

**KAIM Marcin Mateusz**

**Dissertation Title: Towards a Concept of Alternative Participation. A Theoretical and Empirical Based Approach**

**Summary**

In this dissertation, the discussion focuses on the deficiency of recognition of social discourses originating from the predominance of representative democracy theory that has placed voting and political parties in the center of democracy. This denied recognition to social discourses expressed by different means. In political participation research, those means are considered as unconventional. As an answer to this problem, the traditional distinction between conventional and unconventional participation is reconfigured into three categories, namely conventional, unconventional, and alternative participation. Introduction of the third class of political participation makes it possible to redefine the idea of participation in a way that includes new forms of participation into the political. Forms which were not properly recognized could be acknowledged as political, creating an opportunity for the empowerment of individuals and the emancipation of previously marginalized discourses. Furthermore, the new category provides a tool to classify new forms of participation, which escape orderings either as conventional or as unconventional.

The concept of alternative participation is founded on Chantal Mouffe's idea of agonistic pluralism and on Niklas Luhmann's system theory. Through the reference to Mouffe, it becomes possible to argue that alternative participation can produce agonism through socialization. This claim is verified in an empirical study predicting the socializing effects of alternative participation on individuals' attitudes. The result demonstrates that alternative participation produces attitudes that are considered as essential to producing agonism. By means of Luhmann's theory, alternative participation is given additional validation as a tool to expand the meaning of politics. Furthermore, Luhmann's insights into the mechanisms of observation of social reality become an addition to agonism. In this line, it is claimed that reflective observation of social reality is necessary to produce agonism. As a result, this assumption becomes a supplement for the empirical study. Therefore, it is possible to successfully verify the positive role of alternative participation in producing reflective observers of social reality.