

## **RESEARCH CONFERENCE – CALL FOR PAPERS!!**

**AUSTRIAN RESEARCH ASSOCIATION – WORKING GROUP ON DEMOCRACY**

**TOPIC: "CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRACY"**

**VIENNA, NOVEMBER 9-10, 2012**

The Working Group on the Future of Austrian Democracy (*ARGE ZUKUNFT/DEMOKRATIE*) of the Austrian Research Association (*ÖFG*) is issuing a call for papers for its annual research conference to be held November 9th and 10th in Vienna, Austria.

The Working Group invites conceptually innovative papers devoted to questions of civil society and democracy. Preference will be given to work focused in particular on the themes of *lobbying and civil society, citizen juries, contemporary protest behavior, perceptions of democracy in civil society, and local democracy*. The conference is interdisciplinary in orientation and welcomes work from all social sciences and the field of legal studies. Whereas theoretical work is considered important, the Working Group is especially interested in papers that follow a sound analytical and empirical research design, respectively that employ a modern methodology commensurate with, and appropriate for their field.

**Topic 1: *Lobbying, Civil Society, and Democracy?*** In the European continental tradition, lobbying has been perceived in the public discourse as having a harmful and negative influence on the quality of democracy. In the Anglo-Saxon reception, the verdict has been rather mixed. On the one hand lobbying can be seen as a linkage between civil society interests and legislators and, thus, as a means of educating law-makers independently of powerful institutions such as political parties, government ministries, and the executive branch. On the other hand, the superior resources of corporations and mainstream institutions suggest that civil society groups are at a clear disadvantage when it comes to lobbying. In some cases like Austria, both the public discourse and even the law draw a distinction between "positive" interest groups such as labor unions and employer associations and seemingly less desirable "lobbies" per se. We are interested in work on the nexus between lobbying and civil society and especially in the following research questions:

- a. ***What evidence is there to support conclusions about the helpful or harmful influence of lobbying on democracy from the perspective of civil society?***
- b. ***What are effective lobbying strategies pursued by civic organizations and citizen groups to affect political outcomes (especially in the face of significant opposition)?***
- c. ***What can we say comparatively about the relationship between civil society and lobbying among European polities?***

**Topic 2: *Citizen Juries and Similar Mechanisms – Relevance, Usefulness, and Democratic Quality?*** At least since the 1980s citizen juries, citizen committees, and the likes have been a means of enhancing citizen participation. Whereas some regard this as an innovative aspect of civil society engagement as it allows citizen representatives to pass judgment on more complicated problems ill suited to referenda and ballot initiatives, others have contended that the lack of professionalism, accountability, and legal base pose challenges that render such groups

at best as symbolic fig leaves and at the worst as a dangerous form of undermining the state of law and democracy itself. Whereas citizen juries have been part of the political conversation in countries like the US and Britain, they have been less well known in Austria. However, the growing importance of the internet as a social organizing tool and the emergence of *Bürgerfora* (citizen forums) in Germany have drawn attention to this phenomenon. The question of citizen committees is also of relevance in democratic technology assessment.

- a. **What has been the role of Citizen Juries and similar mechanisms in shaping political decision making – also in conjunction with the internet or in technology assessment? Has their role been largely symbolic or substantive beyond the regional level?**
- b. **How can such models be adapted to function in the context of traditional representative democracies like Austria?**
- c. **What legal basis would such groups require to be politically effective?**
- d. **What tools and organizational characteristics do effective groups of this type share – in either the real or virtual world?**

**Topic 3: Contemporary Protest and Unconventional Political Behavior:** This topic examines the protest (and/or unconventional political) behavior in advanced democracies, seeking identify patterns and explanations for the variance of protest behavior across countries and within the political system. From the vantage points of Austria, a country with a highly consensual political culture and rather muted forms of protest, the following questions are of interest:

- a. **What explains forms of protest behavior and their variation across time, space, class, and situation?**
- b. **What makes protest behavior effective?**
- c. **What are recurring issues that trigger protest behavior?**
- d. **What is the composition of the protest public and what is its relationship to civil society at large?**
- e. **How do the traditional actors (governments, parties, bureaucracies, etc.) deal with protest behavior?**
- f. **What empirical data of political protest behavior do we have? Here individual level survey data and/or aggregate protest event data would be especially pertinent.**

**Topic 4: Perceptions of, and Willingness to participate in Democracy as Manifest in Civil Society:** The public discourse in many advanced democracies centers on questions of "democratic fatigue", the need for "systemic reform", and the "democratic deficit". Beyond a superficial treatment, this question has proved hard to tackle because "democracy" in the abstract seems to be popular and only its concrete manifestations in the form of institutions and persons appear to be under siege. Moreover, the criticism directed against the current state of democracy seems to be correlated with the elite-mass cleavage and surveys, while clearly reflecting diffuse discontentment, indicate neither a clear remedy to the problem nor is it evident that specific reforms of the polity would boost overall satisfaction. The question that therefore arises is one of (changing) expectations of democracy and the perception of democracy in civil society that is outside the realm of experts and political professionals – this may include also an analysis of the perception of the role of the citizens themselves (cf. the distinction between *Citoyen* and *Bourgeois*).

- a. **What is the state of democracy as perceived by civil society and what are the causes? Are transactional and representative models of democracy doomed?**

- b. **How to manage the expectations game? How have expectations of democracy changed and how can they be managed?**
- c. **How can we best make sense of the comparative empirical evidence that we see reflected in views of democracy?**

**Topic 5: Local Democracy – Locus of Democratic Experimentation and Access Point for Civic Engagement:**

Because of its smaller scope and large variety local politics has produced a flourishing diversity of democracy in action. Local democracy can also be considered a laboratory for democratic innovation. This topic investigates the patterns and variety of how democracy manifests itself at the local level in terms of political participation, organization, strategies, and activism.

- a. **What is the state of local democracy and what patterns can be discerned?**
- b. **What best explains variation in local democracy both relative to a polity and between polities?**
- c. **What role does local democracy play within the large debate about the state of democracy in our societies?**

**Conference Details:** The two-day research conference will be held in the vicinity of the University of Vienna. The goal is to invite a small number of researchers of all levels (advanced graduate and doctoral students are particularly encouraged to apply) to participate in three to four panels to discuss their work within the group and engage in a focused debate in a workshop-like atmosphere. Invited panelists may expect to have accommodations made available as well as a small stipend to help defray a portion of their travel cost. The conference's goal is to work toward drafting one or several working papers as first step toward a publication. Applicants who cannot be accommodated on the panel may still be asked to present a poster of their work and may take part in the discussions.

**Submission Details:** As the organizing institution, the Austrian Research Association, is inter-disciplinary, the call is open to all disciplines although fields such as Political Science, Jurisprudence, Public Administration, Economics, and Sociology will be most typically associated with the kind of research sought for this conference. Desirable work should be empirical or analytical in nature. Although the country of reference for this conference is Austria and the Austrian democratic system, the analysis and findings to be presented at the conference do not have to be limited to Austria as long as the work is deemed relevant in this context. The conference is especially interested in novel ideas and innovative work. Individual submissions are not required to follow an inter-disciplinary approach

**To be considered, please submit an abstract of not more than a single page (or 700 words) along with a brief description of your current work and institutional affiliation to the address listed below.**

**DEADLINE: JULY 15, 2012**

**Organizing Institution:** The Working Group on the Future of Austrian Democracy of the Austrian Research Association is a national interdisciplinary and inter-institutional panel of scholars organized under the auspices of the Austrian Research Association and led by Reinhard Heinisch, Professor of Political Science at the University of Salzburg. The group's specific objective is to assess the state of democracy in Austria and to investigate important challenges that impinge on its future development. Specifically, the work intends to draw attention to significant questions and problems affecting the state of Austrian democracy in at least five critical dimensions, one of which concerns civil society and democracy – hence the agenda of this conference. Drawing on the diverse expertise of

the scholars involved in this project, the goal is to engage in scholarly research, contribute to a public discourse on democracy, and stimulate further specialized research.

PLEASE SEND YOUR SUBMISSION BY THE DEADLINE OF **JULY 15, 2012** VIA E-MAIL TO:

**Attn: "Democracy/Civil Society Research Conference 2012"**

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For more on the **Austrian Research Association**, please see: [http://www.oefg.at/frm\\_object.htm](http://www.oefg.at/frm_object.htm)  
For more on the **Working Group**, please see: [http://www.oefg.at/text/veranstaltungen/conf\\_democracy/ARGE\\_Presentation.pdf](http://www.oefg.at/text/veranstaltungen/conf_democracy/ARGE_Presentation.pdf)

**(Proposals submitted after the deadline may not be considered)**