Abstract

Despite the world-wide triumph of democracy, the quest for an optimal 'politike' has not yet reached the “end of history” (Fukuyama): It turns out that representative democracies do not necessarily satisfy the citizenries. Several democratic innovations have been tried out to counter these malaises – in fact, with a multitude of different designs. However, the real impact and the potential of democratic innovations are still contested. The joint session aims to analyse the plurality of democratic innovations according to their effects. The analytical outline includes on the one hand descriptive questions about the different designs and on the other hand evaluative questions focusing on the different effects of these different designs. The workshop will attract advanced students as well as young members of the profession and well-established professors, fellows with theoretical as well as empirical focus and researcher coming from Northern and Southern as well as from Eastern and Western Europe.

Outline of the topic and extended workshop description

Despite a fundamental triumph of democracy in Europe, worrying tendencies in contemporary democratic systems give rise to concern. Citizens have become more critical of democratic institutions and political actors, such as political parties, politicians and parliaments (Norris 1999). The most common way of participating – voting at elections – has declined in most democracies since the 1970s and the decline has been particularly marked in established democracies. Also the share of citizens belonging to political parties has waned dramatically.

Both politicians and political scientists have acknowledged these malaises of modern representative democracy (Dalton 2004; Schmitter and Trechsel 2004). They worry about the long-term effects of democratic distrust and many have called for more participatory forms of democracy where citizens should be given tools for enlightened understanding and be effectively included in political decision-making (Offe 2003). Or, as Diamond and Morlino (Diamond and Morlino 2005) put it, there is a high level of consensus that also “long-established democracies must reform … to attend to their own gathering problems of public dissatisfaction and … disillusionment”. By now, several democratic innovations aiming at involving citizens in democratic decision-making have been put forward and tried out – different forms of citizen deliberation, direct democracy and varieties of governance with citizens’ associations (Saward 2000; Smith 2009).
Yet, the real impact and the potential of democratic innovations is still contested (OECD 2005). Until recently there is a striking imbalance between the amount of time, money and energy invested in participatory innovations and the amount of attention paid to analyze and assess them. Although democratic innovations attract considerable scholarly interest since few years, cross-national networking and coordination is clearly underdeveloped.

The first problem is the definition of the term “democratic innovation”, which is still contested (Saward 2000; Papadopoulos and Warin 2007; Smith 2009). As a working definition we refer to democratic innovation as new practices consciously and purposefully introduced in order to improve the quality of democratic governance in any given state, irrespective of whether the innovation in question has already been tried out in another system.

The second problem is the lack of systematic, comparative research. However, first studies prove that participatory innovations do not improve the quality of democracy per se (Geissel 2009). No innovation can solve all current democratic malaises. Various innovations seem to improve different aspects of democracy. Some innovations have the potential to enhance input legitimacy, whereas others add to the deliberative quality of political processes or support the improvement of civic skills.

The joint session aims to analyse different democratic innovations following an “analytical outline”, which includes descriptive as well as evaluative questions proposed below.

**Descriptive questions, such as:**

1. Who promotes the democratic innovations (top down / bottom up) and why?
2. Who participate in the democratic innovations?
3. What kind of issues do the innovations approach and in which way is the process regulated?

**Evaluative questions, such as:**

1. Which innovations improve input-legitimacy and inclusive participation?
2. Which innovations improve output-legitimacy and effectiveness?
3. Which innovations improve deliberation?
4. Which innovations enlighten citizens and improve democratic skills?

Finally, analysing the democratic innovations via the above outlined framework we are aiming to “answer” the question: What are the effects of different democratic innovations?

The topic has not been covered during the past two years in an ECPR-Joint Session. No programme in this field, no scientific community or network exists up to now, for example there are no standing groups within the European or International Political Science Associations. However, the workshop will continue a lively, rich discussion, which started at the section “Democratic Innovations and Innovative Democracy in Europe” at the 5. General ECPR Conference, Potsdam, 2009. The proposed workshop will bring together scholars who evaluate the different effects of different democratic innovations.
Relation to existing research

With few exceptions, published in recent years, the case study approach looking at one innovation in one country at one level (local or national) and in one policy field is still prevailing. In these case studies each innovation is assessed within its own setting and according to its own goals. Recently some scholars try a more systematic access, e.g. Smith (2009), Fung (2008) or Papadopoulos/Warin (2007). However, these studies mainly focus on the Americas – for example the British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform (Canada), Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegra (Brasil), or policing in Chicago (USA). Systematic collaboration of researchers in this field comparing the impacts of different innovations is missing – especially in Europe.

Participants

The workshop aims to attract a variety of participants. It will attract advanced students as well as young members of the profession and well-established professors, fellows with theoretical as well as empirical focus, researcher from Northern and Southern as well as from Eastern and Western Europe – as former conferences on similar topics have already demonstrated (e.g. conference “Democratic Innovation – Theoretical and Practical Challenges of Evaluation”, Feb. 2008, Social Science Research Centre, Berlin). Several colleagues have already expressed their interest to participate in the workshop. However, we will ensure that the workshop is open for new fellows and aspects, especially for fellows from the new EU-member states.

Type of paper

We will welcome a mixture of papers: empirical as well as theoretical papers, case studies as well as comparative research, conceptual manuscripts as well as experimental studies. We believe that a combination of theorists and empiricists, of case studies and comparative research from a variety of countries is necessary to merge the findings and results, which came seldom together up to now.

Funding

The workshop directors will apply for funding not only at the national Research Foundations, but also at different foundations and their universities. The long-term and successful experiences of the workshop directors with funding will most likely lead to successful funding of the workshop.

Biographical note

Prof. Dr. Brigitte Geissel, professor for Political Science and Political Sociology at Goethe University Frankfurt (Main), has been researcher/lecturer at various universities/institutes such as Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB), Åbo Akademi (Finland) and the Universities of Muenster, Berlin, and Illinois (USA). Her research interests include new forms of governance, democratic innovations, political actors (new social movements, associations, civil society, parties, political elites, citizens), recent publications f.e. in Comparative Sociology, West European Politics, European Journal of Political Research.

Dr. Irena Fiket, is a research fellow at The Centre for the Study of Political Change (CIRCaP), University of Siena. Her research focuses on effects of deliberative and participatory practices on citizens’ attitudes as well as on citizens’ attitudes and public sphere. Research experience in the field of democratic innovations: member of scientific committee of EUROPOLIS (European deliberative polity making project),
Deliberative Poll (Turin) and European Citizens Consultations (Italy). Publications in the field in *Stato e Mercato*, 2008 (coauthor), *Oxford University Press*, Forthcoming (coauthor).

**References**


