

Political Identities: Conceptual and Methodological uses to better Understand Sociopolitical Realities

Panel Chair:

Alon Helled, Università degli Studi di Torino, helledalon@gmail.com

Abstract:

Identity is one of the crown jewels in the kingdom of 'contested concepts'. Only few concepts are so integral to social and political sciences, yet address contradictory purposes. The notion of identity simultaneously imply unity and recognition but can equally entail separation and differentiation. From the fragile individual as a self-solidifying framework, to the layered in-group sense of belonging through nation-states to the global and supra-national realities of our time, identities juxtapose peace to conflict, often with far-reaching political consequences. In addition, the concept means long debate and divergent uses. Both constructivist and de-constructivist approaches have led to the same result: the eternal return of the topic. Some say the concept should be abandoned, while others advocate to refine it and make better use of it. That said, there is no doubt that identities are programmatically asserted and promoted in contemporary politics. They generate cohesion and demand recognition while their politicization often excludes the 'other' and creates insurmountable boundaries. Thus, political identities are socially constructed and hold some responsibility for inclusion/exclusion – self/other nexuses. Looking at identities in political research provides explanatory tools to better understand a wide variety of political events and social dynamics. As they are produced as much as they produce, the conceptual richness the notion presents is truly remarkable: the feelings of attachment, belonging, recognition, norms formation and integration, the logics of appropriateness are only few examples. The latter are all factors relying on a certain type of identity and/or identification. Moreover, multiple identifications overlap, interact, include or exclude, conflict or enhance cooperation. The formation of identities can lead to multicultural integration of diversity, tolerance, recognition and pluralism while simultaneously exclude and build walls. Identities are thus effective instruments for the politicization of social life. The construction of social structures and of specific social practices, -together with their imaginary significations-, suggests that political identities are a sort of social glue. Although

multicultural and multifaceted identities populate the twenty-first century, there has not been much discussion about the breadth and depth of identity in political science.

Since dealing with identities means to integrate contestation into contestation without neglecting the peculiarities of each sociopolitical context, the panel aims to scrutinize the state of the art in identities research and to bring into debate the processes of identity making and identity building. It wishes to open the floor to dynamic multi-dimensional and inter-disciplinary understandings of identities in their historic and political formation, -especially in the ways they shape the present and future of contemporary politics. A focal place will be given to conceptual and analytical use as well as to methodological refinement and innovation in the research of identities in a broad spectrum. The panel invites paper-proposals on single case studies or cross-sectional analyses, reflective essays, experience sharing or works addressing new methods.

If you have a Paper you think might fit in this Panel, please contact the Panel Chair before 31 January with the following information:

- Title of the paper (no more than 20 words)
- Abstract of the paper (no more than 250 words)
- Author's (and if applicable co-author's) email address as registered in their MyECPR account
- 3 – 5 keywords