Summary of the Dissertation

of Felix Butzlaff

Title: Contemporary Civil Protest in Germany.
Organizers – Expectations – Images of Democracy

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Content

Conclusion

Over the past years in Germany and its European neighbor countries there has been a rising perception of a social and political crisis. Such perceptions always trigger feelings of insecurity and a slowly increasing search for new and possibly better forms of democratic representation. Well-established instruments and interpretation frames to understand and mediate the basis of society, politics or economy have failed to work the way they were expected to. And every shock on the social or economic organization changes our view and understanding of the mechanisms that drive that same organization. This way the search for new perspectives on the way to understand our societies is fostered every time we observe a crisis that cannot be explained by the established interpreters and experts.

Different from past periods of perceived crisis in western democracies – from the debates on the destructive role of political parties in the Republic of Weimar to the "Unregierbarkeitsdebatten (debates on ungovernability)" during the 1970s to the word "Politikverdrossenheit (disenchantment with politics)"– in the ongoing crisis the individual citizen plays a critical role as organizer, focal point and loud speaker of the dissatisfaction with politics and democracy. At the same time, traditional mass organizations – such as trade unions, churches or political parties – are losing their reach and credibility as established formations to gather and represent social interests.

This study does not address this question from the perspective of the sociology of organization or the science of political parties, but with a focus on those whose faith in democracy has been in decline. A crisis of democracy can be nourished by allegedly objective problematic situations or likewise by a change of expectations or hope connected to democracy. Hence, this study examines those political citizens that stand at the core of the present perception of crisis: citizens that do not agree anymore with democratic opinion-formation and decision-making and have lost their faith in the problem solving capacities of the representative democracy. This study takes a look at the phenomena of contemporary civil protesting and those who organize them.