

## BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

**SPYRIDOU PASCHALIA**, Cyprus University of Technology  
**IOANNIDES NIKANDROS**, Cyprus University of Technology

### **“Are journalists willing to support democratic innovations? Professional role perceptions at times of political disconnection”**

Governments are falling short of meeting people’s expectations on participation, representation and responsiveness. Feelings of discontent and cynicism towards the political system are growing particularly in developed countries (Stoycheff, 2020). A large body of normative-driven research influencing policy initiatives and agendas, promotes participatory and deliberative models of democracy (Fishkin et al., 2021). Under these models, citizens are more often and more closely associated with policy-making through democratic innovations, namely tools and processes supporting citizens’ engagement and participation in policy-making as a remedy to the ‘malaise’ of representative democracy. In this context the media are assumed to be an important institution for supporting and promoting democratic innovations (Miller & Vaccari, 2020). However, the study of journalism’s role in this direction has not been adequately addressed in the relevant literature. Drawing on theoretical underpinnings of journalists’ roles (Hanitzsch et al, 2019; Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017) and using Participatory Budgeting (PB) as a popular example of democratic innovations, the present study explores journalists’ willingness and ability to promote PB and other democratic tools. Briefly, Participatory Budgeting refers to the possibility given to citizens to have a say on how public money is spent.

We argue that perceptions over PB along with perceptions over journalism’s role affects journalists’ reporting and commitment to actively support democratic innovations. Drawing on 49 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with journalists in four European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Ireland and UK), we examine the link between journalists’ views on their profession, their ongoing role vis-à-vis democracy, and their perceptions of participatory budgeting. Results do not provide a distinct theme linking the three components, as the political environment and the financial specificities of the media sector appear to influence how journalists interpret the relevance of participatory budgeting. Specifically, we find that ideas of detached reporting as a fundamental form of serving their informational role downsize journalists’ willingness to support and promote democratic innovations. Digging deeper we find that limited resources and political constraints hindering access to information and limiting transparency and accountability, result in a generalised cancellation of democratic innovations as tools fostering citizen participation and reverting political discontent.

#### **References**

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