

Call for Papers for the first workshop of a series of three on

“The Role of Practices at the Intersection of Civic Rights and Democracy”

COST Action CA 16211 RECAST
Reappraising Intellectual Debates on Civic Rights and Democracy in Europe

Working Group 1: Practices

Centre for Liberal Strategies, Sofia
23-24 March 2018

The workshop series starts from the hypothesis that the paradigm of social mobilisation and politicisation has shifted in ways that affect liberal representative democracy in its core institutions and disrupt the mutually fruitful relation between civic (i.e. political and what is often referred to as civil) rights claims – and representative liberal democracy.

For a time span of about 30 years since 1968 (and for a period of roughly 15 years after 1989 in the post-communist countries in CEE) social movements had been primarily civil rights movements and mobilisations that aimed at extending the scope of the political to new individuals, new groups, new issues, such as the women’s rights movement, anti-discrimination movements, the environmental movement, etc. The social movements thus had an inclusive rather than an exclusionary effect on democratic representation, and were extending the scope and meaning of civic rights. This does not mean that the relationship between civic rights and liberal democracy has ever been unproblematic, the ambivalence produced by the interplay between legal norms, institutional devices, moral values, and political ideals is inescapable. Yet, criticised for their coming short of the democratic ideal, liberal democratic institutions and legal frameworks were involved in a process of reinvigoration by this very criticism.

Recent trends of critical challenges towards liberal democracy undermine this process and democracy’s capacity to adjust to historically changing demands for political representation and further civic rights recognition. Diverse forms of protests (anti-minority and anti-immigrant, but also challenges to “judicial supremacy”, the growing drive to use referenda/popular vote as democratic antidotes to this perceived threat, etc.) and the rise of populist mobilisations, as well their specific use of social media, redefine politicisation by recurring to the paradigm of the friend/enemy opposition and by reverting to a ‘majoritarian’ definition of democracy, i.e. rule by the majority of the electorate interpreted as expressing the exclusionary and homogeneous ‘will of the people’.

These practices do not aim at extending the political to new groups and issues. Rather, they aim at excluding minorities and as a result reduce the multiple lines of conflict of civic rights discourses to a simplistic opposition between the majority of the people, on the one side and the so-called intruders (opposition parties, minorities, unpopular



individuals or groups) and the elites (judges and other unelected officials, but also elected ones, yet, perceived as unaccountable representatives) on the other. This reduction of the pluralistic political community to the homogeneous majority of 'the people' delegitimises the democratic division of powers, denounces the judicial institutions as undermining the democratically expressed will of the people and disregards minority or oppositional claims.

The workshop would like to explore this shift in practices – social, political, legal, formal and informal: from inclusive, opening more space for civic rights claims and actions towards more exclusionary, closing up practices. The focus of the current workshop is on exploring the observed shift in practices from civil rights movements that enhance democracy, to populist and other mobilisations with a potential to undermine it. The suggested focus of the next two workshops will be 1. on the potential of social, political and legal, formal and informal, practices to reinvent and reinvigorate democracy at the national and European level, and 2. on discussing policy suggestions for concrete measures to enhance the potential of beneficial practices.

The following questions will serve as a guideline for submissions for the first workshop:

- Which forms and/or cases of social mobilisation exemplify this shift in politicisation? How have these shifts evolved in social, political, legal and other – both formal and informal – practices across European democracies?
- Which of the diverse practices observed in the last couple of decades in European democracies privilege an exclusionary anti-civic-rights discourse? How are they functioning? And what are their effects on liberal representative democracy?
- Are there formal and/or informal practices that go against the identified above current and do they have the potential to revitalise democracy and re-establish its mutually beneficial link with civic rights?

Please, submit an abstract for a position paper of no more than 300 words before Friday, 2 February 2018 to both conveners, ruzha.smilova@gmail.com, meikesg@gmail.com. This abstract should exemplify the case and practice you are going to analyse and should indicate a position on (one or more of) the above mentioned questions.

Organisers

Working Group Practices. COST Action CA 16211 RECAST *Reappraising Intellectual Debates on Civic Rights and Democracy in Europe*
http://www.cost.eu/COST_Actions/ca/CA16211 & <https://www.uma.es/costactionrecast>
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