Preface

The idea of this book emerged when an unpublished manuscript by Egon Matzner was discovered ten years after his untimely death (2003). Egon Matzner had been Professor of Public Sector Economics at Vienna University of Technology, and Director of the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB). His latest thoughts centred around res publica in times of globalization. How can the public sphere be protected when nation states lose political ground? What should be the res publica, the public matter, in a changing world?

This book takes up these thoughts. It is the result of a joint research project, ‘Res Publica’, of the Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut (WSI, the research institute of the German trade unions), and two international universities: Utrecht University School of Economics in the Netherlands, and the Vienna University of Technology’s Center of Public Finance and Infrastructure Policy in Austria. This multidisciplinary and international project was financed by the Hans Böckler Foundation (HBS) in Düsseldorf.

The editors want to thank Michael Sommer (former head of the German Trade Union Confederation, DGB), and Dr Nikolaus Simon (former Executive Director of the Hans Böckler Foundation, HBS), for their encouragement and commitment in setting up this international project between the trade union research institute WSI and international academia. Dr Wolfgang Uellenberg-van Dawen from the managing board of the HBS gave many inspirations to this project. We want to thank the Hans Böckler Foundation, and indirectly all members of the DGB-related German trade unions, for the financial support which made this research project and the publication possible.

To prepare this book, several meetings took place at the WSI in Düsseldorf, at Vienna University of Technology and at Utrecht University in the Netherlands. We want to thank the participants of these meetings; notably, Florian Blank, Eric Seils and Dorothee Spannagel, from the WSI. Furthermore, the WSI was represented through its WSI–Eucos PhD students at Utrecht University. These were Swantje Falcke, Leydi Johana van den Braken, Ian Koetsier and Daan van der Linde. We want to thank Erik Stam, Jaap Bikker, Ioana Deleanu and Loek Groot from
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Utrecht University School of Economics; Frans van Waarden, University College Utrecht; Hans Renes, Human Geography and Planning, Utrecht University; Stephan Leibfried from the University of Bremen; and Wolfgang Blaas, Wilfried Schönbeck, Gerlinde Gutheil-Knopp-Kirchwald, Grazia Withalm, Katharina Fischeneder and Leonhard Plank from Vienna University of Technology, for important input and presentations.

We thank all the authors for their contributions, and also many scholars who have discussed the chapters of this book on various occasions with us. Furthermore, we want to thank Douglas Deitemeyer, Irene Popenberger and Iris Schneider for their help in editing the manuscript, and Matthew Pitman and Edward Elgar Publishing for their elegant style in publishing this book.

Our endeavour was a multidisciplinary one, bringing together scholars from various disciplines: economic research, sociology, political science, geography and spatial planning. This approach was both challenging and rewarding. When crossing disciplinary borders, we have to learn to speak each other’s language and navigate across paradigms, yet we encounter new ideas which help us to understand, describe and justify the broad societal and political shifts we encounter in the world today. And this book is our attempt to share our insights on the matters of res publica.

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Utrecht and Vienna, February 2017