



H.F.R.I.
Hellenic Foundation for
Research & Innovation

Description of the funded research project
1st Call for H.F.R.I. Research Projects to Support Faculty
Members & Researchers and Procure High-Value
Research Equipment

Title of the research project: Hollowing Democracy, Party Politics and Social Protest during the “Great Recession.” The Case of Greece, 2008-2018



Principal Investigator: Seraphim Seferiades

Reader-friendly title: Hollowing Democracy, Party Politics and Social Protest (Greece 2008-2018)

Scientific Area: Social Sciences

Institution and Country: Panteion University, Greece

Host Institution: Pateion University

Collaborating Institution(s): Scuola Normale Superiore

Project webpage: <https://lcp.panteion.gr/>



Budget: €166.650

Duration: 36 months

Research Project Synopsis

The impetus behind this project came from the observation that, despite the progress made over the last couple of decades, the concerted study of institutional and contentious politics (politics as governance and politics as struggle), itself a prerequisite for the stereoscopic understanding of the political phenomenon, is still lagging. As a result, in the context of conventional politology, the “Great Recession” tends to become normalized (without theoretical appraisal of the fact that it entails projects of domination), whilst studies focusing on popular mobilizations fail to break free from the straightjacket of descriptivism (without enough attention paid to the role that political mediation plays in their evolution and outcomes). Detailed study of the Greek case (2008-2018) –characterized by both the outbreak of extensive social protest and the overhaul of the party system– can help us overcome these problems. By revisiting concepts and key theoretical debates in both fields, en route to a robust interdisciplinarity, our research, in institutional politics (a) examines the nature of the “crisis” (via assessing diverse pertinent discourses); (b) records critical junctures in the process of democratic hollowing (e.g., transformations in the balance between legislature and executive); and (c) explores the mounting crisis of representation, by paying special attention to the internal functioning of parties. As far as contentious politics is concerned, we (a) take stock of new contentious repertoires by reconstructing the concept of “radicalization;” (b) highlight the subjective dimension of protest by undertaking qualitative-ethnographic analysis of the dominant value frames (by conducting interviews employing the method of visual essaying); and (c) carries out extensive protest-event-analysis whilst focusing on the process of political mediation. Combining our findings allows us, finally, to reflect on the future of democracy in Greece and Europe. Our findings will constitute a solid data base, other researchers will also be able to use.

Project originality

The project's overarching goal is to move beyond superficial analyses of contemporary democratic politics, characterized by the penchant to take for granted what mostly needs to be explained. Aspiring to construct the template for a robust interdisciplinarity between institutional and contentious politics, the project seeks to demonstrate (a) how contemporary democratic hollowing reflects a deliberate project to effect systemic reproduction through curtailing popular rights; and (b) how social-movement emergence, trajectories and outcomes are largely determined by the ways in which social-movement organizations and allied political parties make use of their strategic resources. Identifying and systematically researching domination *within* institutional politics, and governance *within* contentious politics implements a highly original way of approaching contemporary problems. It also raises and tackles questions that urgently need to be addressed in the context of thinking about current democratic predicaments and futures. The project's expected results are equally original in terms (a) of their theoretical impact and the realignment of research interests they are likely to generate, and (b) the systematic exposition of their conceptual underpinnings – involving the thorough cognitive mapping and assessment of a variety of concepts. The project is also innovative in terms *both* of its methodology *and* the techniques it adopts. Our institutional analysis takes on the original task of meticulously charting post-democratic forms, whilst our *Critical Protest Event Analysis* goes far beyond mere charting and descriptive quantification, to provide meaningful explanatory propositions regarding movement-emergence, trajectory, and outcomes. Equally innovative is the attention we pay to the subjective dimension of politics. By establishing focus groups and utilizing advanced video-essaying techniques, we seek to document the way people experienced key events of the period and highlight issues and discursive themes that captured their imagination.

Expected results & Research Project Impact

One of the main aspirations of the project is to produce a social science that is cognitively relevant to contemporary problems. Pointedly addressing the cardinal issues of democratic hollowing and the role that the activation of the *demos* may play in envisioning democratic deepening, constitutes an important contribution both to science and society. It is equally important for the economy. Understanding the transformations that the political system underwent in the years of the “Great Recession” and its constant interplay with social processes (the essence of the robust interdisciplinarity we seek to accomplish) decisively helps minimize what people in finance call “systemic risk,” also contributing to better decision-making in a rapidly changing world. By recasting core concepts and revisiting key theoretical debates in institutional and contentious politics, we expect our project to lay the grounds for novel approaches both empirically and theoretically. Having conducted extensive analysis in the two fields (institutional and contentious politics), we will be able to fruitfully synthesize findings *en route* to an interdisciplinarity capable of raising important questions in contemporary democratic theory and providing meaningful –theoretically grounded and empirically unambiguous– answers: E.g.,

- *What are the precise roots and nature of democratic hollowing, through what processes has it evolved, and how have social movements –historically, the main promoters and catalysts of democratization– sought to remedy it?*
- *What factors kept social movements from countering austerity in the short-term, and what are their prospects for the near future?*
- *What has been the role of different political discourses and strategies, and what sort of residues has the recent protest wave left behind?*
- *What are the prerequisites and what specific proposals can be made for attaining a democratic renewal?*

The importance of this funding

ELIDEK funding has meant a great deal to each and every member of the research team in a variety of ways: personally, professionally, and –perhaps most crucially– cognitively. The overall research environment in Greece has been burdened by the economic crisis and, currently, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Precisely for this reason, research in the social sciences is more necessary than ever. The capacity to reflect on the roots of social problems and suggest ways for dealing with them is a sine qua non factor both for the research community and for society as a whole. ELIDEK funding is providing this opportunity to scholars (both young and more seasoned) –something for which this project’s research team and me personally as the Principal Investigator feel both grateful and inspired.



H.F.R.I.
Hellenic Foundation for
Research & Innovation

COMMUNICATION

185 Syggrou Ave. & 2 Sardeon St. 2
171 21, N. Smyrni, Greece
+30 210 64 12 410, 420
communication@elidek.gr
www.elidek.gr