

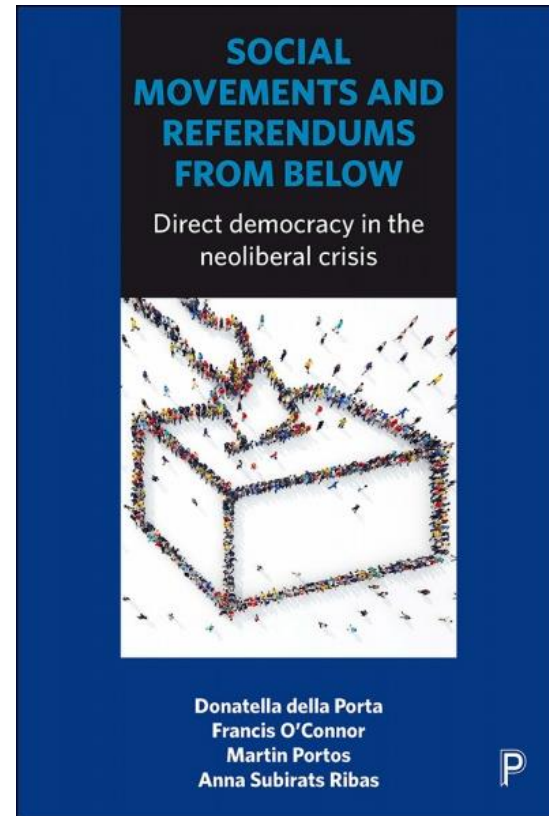
Referendums from below as participatory devise



centre on
social movement
studies

Block 1 How are referendums initiated?

Referendums from below



Catalan referendum/s



Scotland referendum on independence 2014



Referendum against the privatization of water





Referendums from below

- Ideal type (not necessarily all conditions):
 - Referendum called from citizens—not government or parties
 - Referendum campaign—horizontal forms of participation, not elite-driven
 - Referendum results—empowerment-
emancipatory



Block 2 What is the role of civil society? Conditions for referendums from below

- Mobilized movements
- Catalyzing events
- Institutional opportunities for direct democracy
- Multiple actors strategies in referendums arena



Referendums and movements: resonance

- Participatory visions
- Direct democracy
- Open new spaces
- Potential for deliberation
- Positive visions of citizens



Referendums and movements: tensions

- Majoritarian logic
- Potential for party domination
- Not often deliberative
- Money counts
- polarizing

Block 3

- What counts as a successful referendum?
Is it that the content we agree with wins?
Is it mass mobilization (previous question)? Is it the existence of a deep and healthy public debate? Is it something else? Which are the conditions for success?

Participatory

- Tierney (2012: 9) noted that ‘a shift in political attitudes has taken place, the effect of which has been to make the citizens either more confident in their ability to make key policy decisions or less confident in the ability of their elected representatives to do so’. As Laurent Bernhard (2012: 199) argues, ‘giving people more voice is widely considered a promising remedy against the current crisis of democracy’.




Deliberative potential

- ‘contribute to transparent and deliberative political processes and to governmental accountability. [...] Popular initiatives substitute responsiveness lacking among political elites by articulating issues and proposing innovative or neglected policy options with the threat of a referendum vote’ (Schiller, 2009: 211).

empowering

- The introduction and extension of direct democratic instruments currently enjoy growing interest and enthusiasm in both public and scientific debate. In addition to policy-oriented analyses, more and more positive indirect consequences for citizens are revealed: Direct democracy is supposed to increase electoral participation [...], political knowledge [...], efficacy [...], trust in institutions [...], social engagement [...], and, in fact, happiness [...]. Not surprisingly direct democratic institutions are expected to be a promising remedy against the democratic and political malaise. Fatke (2015: 99)

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- **Block 4** In many places, referendums happen, not only at the State level, but also at other lower levels of government. We have seen many of these examples during this conference. What do you think about the possibility of implementing referendums at the local level? Do you think that scale matters and how? Do you think that topics matter? Do you think this affects the kind of mobilization? Do you think there is a higher or lower level of success, based on what we discussed in the previous block?



Times of crises as intensification of time

- contingent,
- understructured
- emergent,
- open-ended



Referendums in times of crisis

- The Great Recession that hit Europe in 2008 can be seen as a critical juncture, triggering not only socioeconomic but also political transformations.
- The crises—in plural—have also shaken political legitimacy of representative democracy
- Triggering forms of direct democracy—including referendums

Thickened history

- Not all historical eras are alike. There are times when change occurs so slowly that time seems almost frozen, though beneath the surface considerable turbulence and evolution may be silently at work. There are other times when change is so compressed, blaring, and fundamental that it is almost impossible to take its measure. (Beissinger 2002: 47)
- Collective identities are to be seen ‘not only as a cause of action, but also as the product of action’ (Beissinger, 2002: 11). ‘Thickened history had provided the context for a fundamental transformation of identities which, in “quieter” times, were once believed to be fixed and immutable’ (2002: 148).

Beyond the limits...

- While in quiet times political entrepreneurs indeed aim at building some structural advantages, these advantages are then put to work in noisy times, when ‘the constraining parameters of politics undergo fundamental challenges, leading to rapidly shifting assumptions about the limits of the possible’ (Beissinger, 2002: 151).

