

Call for Papers
The Future of Democracy
Graduate & Post-Graduate Conference on Innovative Scenarios
for the Future of Representative Democracy

7 – 9 April 2017

Goethe University Frankfurt am Main
Research Unit Democratic Innovations

Today, the system of representative and elite-centered democracy stands worldwide under considerable pressure. Existing institutions of the representative system – necessary for effective democratic decision making and implementation – are increasingly losing their legitimation power. The symptoms of this development are a significant decline in trust in formal institutions, decreasing membership of political parties, and a growing gap between citizens and their representatives combined with significant increase in unconventional participation and mass protests against government policies.

However, the current system of representative democracy is not the end of the democratic development. Within established, but also in new and consolidating democracies a process of rethinking, search for new directions, and development of innovative scenarios is taking place. One of the focal points of this process is to enable more participation of citizens in political processes, be it through increasing inclusiveness of representative democracy (e. g. personalization of electoral law, lowering of voting age, lowering quorums), by extending direct democracy or by introducing consultative-deliberative procedures. The future of democracy may be an innovative combination of representative, participatory and deliberative democratic elements.

This graduate & post-graduate conference takes the opportunity to address these questions and focuses on the actors and the instruments of these innovations, to investigate the specific procedures carried out, and the relevant contextual factors. Last but not least, in a wider focus of the conference are the effects of these processes. Within this framework, a broad range of proposals is welcome, and asked to engage with the following question: What impact and contribution does the scenario in question provide for the future of democracy?

Section 1. The Input Dimension: Actors and Instruments

The first thematic section of the conference focuses on various aspects of involvement in participative procedures (both on-site and online). Here contributions concentrating on more traditional questions of who participates and why are welcome, as well as proposals addressing individual factors and mobilization processes within representative, directly democratic and deliberative-consultative procedures. Further questions include: What is the role of politics and administration, which interests do they pursue and how do they affect the innovative processes? How do citizens perceive democratic innovations?

Section 2. The Process and Context Dimension

The second section of the conference will examine procedural and contextual dimensions of the respective democratic innovations. Considered will be contributions engaging with first, procedural aspects – for example, analyses of discussions within democratic procedures (both on-site and online). Which mechanisms/strategies are used to assert interests, which procedural design and implementation features should be taken into consideration? Second, contextual aspects can be scrutinized: which states/provinces/municipalities experiment with which democratic innovations and why (ranging from electoral law reform(s) and direct democracy, to participative budgeting and citizens' fora)? Of particular interest are also the effects of social and political conflict lines on democratic innovations.

Section 3. The Dimension of Effects

The third section concentrates on the effects of democratic innovations. Here contributions examining policy effects, issue congruence between citizens' preferences and elite decisions are welcome, as are papers analyzing the quality of the deliberations within participative processes. Focus on participants (within representative, directly democratic and deliberative-consultative procedures) and their political attitudes, knowledge, identification with the community, etc. is also of particular interest, given the fact that many procedures aim at the activation and education of citizens.

General information

Encouraged are both empirical and theoretical contributions, no specific theoretical or methodological 'schools' are excluded. The geographical scope ranges from the local level to the regional level, from national to European, international and transnational contexts. The conference is aimed decidedly at junior scholars – graduate students and early career researchers (post-docs).

The following panel chairs and discussants are designated: Brigitte Geissel (University of Frankfurt), Norbert Kersting (University of Münster), Claudia Landwehr (University of Mainz), Patrizia Nanz (IASS Potsdam), Thamy Pogrebinschi (WZB Berlin), Angelika Vetter (University of Stuttgart).

Please send your abstract (max. 500 words) until November 13, 2016 to the following email addresses:

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