Workshop Title: Bringing Citizens Back In - Political Participation and Participatory Democracy

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In many established democracies, governments are starting to get worried about the willingness of citizens to take part in political activities. Declining rates in voter turnout or party membership trigger initiatives for political reform in order to bring citizens back in and to reverse this perceived trend towards political apathy. The German government for example is considering constitutional reform to allow for electronic voting and measures of direct democracy. The British government is experimenting with electronic citizen consultations and the Swedish government has appointed a minister for democracy to do something about the decline in civic engagement.

These activities raise questions regarding the ability of political institutions to raise the level of political participation and to increase its quality. There have been various ongoing debates in political science and democratic theory on participatory design and participatory democracy. However, little attention has been directed towards the actual impact of participatory institutions on individual behavior. On the one hand, debates on participatory democracy, deliberative democracy and electronic democracy are largely driven by normative concerns and are being based upon the firm belief that political institutions should be as participatory as possible. On the other, debates on direct democracy and on the input performance of democratic systems are more or less concerned with describing positive institutional structures. They by and large ignore the intriguing question whether institutions matter at all when it comes to the question of increasing the quantity and quality of individual political participation.

The general theme of the workshop is to bring together different debates on participatory democracy and participatory design and to focus these debates in a more explicit way on the critical link between participatory design and individual political participation.

Relation to existing research:

This main theme of the workshop touches upon a variety of so far disconnected debates:

i. The normative debate on participatory democracy emphasizes participation as the core element of democracy. Its main focus is on (macro)models of democracy to distinguish participatory democracy and non-participatory “elitist” democracy. Elitist democracy is assumed to be the main reason for low rates of political participation as
well as for low quality of political participation (Pateman 1970; Barber 1984; Wolfe 1986)

ii. The debate on direct democracy focuses on direct decision making as a specific institutional means to implement participatory democracy. While there has been ongoing debate on the impact of direct democracy on patterns of political participation and political integration there is little empirical evidence in this regard (Arnim 2000; Linder 1999; Kobach 1993; Cronin 1989, chapter 9; Magleby 1984).

iii. The empirical debate on measuring democracy subsumes many contributions relevant to the debate on participatory design. In contrast to normative debates on participatory democracy or to positive debates on direct democracy this body of literature aims at an institutionally more complex account of participatory design to conceptualize the “input-performance” of democratic systems (Beetham/Weir 1999; Schmidt 2000; Abromeit 2001).


v. The debate on deliberative democracy argues for strengthening a particular mode of political participation and for designing institutions to implement “strong democratic talk” while it is sceptical towards direct decision making (Manin 1987; Dryzek 1990; Cohen 1989; Miller 1989).

vi. More country specific accounts on constitutional reform within the frame of liberal democracy are focused on providing rich descriptions on the policies and politics of reforms towards a more participatory design (Lipset 1995; Scholz 1995; Lindsay 2000; Kastendieck 2000).

Each of these debates claim the crucial function of institutional design in raising the quantity and the quality of political participation. However, this claim remains assertion and requires more robust (and persuasive) theoretical and empirical substantiation. Very little is known about the actual impact of participatory institutions as well as about the specific mechanisms which relate participation and institutional design. Moreover, different authors touch upon very different aspects of participatory institutions, ranging from direct democracy to citizen consultations within the frame of liberal democracy.

The debate on participatory democracy is thus deficient in two crucial aspects: first, it suffers from a strong mis-relation between the many far reaching claims on the one hand, and little detailed empirical knowledge on the other and second, it suffers from the lack of integration of these different debates and thus from the lack of conceptual clarity. To put it into other words, we hardly know what participatory democracy is and we furthermore know nothing
about its impact on the quality and quantity of individual political participation. This workshop is responding to these unresolved issues and poses two major questions:

**What is participatory democracy in institutional terms?** What kind of institutions are available hypothetically, in experimental designs or in actual real world settings to ensure the ability of citizens to participate in the political process?

**How does participatory democracy affect the quantity and quality of political participation?** Are specific institutional arrangements better suited than others to reach both goals at the same time? What kind of evidence do we currently have regarding the impact of participatory democracy on individual behavior? Which mechanisms could explain the link between participatory design and political participation? How does context relate to this link between design and participation? Does the effect of given types of participatory institutions vary with differences in context?

**Workshop Participation:**

The workshop would welcome students of political participation, students of democracy and participatory design, institutionalists as well as country specialists. These heterogeneous group of participants should share a general interest in the relationship between political participation and participatory institutions. Participants should also be open to different methods (qualitative vs. quantitative; case study vs. comparative approach) and theoretical frames. The intention is to organize a workshop with an innovative and potentially stimulating mix of scholars from a variety of intellectual backgrounds. In addition to this an eclectic demographic mix of academics would be sought, thus the participation of established academics, new entrants to the profession and postgraduate students will be welcome. We also welcome a mix of academics coming from different national backgrounds including southern and central/east Europe to draw from a wide variety of national experiences.

**Type of Paper:**

The workshop would first and foremost welcome three types of papers: First, papers which theoretically discuss the concept of participatory democracy/participatory design with a focus on political participation; Second, papers which provide empirical case studies on participatory designs at all levels of government (local, national, supranational) with a focus on its impact on the quality and quantity of political participation; Third, comparative research which empirically focuses on the relationship between participatory design and political participation.
About the Authors:

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