

“Closer to the people? On (direct) democracy in the age of digitalisation”

Call for contributions to edited volume “The Crisis and Future of Representative Democracy”

Background & objectives

Democracy is in jeopardy. The rise and rise of authoritarian populism as well as the accompanying polarisation of politics and sustained attacks on the fundamental norms and foundations of liberal democracy in Europe and elsewhere have made that clear. Yet these symptoms are also reflective of a much longer decline of institutions in contemporary liberal representative democracies. Low levels of electoral participation, low levels of trust in government and political institutions, erosion of mainstream parties and party membership, fragmentation of the political landscape, and the decline of established channels to represent and mediate societal interests (parties, unions) epitomise this long-term trend.

Many on the left advocate the idea that bringing political control “closer to the people” who are (supposedly) most affected by respective political decisions can help counter and possibly prevent the disaffection and alienation of large parts of society from the political system and its arenas, both at the level of the political system and in everyday policy- or decision-making.

On (direct) democracy in the age of digitalisation

Initiatives that push for more direct involvement of citizens in policy-making have gained currency over the last decades. Advocates emphasise the opportunities these hold to increase political legitimacy as well as improving policy content. However, both the classical methods of direct democracy by voting on issues or pre-designed policies (i.e. referendums) and the more qualitative formats seen more widely in recent years (e.g., citizen initiatives, citizen budgets, citizen assemblies) which aim to include citizens in the process of designing policies tend to fail to solve the problems of unequal participation and representation (along lines of race, class, age, gender, citizenship, place of residence, among others) they aim to address. The advancing digitalisation of democracy promises new chances for participation and representation. Public administrations in cities across the world adopt and experiment with e-tools to bring people into the political process and to foster their agency by offering spaces for participation and collective organising. Some even claim that herein lies the potential to revolutionise the way we “do democracy”, including the relationship between government and population, from representative to a truly participatory democracy. Questions to be discussed may include (but are not limited to):

- What potential does digital democracy have to solve the issues of unequal participation and exclusion from political process that characterise representative democracies?
- What are the prospects for greater inclusion, democratic participation, equity and justice through e-democracy beyond the urban or metropolitan spaces and their particular demographics where these tools tend to be adopted primarily?



- Can e-democracy work as a bulwark against the authoritarian right? How so?
- Which dangers and pitfalls should be avoided, and how?
- Who and what are the drivers of digital democracy, and what are the obstacles in the process?

We invite papers focussing on these and other questions linked to (direct) democracy and digitalisation in representative democracies. We are particularly interested in single or comparative case studies as well as practical implications and recommendations based on these studies.

Requirements

- Papers should be no longer than 9,000 words, excluding list of references, and written in (British) English.
- Contributions should be written with an informed, non-specialist audience in mind, targeting specifically practitioners, activists, stakeholders, politicians and other political actors on the left/progressive spectrum.
- Contributions must adhere to referencing standards and the RLS style guide, which will be shared with authors whose proposals are accepted for publication.
- Potential authors should be aware of the minimum of two rounds of review and revision anticipated, plus language editing, if applicable, which will require quick turnarounds September–November 2020.
- The timeline is non-negotiable unless modified by RLS Brussels.
- We offer 3.000€ for each paper (to be invoiced by the contractor and paid by RLS Brussels after completion of the revision/editing process).

The book

This edited volume to which this chapter will contribute brings together scholars, researchers, activists and practitioners to discuss the state of democracy as well as to explore potential future developments in contemporary liberal representative democracy. It aims to take stock of and analyse the problems of contemporary democracy in Europe from a left-wing perspective. Second, it seeks to explore approaches to transforming democratic representation, participation and governance at any level (local, regional, national, supranational/transnational) with a view to forging an inclusive, equal, free, just and sustainable society.

Timeline

- Submission of abstracts: **Thursday, 09 July 2020, 11:00 AM CEST**
DEADLINE EXTENDED!!!
- Notification to authors: Friday, 10 July 2020
- Submission of full papers: Tuesday, 7 September 2020
- Minimum of two rounds of review & revision: September–November 2020 (submission dates TBC)
- Language editing: December 2020–January 2021 (dates TBC)
- Publication: Spring 2021

Application

Abstracts of up to 1,000 words outlining the proposed argument and approach must be submitted to Ada Regelmann at ada.regelmann@rosalux.org, subject line: “[your name] - Abstract: The Crisis and Future of Democracy”, by Thursday, 09 July 2020, 11am CET. Late submissions will not be considered.

