

ID: MSCA-19-Severs02

Discipline: Political Science

Title: The “constructivist turn” in the literature on political representation

Abstract: Increasingly, scholars working on the subject of political representation emphasize its constitutive aspects. Representation does not simply mirror socio-political realities (an understanding of re-praesentare that centres on the spatial-temporal gap between the citizenry and its leaders). Representation, rather, is indispensable for the constitution of such realities: it is only after and through being offered representations of itself that a people can find itself together, implied in a collective body or generality (an understanding of re-praesentare that treats re-iteration as the foundation of inter-subjective conceptions of what is real). These insights are routinely described as implying a “constructivist turn” in the representation literature. But what is it that we are turning away from? And where are we turning to? And, more fundamentally, what is lost and gained by this new understanding of political representation? (cf. Näsström 2011; Saward 2010; Disch 2015, Severs and Dovi 2018). I welcome theoretical interrogations of the contemporary representation literature and how the “constructivist turn” is affecting our understanding of power (inequalities) and is shaping how we theorize representation fairness, citizen-state relations, citizen-citizen relations, and the ethics of political representation. I also welcome empirical research that seeks to unpack the power differentials that underpin and characterise contemporary representative praxis; either at a dyadic level (citizen-representative interactions) or a systemic level (the overall functioning of the representative system, including citizen-citizen interactions).

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