Organizing for an Inclusive Society: Meanings, Motivations & Mechanisms

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A society is considered to be inclusive when all its members have access to relevant information and resources and, at the same time, demonstrate a willingness and capacity to develop rich and meaningful lives for themselves, and for others. In its pursuit of ideals such as equality and respect for diversity, inclusivity lies at the core of contemporary visions on modern democratic societies. Yet, we do not need reminding that inclusion is inextricably linked with exclusion and therefore may demand that we address difficult questions, trade-offs, and conundrums. Inclusivity depends on an ongoing effort to create and maintain organizations, institutions, and environments, as well as practices and languages, in which and through which these ideals find their expression, but which can also be contested. The ambition of a society that enables and fosters participation – one in which no one is left behind – may, paradoxically, never be fully accomplished.

The complex nature of today’s social challenges suggests that there may not be one best way to organize for inclusivity. For example, in certain circumstances, inclusivity may become a convenient framing to avoid discussing burning or controversial issues, such as equality or democracy. The value of inclusivity can be questioned if, in its very name, differences are pushed to the background and suppressed as irrelevant, thereby confirming the dominance of the ‘normal’ in social, cultural, political or economic terms. Despite many notable efforts, organizing for an inclusive society inevitably goes hand in hand with the bright and dark sides of organizing.

In 2021, the EGOS Colloquium will be located in a city with an extensive history of organizing for inclusivity. Amsterdam, the city, and its citizens have for a long time found creative and sometimes almost subversive ways of organizing their livelihoods and interactions with different social groups in a limited space and under continuous external pressures. Shaking up old ways of thinking and living together, as well as creating new forms of collaboration, communication,

General Theme
compromise, and exchange, have always been central to this city’s organizing – in both its bright and dark manifestations. The long history of migration to Amsterdam serves as an example of the entanglement of positive and negative sides of organizing. The steady stream of migrants – whether from the nearby countryside or from far away locales – seeking work, inspiration, and protection among like-minded people has led to excellence in many fields and domains ranging from economics to the fine arts, but also to exploitation, dominance, and abuse of power. Therefore, in striving for inclusivity, people struggle with its dark side. This struggle manifests itself in an ongoing search for answers to the question of what it means to be a citizen of the city; a continuing debate about motivations to live and work here; and a ceaseless quest to discover and maintain organizational mechanisms that foster inclusivity.

As the host of the 37th EGOS Colloquium in 2021, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) shares the city’s history of finding unconventional ways to deal with setbacks and adversity. Founded in 1880 as a privately financed countermovement to the ruling of the clergy and the government, it organized itself to stay independent and free (vrij) from external influence – free from the church, the state, and commercial interests. VU embodies the will to organize for an inclusive society, yet does not hesitate to acknowledge the complexity of such organizing.

We hope that we will be able to invite EGOSians to our vibrant city of change, reflection, and invention – also to learn from the past in order to shape the future. Time will tell in which format we will be able to welcome you, however, we will organize a Colloquium that fosters dialogue about organizing for an inclusive society – be that in a physical or virtual format.
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Submissions and Applications
Tuesday, January 12, 2021
Deadline for submissions of short papers (via egosnet.org).

Tuesday, January 12, 2021
Deadline for applications for the Pre-Colloquium PhD Workshop and the Pre-Colloquium Post-Doctoral & Early Career Scholars Workshop (via egosnet.org).

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