

Research Outline

Innovative Forms of Democratic Participation: Deliberations in a Japanese and German Comparison

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As empirical studies have demonstrated, even in consolidated democracies, democratic norms such as equality or accountability are not inherent in the political system. In fact, political theory assumes that the resilience of liberal democracies is challenged constantly and their values are being contested. Also, in practice, recent concerns about the global trend of democratic threats have superseded the enthusiasm for democracy after the third wave of democratic transformations at the end of the twentieth century. Thus, political scientists have widely discussed new methods of a participatory, deliberative and direct democracy to ameliorate the stated malaise of representative democracies (Newton and Geissel 2012; Kersting 2017; Tsubogō 2015).

All these normative concepts build on the idea that the origin of modern mass democracies lies in the ancient self-government of citizens. Therefore, citizen participation is also the essence of a representative democracy today. Despite the continuity of this democratic core value, politics has been transformed over time by changing socio-political behavior based on needs and demands of the sovereign. Giving concrete samples: the number of citizens' demands for a more frequent and influential direct say on policy-making has risen, in contrast voter turnouts are at the record-low. These transformations have forced polity to react to the status quo of today's society and to reflect on suitable and effective participatory designs.

Against this academic backdrop, this research project empirically scrutinizes to what extent innovative forms of participation – especially deliberations – effectively cure the recent malaise of German and Japanese representative democracies. The study combines methodologically qualitative criteria which are based on normative theories of deliberative and participatory democracies, and concepts for measuring the quality of democracy. Focussing on deliberative participation from an institutional perspective, deliberations are here conceived as governmentally implemented political procedures which provide citizens with participatory forums. There, they can discuss equally and independently in groups about given political topics. The participants form their opinions based on officially provided, balanced information. After the deliberation, the participants' suggestions are summarized in non-binding policy recommendations which are submitted to the responsible government.

Identifying a focus on Europe and North America in the publications on participatory and deliberative democracy, this project pursues to fill this gap with its Japanese-German research project. This innovative, interregional study aims to enhance existing empirical

and theoretical research. Moreover, the comparison endeavors to identify the cultural determinants of democratic challenges in society, politics and polity, and to furthermore scrutinize potential solutions to counteract them. Concretely, the qualitative research method of this project combines analyses of academic discourses with empirical cases of deliberations in Germany and Japan. Among the vast number of diverse deliberative procedures, mini-publics and a deliberative poll serve as empirical samples for Japan, the former being the most widely spread deliberative method there. In the First National Deliberative Poll in Tokyo in 2012, a randomly selected representative sample of citizens from all over the country discussed and formed their opinions about Japan's future energy strategies after the nuclear accident in Fukushima. The cases are elaborated qualitatively using in-depth interviews, official publications and additional studies. The criteria for evaluating the deliberative impact on Japanese and German democracies are anchored in theories of deliberative and participatory democracies and concepts of measuring democratic quality.

Lastly, this research project utilizes the considerable expertise of its principal investigator in Japanese studies and political science to meet the demands of the BMBF-funded program "Small disciplines – Big potentials". Her familiarity with the state-of-the-art in political science leads to a study which is more firmly embedded in methods and theories of the discipline than single area studies often are. At the same time, her holistic approach of Japanese studies reveals, in an innovative manner, the socio-politically shaped cultural explanations for the deliberative outcomes in the respective country. By including Japanese cases in this research, it counteracts the western bias in literature and creates a new sensitivity for the Euro-/Anglo-centric perspectives in political science. In summary, the project intends to strengthen the significance of Japanese social science studies in German academia, to invent methodological impulses for the area study and to provide new empirical insights for the discipline of political science.