming that the convention has ruined the family values and by the feminist groups asserting that the convention is the leading document to combat violence against women. *Change.org* has enabled those groups to defend their claims and to be supported.

Both the supporters and the opponents of the convention launched campaigns about the convention. After the public debate on annulling the convention, the supporters launched a campaign titled "Enforce the Istanbul Convention and the Law No. 6284 *#IstanbulConventionSavesLives*".[8] The campaign demands Grand National Assembly of Turkey to enforce the law to combat feminicide and violence against women. In addition to this demand, the campaigners also informed users about the Law no. 6824, which is a national law

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6   https://www.change.org/policies/community?lang=en-US (accessed 12 August 2020).

7   https://www.change.org/policies/community?lang=en-US (accessed 13 August 2020).

8   https://www.change.org/p/kad%C4%B1nlar%C4%B1-koruyan-istanbul-s%C3%B6zle%C5%9Fmesi-uygulans%C4%B1n-istanbuls%C3%B6zle%C5%9Fmesiya%C5%9Fat%C4%B1r-tbmmresmi-adalet-bakanlik (accessed 14 August 2020).

based on the convention. On the other side, the opponents launched a campaign titled "Annul the Istanbul Convention" by supporting that the convention ruins the family values.[9]

Although the aforementioned convention is the primary legal instrument to combat violence against women in Turkey, *Change.org* provided platform for the supporters and the opponents of the convention. In other words, even though the convention's importance and role in combating and preventing violence against women, *Change.org* is used by groups to disseminate their opinions about the case. In this way, *Change.org* becomes a locus of juxtaposition of different standpoints on a same issue. By bringing different ideas together without prioritizing any, *Change.org* becomes a heterotopia where different worldviews stand side by side. Here, people are the agents deciding which campaign will shine through others and will affect the decisions in the future.

Conclusion

The current study aimed to analyze *Change.org* as a digital heterotopia from Foucault's perspective. In this context, five main research questions were identified for the analysis. First, the study focused on the conceptualization of heterotopia and digital heterotopia. Then, the case was analyzed through descriptive case study analysis.

Based on the first research question, the study showed that heterotopia is defined in comparison with utopia in social science although the concept is originated from anatomy studies and stands for organ displacement from its normal position of the body (Sudradjat 2012). Differently from utopias, heterotopias are locatable in physical time (Saldanha 2008). For Foucault (1986) heterotopias are formed in the founding of society. They are counter-sites and exist in every culture and civilization. The heterotopia possesses "mirror effect" that reflects juxtapositional and relational spaces (Sudradjat 2012). Foucault (1986) states that the heterotopias have different spatial types and determined functions in society. They can juxtapose several spaces and sites in a single real place. The heterotopic sites are not freely accessible like public spheres. There are some rules that should be followed for the entry. On one hand, the heterotopias create a space of illusion exposing every real space, on the other

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9   https://www.change.org/p/aile-ve-sosyal-politikalar-bakanl%C4%B1%C4%9F%C4%B1-
      istanbul-s%C3%B6zle%C5%9Fmesi-iptal-edilsin (accessed 15 August 2020).

they form splendid real spaces compared to ours. Therefore, an alternative social ordering is performed within heterotopia (Hetherington 1997). From this point of view, digital media can be also considered as an example for heterotopia in terms of providing platform which is isolated physical time and space. It allows the users to exist in online and physical worlds simultaneously. In general, the ambiguous duality (real world and virtual space) of digital landscapes enables them to function as heterotopia (Lin and Yang 2020). They can link competing spaces such as politics, individual demands and entertainment through online interactions (Witteborn 2014). Digital heterotopias function as cultural memory spaces that juxtapose different spaces like online and offline, experts and amateurs, science and popular culture (Komalova 2018).

In the scope of second and third research questions, the findings revealed that *Change.org* is also a digital heterotopia that juxtaposes different spaces, locations and issues in a single place, and has its own rules to follow. Founded in 2006 by Ben Rattray, *Change.org* has more than 265.000.000 registered and unregistered users of this platform worldwide. As can be shown in Table 1, 27,8% of the users are registered from USA. As stated by Saldanha (2018) for the formation of a heterotopic site, *Change.org* is also locatable in physical time. The platform aims "to empower people everywhere to create the change they want to see" and to promote civic participation. In doing so, it provides opportunity for campaigners to reach people and decision makers to start the petition. As any heterotopic site should have some permissions and gestures (Foucault 1986; Hetherington 1997), *Change.org* has also its own community rules. The initial step is to have access to Internet and technological tools in order to register and start the petition. "Community Guidelines" should also be read and agreed by the users. This guideline includes violation, safety, privacy and such human rights protection content. In case of violation, the access of the user can be restricted.

As the heterotopia includes "mirror effect" reflecting juxtapositional and relational spaces (Sudradjat 2012) and has different spatial types and determined functions with society (Foucault 1986), *Change.org* creates a space of illusion aiming an ideal society, and creates a real space with concrete outcomes. It is a virtual space in which people put signature to the campaigns, but these campaigns end up with real results. It functions as a "mirror" for the users by reflecting the possibility of social change and civic participation though its non-physical space in online and by creating concrete outputs for the real world. For instance, in the project titled "Disability is no reason for

deportation. Let our Adyan stay in Australia" following the 32.059 signatures, Adyan's family obtained permanent residency in Australia. Besides, after the campaign titled "Straws Suck! Ban Single Use Straws Across the UK" gathered 108.874 signatures, the UK government made commitment to ban the use of plastic straws.

In the framework of final research question, the findings showed that *Change.org* celebrates diversity and the right to freedom of speech although the platform acts responsively towards violations, hate speech and incitement of violence. If the responsible team of *Change.org* determines that a reported campaign does not violate the "Community Guidelines", it is not censored. Instead, the complaining users are encouraged to launch counter campaigns against the campaign. For instance, two opposed campaigns concerning "The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence" have been launced in Turkey. Following the public debate on annulling the convention, the supporters have started the campaign titled "Enforce the Istanbul Convention and The Law No. 6284 *#IstanbulConventionSavesLives*" in order to make the Grand National Assembly of Turkey enforce the Law to struggle with feminicide and violence against women. On the opposite side, the users launched the campaign titled as "Annul the Istanbul Convention" by supporting that the Convention ruins the family values. *Change.org* can also be understood as a synchronic space that juxtaposes campaigners and supporters from different regions and time zones of the world. In addition, there are many campaigns focused on various topics such as human rights, animal rights, health, economic justice, environment, entertainment and education in one single place.

Consequently, the findings revealed that *Change.org* can be considered as an epitome in terms of understanding digital heterotopia as digital media corresponds to the main characteristics of heterotopia. As stated in the literature review, no research has analyzed *Change.org* as digital heterotopia, so it is believed that this current study can be pioneer. In particular, the research categories which were designed based on the literature can be directive for the further research. To be clearer, the community guidelines of Change.org as community rules, the mirror function of it which reflects the needs of society and also providing a synchronic platform for campaigners and supporters can be useful for future studies to analyze and characterize the similar digital environments.

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