

## **ECPR Standing Group on Forms of Participation**

Dramatic changes are now occurring in the field of citizen involvement in politics. Participation is evolving and diversifying not only in terms of the most common forms, but also in terms of the type of actors involved, their reason and targets of actions. Developments in political science show that individuals and groups are increasingly engaging in political activity outside the nation-state and outside the traditional realm of politics (the three branches of government). Since these changes pertain simultaneously various domains and arenas, the traditional division between conventional and unconventional political participation can no longer be adequate as a scholarly platform for studying current political developments at the individual and group level.

Established in 2004, the ECPR Standing Group on Forms of Participation aims to provide a forum for different schools of participation research to meet, compare approaches, and develop new research strategies. It offers a venue for scholars researching participation from different angles - electoral participation, social movements, social capital, gender, globalization, individual action, virtual engagements - to engage in an open discussion on developments in the participation of individuals and groups in politics.

Important goals of the standing group are, on the one hand, to enable scholars of participation to increase their collaboration both formally and informally, facilitating the development of European approaches to political participation - a field that otherwise has been dominated by an American conceptualization of the political system. On the other hand, the Standing Group aims to help policy-makers and politicians directly and indirectly better understand the complexity of participation in politics.

In terms of policy-making, governments in country after country decry publicly the retreat of citizens from participative arenas. Several governments have commissioned democracy projects to encourage young people and others to become involved in politics through voting. Other conventional forms of participation like party and union membership have also been in decline. Governments have also commissioned reports to take the pulse of social capital, as they fear that the political fabric of their societies is worn thin. Finally, governments, particularly at the local level, have put into practice new forms of citizen participation in decision making. These governmental efforts open up a number of issues, such as what should and what should not be called participation, the different procedures and mechanisms, the consequences of such processes, and so on.

Forms of Participation is less than two years old. The Standing Group's first activities included membership recruitment, construction of the group's website, and formulation of the Standing Group's themes. Effort has also been put in establishing contacts with national and regional research networks on participation as well as in requesting information on new books, upcoming conferences, and calls for papers from members and non-members to post on the web site. The types of activities envisioned for the Standing Group include annual workshops at the ECPR Joint Sessions and Research Sessions, a website for research, teaching and social outreach, newsletter, collaborative books and journal articles based on workshop papers, and given sufficient funding a summer school on participation.

An important goal of the SG is to build an active network of participation researchers who can use their joint resources and talents to organize conferences, summer schools and apply for joint funding to enhance the standing group and conduct cross-country research. Members

have already begun to establish regional and national participation research networks. Such national as well as regional networks are an important cooperative resources for the ECPR Standing Group on Forms of Participation.

The Standing Group is still developing. As citizen involvement in politics is a very important topic in Europe today, we expect the Standing Group to become an important source of information on scholarship on participation for politicians, policymakers, active researchers, teachers, students and journalists. Our aim is to publicize the importance of political science research in this area and to encourage more scholars and students to engage in this participation scholarship.

The governance structure of the Standing Group consists at present of two co-conveners and a steering committee:

**Standing Group Conveners** (for the period 2006-2009)

Michele Micheletti, Stockholm University, Sweden.

Francesca Forno, University of Bergamo, Italy

**Steering Committee** for the period 2007-2008)

Lesley Hustinx, K.U. Leuven University, Belgium

Lorenzo Mosca, European University Institute

Ariadne Vroman, University of Sydney, Australia

***Appointed positions***

**Resource editor:** Katrin Uba, Uppsala University, Sweden.

Forthcoming events and members' new publications: Gema Garcia (University of Mannheim) & Irene Martin (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

**Webmaster:** Henric Barkman, Stockholm University, Sweden.