

## LAUDATIO STEIN ROKKAN PRIZE 2014

The Jury for the Stein Rokkan Prize for Comparative Social Science Research 2014 has decided to honour Christian Welzel in recognition of his book *Freedom Rising: Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2013. The prize winner has set himself an ambitious task: to study the progress of universal freedoms through the conceptual and empirical lenses of a comparative analysis of the role of emancipative values in rich and poor countries. He seeks to identify the sources of emancipative values; to demonstrate their quality as a fundamental civic force and as a key propellant of pro-democratic impulses; and to locate emancipative values in the evolution of human civilisation.

Christian Welzel has succeeded in his ambition. His book is a piece of scholarship that constitutes - in empirical, conceptual, theoretical and methodological terms - a very 'substantial and original contribution in comparative social science research', as stipulated as the main criterion for the award of the Stein Rokkan Prize.

*Freedom Rising* starts from the premise that the quest for emancipation, defined as the desire for a life free from external domination, is the major source of human empowerment trends. The book provides an intriguing narrative of the circumstances under which the pursuit of emancipation becomes a powerful social and political force. The adaptive quest for freedom, the author argues, may be suppressed by existential pressures, as in pre-modern times or in the context of modern autocracies; but it awakens with widening existential opportunities created mainly by technological advancement, economic and social development, the increasing importance of secular values, and the growing availability of people's action resources. Welzel highlights the emergence, reproduction and spread of emancipative values, i.e. values which emphasise, above all, free choice, equality, voice, and autonomy, as the decisive driver behind the trend towards human empowerment. According to his analysis of cross-national and time series data on value change in a large sample of countries, emancipative values are to be counted among the major social antecedents – if not the major antecedent – of pro-social behaviour as well as of transitions to democracy and the institutionalisation of democratic rights.

The empirical scope of *Freedom Rising* is impressive as is its methodological and statistical sophistication in analysing a wide range of micro- and macro-level data. Welzel integrates the findings of his study in the framework of an "evolutionary theory of emancipation". This theory rests on three major pillars. The first is the "source thesis", which accounts mainly for the technological and socio-economic determinants and other exogenous conditions of human empowerment processes, with the rise of emancipative values at their core. The second pillar consists of the "sequence thesis". This thesis focusses on endogenous determinants of emancipative values, on the one hand, and on their pro-social and pro-democratic implications, on the other. The third pillar consists of the "contagion thesis". This part of the analysis suggests that the human empowerment process in a period of globalisation and, hence, an environment of accelerated diffusion processes, is about to break free from its initial exogenous conditions.

*Freedom Rising* is a book with an extraordinarily broad data base and a complex theoretical foundation. It combines approaches from political culture studies and political psychology with concepts and hypotheses from research on democratisation and economic and social development. The book is a major achievement in comparative scholarship. It asks ambitious

questions; it is conceptually innovative and theoretically sophisticated; it displays a deep knowledge of the origins, sequences and consequences of emancipative values; it succeeds in tracing developments both over time and across diverse cultural zones; and it sets out its questions and findings with great clarity.

The book's arguments and especially its positive outlook on the progress of human empowerment will not go unchallenged. But no serious discussion of the prospects of human empowerment, freedom and democracy in a globalising world will be able to ignore its claims.

Professor Klaus Goetz (ECPR Executive Committee and Chair of the Stein Rokkan Prize)

Professor Dr. Ingrid van Biezen (Leiden University)

Professor Dr. Stein Kuhnle (University of Bergen and Hertie School of Governance, Berlin)

Professor Dr. Manfred G. Schmidt (Universität Heidelberg)

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