

IPW LECTURES

How is a democracy corrupted? From sovereignty to spirit

Lecturer: **Sophia Näsström**
(Universität Uppsala)

Moderation: Oliver Marchart
(IPW | Universität Wien)

Thursday, 3 November 2022, 16:45h
Hörsaal III, NIG, Erdgeschoß

Abstract

Do democracies die at the hands of the people or their elected leaders? Does it happen quickly or slowly? These questions are today at the forefront of many debates on democratic backsliding. Still, while we have good reasons to worry about the corruption of democratic practices and ideals, these worries are often attributable to distorted beliefs about what democracy is. Based on my book *The Spirit of Democracy: Corruption, Disintegration, Renewal* (OUP 2021), this talk will ask what happens to the diagnosis of democracy's corruption if we move from a sovereign- to a spirit-orientated understanding of democracy. According to Montesquieu, different political forms are animated and sustained by different spirits: a republic by virtue, a monarchy by distinction and a despotic regime by fear. In the talk, I will do three things: recapitulate the core concept of "the spirit", clarify why modern democracy is a sui generis political form animated and sustained by a spirit of emancipation, and finally, demonstrate how this outlook challenges two predominant ways of analysing the corruption of democracy, namely those who proceed from popular sovereignty and democratic proceduralism. The bottom line is that peoples and procedures are not democratic by default. It all depends on the spirit that animate them.