

**The International Sociological Association's Research Committee 10 (RC10),
the Hans Böckler Foundation, and the Link Campus University**

Present an International Symposium

**Participation in Crisis? Appraising Acute Challenges and Exploring
Prospects for Revitalising Inclusive Democratic Voice**

Link Campus University (Rome)/Online

2 – 3 July 2026

Call for Papers

The ISA Research Committee 10 (RC10), the Hans Böckler Foundation, and Link Campus University warmly invite scholars, researchers, and practitioners to submit abstracts for the international symposium, "Participation in Crisis?". The symposium will take place in a hybrid format (in Rome, Italy, held by the Link Campus University, and online) on 2–3 July 2026.

This symposium seeks to critically examine the dual nature of participation in the contemporary world: as a practice increasingly under siege by technological and political forces, and as an essential mechanism for navigating the "new normal" of permanent crisis.

Globally, inclusive and democratic participation faces acute, dynamic, and diverse challenges, even within historically established democratic states. These challenges manifest at the national level, where democratic structures and processes are under threat of demonstrable erosion. Simultaneously, they occur—often less visibly—within local governments, market operations, corporate governance, and the administration of social services.

Scholars, civil society advocates, and trade unions share mounting concerns regarding the erosion of democratic expression, highlighting the rising tide of authoritarianism and a concurrent loss of the social competencies necessary for democracy to function and be valued. While this crisis appears to be intensifying, individuals and groups continue to seek avenues for self-expression and strive to have their voices heard across diverse decision-making arenas.

Increasingly, this expression is channelled through online social media forums. However, these digital voices are often unpredictably amplified or ignored by mainstream media, a dynamic that can further exacerbate the erosion of democratic rights and fuel authoritarian trends. In physical spaces, public expressions in city streets and squares frequently take the form of reactive protests against the decisions of powerful elites, rather than reflecting a system of proactive, valued participation in the decisions that shape society. Nonetheless, these expressions remain a powerful testament to an implicit democratic demand and aspiration

This symposium provides an advanced forum for scholars to debate, appraise, and explore the prospects of participatory democratic decision-making across political, economic, and societal life. In confronting these systemic crises, we ask: Can we devise radical innovations to seed the revitalisation of participatory democracy within our public and economic institutions?

Abstract Submission, Information, and Important Dates

- **Submission Type:** 500-word abstracts
- **Deadline for Abstracts:** 10 June 2026
- **Notice of Acceptance:** 12 June 2026
- **Symposium Dates:** 2–3 July 2026
- **Format:** Hybrid (Link Campus University, Via del Casale di San Pio V 44, Rome (Italy) / Online)
- **Publication Opportunity:** Selected papers will be considered for a proposed book project
- **Submission Details:** Submissions should be directed to the Scientific Committee via the RC10 Secretary, Sheetal Bhoola (sheetalbhoola@gmail.com)
- **No Conference Fee.**

Local Organising Committee

- **Chair: Michela Freddano**, Vice-President of RC10 and Senior Researcher at INVALSI (National Institute for the Evaluation of Educational System of Instruction and Training). michela.freddano@invalsi.it
- **Co-host: Stefania Capogna**, Associate Professor and Scientific Director of Digital Technologies Education & Society at Link Campus University. s.capogna@unilink.it
- **Beba Molinari**, Research in General Sociology at the University of Rome Tor Vergata. beba.molinari@uniroma2.it

Scientific Committee

- **Dasarath Chetty** (President, South Africa) chettytd@gmail.com
- **Michela Freddano** (Vice-President, INVALSI, Italy)
- **Eleni Nina-Pazarzi** (Vice-President, University of Piraeus, Greece)
- **Stefan Lücking** (Vice-President, Hans Böckler Foundation, Germany)
- **Sheetal Bhoola** (Secretary, University of Zululand, South Africa)
- **Volkmar Kreissig** (Treasurer, Germany)
- **P.P. Balan** (Board Member, India)
- **Catherine Casey** (Board Member, Loughborough University, United Kingdom)
- **Katrinell Davis** (Board Member, Florida State University, USA)
- **Jūratė Imbrasaitė** (Board Member, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania)
- **Stefania Capogna** (Link Campus University, Italy)
- **Beba Molinari** (University of Rome Tor Vergata, Italy)

Research Topics addressed at the Symposium include:

To align with the symposium's overarching theme of navigating crises in democratic participation, we propose key research topics that focus on the intersection of labour, digital platforms, and artificial intelligence. The symposium also welcomes research addressing citizen participation in decisions affecting public institutions and civic life.

1. **Algorithmic Management and Worker Autonomy:** How do AI-driven algorithmic management systems within platform economies erode or redefine the traditional democratic voice of the worker?
2. **Trade Union Adaptation:** What innovative organising strategies can trade unions develop to effectively mobilise and represent the highly fragmented and geographically dispersed workforce characteristic of platform economies?
3. **Digital Authoritarianism in the Workplace:** In what ways does the integration of AI in corporate decision-making structures contribute to new forms of workplace authoritarianism, and how can labour movements counter these trends?
4. **Revitalising Collective Bargaining:** How can collective bargaining frameworks be modernised to ensure that the deployment of AI and the rules governing platform work are subject to inclusive, democratic worker participation rather than unilateral corporate design?
5. **Data Rights as Democratic Rights:** To what extent can trade unions leverage data rights and digital transparency as tools to democratise the otherwise opaque, AI-governed ecosystems of platform economies?
6. **AI as a Participatory Tool:** Can artificial intelligence be reclaimed from market-centric applications and utilised by trade unions and civil society to enhance democratic participation, aggregate worker grievances, and facilitate collective action in crisis scenarios?
7. **Citizen public participation:** The symposium also welcomes topics that address citizen participation in public institutions, such education, health care, and urban spaces, and civic life.
8. **Education for participation and Democracy:** Education has always been considered an essential component for democracy and the formation of an active and responsible citizenship. Faced with the educational emergency, the crisis of intermediate bodies, and the phenomena of polarization fueled by digital capitalism, what can civil society and educational institutions do to enhance democratic participation and facilitate collective action in crisis scenarios?

Looking forward to your participation!!!!