

## Tuesday, 21 March – Doing Democracy without Political Parties?

Speakers: Will Derks (NIMD), Georgina Gomez (ISS) and Loes Keyzers (Jan & Alleman)

Together with NIMD and ISS, SID-NL organized a debate on 21<sup>st</sup> of March on the topic of political parties and democracy. This debate is part of a series on doing democracy differently. The debate initiative is partly responding to the emergence of populism everywhere which seems to downplay the role of parties, and partly to explore new ways of ‘doing democracy’ outside the realm of the (established) political parties. The first debate of the series thus explored whether or not parties are the appropriate channels for democratic governance. Do we really need them? And if not, what are the alternatives?



### Will Derks

Political parties are here to stay, but political parties need to be modernized. They need to become more trustworthy in society. Parties are too embedded in laws and regulations that they won't disappear any time soon. Classical political parties are 19<sup>th</sup> century solutions for 19<sup>th</sup> century problems. We are witnessing the end of an era, and the beginning of a new one. In this new era, we see several clubs, movements and political parties that do things differently. Different kinds of parties all around the world adapt to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and take the changing relationship between politicians and citizens as their starting point. They have a few characteristics in common: the parties want further participation, are open and porous on all levels, emphasize self-governance and decentralization, and operate on the global level. But they are perhaps not meant for all eternity, even though in this new form parties prefer a long term vision over short term political success. Political parties need to be embedded in the 21<sup>st</sup> century network. The national level is like the current political parties, a 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic idea that will disappear.

### Loes Keyzers

Political parties, as they function nowadays, are more a hindrance than a help in finding solutions to the urgent global and local challenges we face nowadays. It is absolutely inadequate to reduce ‘doing democracy’ to once in four years electing representatives into political parties to govern our society. The design and implementation of policies to address problems such as climate change, systemic exclusion, marginalisation and poverty cannot be left to political parties, which compete for votes and limit their interests the next elections. Our historical western notions of what is good governance and adequate representation are far too limited in scope and require more than just updating the political party democracy. Nowadays there are experiments and alternatives which go beyond the ‘political party’ box. An example is the “Fossilvrij” campaign which brings urgent global issues discussed in the Paris Climate agreements to the level of local politics. It is a movement beyond parties, outside parties, grass-roots and worldwide. Doing democracy differently implies paying full attention and critical review of all old and newly emerging forms of political representation and governance.

### Georgina Gomez

The political party as a form of organization is part of how the system works in combination with other forms of representation. As long as we are in this institutional system, ideas will be channelled through political parties. We do not have a suitable alternative at the moment to do what parties do: represent ideas, sit in the Parliament, form governments, and so on. Therefore political parties are here to stay. They organize society and represent people that more or less think the same. On the local level, it is not only about political ideas but also knowledge. To make bigger changes, we need a bigger structure. This means that movements need to become organised.

**Future:** So, where do political parties find themselves in the future? Could it be a combination of grassroots initiatives alongside established parties? These bottom up initiatives do not necessarily make political parties irrelevant because of its embeddedness in institutions and law and regulations. Doing democracy another way is a slow process that is easier done on the local level instead of state level. Loes states that there should be experiments and dreams for new kinds of democracy, to which Will answered: She is a dreamer, but she is not the only one. Singing is part of democracy, it can be used to find out what we share in common. The Jan and Alleman choir demonstrated nicely how different societal topics can be brought to attention in songs.

