Multiple Democracies: Political Cultures and Democratic Variety in Post-Enlargement Europe

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Abstract
The emergence of democracy in former communist Central and Eastern Europe has enjoyed the extensive interest of political scientists studying the democratization of non-Western, formerly authoritarian societies. Democratization also raised the interest, but much less prominently so, of a number of political theorists interested in the implications of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe for normative political theory. Both democratization studies and normative political theory ultimately admit to the importance of political culture in sustaining a modern democracy. In democratization studies, the concept of political culture has gained renewed coinage as a cultural support for procedural democracy, while, in contrast, in normative political theory the invocation of political culture stands for a variety of concerns: self-limitation, participation, civic engagement, rationality, to name but a few. Whereas in democratization studies a widespread consensus understands liberal political culture as a reflection of a Schumpeterian, procedural kind of democracy, and as consisting of a mixture of participation and self-limitation, in political theory there is clearly no consensus on the ultimate form democratic political culture should take, and various understandings between culture and politics are endorsed and debated. In the paper, it is argued that empirical studies of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe would gain substantially if the potential diversity of political cultures as emerging from normative political theory would be incorporated. At least three important advantages can be gained from such an engagement. First, the insight would be gained that the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe are underpinned by different - but equally democratic - political cultures, with context-dependent definitions of the relation between politics and culture. Second, by taking into account the multi-interpretability of the democratic ‘imaginary’, the differentiated nature of political cultures – not only between but also within societies – and the political struggle over interpretations of democracy would be better reflected. Third, and perhaps most significant for the specific European situation, the emergence of Europeanised and post-national forms of political culture is better conceptualised in an approach that acknowledges various interpretations of the relation between politics and culture.

Keywords: Democracy • Diversity • Eastern Europe • Political Culture • Political Theory