



31. Bremer Universitäts-Gespräche

Program

Liberal Democracies under Stress: Economic Inequality, Cultural Diversity, and Populism

November 15 and 16, 2018

Coordinators

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Universität Bremen

Wolfgang-Ritter-Stiftung
Universität Bremen
unifreunde e.V.

in cooperation with the Bremen International Graduate School of
Social Sciences (BIGSSS)



The Idea

Since 1988, the Bremen based Wolfgang-Ritter-Stiftung, the University of Bremen and unifreunde e.V. have annually organized the Bremer Universitäts-Gespräche. The aim of the semi-public conference series is to encourage a research-based dialogue on important topics of all fields and disciplines. The organizers hope for a lively exchange between representatives from academia, politics and business, adding new ideas and practical relevance to ongoing discussions.

The event starts on Thursday night with a public panel discussion in German at the historical Schütting building in Bremen's City Centre. During the following reception and dinner, hosted by Sparkasse Bremen, guests have the opportunity to exchange ideas further.

Friday is devoted to in-depth presentations and intense discussions in English. Located in the Atlantic Grand Hotel Bremen, guests are invited to enjoy an inspiring and undisturbed conference atmosphere: A number of short talks highlight elements of the panel discussion of the right before and the participants are invited to ask questions and contribute to the exchange.

The Organizers

In 1970, the entrepreneur Wolfgang Ritter, former owner and CEO of the Martin Brinkmann AG, formed a foundation with the intention to support Bremen's scientific institutions and young academics. Furthermore, with the Bremer Universitäts-Gespräche, the Wolfgang-Ritter-Stiftung opened a forum for research topics of societal interest to be discussed by the wider public, not only among scientists.

With more than 100 academic programs hosted by 12 faculties, the University of Bremen offers more than 20,000 students an innovative model of higher-education. As an internationally recognized research institution attractive to young and more experienced scholars alike, the university has recently developed links between academia and industry through the University Technology Park. The Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences (BIGSSS) is one of Germany's leading schools of doctoral training in the social sciences.

Friends of the University and the Jacobs University Bremen Society (unifreunde) was founded in 1961. Their goal is to foster scientific education and research activities, and especially to strengthen the guiding spirit of the universities.

The Topic

Recent observations of Western liberal democracies suggest that they are coming under pressure in several ways. Firstly, long standing norms of statehood, the so-called “liberal” or “universalist” consensus, are increasingly questioned, particularly by right-wing populist movements. In addition, there is a critique of economic globalization stemming from the left (e.g. Podemos, Syriza). Where cultural liberalism in particular is opposed from the right, economic liberalism is criticized from the left.

Both of these forms of questioning suggest that the pressure on the political system is linked to a second stress factor, namely various forms of economic inequality and cultural difference which overlap and intersect in complex ways. We can identify two dynamics of inequality which, in their interaction, lead to an increasing threat to social cohesion:

On the one hand, we see increasing economic inequalities that translate into corresponding symbolic, but also social boundaries between worldviews and lifestyle patterns of social groups, who seldom come into contact with one another. A second element of this inequality can be identified as the increasing status competition within social groups, especially in the middle classes. Competitive behavior and social comparisons are prevalent not only in education, labor and financial markets, but also, for instance, in dating apps and social media networks. These mutually reinforcing dynamics of social segregation between and status competition within social classes, and intersecting cultural conflicts and divisions, threaten to undermine social integration across classes, and fuel further democratic instability.

The ‚Bremer Universitäts-Gespräche 2018‘ address this current stress constellation of Western liberal democracies in more depth by relating the perspectives of both stress factors to each other. To this end, scientists and representatives from politics and civil society will discuss the following topics in four panels: (1) Populism, Populisms; (2) Democratic Participation – a Panacea?; (3) Dynamics of Social Inequality; (4) Diversity and Identity Politics.



Thursday | November 15, 2018

6:00 pm **Public Event at the Schütting Bremen** *in German*

Welcome *Prof. Dr. Heiko Starobom* (Chairman of Wolfgang-Ritter-Stiftung)

Introduction *Prof. Dr. Martin Nonhoff* (Professor of Political Theory at Universität Bremen)

Prof. Dr. Olaf Groh-Samberg (Professor of Sociology at Universität Bremen & Dean of BIGSSS)

Panel discussion **Können wir noch miteinander reden? Das Auseinanderdriften der Gesellschaft und die Krise der Öffentlichkeit**

Can We Still Talk? The Drifting Apart of Society and the Crisis of the Public

Democracies thrive on successful communication on controversial issues and between conflicting parties. In recent years, however, this seems to have become difficult. On the one hand, economic inequalities have grown significantly in Germany, and with them the differences and distances between the realities of the rich and poor. At the same time, conflicts over values are breaking out, which are tied to the foundations of identitarian self-perceptions and are therefore discussed in a highly emotional way. The public, civic and political discourse that would be in demand here is itself fundamentally questioned as a hegemonic discourse of elites and certain social milieus that have long since dissociated themselves from the everyday realities of many people. How can communication and understanding be achieved in the face of serious inequalities and conflicts?

Aydan Özoğuz (SPD, Member of the German Bundestag)

Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Merkel (Director of the research unit „Democracy and Democratization“ at the WZB - Berlin Social Science Center)

Jürgen Kaube (Co-Editor Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung)

Host *Stefanie Rohde* (WDR, Deutschlandfunk)

Music *Katharina Franck* (Singer, Songwriter and Author)

8:00 pm Dinner reception at the Vorstandsgästeräume of Sparkasse Bremen AG with invited guests

Dinner speech *Prof. Dr. Heiko Starobom* (Member of the Board of Sparkasse Bremen)

Friday | November 16, 2018

Symposium at Atlantic Grand Hotel Bremen, Goldener Saal *in English*

Host: *Stefanie Rohde* (WDR, Deutschlandfunk)

9:00 am **Welcome**

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Bernd Scholz-Reiter (Rector of Universität Bremen)

9:15 am **Panel 1: Inputs and discussions on Populism, Populisms**

Prof. Dr. Philip Manow (Universität Bremen)

The Political Economy of Populism

PD Dr. Paula Diehl (Universität Bielefeld)

The Role of Mass Media in Normalizing Right-Wing Populism

Prof. Yannis Stavrakakis, PhD (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki)

Populism(s), Anti-populism(s) and Democracy Discussion

10:30 am **Coffee Break**

11:00 am **Panel 2: Inputs and discussions on Democratic Participation – a Panacea?**

Prof. Dr. Martin Nonhoff (Universität Bremen)

Why Even Radical Democrats Should Have Some Doubts about Direct Democracy

Dr. Arndt Wonka (Universität Bremen)

The (Im-)Possibilities of Effective Political Participation in the European Union

Prof. Karolina Wigura, PhD (Kultura Liberalna/University of Warsaw)

Civil Societies vs. Illiberal Regimes

12:15 am **Lunch**



1:30 pm **Panel 3: Inputs and discussions on Dynamics of Social Inequality**

Prof. Dr. Olaf Groh-Samberg (Universität Bremen)
Competition and Segmentation: How Inequality Tears Us Apart

Prof. Shamus Khan, PhD (Columbia University)
Saying Meritocracy and Doing Privilege – Understanding Elites

Mirijam Günter (Author)
Die Unsichtbaren

2:45 pm **Coffee Break**

3:15 pm **Panel 4: Inputs and discussions on Diversity and Identity Politics**

Prof. Dr. Paula-Irene Villa (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)
Gendergaga? Symptoms of post-essential anxiety

Prof. Dr. Klaus Boehnke (Jacobs University Bremen)
Identifying with a Polity: Are There ‚Good‘ and ‚Bad‘ Feelings of Togetherness?

4:30 pm **Final Remarks**

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Bernd Scholz-Reiter (Rector of Universität Bremen)

5:00 pm **End**