

ECREA Section Communication and Democracy Mission Statement

Interlinked notions such as democracy, power and participation are contested notions, constantly being re-negotiated and debated. Democratic and emancipatory struggles, linked to citizenship and rights, have always used media as a resource to articulate, disseminate and deliberate new ideas of citizenship, concepts and rights, while access to and sharing of information are central to democratic systems. Media in themselves, as well as access to communication tools and capabilities to find, select and process information, have recently also become a realm for struggle. In this regard can be referred to communication rights, the need for a pluralistic media landscape or the digital divide.

Media and their usages are, however, not an end in themselves, but must be embedded within a democratic context where values of transparency, freedom of expression, equality, reciprocity, respect and tolerance are central. Indeed, the maturity of a democracy can in part be deduced from the way it deals with discontent, protest and alternative discourses to the dominant views, thus consolidating practices of pluralism. Respect for minority rights and the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity are also paramount in this regard.

Besides this, there is a urgency to pay more attention to what is sometimes called the legitimacy crisis of formal representative democracy and the seemingly growing gap between citizens and (formal) politics. In this regard, more participatory models of democracy are being put forward, while ICT-applications to facilitate this are fostered through an encompassing "e-democracy discourse". Developments in this field need to be assessed against the very principles of democratic practice.

In a democracy a balance always needs to be struck between efficiency of decision-making and participatory inclusiveness. This partly explains the recent focus on civil society as an intermediary and relatively autonomous non-profit sphere in between citizen, state and market. Civil society is, however, diverse and fragmented, often single-issue oriented, but is nevertheless increasingly able to form large coalitions, develop common agenda's and assert itself as a legitimate actor in local, national, as well as international, policy making processes.

There is a need to examine the interplay and interfaces between the formal political process and informal political processes more closely. Media, traditional and new, play an increasingly important role in this regard, both as enabling participation and as creating new (structural) constraints or confirming old ones.

The Communication and Democracy section of ECREA promotes critical thought-provoking research that relates to the above-mentioned issues or indeed others concerning the dynamic relationship between media, communication and democracy. It encourages interaction among scholars who are conducting research on this relationship in consolidated, as well as emerging, democracies. The Communication and Democracy section is keen to explore sound theoretical analyses, backed up by empirical research, be it quantitative, qualitative or a combination of both, and welcomes interdisciplinary approaches to the different issues and topics. As such, a non-media centric approach is preferred, allowing dialogue among different disciplines to develop. The Communication and Democracy section also welcomes contributions from young scholars and aims at being representative of the different scholarly and linguistic traditions of European research in Communication.

This current mission statement, as well as statutes of the section, are provisional and still have to be formally approved at the first business meeting.

Main Topics:

? Theories of democracy, power, discourse and representativity in relation to the media and media systems (including issues of participation, public spheres developments but also media concentration as obstacles to democratic pluralistic systems)

? Democracy and communication rights (including policies promoting communication rights and initiatives from below around communication and digital rights)

? Actions and participation, direct and mediated: exercising citizenship (including civil society media usage, new forms of (h)activism, participation in decision-making processes)

? E-democracy and e-governance: reflections and initiatives at local, national, regional and global level.