

INTERPRETIVE POLICY ANALYSIS CONFERENCE 2021

Panel Title:

P22- Reclaiming participatory governance: how social movements are re-imagining democratic innovations

Panel Convenors:

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One of the most interesting political developments of the past 10 years has been the adoption by social movements of strategies seeking to change political institutions through participatory governance. These strategies have flourished in a variety of contexts, from anti-austerity and pro-social justice protests in Spain to movements demanding climate transition and race equality in the UK and the USA, or constitutional reforms in Belgium and Iceland. The chief ambition and challenge of these new forms of bottom-up governance is to institutionalise the prefigurative politics and social justice values that inspired them in the first place, by mobilising the bureaucracy to respond to their claims for reforms and rights. In doing so, social movements and grassroots groups have drawn on lessons learned from the literature and the practice of participatory governance in the past decades, and they are now experimenting with concepts of deliberative democracy and sortition, as they reinvent ecosystems of online and offline spaces of participation to advance their agenda of social transformation (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2016; Bua and Bussu 2020).

We are now witnessing renewed interest on behalf of practitioners and academics in more radical approaches to participatory governance, which seek to make more meaningful, systemic and ongoing connections with political agendas developed by social movements, whilst also engaging public administrators and citizens as individuals in ways that define participatory governance (Warren 2014).

This panel aims to provide timely critical reflections on:

- the constraints imposed by cultural, economic, and political power relations on these new empowered participatory spaces;
- the potential of this new “wave” of participatory democracy to reimagine the relationship between citizens and traditional institutions towards more radical democratic renewal;
- where and how these new democratisation efforts sit within the representative state and how tensions between the different demands of lay citizens, organised civil society, and public officials are being managed.

Some of the overarching questions we encourage paper contributions to engage with are:

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- What occurs when social movements have opportunities to shape the institutionalisation of participatory governance processes?
- Can they reanimate the radical potential of citizen participation for social transformation?
- How might we evaluate and assess the success of these approaches?