Project Note:

Autonomy Arrangements in the World

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The ongoing project 'Autonomy Arrangements in the World'[2] was created as a result of the collaboration of a variety of institutions at a correspondingly named conference in Flensburg in 2012. The project aims to address some of the shortcomings of contemporary research on autonomy identified at the conference. The conference's call for papers resulted in the publication of an edited volume comprising 16 case studies in 2014. Launched in July 2016, the web platform of the project "Autonomy Arrangements in the World" provides scholars, decision- and policy-makers, and the general public with free access to data on territorial and non-territorial arrangements, which also includes lesser-known examples such as indigenous forms of self-governance.

1. Autonomy Research and its Pitfalls

Numerous minority groups and indigenous peoples around the world claim various forms of territorial and non-territorial autonomy. The varying actors, forms and degrees of these autonomies create a highly debated topic concerning the accommodation of ethnic, linguistic or religious diversity through self-governance arrangements in both the academic literature and the public sphere.

While the body of scholarly works on autonomy is sizeable and expanding at an impressive pace, the content of the autonomy concepts remains disputed. Furthermore, little room is left for lesser-known examples, since a handful of well documented cases dominate the overall picture. Amongst them, prevalent territorial autonomies have been frequently covered by academic analysis, notwithstanding that non-territorial arrangements have been on the rise since the 1990s.

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[2] The team of the "Autonomy Arrangements in the World" project is composed of several experienced researchers on comparative politics and comparative law. For details, see http://www.world-autonomies.info/abouttheproject/people.

2. Autonomies in Context

'Autonomy Arrangements in the World' aims to counteract exactly this development by combining studies on both territorial and non-territorial arrangements to create an interdisciplinary and comprehensive online collection of case studies regarding autonomy.

In this regard, the main short-term goal of the project is to map various autonomy arrangements and to present each case study in as standardized a format as possible. In the long run, the project aims to facilitate comparative analyses of autonomy arrangements, to inform the design and implementation of self-governance as an instrument for the accommodation of diversity, and to provide a better understanding of theoretical and practical developments in this field. By adopting a more facts-based approach, the online compendium provides a foundation for a more informed assessment of the advantages and shortcomings of the existing autonomy arrangements, and explores the discrepancies between theory and practice.

3. Methodology

'Autonomy Arrangements in the World' bridges comparative politics and comparative public law. The external experts contributing case studies to the web platform are required to follow this interdisciplinary approach. To ensure comparability, all case studies are based on common terms of reference [3]. However, certain elements of the suggested structure of the studies may be relevant in some cases, but less so in others, according to the different characters of territorial and non-territorial autonomy arrangements. Thus, authors are granted sufficient leeway to consider the specific circumstances of their respective cases and are supported by the Scientific Board composed of well-known legal scholars and political scientists from Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa and North America, reflecting this nuanced and global approach.

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[3] The suggested structure for the case studies is the following: 1) Essential facts and figures; 2) Autonomy and state structure; 3) Establishment and implementation of autonomy; 4) Legal basis of autonomy; 5) Autonomous institutions; 6) Autonomous powers; 7) Financial arrangements; 8) Intergovernmental relations; 9) Inter-group relations within the autonomous entity; 10) Membership, "quasi-citizenship" and special rights; 11) General assessment and outlook. At the end of the case studies a list of relevant further readings about the cases is also provided.

4. Developments

Currently the online platform contains four case studies concerning the territorial arrangements of South Tyrol (Italy) and Jammu and Kashmir (India) and the non-territorial arrangements established in Serbia and Hungary. In the first phase of development, the project team focuses on the following case studies:
- Africa: Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan;
- Americas: Bolivia, Québec, Puerto Rico;
- Asia: Hong Kong, Nepal;
- Europe: Åland Islands, Basque Country, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Catalonia, Greenland.

Several cases from the list above are currently in the drafting process and are planned to be available online by the end of 2017. The project team regularly updates the 'News' and 'Publications' sections of the website along with the database content, making the online platform a useful tool for keeping interested parties informed about the latest autonomy-related developments around the world, and for sharing information on recent important contributions to the academic literature.

5. Contributions

Scholars, researchers and practitioners from all over the world are welcome to contribute to this project with comments, suggestions and critical feedback. Moreover, the project team would be happy to answer all inquiries from subject matter experts who are interested in authoring further case studies. The online compendium is dependent on a dynamic interplay between research and networking and on the possibility to create a basis for future cooperation in this field among research centres, universities, and governmental and non-government organizations. Ultimately, projects such as this online compendium of autonomy arrangements have the potential to deepen our understanding of the empirical phenomena and enable more accurate conceptualizations, definitions and typologies.

To contact the project team please write us an email (contact@world-autonomies.info) or visit our Facebook page (@autonomy.arrangements).