

ActEU Activating European Citizens' Trust in Times of Crises and Polarisation

New European research project strengthening trust in democracy

Trust in politics is in crisis throughout Europe. This is clearly reflected in regular polling. How does politics regain trust and how can young people become more enthusiastic about democratic participation? This is being investigated by the new research project "ActEU" at twelve European universities. The consortium is led by the Institute of Political Science at the University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) together with Saarland University. The project has started in March 2023*

"Climate change, immigration, gender injustice: these challenges are debated throughout Europe," says Michael Kaeding, EU professor at the Institute of Political Science at the UDE. In view of this polarisation, the ActEU project seeks to investigate the trust of citizens in political institutions and their legitimacy in the face of this polarisation.

The 30 international researchers who make up the ActEU consortium are not approaching this issue from the traditional survey format. "By moving away from the usual method, we can recapture legitimacy and political trust," Kaeding explains. To this end, a team led by Prof. Dr. Daniela Braun (Saarland University) and Dr. Kristina Weissenbach (NRW School of Governance, UDE) are developing very different survey methods, from web analyses to experimental interviews.

In the second phase of the project, young people in particular will have their say on the subject. Throughout Europe, researchers from the participating universities will offer Youth Democracy Labs. These will be set up in cooperation with a civil society network in the participating cities such as Duisburg, Prague or Paris. Prof. Kaeding sees this as a great opportunity: "We will develop new material for teaching at universities and schools." The publication of comics in particular is intended to make democracy tangible, with the project intending to develop these together with political cartoonists and EU partners for use throughout Europe in teaching and political education.

ESPOL will in particular co-lead Work Package 3 on "Citizens' behaviour: The changing patterns of citizens' political participation", that explores how variations of political trust affects political participation patterns, by focussing on the way citizens act (behaviour) and the way they perceive possibilities for participating (perception).

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