New tools of citizen participation and democratic accountability
Elective MA course Winter 2018
4 CEU credits, 8 ECTS credits

Instructor: Marina Popescu (mpope@ceu.edu)
Department of Political Science
Central European University
Office: Room 404, 12 Oktober 6 Street

Classes: …

Office hours: 2 hours before class and with prior appointment by email

Course description

This course aims to link the big questions of democracy, representation, accountability and participation with practical examples of mechanisms that were developed in order to achieve “better” or “more” democracy beyond or within traditional elections and traditional organizations across a wide range of new and old democracies across the world. This course is addressed to those with an interest in political communication, comparative politics, civil society, political activism, Internet-based innovations and institutional design. The class is designed to bridge democratic theory (and also critical takes on democratic theory) with the empirical analysis of practical, real life tools. Given the increasingly widespread use of democracy-enhancing tools, one aim of this course is to apply a comparative evaluation method to assess the impact, success and failure and the avenues for improvement of such tools.

There is not one tool fit for all, and improving the quality of democracy means different things for different people in different contexts depending both on the actual problems encountered and on the view taken about citizens’ roles in a democracy. More generally, the choice of democracy-enhancing tools depends both on the democratic gaps and the specific problems that are identified and on the democratic goals which such tools are designed to achieve (e.g. transparency, participation, empowerment, accountability.

The course will discuss:
- online and offline tools like citizens juries, citizens assemblies, citizen advisory bureaus, deliberative polls, crowdsourcing, online consultations, pledge trackers, fact checkers, vote advice applications, participatory budgeting
- distinctions between deliberative and consultation methods
- transparency and accountability instruments
- participatory decision making mechanisms
- constitutional and electoral system reforms through citizen involvement
- actors involved: why and how different tools are promoted by different actors from local governments to national legislatures, from civil society associations projects to institutionalized transparency and consultation mechanisms, from online citizen groups to established media organizations
The course will start by reviewing the main questions and concepts related to representation, accountability, citizen participation and political decision making, mapping the various democracy-enhancing tools that have been available and for what specific goals and in which specific contexts they have been used. The bulk of the course will refer to practical examples from around the world.

**Learning outcomes**

By the end of the course, students are expected to be able to

- critically assess and evaluate democratic innovations, online and offline;
- link real-life examples of tools to more general debates around the concepts of democracy and participation;
- design simple tools that can be applied to the solution of problems in specific contexts;
- develop the appropriate examples and arguments for discussion, through individual or group work.

**Course requirements:**

**Note taking (25%)** – 6 summaries (3 mandatory texts by Geissel, Fung, Smith, submitted at any point in the course + 3 more texts that you can choose, and can be from recommended readings following prior approval by the course instructor)

The three mandatory texts are likely to be (final list available December 2017):


For each submitted notes you can get:

- Insufficient = 0
- Acceptable = 50
- OK = 75
- Very Good = 100

You need to submit at least 6 reading notes. To pass you need to collect at least **400 points** from all submitted assignments. You can submit more summaries to get more points, but the maximum amount of points you can get for this requirement is 600 (equivalent to getting 100 in each of the six mandatory notes).

Comments on the weekly assignments can be obtained during office hours. Grades will not be posted on a weekly basis and it is up to you to decide the number of submissions beyond the minimum required.

Most people should be able to receive an OK for all of the summaries and all of you can easily get the maximum points for this component. The note taking exercise ensures that you read the assigned readings but fundamentally their goal is to help you get a grip of the core readings, see what you do and do not understand and
be able to participate in the exercises. They allow you to have structured notes for the seminar discussion. Last but definitely not least, they provide very useful long-term skills from the ability to complete tasks within deadlines to critically engage with potentially new and complex written materials with an eye to derive the main points, arguments, methods, and to present them briefly and clearly, as well as to quickly and confidently be able to identify and point out problems or useful ideas. These are all skills that are often lacking in the training of many undergraduates but are essential in any workplace. Social science education can provide this and easily get you ahead of the pack.

The style and length of the notes is up to each student; but make sure to include a simple, clear, (even bullet point style) summary of the main question, the main ideas, arguments and findings. The feedback on the notes at the start-up of the course should suffice to clarify what is a good summary and what is not. Generally, the reading notes can include sections that are cut & paste but they must be marked with quotations or a different font and page numbers should be indicated. Include notes on points that you found unclear or unconvincing as well as of things that you found particularly interesting or relevant from a democratic theory, comparative or methodological perspective, or for a real life situation you know of; provide if you feel like examples from what you know or read elsewhere that pertain to the topic and arguments; these would be particularly useful to discuss in class. Do not avoid raising points you did not understand or listing as a main idea something that seems unclear to you. The goal is to understand the materials and be able to do the task, not just try to get a better grade; you cannot really cover up how much you really engaged with the topic and understood it! Honest struggle to understand is valued more than chasing a top grade through avoidance of thorny issues.

**In-class and take-home exercises (40%)** - based on readings notes and on documentation of further examples, students will argue the merits, demerits and limitations of various tools in class. Detailed descriptions of the tasks will be provided in due time, during the course. Notes will be submitted both for the individual and group exercises.

**Final paper (35%)** – this will usually take the form of systematic and critical evaluation of an existing participatory, participatory deliberative or information tool. Describe the tool and critically examine its design, goals and effects/ success in a particular context by applying the analytical framework suggested during the course. Connect the existing literature on the type of tool you are analysing with the particular case you have chosen.
Course structure and readings

Note: The readings are provisional until December 2017. Further readings and links related to the topic will be also added in December and more links will be made available on e-learning during the course. Watch this space😊

INTRODUCTION

WEEK 1: Open democracies, open government, open politics: more than catchphrases? Why new tools? Fixing what, where and how


Morozov, Evgeny. 2013. To save everything, click here: technology, solutionism and the urge to fix problems that don’t exist. London: Allen Lane. Introduction (ix-xv) and Chapter 3 (63-99). [no reading notes required]

Required mandatory reading [These readings will be used in several classes. Notes are due by the end of the course. The earlier you read and do at least a first take on the notes, the more useful for you in class]


Do familiarize yourself with

https://www.opengovpartnership.org/

http://participedia.net/

http://participationcompass.org/
WEEK 2: The Constitutional Assemblies of Iceland and Ireland

**Exercise 1:** provide the facts and the arguments to discuss the pluses and minuses of the recent constitutional reform process in Iceland that received extensive media coverage worldwide. Use any resources you can find (online primarily).

**Readings**


ADD JoP/bjps on Iceland & more recent citizens assemblies stuff


http://stjornlagarad.is/english/

http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSBRE89K09C20121021?irpc=932

http://www.constitutionalassembly.politicaldata.org/

https://www.constitution.ie/

https://www.facebook.com/groups/20942842125/

**… JANUARY/FEBRUARY:** Deadline for sending in the ideas for Exercise 3 on … More details provided in class.
***: Deadline for sending in the Excel sheet with the tools for Exercise 3 on …

WEEK 3: Citizens assemblies and electoral system reforms in Canada and the Netherlands

Required readings


http://www.citizensassembly.bc.ca/public
http://www.citizensassembly.gov.on.ca/
http://www.mapleleafweb.com/old/features/electoral/citizen-assembly/backgrounder.html

Background readings

British Columbia


Ontario


The Netherlands


WEEK 4: Participatory budgeting in Porto Allegre and beyond

Mandatory readings – notes (if you decide this is one of your 3 other readings to take notes of) are due on ..., before the end of the day


Sintomer, Yves; Herzberg, Carsten; Röcke, Anja; and Allegretti, Giovanni (2012) "Transnational Models of Citizen Participation: The Case of Participatory Budgeting," Journal of Public Deliberation: Vol. 8: Iss. 2, Article 9. Available at: http://www.publicdeliberation.net/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1234&context=jpd


http://participedia.net/en/methods/participatory-budgeting
http://participedia.net/en/cases/participatory-budgeting-porto-alegre
http://participedia.net/en/cases/participatory-budgeting-berlin-lichtenberg
http://participedia.net/en/organizations/participatory-budgeting-unit-manchester-uk
http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/
http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/models
http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies/case-studies
http://participedia.net/en/cases/chicago-participatory-budgeting-project
http://participatorybudgeting49.wordpress.com/
http://www.ward49.com/
http://www.participatorybudgeting.org
http://www.pbnyc.org/
https://gianpaolobaiocchi.wordpress.com/
https://www.facebook.com/groups/participatory/
https://www.facebook.com/groups/PBintheUK/

Participatory budgeting beyond the Porto Alegre example
**Exercise 2:** In-class discussion on different examples of participatory budgeting following the grid/questions/same style used for Citizens Assemblies and Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre

**WEEK 5: Questions, concepts, dimensions**

Part 1 - Comparing Tools: Fixing what, where and how. A theoretical and analytical framework

**Exercise 3:** Find 2 tools in your country (or in other countries, after approval) and provide the most accurate description of the context in which such tools were adopted, the problem they (try to) address and how they operate (d). Make a list of the positive aspects and of the potential criticisms of these tools.

In class, we will discuss and compare the tools and show how we can group them in different categories.

**Mandatory readings:** MR1 Fung - Democratizing the Policy Process

**Part 1 - Comparing Tools: Discussion**

**Mandatory readings:**


MR3 - Smith - Studying Democratic Innovations

**RECOMMENDED READINGS:**


**BACKGROUND READINGS** [non-academic texts; give you an idea of the universe of ‘tools’ and existing approaches to their design and evaluation]:

Clift, Steven L. 2004. E-Government and Democracy - representation and citizen engagement in the Information age, Publicus, UNPAN/DESA.


WEEK 6: Information tools: how citizens check on politicians/governments at election time and beyond?

- Prospective means: vote advice applications, costing of party manifesto pledges, issue position trackers
- Retrospective means: integrity/candidate profilers, fact checkers, spending evaluations, parliamentary monitoring
- Type of actors checked upon: parties, candidates, governments
- Type of actors developing the checks: public broadcasters, independent (state) agencies, civil society organizations, independent media
- Types of checks: political issue positions, ideological/value/issue consistency, integrity, financial/economics skills and performance, various measures of performance

Part 1 - Prospective means: vote advice applications (VAA in different electoral contexts)

Costa Lobo, Marina, Maarten Wink and Marco Lisi. Mapping the Political Landscape: A Vote Advice Application in Portugal


Part 2v- Retrospective means: monitoring politicians


Strengthening Parliamentary Accountability, Citizen Engagement, and Access to Information: A Global Survey of Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations | Andrew G. Mandelbaum

INFORMATION TOOLS

Exercise 4: Discussion of information, participation, uses and possible effects of information tools based on examples of parliamentary monitoring and of other retrospective and prospective information tools

WEEK 7: Participatory and participatory deliberative tools

Part 1 -Democratic software? The case of Liquid Feedback

Exercise 5: Gather information on the platform "Liquid Feedback" and prepare for an in-class discussion on the topic following the grid/general questions of the course.
Behrens, Jan, Kistner, Axel, Nitsche, Andreas and Swierczek. 2014. The principles of LiquidFeedback. Interaktive Demokratie e.V.

Part 2 -From consultations to autonomous accountability


PARTICIPATORY & PARTICIPATORY DELIBERATIVE TOOLS

WEEK 8: Mini publics and deliberative polls

Part 1 – Deliberative polls: Principles and ideals


Part 2 - Mini publics: Types & Critical issues


--- Deadline for approval of final paper/project topic

WEEK 9: Success and failure of participatory tools – design and evaluation


Font, Joan, Della Porta Donatella and Sintomer, Yves. 2014. Participatory Democracy in Southern Europe: Causes, Characteristics and Consequences. Rowman and Littlefield. Chapter TBA.


***: *Exercise 6: Identifying goals, design and evaluation of tools success*

**WEEK 10:** Empowering and interactive media content after the digital transformation

**WEEK 11:** Enablers of democratic government: under which particular circumstances are tools more likely to work?
**Exercise 7:** Evaluate a tool (group exercise). Detailed information will be provided in due time.

**Recommended readings (to be split and read depending on the agreed upon tool and contextual variable to be addressed):**


Debate between Evgeny Morozov and Steven Johnson on “New Republic”


**WEEK 12: FINAL PROJECTS PRESENTATIONS**

Final take home paper – in-depth evaluation of an existing tool