

Local Politics and Citizen's Participation

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Theodor-Heuss-Academy
Gummersbach
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Topic

“All politics is local” is a prevailing phrase – not only in U.S. politics. Apart from the strategic meaning it implies also a liberal perception of politics – starting off from the individual, who should be instrumental in all decisions that affect their life. Looking for solutions at the local level, involving responsible individuals and making use of decentralized local competences and knowledge are important principles to get local government politics close to citizens, encourage their participation, communicate with them more effectively and make government more efficient. However, in reality local politicians around the world are facing huge challenges to implement such principles due to administrative, legal, financial and practical problems. Additionally, in a world where communication methods have become so diverse and the online and internet space is a growing platform for citizens to actively communicate with each other and their local authorities – engagement with citizens has become even more essential. It is important to note that digital communication methods such as the cellphone have made communication much easier across the world.

In this seminar, which comprises of an online phase and a two-week seminar we are going to focus on the above-mentioned questions and we will look for answers involving the views and experiences of participants as well as external contributors. Besides such input we will use participant oriented methods to cover the subjects of the seminar. This will include working groups, simulation exercises and practical individual training.

The seminar will cover ideas on a necessary framework for a functioning local government sector. Nevertheless we will also discuss practical concepts on how to work successfully at a local level in given situations with numerous limitations beyond the decision making power of councilors and mayors.

Content-wise the seminar will focus on six modules:

- Local government politics and liberalism: Why is local government politics important for liberals and what should a liberal policy approach for local politics include?
- Reform ideas for local government including the concept of ‘New Public Management’ Participation as an element of good governance at a local level: Different instruments of formal and non-formal participation. Participation as a success strategy for political parties and organizations.

- Communication techniques and how citizens and liberal local activists can use online media tools such as social media platforms and online forums to enhance participation and mobilise support for their ideals. We will also engage in practical training that looks at how we can strengthen our communication skills and use them to improve performance
- Local politics, political parties and civil society: How can we use a modern liberal approach for local government politics to be politically more successful? What are the roles of political parties and civil society?
- Developing effective plans and programmes to implement liberal ideas at local government level that include citizens and their interests

Target group

- 1) Active liberal local government politicians like councilors, mayors or representatives of local party branches.
- 2) Representatives of liberal NGOs and citizen groups who focus in particular on the local level.
- 3) Politicians or individuals involved with issues of local government.
- 4) Functionaries of liberal political parties who are involved in training of local politicians or consolidating party structures on local level

Subjects

- 1) Local government politics and liberalism
 - Why are local self-administration, subsidiarity, decentralization and participation liberal concepts? Why is local government such an important sphere of government?
 - How can we implement these concepts? Which frameworks are necessary? (legal, financial etc.)
 - Analysis in our own countries: the legal environment and the autonomy of local government to make its own decisions.
 - How do we develop, protect and grow local government autonomy?
 - Is local government politics ‘non-ideological’? Is there a specific liberal approach?
 - Where are achievements / best practice examples and deficits / needs in our countries?
- 2) Reform ideas for local government
 - On the way to New Public Management – and back? How to create a citizen oriented, efficient, democratic and responsible (non-corrupt) local administration? What are our priorities as liberal politicians and how can we implement them according to NPM principles?

3) Participation as an element of good governance on local level

- Formal and informal means of citizens' participation; participation in the digital age (new media tools, cell phones etc.)
- Information rights, initiative rights and decision rights
- How can we enhance citizens' involvement in local politics?
 - Where are achievements / best practice examples and deficits / needs in our countries? What should be the role of civil society and their institutions such as NGOs and citizens groups?

4) The importance of effective communication – listening, engaging and communicating

- How can we strengthen our communication skills and use them to improve performance (practical training focusing on a variety of communication platforms including online media)
- How do we use local media, both traditional and new media to communicate with our residents – what are the most effective ways of communicating with our residents as a local government but also as individual liberal politicians?
- The importance of listening and understanding in effective communication

5) Local politics, political parties and civil society

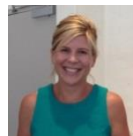
- How can we use participation and citizen orientation as instruments to increase political success? What does this mean for structures and strategies of political parties? Local government level as a particular chance for opposition parties to switch voting patterns.
 - (with practical simulation / strategy exercise)
- How can we make a difference for our residents? Creating centers of excellence' despite difficult framework conditions and building momentum in voters' minds about what we can do for their daily well-being.
 - Where are achievements / best practice examples and deficits / needs in our countries.

Facilitators



Petra Pabst

Petra Pabst became involved with politics in different youth organizations at the early age of 15. Focusing on policy development and political programs she later became president of her regional branch and vice president at the state level. Today she continues her political commitment at the local level as member of the regional parliamentary group. By profession, she is a political scientist and facilitator; her areas of work are liberal values, policy development, strategic planning and Europe. She currently works for the parliamentary group of the FDP in the state parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia as a Scientific Consultant.



Kylie Hatton

Kylie Hatton is the Deputy Director for Communication & Marketing at the University of Cape Town, the top university in Africa. Prior to joining UCT she worked for the City of Cape Town, one of South Africa's largest and leading municipalities, as the Manager: Media. Kylie was responsible for the oversight of all of the City's media engagement and relationships. She served 6 Mayors during her time at the City. She was also responsible for the development and implementation of the branding, marketing and communication of one of the first integrated rapid transit projects in South Africa, Cape Town's MyCiTi bus project. She has also worked for the international non-government sector as well as South Africa's Parliament.

The Foundation

We, the **Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom**, promote individual liberty, free and open societies and free markets in Germany and throughout the world. To us freedom is the guiding principle in policy making. We believe that free and open societies are the only societies that allow human beings to decide for themselves what is best, to develop their full potential and to pursue their dreams. This is what we mean when we claim to value human dignity. And it is freedom that produces prosperity. Together with our counterparts – who all share a similar set of values – we support initiatives in Germany and abroad that serve to enhance respect for the rule of law, private property and human rights, that foster tolerance and that strengthen economic freedom rights and democracy.

The programmes of the Foundation's **International Academy for Leadership (IAF)** form an integral part of our international work and offer Liberals from all parts of the world opportunities to engage in dialogue, an exchange of ideas, networking and mutual cooperation. We aim to inspire.



Venue

International Academy for Leadership (IAF)
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