

Call for interest

Exploring a democratic ritual: “Young citizens’ ceremonies” in transnational perspective

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Throughout the 20th century, and in some instances until today, various European countries, among them Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and France, have organized ceremonies to celebrate the accession of young citizens to their political rights (and duties). Called *Jungbürgerfeier*, *Erstwählerfeier*, *Burgerdag* or *promotions citoyennes*, these rituals have long been forgotten in countries where they ceased to exist, or been overlooked as marginal or simply boring. In fact, however, in the course of their transformations and transnational circulation they have crystallized key tensions within contemporary democracies.

We are a team of scholars coming from different disciplines (anthropology, history, sociology, and political science) working on these ceremonies in Switzerland, France, Germany and the Netherlands. We would like to invite scholars working on or interested by these ceremonies in other contexts to join us and help us broaden our transnational perspective. We envision a workshop in July 2021 and a common publication building both on our specific case studies and on transversal questions.

We are particularly interested in the following questions:

- **Genesis of these ceremonies:** what ends motivated their invention, under what inspiration (from other countries but also from other ceremonies, such as religious coming-of-age rituals or the (East-)German, *Jugendweihe*)? What needs, “problems”, or even “crises“ of politics and/or youth where they intended to solve? What actors diagnosed these issues and promoted these ceremonies as “moral entrepreneurs“ (Howard S. Becker)? At what level(s) of the state were they organized and with what civil society partners (i.e. citizenship education, youth or women’s groups)?
- **Historical transformations:** did the aims of these ceremonies evolve over time, and hence their forms? Why were they abandoned in some instances and maintained in others? How do they relate to other kinds of ceremonies, such as naturalization ceremonies? How do these chronologies fit (or fail to fit) with the transformations of democracy at large? Can the study of these ceremonies help us adjust our understanding of European democracies throughout the 20th century (from the interwar tensions, the “disciplined” or “constrained” model of democracy after 1945, to 1968, or tensions surrounding citizenship in today’s multicultural societies)?
- **Ritual dimensions:** how did/do their organizers approach their “choreography”, from speeches, oath taking and/or the distribution of certificates and booklets, to music, food and beverages? How

did they plan the “staging” of politics, democracy, pluralism, and particular political actors during these events? What other actors (i.e. military or religious authorities, civil society, youth groups) were invited and in what role? How solemn, participatory, and/or entertaining were/are these ceremonies supposed to be? What is the intended place of young people themselves? How have organizers anticipated and approached possible disruptions (from laughter to planned interventions)? What role has the media played in the staging of these ceremonies (both by organizers and by potential disrupters)?

- **Understandings but also concrete practices of citizenship and participation** that were/are negotiated (and often contested) in these ceremonies, between authorities, political forces, civil society, and of course young people: what level(s) of citizenship (local, regional, national, supranational) were addressed? What role did localism and/or nationalism play? What understanding(s) of citizenship and participation (voting, demonstrating, and participating in political parties or in social movements) were particularly promoted, legitimized or on the contrary stigmatized?
- **The interplay between inclusion and exclusion, along the lines of gender, age, social class, nationality:** how did/do the ceremonies handle the exclusion of some young people (women and foreigners in particular) from political rights? Were differentiated models of citizenship promoted as a result (i.e. male citizen-soldier vs. nurturing mothers)? Where these ceremonies were designed to address all young people, who actually took part? How socially exclusive have they remained in their very design?

Calendar

- Abstracts (around 500 words) for March 1st, 2021
- Selection: March 2021
- Drafts on case studies until June 1st, 2021
- Workshop (format to be discussed, off- or online): July 2021.

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