

Panel 2: Freedom of Choice

Organizers:

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The rise of new patterns of democratic governance over the last decades has changed the relationship between freedom of choice (a most important democratic value) and democratic citizenship. Recently, this question has moved to the centre of public debate, with 'choice' being seen as the opportunity to re-imagine democracy. New concepts have been developed to come to terms with the creation and recreation of the ambiguous meanings of democracy and free choice, such as 'consumer-citizenship', 'lifestyle politics', and 'aesthetic choice' in the making of a new democratic culture. Key in such new concepts is that they transcend old contradictions, like state-market, public-private, and political-economic. In public and scholarly debates, the 'freedom of choice' increasingly serves as a discursive resource of contestation around which new democratic meanings, relations, and interests evolve. In Europe, governments are in the process of transforming the very nature of democratic citizenship along the lines of choice. Governments increasingly make problematic the civic exercise of choice in terms of various self-responsibilities for a variety of policy objectives and public interests.

This panel sought to discuss whether European and cross-national patterns can be retraced, as well as patterns between public policy domains. It sought to converse about whether different uses and meanings of freedom of choice, the limits of freedom of choice, and the manners in which the freedom of choice legitimizes policy, and what such patterns would tell us about democracy today. Through a freedom of choice discussion, this panel liked to find out how choice functions as a mechanism through which democratic citizens constitute themselves as (envisioned) responsible governance actors, what such (attributed) moral agency would entail, and what kind of ambivalence, paradox, and precariousness prevails in such a scenario. Though the panel was primarily oriented towards inspiring a scholarly dialogue on actual and highly urgent issues, it also invited more general (including philosophical and historical) papers on freedom of choice and its relationship to governance, citizenship, and the state.

Type of papers

This panel invited all sorts of papers, from all disciplinary backgrounds, that take the issue of freedom of choice, no matter how it is conceived, as their focus. Papers are also invited about choice related issues, such as self-responsibility, choice competence, (neo)liberalism, liberal democracy, consumer-citizenship, culture of high capitalism, global culture industry, choice control/monitoring, choice governance, etc. The papers may have had a normative or empirical character, they may be theoretical and idea-oriented or present a case study of a more profane world or some policy field. All methodological alternatives were invited.

Link between the panel and a sub-theme of the NIG research programme

The panel was linked to the subtheme 'Citizens and Governance'. It concentrates on freedom of choice in discourses on (new or old meanings attributed to) citizenship and governance, maps its limits and constraints, and stimulate (original, creative) thinking about democratic statehood.