

CALL FOR PAPERS



Debating Direct Democracy: Processes and Mechanisms of Citizen Participation

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Call for papers: The deep political crisis currently sweeping Europe is not only posing challenges to contemporary politics but also to its theoretical foundations, bringing into question the scope and limits of representation (Tormey, 2015). The notion of renewing or revitalising democracy emerges in this context, driven by the expectation of expanding the spheres where citizens can be actors in the definition of public affairs (Cortina, García Marzá and Conill, 2008). A number of experiences promoted with this intention have arisen in different parts of the world. These include examples such as participatory budgets, citizen audits or popular consultations (Font et al., 2014; Geissel and Newton, 2012; Lissidini et. al., 2014).

At the national level a trend towards the introduction of legal provisions to activate mechanisms of direct democracy, such as the referendum or popular initiative, has been observed, especially in Latin America and Eastern European countries (Serdült and Welp, 2012). In terms of activity, the European Union has been the object of many referendums associated with the integration process while the recent introduction of the European Citizens' Initiative takes an unprecedented step, albeit an indirect and consultative one (Méndez et al., 2014). However, these processes of democratic innovation, which either recoup already well-known but little used mechanisms or create new institutions, are not limited to the national or supranational level but have played a key role in local governments both in Latin America (Porto Alegre or Montevideo are now classic examples) and in Europe (Barcelona, Bologna, Madrid, among others). Here, new technologies have a major contribution to make in overcoming the constraints of time and space that are frequently put forward as an argument against these forms of participation.

In this complex process, some institutions of citizen participation have been quite easily integrated into the political repertoire of representative democracies. Rather than a dichotomy between the representative principle and direct democracy, it works as a gradual incorporation of elements of citizen participation in the workings of representative institutions (Resnick, 2007). However, in other cases these mechanisms are the source of dispute between local and central governments, between citizens who are calling for their regulation or who are working to put them into action and governments that are doing their best to prevent this to happen. The spectrum of experiences is as diverse as the outcomes.

The aim of this edition of the journal *Recerca* is to critically analyse the possibilities and limits of mechanisms of citizen participation in order to gain a better view of the tensions, contradictions, adjustments and imbalances that take place in the democratic ecosystem (Dekker and Feenstra, 2015). Under what conditions can mechanisms of direct democracy contribute to empower citizens, enhance transparency and generate processes that strengthen democracy? What are the dynamics produced by the new participatory settings in which activists demanding participation come into contact with public institutions and organs of government? How can direct participation be reconciled with traditional politics? What are the limits of citizen participation in post-industrial societies? We hope to explore these and other related questions from a broad political, philosophical and/or sociological perspective to arrive at a more comprehensive vision of democracy and its future. *Recerca* welcome contributions from a theoretical perspective as well as those taking an empirical approach, from both case studies or a comparative perspective.

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