



Democratic Innovations in Political Systems

- Towards a Systemic Approach

av

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Abstract

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There are many indicators that the representative democratic system is currently facing serious legitimacy challenges. Two central indicators of these challenges are changing patterns of political participation and a decline in system support. Against this backdrop, a growing number of governments claim that democratic innovations (DIs) could reconnect institutions with citizens. This thesis focuses on online DIs implemented in real political contexts, and the overarching aim of the thesis is to contribute to the emergent empirical scholarship on how DIs can influence political systems. In the last two decades, most empirical studies in the field have analysed DIs at the micro level. This thesis takes a different stance by posing system-related research questions to the implementation of DIs and, by doing so, showing how DIs are interrelated with, rather than isolated from, the political system and that DIs can influence political systems.

The thesis consists of one literature review and three empirical case studies, applying a multiple methodological approach. Its novelty lies in three main empirical findings that contribute to the development of the field. First, it shows that participation in DIs can influence citizens' perceived trust towards local political institutions. In addition, the results suggest that predispositions and prior engagement mediate the direction of change in trust amongst citizens. Secondly, the results show that DIs can perform different political functions, such as facilitating spaces for citizens to provide original ideas and deliberation, while also having an agenda-setting function. Thirdly, the results suggest that long-term institutional change is complex and that the implementation of DIs can create a situation in which civil servants and politicians perceive their organisation to be in some 'state of flux', as they are torn between two competing institutional logics. In conclusion, this thesis should be understood as a piece in a broader movement that works towards a systemic approach to the study of DIs, and that by showing these empirical findings, the thesis contributes to deepening our understanding of what influences and functions DIs can have in political systems.

Keywords: Democratic innovations, online political participation, political institutions, political trust, political systems

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