The Quality of Democracy-Concept vs. the Quintuple Helix: On the Virtues of Minimalist vs. Maximalist Approaches in Assessing the Quality of Democracy and the Quality of Society

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the virtues of minimalist vs. maximalist democracy conceptions, based on the central research: Should the Quality of Democracy be equated with the Quality of Society? The article addresses the Quintuple Helix, recently introduced by Carayannis & Campbell (2010), followed by a conceptual discussion of one practical operationalization, notably the “Democracy Ranking” developed by Campbell (2008). By contrast, a more concise model on political democracy, notably the Quality-of-Democracy Concept (QD-Concept), is subsequently elaborated and finally incorporated into the Quintuple Helix for further discussion. The primary aim of the article is highlighting the need to avoid the fallacy of conceptual overstretch in the framework of assessing the quality of democracy. Democracy conceptualizations should more clearly be differentiated from broader conceptualizations on quality of society.

Keywords: Broadening of Democracy Concepts, Conceptual Overstretch, Democracy Ranking, Minimalist vs. Maximalist Democracy Conceptions, Quality of Democracy, Quality of Democracy-Concept, Quality of Society, Quintuple Helix

1. INTRODUCTION: THE BROADENING OF CONCEPTS - QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY AND QUALITY OF SOCIETY

The key research question of this article is: Should the Quality of Democracy be equated with the Quality of Society? This article is thus written against the backdrop of the current trend in scientific research on democratic quality, namely the broadening of the conceptualizations on democracy.

The evolution of concepts ranges from electoral via liberal conceptions to overall-inclusive “macro-concepts” such as the Quintuple Helix by Carayannis & Campbell (2010). The Quintuple Helix is based on the Triple Helix proposed by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000), extending...
this Helix of “university-industry-government relations” by the “media-based and culture-based public” (Carayannis & Campbell, 2009) as well as the “natural environments” (Carayannis & Campbell, 2010). These models oscillate in the field of tension between minimalist and maximalist conceptions about democracy, a stress ratio of economicalness and relevance.

This article will present a concise model on political democracy, notably the Quality of Democracy-Concept (QD-Concept). It thus underscores the need for proper differentiation between focused conceptualizations of political democracy, on the one hand, and comprehensive conceptualizations of society, on the other hand. The endeavor of conceptualizing the quality of political democracy should not be confounded with broader quality assessments including societal subsystems such as the media, knowledge, the economy, culture or the environment. The main purpose of this article, however, is not to postulate the supremacy of one conceptualization of quality measurement over the other. It rather stresses the need to clarify and reveal the point of departure of scientific research processes.

The analytical program of work of this article will be as follows. In section 2 the different virtues of minimalist vs. maximalist approaches are highlighted, sensitizing for the difficulties encountered in the process of broadening of democracy concepts. Section 3 discusses the Quintuple Helix introduced by Carayannis and Campbell (2010), while in Section 4 the Democracy Ranking proposed by Campbell (2008) is analyzed. On the basis of this critical assessment, the Quality of Democracy-Concept (QD-Concept) is introduced in Section 5, following an extensive discussion of indispensible dimensions of political democracy. In the final Section 6, these contrasting conceptualizations are then merged, i.e. the QD-Concept is incorporated into the Quintuple Helix. This ultimate step evidently illustrates the interconnections between minimalist and maximalist conceptualizations of quality of democracy and quality of society. The overriding purpose of this article thus is sensitizing for the fallacy of conceptual overstretch in the realm of conceptualizations and assessments of quality of democracy.

2. MINIMALIST VS. MAXIMALIST CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

Before starting measuring the quality of democracy, there is a need for clarification of the concept “democracy” (Lauth, 2004, p. 12; Abromeit, 2001, p. 3). Particularly, the differentiated classification between regime types as well as within established democracies requires an adequate definition and proper operationalization of democracy (Lauth, 2004, 14). In scientific literature there is an enormous variety of often confounding indicators, dimensions and attributes to assess democratic quality (Lauth 2004, 13; Hadenius 1992, 5). Two different approaches can be distinguished; minimalist and maximalist democracy conceptions (see Figure 1).

Both conceptions feature virtues and pitfalls, strengths and weaknesses. Minimalist conceptions try to depict the reality with only few dimensions and indicators, thus concentrating on basic universal requirements for democracy (Coppedge & Reinicke, 1991, p. 48; Lauth, 2004, pp. 25-26). As a result, global comparative analyses become feasible (Lauth, 2004, p. 23). At the same time, minimalist concepts suffer from validity problems (Bogaards, 2007, p. 1233; Abromeit, 2001, p. 3). Many countries are automatically top-ranked, because a differentiated classification of countries is often hardly possible (Coppedge & Reinicke, 1991, p. 58). Besides, minimalist conceptions often only refer to the equality and liberty principles of democracy, thereby, neglecting the democratic principle of control (Lauth, 2006, p. 91).

By contrast, maximalist concepts focus on a more comprehensive depiction of democratic reality by including auxiliary preconditions and conducive factors of democracy (Bollen, 1991, p. 8; Lauth, 2004, p. 29). The problem arises that the measurement of political democ-
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