

Call for Papers: Democratic renewal in times of polarisation (19-20 September 2019)

The Leuven Centre for Public Law (LCPL) and RIPPLE (Research in Political Philosophy Leuven) are pleased to call for papers for the conference “Democratic renewal in times of polarization. The case of Belgium”, which will take place in Leuven (Belgium) on Thursday 19 and Friday 20 September 2019.

Conference theme

Democracy is in crisis: participation in elections is dropping, opinions are polarizing, and there is a widespread belief that parties and politicians fail to represent all citizens. This has created a strong push towards experimentation with various “democratic innovations”. Recent years have seen a veritable explosion in new forms of citizen participation and deliberation around the world. At the same time, there is a renewed interest in forms of “direct democracy” such as referendums.

Things seem a bit different in Belgium. While politicians and citizens alike lament the “gap” between politics and citizens, little action is taken to close this gap. Calls for more direct citizen participation still face the spectre of the 1950 referendum on the Royal Question, which rocked Belgium to its very core and nearly split the country. This traumatic experience explains, at least partly, the hesitations to give citizens a more direct say.

Are such fears legitimate? What are the challenges and opportunities for citizen participation in a divided society such as Belgium? Can new modes of citizen participation live up to their expectations? And are they compatible with our received understanding of democratic legitimacy? This conference will take stock of democratic innovations around the world, will draw lessons – both practical and theoretical - from their successes and failures, and will ask how these lessons can be applied to the case of Belgium. This conference is explicitly multidisciplinary; it is open to scholars from political philosophy, democratic theory, empirical political science, and constitutional law.

We welcome papers dealing with traditional and new forms of citizen participation, the democratic legitimacy of participatory innovations, and the applicability of participatory ideas to Belgium or similar cases. Papers do not have to focus on the Belgian case in order to be considered.

Confirmed keynote speakers

Maija Setälä (Turku)

Laurence Morel (Lille 2 and SciencesPo)

Nenad Stojanovic (Geneva)

Hélène Landemore (Yale)

André Bächtiger (Stuttgart)

John Parkinson (Canberra and Maastricht)

Ian O'Flynn (Newcastle)

Submission details

Paper abstracts (500 words) and short CVs (200 words) should be sent to Ronald Van Crombrugge (ronald.vancrombrugge@kuleuven.be) by 10 June 2019. Selected paper presenters will be informed by 15 June. This call for papers is open for junior researchers (PhD candidates and postdocs), early-career scholars, as well as senior scholars. We especially encourage members of underrepresented groups to submit proposals. All presenters at the conference will be asked to pay a registration fee of 80 euro (which includes cold lunches and coffee breaks). In addition, paper presenters are welcome to attend the conference dinner (price: 65 euro).

For more information, please contact Ronald Van Crombrugge (ronald.vancrombrugge@kuleuven.be).

This conference is jointly organized by KU Leuven's Faculty of Law and KU Leuven's Institute of Philosophy.