

BOOK REVIEWS

Marius I. Tătar (2022): *Democracy without Engagement? Understanding Political Participation in Post-Communist Romania*, Lexington Book, Lanham, Boulder, New York, London, ISBN 978-1-4985-3524-3, 237 p.

Review by Irina POP

On the author Marius Tătar

Marius Tătar is an author with an academic career established on a remarkable professional deontology in doing research and in his academic development for being well qualified for producing innovative and substantial works. He graduated in Political Science at the University of Oradea as the first in his promotion; he followed a professional development focused, both, on a specific niche of research - political participation - and open to the related academic disciplines – Political Geography, Sociology (methods and techniques of the empirical research) and Law.

Interested in an academic career, Marius Tătar became twice an MA' graduated a) in Political Science and b) in Euro-regional Studies. In 2011, he got his doctoral degree, Ph.D. in Political Sociology (with distinction). His Ph.D. thesis topic was *Political Participation and Democracy in Romania after 1989*.

He developed his academic competencies at the international level too, by accomplishing formative activities in other European universities: Sept. 2015 - August 2016 Postdoctoral Research Fellow, the University of Lausanne, Institute for Political Science, Switzerland; 2014 (January-June) Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Debrecen, Hungary; 2013 (July-December); Robert Bosch

Visiting Fellow, Institute for Human Sciences (IWM), Vienna, Austria; 2006, Certificate in Comparative European Politics, Central European University, Political Science Department, Budapest, Hungary. Numerous pieces of training are added to his academic development.

For more than 20 years, his focus is on political participation and democratization in Central and Eastern European. He is approaching the issue with high skills for political science research competencies in comparative politics accomplished and attested in academic *Diplomas* and related skills as Analyst-Programmer, (certified 1997); very good command of statistical analysis software, Microsoft Office tools, Multilingualism - academic competencies in English, Italian, French, Hungarian). He started with studies on electoral participation, later he oriented his academic interests largely to political participation. Many articles on the topic, published mainly in *JIMS, Journal of Identity and Migration Studies* - [Journal of Identity and Migration Studies - JIMS \(e-migration.ro\)](http://Journal of Identity and Migration Studies - JIMS (e-migration.ro)), and also in other academic periodicals, show the academic route that he followed. Among his studies we choose as samples and reading's recommendations TĂȚAR (2019): '*Are the Balkans Different? Mapping Protest Politics in Post-Communist Southeast Europe*' in Florian Bieber (2019), (ed.) *Rebellion and Protest from Maribor to Taksim: Social Movements in the Balkans*, London, Routledge; TĂȚAR (2016): '*Democratization and Political Alienation: The Legacies of Post-Communist Transition in Romania*', *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies*, vol. 10, no.2, 2016, pp. 85-108; TĂȚAR (2013) '*Searching for 'another Democracy'? Changing Patterns of Political Participation in Romania during the Economic Crisis*' or the article. *Multiple Exclusions: Civic and Political Disengagements of vulnerable Youth in European Union*; TĂȚAR (2005): '*Consolidating Democracy by International Assistance for Civil Society in Romania*' in Lia Pop, Cristina Matiuta (eds.), *European Identity and Free Movement of Persons*, Oradea: Editura Universitatii din Oradea, pp. 87-100.

His international recognition is easy to be accessed on Google Scholars and summarized as Citations 194, h-index 9, 5 I 10-index.

The book *Democracy without Engagement?* authored by an academic with such a serious formation, could be nothing else, then a book for that to enter the classical bibliography of the topic of participation.

Describing the book Marius I. Tătar (2022): *Democracy without Engagement?*

Marius Tătar is proposing an analysis of a nowadays very hot political topic: democracy and its contemporary fate. He is among those, who see democracy development as an assumed political participation.

The methodology applied is consisting of a) a careful presentation and review of the political participation's theoretical frameworks: and b) an empirical analysis of the participation. Here the author, innovatively appeals more to the longitudinal and dynamic analysis, than to the static perspective, focused *hic et hoc*.

The specialized literature's accomplishments are succinctly presented and assessed according to their relevance for political participation in Central and Eastern Europe, specifically in Romania.

The book structure is a sample of a text done in an elegant classic style. The text is organized into seven chapters, preceded by an *Introduction*, and finalized in short *Conclusions*. (Simple, *Conclusions*. Not *Conclusions and Recommendations* as the contemporary texts in political science use to propose.) The book is accompanied by a *Technical Appendix*, a *Bibliography* (large and focused), and an Index. Each of them is thoroughly conceived and accomplished.

The *Introduction* opens the question of political participation and its relationship with democracy progress.

Chapter I is considering four models of democracy, namely, the minimalist electoral model, democratic responsiveness, deliberative, and participatory. The author proposes four ways of conceptualizing citizens' participation in political life: participation equated with voting in elections, participation as attempts to influence political authorities, participation as cognitive engagement in politics, and participation as direct involvement in the local decisions making process.

Chapter II is about the socio-economic context of citizens' political participation.

The third chapter analyses the citizens' electoral behavior in Post-Communist Romania and tries to find explanations for its constant decline in electoral participation, after the 90s, in West and East Europe, typologies the voters, and identified the most important predictor in the parliamentary elections: partisanship. (Tătar, M. 2022, p. 86.)

The fourth chapter is analyzing citizens' political participation as attempts to influence governmental decisions in the cases of conventional participation, in

Romania and other 14 countries from eastern and central Europe. It also goes on to examine the participation in protests in the same areas. The chapter is substantially innovative by introducing the author's patterns of analysis, related to all four types of political participation.

Let's insist that such a pattern is easy to be taken over by other researchers and easy to be read as a set of ways to see systematically the electorate's political participation. That is why we take them as highly contributive to understanding political participation. The chapter is also comprising an interesting typology of participants based on citizens' engagement in conventional participation as well as in the protests. Namely the inactive, conformists, contesters, reformists, and absolute activists. (Tătar, M. 2022, pp. 107-125.)

Chapter V analyzes the Romanians' political participation based on cognitive involvement. This participation is defined as an interest in seeking information on political issues, political discussions, and political knowledge. The result is that the most important predictor of participation is political interest.

Chapter VI approaches the engagement at the local level. The concept of participation is structured into two parts information and consultations.

Chapter VII focuses on the economic crisis's effects on citizens' political engagement, specifically in 2012. The analysis concludes that the economic crisis has made the citizens more attentive to politics, to the incumbents' abuse of power, and to governmental corruption. People perceived the governmental corruption and its members' limited capacity, as in the case of restructuring of the hospitals with limited efficiency “, ...as a threat to their lives” (Tătar, M. 2022, p. 193) It results in more and better-organized protests asking the parties' elites for another type of democratic government: no arrogant, more open, better qualified, more efficient, and transparent.

Conclusions' part of the book *Democracy without Engagement?* underlines the peculiarities of the Romanians citizens' engagements in politics in their congruence with other Central and East Europeans. These engagements are characterized by a higher turnout after the economic crisis and by more protests. In brief, by an increased political engagement. According to the author's implicit suggestion, the mapping, and analyses of the Romanians citizens' engagements - compared with those of other Central and Eastern European citizens - represents the novelty proposed by the book.

***Democracy without Engagement?* as a contributive book for developing innovative research**

To conclude, it is to affirm that the book is innovative and inspirational, and it represents a brand.

From our point of view, it is innovative because it proposed two types of novelties a) peculiarities of the Romanians citizens' engagements in politics – as the author pointed out in his Conclusions; b) structural novelties. They are about the concepts proposed, about predictors identified, and about the perspective proposed.

The book *Democracy without Engagement?* of Marius Tătar is also inspirational. From a political communication perspective, it invites us to think from a broader perspective in conceiving the political participation of the citizens. It inspires us to understand the elites and the incumbents as citizens, as they surely are. Analyzing their political participation and opening the question of their accountability is a significant key to democracy. The book inspires us to extend the analysis to the political participation of the non-eligible candidates - "the rabbits, as they are known in the electoral committees of the political parties - of the eligible candidates and of political elites as individual actors. The book invites too, to include in the future analysis the political parties, pressures groups, and civic organizations participation. A next book? We wait for it!

It is a brand, for the Romanian New Generation of Researchers in Political Sciences, and for Oradea University too. It is to be known - well advertised - and not to be let covered by the multitude of products issued only for academic promotion.

To purchase the book *Democracy without Engagement?* or, at least, to read it carefully, is highly profitable. It is profitable for getting a standard of serious academic writing; for learning from an expert what it is the political engagement and what it means for democracy progress; for a direct access to useful concepts and patterns (where the theoretical concepts were turned into operative ones, measurable) in approaching the field of citizens political participation.