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ANTI-POLITICS AND CIVIC IDENTITY

HOW TO REVITALIZE THE PUBLIC SPHERE
IN A DEMOCRACY?

ABSTRACT   Contemporary democracy requires rethinking on the normative level and cer-
tain changes in the institutional and cultural dimensions. To this end, we should
start by revising our perception of the public sphere and the role that citizens
have to play in it. First of all, it should be emphasized that the public sphere is
composed of various citizens' forums, which should be effectively included in
the political decision-making process. New institutional solutions must ensure
the free flow of information between citizens and take into account different,
even minority points of view, because democracy, if it is not to be exclusive, can-
not be limited only to formal representation and closed, top-defined forms of
discourse. In fact, people are unequal in terms of their civic competences, both
in terms of their individual characteristics, as well as their social position, and de-
mocracy should neutralize these inequalities. These problems cannot be solved
on purely theoretical grounds. Indeed, the clash of different views and argu-
ments in the political debate is a constitutive element of politics, and therefore
they have to be negotiated in practice by actual citizens. The lack of such solu-
tions and, consequently, the experiences enabling the development of civic com-
petences, not only result in a crisis of democracy, but also lead to the negation of
the very essence of politics.

Keywords: democracy, anti-politics, citizen, participation, identity, delibera-
tion

INTRODUCTION

The statement that democracy is in crisis now, in the early the 21st century, has actually become a cliché. The low level of confidence in both the institutions and the political elites is accompanied by the progressive erosion of the public sphere. The response to this crisis, both by the theorists of democracy and the political elites themselves, seems inadequate to the real causes and, above all, remains extremely conservative. Any proposed institutional reforms are rather cosmetic and do not touch the essence of the system. Meanwhile, citizens expect concrete changes that will bring not just an illusion, but a real representation of their interests. Democracy does not need a refresher, but a deep reconstruction – adapting institutional infrastructure for a whole new world and citizen. What is needed, however, is an analysis that will go beyond the institutional dimension of politics and will not be limited in its conclusions and recommendations to the proposition of the reform of the system. The changes must not be superficial because the distrust concerns not as much representative democracy and the current political elites, but the world of politics itself, which is more like a theatre of illusion or a soap opera focused on arousing emotions, no longer understandable to most citizens. It is not treated as a mechanism of articulation and harmonization of social interests, but as a cynical game by the elites.

NEOLIBERAL DEPOLITICIZATION POLICY

It is impossible to understand the nature of the change only on the basis of the data recording the declining interest in politics or the declining level of political participation of citizens, as well as formal membership in political parties. Collin Hay analysed the negative effect of a set of neoliberal ideas on how politicians define politics, and how this affects its public perception. According to the image presented in the public sphere, each individual, including politicians, is guided in his behaviour by rationally understood self-interest, and simply strives to maximize it. Undermining the beliefs about the unselfish motivations of politicians significantly contributed also to a significant drop in trust in the state as an institutional system of representation of social interests, and threw citizens into the hands of experts and technocrats.[1] Politics itself has been subordinated to economically understood rationality and thus has been de facto depoliticized.

Meanwhile, politics is the ability to act and to deliberate[2] in a situation of real collective or social choice. In such an approach, politics is everywhere where we are not

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[1]   C. Hay, *Why We Hate Politics*, Cambridge 2007.

[2]   Deliberation should be treated as a special form of debate, which is the essence of democracy due to the fact that it allows expressing opinions by all the individuals affected by the issues raised during its course. Enthusiasm for the return to the idea of deliberation grew along with the crisis of representative democracy and was influenced by the works by advocates of deliberative democracy, such as

dealing with the determination of our fate but with its co-shaping, and the problem is not merely limited to the individual. Therefore, all matters that we have no control over belong to the realm of non-politics.[3] Politicization is a process where the problem becomes the subject of deliberation, decision and action, whereas this was not previously the case. Depoliticization, on the other hand, is the reverse process, that is, matters that were previously a subject of choice, cease to be the subject of deliberation and are considered final and determined.[4] Extending Hay's depoliticization concept, Laura Jenkins defined politics as a creative, indeterminate process that is intrinsically complex in nature, and its participants refer to different values and possess, at least potentially, the ability to challenge the established order.

Politics is inevitably linked to action that, although marked by randomness, is a reflective game between the omnipresent relations of power and freedom in collective life.[5] There can be no politics without a genuine possibility, or even a belief in the possibility of changing the existing order. Politics is the ability to change, and therefore the ability to act. Wherever we influence others through our actions, politics is there. However, social strategies for recognizing or denying the possibility of realizing human will may differ. Politicization in a broad sense would therefore mean revealing and questioning what is taken for granted, that is, morally or politically without alternatives. The strategy of depoliticization entails fatalism and determinism, which limit the human ability to act, choose and change the existing world.[6] Thus, it translates into the practice of presenting certain orders as scientifically justified and unquestionable. Particularism is presented as a denial of neutrality and impartiality. A negative picture of politics is created by means of presenting it as the source of the ideological deformation of the world's image, in order to counter-propose a vision of an organization of a society that is free from political interests.

As a consequence, depoliticization practices can be justified not as destroying diversity, limiting choices and available alternatives, but as liberating from particularisms. The depoliticization of difference results in the replacement of politics understood as a sphere for free social choices, with one where, regardless of our particular motivations, there is only one correct solution presented with no alternative. Therefore, the goal of politicization would be to act against domination in a situation where power

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A. Gutmann, D. Thompson, J.S. Dryzek, J. Bohman, J. Elster, and S. Benhabib. In the light of this theory, deliberation should be organized so as to encourage open interaction, free from coercion, manipulation and unequal power relations, and its aim should be to develop rational, well-founded opinions. In the course of the discussion, participants can change their positions when influenced by new information and arguments presented by other participants. Deliberation is thus presented by the spokesmen of deliberative democracy as a source of the empowerment of citizens and a chance for political healing of representative democracy.

[3] C. Hay, *Why We Hate...*, p. 67.

[4] Ibid., p. 81.

[5] L. Jenkins, "The Difference Genealogy Makes: Strategies for Politicisation or How to Extend Capacities for Autonomy", *Political Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2011), p. 159.

[6] Ibid., pp. 159-160.

relations are blocked or are subject to depoliticization, which prevents the formulation and emergence of an alternative.

ANTI-POLITICS AS A CHALLENGE

Democracy at the beginning of the 20th century has to face a growing decline of confidence in politicians and political institutions. Formal politics is more and more perceived as an idle spectacle directed by PR specialists, perhaps impressive, but certainly not politically effective from the perspective of a citizen, and above all dysfunctional from the perspective of the entire system. Political parties, which look more like corporations that care more about the interests of their own members, rather than public entities that really care about the interests of various social groups, have lost their ability to mobilize citizens; and political institutions have lost the mandate to represent them. Along with the growing sense of political alienation of citizens, a completely new phenomenon has emerged, which political scientists have called anti-political culture.[7]

Lack of trust in formal politics results in demands to directly influence public affairs through referendums, petitions, and civic budgets. This can be seen, of course, as an attempt to create competitive channels of articulation, alternative to discredited party politics. Undoubtedly, it is a testimony of civic commitment, but above all, an expression of the need for adequate institutional changes within the system. According to Hay and Stoker, contemporary political elites do not fully recognize the scale, depth and nature of the disease with which modern democracy is struggling.[8] In their estimation, this is due to several reasons. First, the elites themselves do not understand how much they themselves are responsible for the crisis of democratic politics. Their representatives are more likely to take advantage of, rather than oppose, the anti-political culture because their electoral fortune depends on it. Often, it can even be concluded that they themselves have ceased to believe in the social functionality of politics, and this contributes to the consent to place many key decisions beyond their influence and control. It is not surprising that the citizens whom they allegedly represent have also stopped believing in it. The reversing of this process would require re-establishing collective forms of decision-making. This makes sense as long as citizens feel they exert influence on the process of making decisions that concern them, a factor which can restore their motivation to engage in public life.

Revitalizing politics (re-politicization) means, first and foremost, opposing the depoliticization of public spheres where it has already happened, dominated not by democratically elected representatives, but rather by managers, professionals and experts. Second, the proposed and implemented systemic changes often do not apply to institutions and entities holding key political roles; and the political parties, NGOs, and the

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[7]   C. Hay, G. Stoker, "Revitalising Politics: Have We Lost the Plot?", *Representation*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2009), p. 226.

[8]   Ibid., p. 227.

media themselves are a part of the problem and must be seen as a part of the solution. Third, revitalized politics must be organized much better than today in order to deal with the inherently multi-level nature of the modern world and the related management requirements. Decentralization postulated at the national level cannot mean randomness and the creation of an idiosyncratic system. Politics has become more transnational than it has ever been, while our political institutions and debates have remained stubbornly national.

To summarize, we can confirm that, with a very well-documented low level of political commitment by citizens and growing discontent with politics, we lack a real understanding of the origins of this state of affairs. We do not fully understand where the negative image of politics among citizens came from, which is often even perceived as a cynical game of the elites. Any strategy to revitalize politics must seriously address the issue of changing the citizens' perception. We know what forms of political activity people engage in and what factors drive this activity. We can offer a wealth of empirical data on such issues as voter turnout and election results, but what political science – and social science in general – has a problem with, is to explain how citizens ceased to understand the meaning of politics in the early twenty-first century.

POLITICAL INDIVIDUALISM IN PRACTICE

Neoliberal politics is not practiced through political parties, because the decision-making process regarding society has been removed from democratic bodies. It is based on activity generated around individual cases that can be solved in the same way as a mathematical equation, and is not forged in the public process of agreeing on different points of view and reasons. This new politics is also not adapted to traditional democratic systems and forms of political participation. Contemporary civic activism is becoming more viral and anarchic. It can be called a diffuse model of political individualism, which further contributes to the strengthening of the cracks in the political landscape. All major political parties have adopted significant elements of an antipolitical stance. By attacking each other and constantly emphasizing the lies of their opponents, politicians imitate the vitality of the political scene, but at the same time undermine mutual trust, which destroys the foundations on which the public sphere is built. This form of political rivalry remains socio-technically effective because it mobilizes against competitors whose harmful activities must be restricted in the interests of society as a whole. But at the same time, it confirms the belief of the society that no one can be trusted.

At the same time, the power to make public decisions goes to non-elected agencies and institutions, further aggravating the decline in confidence in the representative system. Politicians consciously engage in the process of removing "politics from politics," and thus reduce our expectations in this regard. With a neoliberal view of politics and a belief that there is no real influence, they outsource decision-making to non-elected but top-down bodies, which has serious implications for the way in which

such decisions are then publicly accounted for. As Lord Falconer explains, politicians delegate decision-making to others because they do not trust that they can already govern themselves effectively and, above all, that they do it in the common interest.[9] We can treat such activities as an expression of the belief that there is no real influence on the political decision-making process. Unfortunately, this is not accompanied by the awareness of how socially dangerous the consequences of spreading such an attitude are – it leads to the destruction of the public sphere.

If politicians are dependent upon powerful interest groups, which leads to their actual incapacitation, they can at most, thanks to modern media, simulate their influence on decision-making processes in the public sphere. Such activity can even be considered socially harmful, because in order to self-promote, politicians contribute to the reproduction of a system that does not actually help the political representation of social interests, but it promotes solutions to a problem that are presented as effective in economic terms, but in actuality they serve the interests of symbiotically connected dominant groups. The detachment of the political elites from the needs of the "people" is used by populists who suggest that in their choices and actions, party leaders are not guided by social interests, but by their own interests. This perpetuates a negative image of politics. This view is further supported when combined with the belief that the majority of politicians do not have sufficient competence and expert knowledge that would enable them to effectively control the shaping and conducting of particular policies; and their stubbornness in maintaining a fossilized, ineffective bureaucracy is an unjustifiable cost. In this view, politics *is a pathogen for which depoliticization is an antidote.*[10]

It is difficult to prove that the modern political class is more concentrated in its motivations and actions on its own self-interest, but the irony is that this is a common political view, on which the modern depoliticization trend seems to rest. Politics has been depoliticized as the decision-making has been delegated to independent bodies, remaining largely outside the effective public scrutiny. The decision-making processes have become more complex as new challenges and actors emerge. Electoral rivalry is becoming increasingly limited and reduced to the level of a beauty contest between candidates, who in order to differentiate themselves no longer refer to political beliefs and substantive arguments. If we are to resuscitate politics, we must recreate the space for public and rational decision-making.[11] In short, we need to recreate the public sphere.

Meanwhile, one of the fundamental problems stems from the fact that the politically significant decision-making has been delegated to non-elected bodies, which are therefore not accountable to the public. Thus, citizens lose the ability to publicly deliberate on the problems that concern them, and the adopted solutions do not have democratic political legitimacy. The fundamental question then remains: how was it even possible for the political elites to co-create such a negative image of themselves? Of course, they cannot be held responsible for it directly. But by adopting the view of

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[9]   Ibid., p. 228.

[10] Ibid., p. 229.

[11] Ibid., p. 235.

the world inspired by public choice theory, in which democratic politics comes down to the pursuit of narrowly and selfishly understood short-term profit by political actors, they have greatly contributed to that. Politics viewed from this angle does not serve any public purpose and should therefore be limited. It can be said ironically that if we believe in it, we will support transfer of decisions concerning us to external bodies in the name of the public interest. It is just that, along the way, we also lose influence on the policy-shaping process. The decision-making takes place without real democratic control. And whether we like it or not, it has very serious implications for our democratic political culture. If politicians themselves see politics as a disease to which depoliticization is the antidote, it is not surprising that ordinary people not only stop being interested in it, but even perceive it negatively. It is even more understandable that the more complex the socio-political system becomes, the less they understand it, and do not know where the decisions that are crucial for them are actually made; and the politicians themselves are, in their opinion, simply more vulnerable to corruption.

The widespread belief that politicians focus on the party interests and the media spectacle rather than on the socially functional activities, have significantly contributed to the emergence of *anti-politics culture*. The constant mutual attacks undoubtedly contribute to the creation of individual and party political capital, but at the same time they discredit politics in the eyes of voters. Political campaigns tailored to the *median voter* have reduced the presence of minority groups and their interests in the political sphere, and they can no longer count on adequate articulation. Moreover, most citizens perceive politicians and politics through the media filter as viewers, and not through the experience of direct contact.[12]

Paradoxically, the emergence of around-the-clock media as well as social media, did not raise people's political awareness, as the quality of the information provided was significantly reduced due to the pursuit of customers and profit. The form and content of the media message was thus subordinated to the mass audience. As a result, we get a caricatured image of politics – simplified and emphasizing its negative features, because such is the demand. Focusing on this dimension of politicians' activity is conducive to the spread of political cynicism among citizens. Modern man has become more of a consumer focused on satisfying his narrowly understood, selfish interests, than a citizen who understands the collective nature of politics.

The media, under the pressure of competition and in pursuit of profit, lower their standards and unite into international media groups. The declining quality of news coverage, in a situation where the media became the main source of political information, is resulting in deformed and simplified messages, while the complexity of politics increases. This is accompanied by the disappearance of the boundary between the message itself and the commentary. Emotion-oriented media popularize a culture of contempt, and journalists often build their position in opposition to the politicians whom they portray in a negative light, such as crooks who must be constantly monitored and kept a watchful eye on. Finally, the media reinforces the image of politics as a marketplace, and the

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[12]   More on this subject, M. Karwat, *O karykaturze polityki*, Warszawa 2012, pp. 11-12.

citizens as consumers who have a right to be outraged if their expectations are not met; or as an arena of sport competition where there can only be one winner. How does this relate to politics understood as a complex decision-making process that allows taking into account different points of view, reasons and expectations? It certainly does not resemble a debate understood as a public reflection of rational citizens. Market expectations for goods are fundamentally different from those in the public sphere. Demanding attitudes dominate, rather than participation and shared responsibility. Much of our modern discontent with politics is due to unrealistic, artificially aroused and inflated expectations of what we are entitled to expect as consumer-voters.[13]

Consumers are guided by simple logic in their choices. If a store does not carry what they expect or they do not like the store, they can go elsewhere. In politics, the only way we can influence the course of events is through action and speech. This allows us to express our fears and try to come to an understanding with others. Unfortunately, this means that the cost of exit, as well as participation, is much higher than on the market. People generally do not like to make a lot of effort for a small prize. Shifting responsibility onto others is a very common mechanism of coping with difficult situations. Expressing opinions is just the beginning because politics is not only about being able to express one's views; it is also the art of listening to others. The essence of politics cannot be reduced to the acquisition of goods by individual consumers, because rather than the market, it resembles an agora, where subjective beliefs and reasons must be universally accepted. Politics is the process of finding a collective answer to specific problems. It is very demanding, but also the most edifying human experience that requires going beyond self-interest.[14]

CITIZENSHIP IN THE WORLD OF ANTI-POLITICS

The level of dissatisfaction with how the system works in the current institutional shape continues to grow. Some blame politicians and the working of the political system. Others blame the preoccupied-with-themselves citizens for resigning and not participating in the political debate and changes.[15] Indeed, ordinary people are less and less interested in the world around them and less socially and politically involved, while politicians are more and more detached from ordinary people's problems. The growing dissatisfaction with formal politics is due in part to a misunderstanding of the political processes that are undertaken and explained in the discourse on democracy. This is partly due to the image of politics that dominates in public discourse as a space for satisfying individual needs, and not socially made choices and decisions.[16]

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[13]	C. Hay, G. Stoker, "Revitalising Politics…", p. 231.

[14]	Ibid., p. 234.

[15]	G. Stoker, "Politics in Mass Democracies: Destined to Disappoint?", *Representation*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2006), p. 181.

[16]	Ibid.

As confidence in the political elite and institutions decreases, party membership also declines. In response to the changing situation, the latter broadens the space for action for spin doctors, campaign specialists, professionals who, by definition, treat citizens as passive observers who should be mobilized as needed. This problem concerns not only political parties, but also non-governmental organizations, which do not rely on mass membership, but on professional campaign organizers. Citizens are also treated here as the audience most often addressed by media campaigns, and who are, at best, expected to sign a letter or participate in an organized demonstration. Simple messaging is sent out instead of a deep, analytical message. What is required is the occasional involvement of a wider group of citizens in an organized "event," which is a protest or a rally. Such involvement is more of a lifestyle, a form of public statement, than a serious, conscious involvement in the political debate. Our involvement is ephemeral, sporadic and shallow.[17] Political participation takes the form of uncoordinated activity by frustrated consumers.

Political alienation, however, manifests itself in many places and in various forms. Citizens who are brought up in an atmosphere of distrust of politicians, scepticism about democratic institutions, and disappointment with how democratic processes work, withdraw from participation in elections.[18] Even if not all European countries show such a permanent tendency, the overall European countries average is lower than even a few dozen years ago. Another manifestation of alienation is the declining membership of political parties. They are now more of a hostage to a system in which they do not play a significant political role. They focus more on self-promotional activities, using the available marketing tools. They are no longer institutions of mass participation and involvement, because citizens are mobilized not by ideologies, but by campaigns on specific issues, and only in limited forms such as boycott, petition or march. Such shallow and, above all, short-term commitment has a marginal effect and leaves a rather disappointing taste for politics. In the long run, this is extremely detrimental to democracy, as it is not conducive to building a public sphere open to all people and views.

The decline in confidence in existing political solutions and elites does not only apply to unconsolidated democracies, which proves that it is a disease of how politics is understood and practiced, rather than a question of a division into old and new democracies. The symptoms of this disease are manifested not only at the level of the political party or government, but of the entire political system. By focusing on the negative sides of the governing process, the media perpetuates the image of politics as an idle and unproductive competition resembling a shadow theatre for children, rather than a socially functional activity. Politics is not respected today, as it is associated with the use of public office for private purposes. In the social aspect, the value of politics has been significantly devalued. It is associated with an activity that does not give any reason to be proud; instead, one has become ashamed of it.

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[17]   C. Hay, G. Stoker, "Revitalising Politics...", p. 231.

[18]   G. Stoker, "Politics...", p. 181.

Regardless of whether we consider it to be the result of imposing business logic on political activity, or more of an incomprehensible persistence in a national and local corseting of politics in the face of economic globalization, people have actually been distanced from decision-making processes on matters that concern them. In their struggle for the customer, the media provides us with a deformed and cognitively simplified image of politics, because it suits the tastes of potential customers whom they must strive for in order to survive. Thus, politics has become associated with party self-service activity and marketing. At the same time, the media, under the pressure of commercialism, have lowered their standards and narrowed the perspective to the extent that they ceased to play an educational role. They focused not on what is the essence of politics, that is, the possibility of confronting different points of view, ideas, and the process of negotiating, agreeing and making – sometimes very difficult – choices in uncertain circumstances, but on what will bring them a particular benefit in the form of ratings and profits.

The combination of all these factors is conducive to the emergence of a political culture based on a distrust of politicians and politics in general. As a result, people do not take their civic responsibilities seriously enough. A society of individualists has arisen, who are so preoccupied with themselves that they not only fail to see the need of getting involved in the community, but also seem to want to lose this ability. Of course, one can retort that politicians have always lied, and money has always played an important role in politics. It seems, however, that the cause of the modern disease of democratic politics lies more in the minds and the decline of civic practices. Politics has been infected by the virus of self-realization. In light of the dominant myth of our times, the purpose of every individual's life is precisely self-realization, which is expressed through the art of making individual choices and absolutizing a single perspective. Politics, whose essence lies in the art of collective decision-making and harmonizing various voices, becomes impossible with such naively understood individualism. *People drift away from politics and get frustrated with their actions because they do not understand the fundamental nature of politics.*[19] The consumer's perspective does not answer the question: how to reconcile a conflict of interests, or individual claims? The logic of the market and politics remains different. Politics is conflict management. It is not enough to merely manifest your will. You also need the ability to listen to other voices and take them into account in the process of reaching common decisions.

Communication competence, not just casting a single vote, sets the horizon of politics, because the pursuit of self-interest requires, contrary to appearances, the understanding of others. Communication is important at every stage of the political process. Rather than ending, politics starts when it articulates its will. Meanwhile, common people cease to see the sense of undertaking public activities. They do not understand that politics is not governed by an invisible hand, but that it has its own internal logic. The public sphere has its own specificity, and politics has its own grammar. A rational model can only work if the majority of those involved in politics have the appropriate

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[19]   Ibid., p. 184.

knowledge and competence. Otherwise, there is a real risk that they can become an object of manipulation, even by a relatively small group.

Resistance in a complex social world is part of politics. It enables the presentation of alternative solutions to social problems and creates room for compromises. However, all this requires the existence of an appropriate institutional base that will ensure the provision of appropriate information and will indicate the spectrum of possible choices. The voice is undoubtedly a key weapon in democratic politics, but first, the citizen has to decide who or what to cast it for. This requires not only the ability to listen, however crucial, but also an access to information on issues being resolved. In today's globalized world, disinformation and *fake news* are becoming a problem. And although it is difficult to talk about the collapse of democracy, the problems described above become a warning that should be taken seriously.

It is necessary to consider how to revive civic spirit and rebuild civic culture, or whether to create new political institutions that will limit the influence of business groups on politics, while expanding and diversifying the participation of citizens in public life. Greater influence of citizens on the political decision-making process would not only be effective empowerment but also have an educational effect, as it would allow to understand the essence of collective decision-making, which is fundamentally different from consumer choices. The trap of consumer thinking is that it identifies individual choices as the only way to express oneself, and thus it maintains a negative image of politics. Changing this picture requires coordinated activities by the various institutions in the field of civic education, including TV debates and academic commentary. We must create a new public realm and recreate the meaning of citizenship.

SUMMARY

The widespread negative stereotype of politics is a reaction to the way it is practiced, and not its negation, as it may seem at first glance. Politics exists because we disagree with each other. Politics is a choice between competing interests, values and views. It often requires an allocation of inherently limited resources, accepted by no one. Primarily because it is a collective form of decision-making, the outcome must concern everyone. Politics at the level of today's large, interconnected and diverse societies is a challenge. It is supposed to reflect our collective will, which is not easy to pinpoint and, above all, changes over time and requires submission to it once it is expressed at the level of a specific decision.

At the same time as our policies are becoming more and more transnational in their nature – both in the sense that the issues which stimulate us politically must increasingly be dealt with at the supranational level if they are to be effectively resolved, as well as in the sense that domestic processes of political deliberation must take into account the broader transnational context in which they find themselves – our political institutions and debates have remained stubbornly national in their substance and content.[20]

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[20]   C. Hay, G. Stoker, "Revitalising Politics...", p. 232.

This maladjustment is a very serious problem in practice. Whether we like it or not, social and economic changes are increasingly multi-layered and therefore increasingly complex, and they place higher cognitive and political demands on us. The globalized world we live in is a product of often unintended interactions between strategies implemented by entities at various levels of multi-level politics. It is extremely difficult to identify key decision-makers and reconstruct political decision-making processes, let alone democratic control. Globalization, which has become almost synonymous with the political surrender, explaining the need for depoliticization, has contributed significantly to this. Politicians refer to external constraints even when they enjoy considerable political autonomy, deepening the sense of their own and social powerlessness rather than treating it as a challenge. Modern political management is about steering in the context of complexity. Our traditional models of democratic thinking do not match this reality, but they must be a starting point in the process of designing new institutional solutions.[21] The changes must not only concern the institutional sphere, but also the perception of politics itself, and redefine the rules that organize it.

Politics that involves the masses cannot do without a democratic ideology, which allows its complexity to be expressed in an accessible way, unfortunately at the cost of reducing and distorting its image. By bringing politics closer to people, we encourage them to participate in various forms, and this affects its increasing complexity and opacity. Inclusiveness may, therefore, paradoxically lead to the negation of democratic politics in the long run. *The paradox, in other words, is that while democracy, with its claims of inclusiveness, needs to be comprehensible to the masses, the ideology that seeks to bridge the gap between people and politics misrepresents (and cannot avoid misrepresenting) the way that democratic politics necessarily works.*[22] Politics is democratic when public decisions are the end result of a complex process involving various actors, both institutional and non-institutional, representing the widest possible spectrum of views and interests. Only in this way are we able to counteract the monopoly of power and restore confidence in politics and democracy.

All universalistic claims can in practice, at best, become a tool of oppression. Top-defined and imposed rules of deliberation in democracy can only serve to consolidate the existing power relations. In order to communicate with each other at all, people must assume equality and reciprocity. To see each other as co-decision makers and citizens, they must not only treat others as equal and equally competent, but also attribute the same epistemic status to their positions as their own. People do not have to be equal in reality and have the same communication competence, but they should assume mutual equality and competence. These rules, although they seem abstract, should in practice apply to every potential dialogue partner in the public sphere. Hence, an extremely important practical challenge for democracy in the 21st century is the development of a set of rules allowing for the creation of deliberative forums open to various

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[21]   Ibid., p. 233.

[22]   M. Canovan, "Polityka dla ludzi. Populizm jako ideologia demokracji", in Y. Meny et al. (eds.), *Demokracja w obliczu populizmu*, Warszawa 2007, p. 59.

values, opinions and communication styles, and competent citizens in this regard. Deliberative competence can be defined as the degree to which the political system has structures which enable it to conduct debates that are real, inclusive and politically binding.[23] There is no ready-designed institutional solution that would guarantee the fulfilment of these conditions. This goal can be achieved through various institutional configurations and by referring to the political experiences of a particular society, and any attempt to corset a complex communication practice is merely an unauthorized usurpation.

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