

## ***MEDem Innovation and Ambition***

### ***1. Innovation***

MEDem will provide *a platform for new research thus promoting innovation*. MEDem will through constant deliberation among the project partners and the associated data collection projects encourage the innovation process. The joint research activities will act as show cases for innovative research. The two chosen topics are challenges to liberal democracy and inequalities in representations. They are chosen on the basis of their potential to combine data on various actors and produce answers on socio-politically relevant questions that could not be addressed without MEDem.

### ***2. Ambition***

MEDem will bring the electoral democracy research community beyond the current state of the art in research on democracies, and will build the basis for establishing a long term investment in the form of a research infrastructure:

- In a data driven society, *MEDem serves as a model for how to integrate different data types* so as to unlock hidden potential for research across different data types. The European Commission in February 2020 released “A European strategy for data”, highlighting the importance for data infrastructures of the integrative approach that MEDem is adopting for research into democratic governance across Europe.
- While MEDem is based in Europe, the *scope of the data it collects and the services it provides are global*. With the establishment of a coordination center and data hub for the comparative study of democratic governance, MEDem will be able to define and establish global standards. Such an institution, integrating so many projects and research communities, does not yet exist anywhere in the world so MEDem will allow the European research community to play a leading role in democracy research.
- MEDem integrates *traditional data types and also new data types such as text data and social media data*. Given that the driving forces behind MEDem are research objectives – to understand the functioning of democracy – we ensure that data integration efforts are not data-driven, but driven by information needs of researchers to address their research questions. Some of these questions are retrospective, requiring the use of existing data made comparable and accessible by MEDem; others are prospective calling for the design of new instruments that deliver comparable data *ab initio*.
- In the absence of MEDem, many researchers are starting from scratch with integrating data for themselves – work that then has to be repeated by other researchers with slightly different

objectives. These piecemeal efforts are not only grossly inefficient but often (given that data integration is not the primary objective of these efforts) are not documented to a standard that would permit other researchers to benefit. Even when saved in an archive, such data often follow conventions unique to each project because not developed by the entire community. This means that such data cannot without elaborate post-harmonization be combined with other data on the same topic to extend the available database. Sometimes it is cheaper to repeat the original data collection enterprise, often at additional cost in terms of research funding. It is clear that current research practices in this subfield result in considerable wastage in terms of research data that could be cumulating but instead sit unused after the original research has been completed.

- Therefore MEDem will reduce costs in time, and in the burden on researchers having new research ideas, by providing them with access to already existing publicly available harmonized comparative data. Often this will remove the need for such researchers to collect those data for themselves and, where new data does need to be collected, ensure the comparability of those new data with existing and future data relating to the same concepts and units.
- MEDem will be an important initiative also in bringing together researchers from different sub-disciplines focused on the study of democratic processes, stimulating the connections that are so important in generating new research ideas. The political science projects that are part of MEDem include by far the greater part of all data collection exercises within the discipline of political science, even going beyond the borders of that discipline to include researchers in political economy, sociology, media studies, legal studies, social psychology and international relations. Within this community, MEDem will make possible new projects that go beyond anything that is currently possible.