



Ways forward for Democracy: (Digital) Potentials, Mobilizations, Strategies

Bavarian School of Public Policy
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Very few would deny that democracy as a social and political project is facing one of the major crisis of its modern history. What has been diagnosed as a great social and political regression takes different forms, for example in the increasingly technocratic logics of government, the expansion of authoritarian practices and institutions and the rise of right-extremist movements and parties in the streets and parliaments of liberal democracies. These developments are the expression of a deep and gradual erosion of democratic institutions, practices and forms of life. There is no lack of diagnoses pointing to the causes and dangers of this process of erosion. The aim of our workshop is to take a further step and to look forward by focusing on the potentials which we believe can be found next to the regressive tendencies of the time. For this task, we would like to bring together different theoretical traditions and disciplines in a productive exchange that explores these potentials for preserving and revitalizing democracy at different levels of analysis: that of democratic forms of life, that of social mobilizations and that of the necessary defense mechanisms against regressive tendencies.

In this exploration, we want to put special attention to the phenomenon of digitization, which, in light of the newest developments can be both seen as a chance and as a risk for democracy. While in the 90s the scientific debate was enthusiastic about the positive effects of digitization and the deepening of democracy, now net-optimists must leave some room for net-pessimists and net-realists. Certainly, post-truth, echo-chambers, big data, etc. pose important challenges to the well-functioning of democratic institutions as well as to the quality of citizen participation. From this background, however, in our workshop we want to put especial emphasis on the potentials of digitization for the overcoming of the actual crisis of democracy: for counter-acting existing risks but also for deepening and transforming our understanding of democratic participation and organization.

In our view, social scientific research in democratic societies must give theoretical support by providing diagnoses and proposals of therapy or, in less prescriptive terms: it must inspire and accompany the emancipatory activities citizens already put in practice. Especially social philosophy, political philosophy and political theory and history of ideas must confront the challenge to disclose the potentials to contradict regressive tendencies and to contribute to a revitalization of weakened democratic forms. In the search for such possibilities, participatory and deliberative theories of democracy cross their paths with proponents of radical democracy, they also

meet theories of political representation, social movements research as well as populist, Marxist, critical-theorists, feminist and pragmatist traditions. While we are aware of the many points of tension, the workshop wants to open a room for the exchange and dialogue among those disciplines and traditions which all aim at contributing to abolishing the current crisis.

The conference will be structured in three themes:

1. The Political Potentials of Forms of Life

How are we to evaluate current transformations of existing forms of life in regard to their democratic import? To what extent can these changes contribute to the reinforcement/destabilization of democratic institutions and practices? Are we facing an erosion or a deepening of democratic life-forms themselves? What role does neoliberalism play in these developments? Can we find in other spheres of social life (family, work, economic organization, school, etc.) resources for the revitalization of democracy? And, how can alternative understandings of economic organization contribute to a revitalization of democratic life-forms?

2. Social Mobilizations as Promoters of Democracy

What, if any, is the democratic potential of current social mobilizations, protests and other forms of activism? Are social movements able to enhance the quality of democratic participation, and in what sense? How do new protests contribute to a transformation of our understanding of citizenship, political rights, etc.? What are the limits of such political potentials, for example, regarding right-extremist movements? And how can different theoretical traditions contribute to understanding the democratizing potential of social movements? How can they contribute to overcoming strategic errors, ideological formations and other blocking mechanisms that limit this potential? What do these traditions have to say about the democratic value of contemporary phenomena such as the rise of different forms of „populist“ movements, the mobilization of collective emotions such as rage and indignation, and, last but not least, of the effects of online activism?

3. (Digital) Democratic Strategies of Defense

What can be done against the rise of right-wing-extremism and how should we counteract the gradual degradation of public communication that seems to go hand in hand with it? How should we combat post-truth as well as all the dangers connected to digitization, big data, echo-chambers and bots? To what extent can technological innovations be mobilized in strategies of democratic defense against current regressive tendencies? What other strategies (economic, educational, etc.) of defense at a national and transnational level may be needed?

Invited speakers include: Paula Irene Villa (München), Regina Kreide (Gießen), Fatima Kastner (Köln), Robin Celikates (Amsterdam), Oliver Flügel-Martinsen (Bielefeld), Daniel Innerarity (Basque Country) and Roberto Frega (Paris, Berlin).

There is a limited number of spots available for papers on the topic of the conference. If you are interested, please send an abstract (word document) of no more than 400 words to waysforwardfordemocracy@hfp.tum.de until January 31st 2019. Please indicate the theme where you believe your paper would best fit. We will notify you about the acceptance of your paper by mid-February 2019.

Organization: Prof. Dr. Lisa Herzog / Dr. Martin Oppelt / Dr. des. Justo Serrano Zamora