



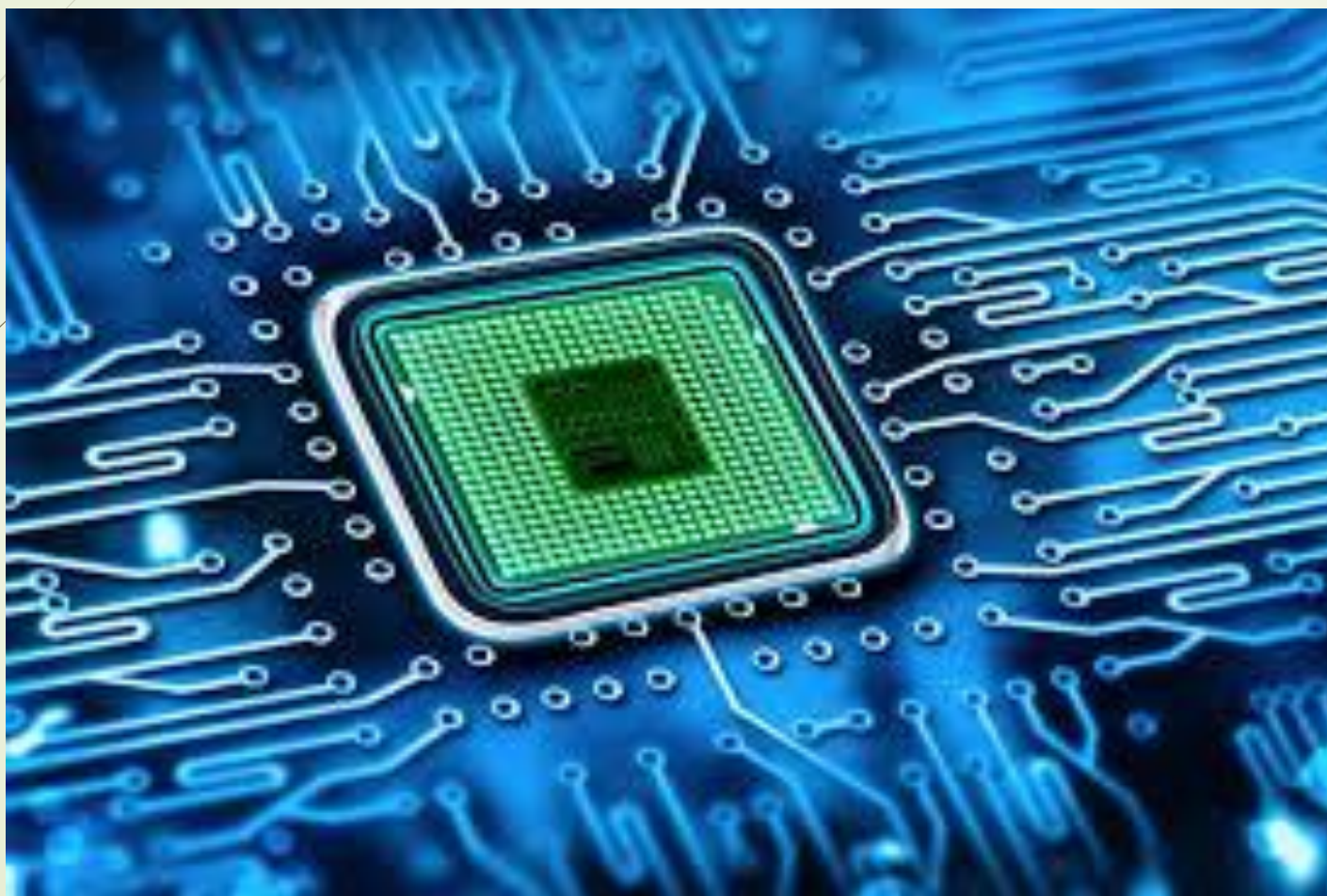
Austrian Parliament Day of Parliamentary Research, Vienna 20 June 2024

Panel I: How do parliaments strengthen and/or undermine democratic resilience?

Parliaments as an example of “generative artificial intelligence”: The new parliamentary encyclopedia

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PARLIAMENTS AS AI SYTEMS



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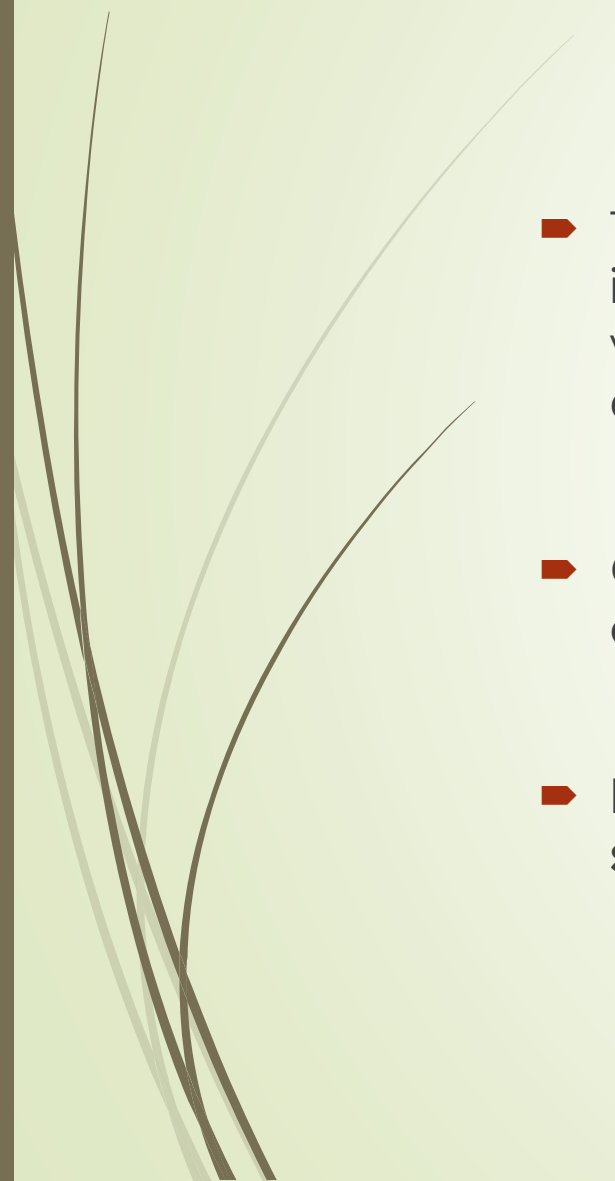


Parliaments as Artificial Intelligence systems

- Parliaments are **human artifacts combining political will with knowledge** in order to take collective decisions
- Such combination is implied in the **deliberative imprinting** of modern parliaments
- Deliberation as not a mere aggregation of opinions and interest, but as an original synthesis.
- For this reason, Parliaments are not only examples of **general AI**, but also of a **generative AI**: they produce political and cognitive outcomes that are often unexpected compared to the starting assumptions.



Parliaments as political AI Systems

- The patterns underpinning this activity have the capacity to strongly influence not only the inner functioning of parliaments, but also their role within the constitutional system, and, **more generally, the democratic quality of a society.**
 - One of these patterns is pivotal to modern parliamentarism: **the encyclopaedic pattern**
 - I maintain that the encyclopaedic pattern can play a crucial role **in supporting the democratic resilience in the 'age of fragmentation'.**
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THE ENCYCLOPAEDIC PATTERN.





THE ENCYCLOPAEDIC PATTERN

- Parliaments tend to produce and organise knowledge according to comprehensive circular structures.
- This feature can be traced back to the origins of modern parliamentarism and can be studied, together with the parallel emergence of the great national encyclopaedias, as one of the predominant intellectual enterprises of modern Europe.
- I maintain that the encyclopaedic pattern remains relevant to understanding the operation of parliaments in contemporary democracies, although due consideration must be given to the “paradigm shifts” undergone by parliamentary representation from the XVIII century to the modern age.

Some features of the 19th century parliamentary encyclopaedism





Some features of the 19th century parliamentary encyclopaedism

- Modern parliaments emerge between the XVIII and the XIX century as the political encyclopaedias of the nascent liberal bourgeoisie.
- They are based on the dual paradigm of free mandate and national representation of parliamentarians: two principles which distinguish these institutions from class-based medieval parliaments.
- Modern parliaments, on the other hand, assert their separation from the society they want to represent. They claim a status of autonomy which renders legislative assemblies circular and self-sufficient institutions



Some features of the 19th century parliamentary encyclopaedism

- An important role in asserting the encyclopaedic paradigm was played by the physical reality of parliamentary plenary halls prevailing in Europe: the hemicycle originally introduced to host the French revolutionary assemblies. This architectural solution made parliaments genuine **theatres of politics**.
- Humanistic and generalist culture of the 19th century parliamentarians
- The role of great parliamentary Libraries and of the Treaties on parliamentary procedure (Erskin May, Eugenie Pierre, Mancini and Galeotti, Redlich)

The paradigm shift in the twentieth century parliamentary encyclopaedism





The paradigm shift in the twentieth century parliamentary encyclopaedism

- Permanent committees and political groups as pivotal structures of the twentieth century parliaments
- Professionalization of politics
- Parliamentary plenary halls became the visual representation of the political system of each country.




The paradigm shift in the twentieth century parliamentary encyclopaedism

- Parliaments as 'encyclopaedia of politics' as a synthetic and immediate representation of something that would have been otherwise quite elusive, i.e. the national political system.
- Specialization of political knowledge.
- Specialization of parliamentary administrations

The challenges to the encyclopaedic paradigm in the digital age





The challenges to the encyclopaedic paradigm in the digital age

- At the present time, parliaments are facing a third paradigm shift.
- They are faced to multiple challenges: the passage to a “liquid” political environment with the decline of mass organized parties, the fragmentation of knowledge and the new dynamics of the digital “infosphere”.

Parliamentary Encyclopaedia: Death or Innovation?





Parliamentary Encyclopaedia: Death or Innovation?

- Parliaments have so far taken a rather conservative approach and have chosen to stick to the traditional structures.
- Permanent committees and political groups are still fundamental structures
- Their importance is even increased in the liquid political environment of contemporary democracies

The Wikipedian Model

WIKIPEDIA
The Free Encyclopedia



The Encyclopaedic Format of the Transnational Public policies



The Encyclopaedic Format of the Transnational Public policies





How to Innovate the Parliamentary Encyclopaedia

- In this context, parliaments **need to update their encyclopaedic patterns in order to intercept the new formats that are currently shaping public policies.**
- This entails, for example, rethinking the system of parliamentary committees. A major step forward would be a radical reform on the basis of the new contemporary public policies emerging at the global level (environmental sustainability, digitalisation, fight against climate change, women empowerment, etc.).
- Parliaments' approach to knowledge should adopt some of the suggestions deriving from the wikipedian experience



How to Innovate the Parliamentary Encyclopaedia: combining commonsense with scientific expertise

- This implies the abandoning of the traditional closed and self-sufficient model, in order to open up the parliamentary encyclopaedic pattern to the participation not only of experts but also of ordinary citizens.
- In this field, there are Parliaments with very interesting experiences, for example with E-petitions, forms of public consultation by parliamentary committees, insertion of deliberative democracy processes within parliamentary decision-making, involving citizens in the setting of the parliamentary agenda and in the formulation of proposals for parliamentary vote



How to Innovate the Parliamentary Encyclopaedia

- The encyclopaedic paradigm is therefore likely to remain relevant for the structure and the work of representative assemblies also in the future.
- However, the full adaptation of this paradigm to the contemporary “infosphere” requires a quantum leap in innovation and imagination
- The new parliamentary encyclopaedia has to reinterpret in our time the three great principles that inspired the Diderot's *Encyclopédie*: **memory, reason and imagination**

Thank You for Your Attention

ENCYCLOPÉDIE,
OU
DICTIONNAIRE RAISONNÉ
DES SCIENCES,
DES ARTS ET DES MÉTIERS.

PAR UNE SOCIÉTÉ DE HOMMES LITTÉRAIRES.

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de France, & correspondant à la Faculté Médecinale, par M. J. LEBLANC, de l'Académie
Royale des Sciences de Paris, de celle de Berlin, & de la Société Royale de Londres.

Tout ce qui est imprimé est
Tantum de iure juris est. (Lettre, 1751, p. 10)

