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University of Iceland
EDDA Research Center
Democratic Constitutional Design

Final workshop / conference 1–3 June 2023
Organizer: Jón Ólafsson (jonolafs@hi.is)



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The Future Deliberat

Exploring
Political,
Social and
Epistemic
Control

Safnahúsið / The House of Collections
Hverfisgata 15, Reykjavík

9:00–10:30 **Paul Blokker, University of Bologna**
Citizen-Driven Deliberation and Constitutional Change. The Promise and the Reality
Citizen-driven deliberative constitutionalism – in particular in the form of citizens’ assemblies – is increasingly discussed, but not yet sufficiently analysed systematically. First, I will discuss the participatory and deliberative turns in constitutionalism and propose six evaluative dimensions that can be used to assess the quality of deliberative constitutional projects, and the extent to which they lead to citizen empowerment. Second, I will discuss various constitutional experiments in terms of citizen empowerment. Third, I will briefly turn to the transnational level and relate to the democratic and constitutional deficits of the EU.

10:45–12:15 **Elena García Gutián, Autonomous University of Madrid**
The Deliberative Wave in Contemporary Democracies. A Political Reading
The expansion of the idea of crisis in contemporary democracies has increased interest in introducing citizen participation mechanisms that aspire to generate deliberative processes. What for some is a fashion that tries to solve the problems of the so-called “democratic deficit”, raises important theoretical questions that are reflected in the ongoing academic debates. For this reason, it is not enough to identify the different “deliberative turns”, stressing a variety of normative presuppositions and goals. But we must clarify the political implications of giving a specific sense to deliberation, as well as to the mechanism and procedures to achieve it.

12:15–13:30 Lunch served at Safnahúsið / The House of Collections

13:30–15:00 **Maija Setälä, Turku University**
Deliberative Impacts of Mini-Publics in Democratic Systems
There are disagreements on the desired roles and impacts of deliberative mini-publics in democratic systems. In addition to the lack of authorization and accountability, concerns have been expressed about “cherry-picking”, “blind deference” and the use of mini-publics as shortcuts. In response, I will argue that more focus should be paid to deliberative impacts of mini-publics, namely their potential to enhance democratic deliberation in the broader democratic system. I will point out that deliberative impacts do not necessarily require the formal empowerment of mini-publics, rather better interaction with existing policymaking processes.

15:15–16:45 **Salvör Nordal, Ombudsman for Children and University of Iceland**
Children’s Participation in Democratic Decision Making
Children have, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a right to be heard in all decisions affecting them. This means that children should be consulted not only within the school or the family, but they should also have an opportunity to actively participate in democratic processes on national and international level. In this paper I will discuss some of the experiments taking place in Iceland on children’s participation on governmental level as well as identify some of the challenges children’s participation incorporates.

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9:00–10:30 **Yanina Welp, Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy, Geneva Graduate Institute**
Participatory Myths. Promotion by the Left and a “Natural” Evolution
The presentation will focus on challenging two common assumptions: the idea that social movements and political parties on the left have been more inclined to promote mechanisms of citizen participation than parties and actors on the right and the connection of the introduction of instruments of citizen participation with more stable and consolidated democracies. It will be argued that “democratic innovations”, in practice, neither are instruments of automatic or linear improvements in democracy nor do political advocates with the power to introduce these new institutions always intend to deepen democracy as their main goal.

10:45–12:15 **Lawrence Lessig, Harvard University**
How Deliberation Could Fit
The challenge for deliberation in the United States is to find the spaces within which it could be inserted, and then be visible enough to inspire its application elsewhere. In this talk, I will explore the opportunity to add citizen assemblies to the process by which a convention proposes amendments to the Constitution. As I will argue, this context would necessitate the most stringent conditions on representativeness but could generate similar experiments elsewhere.

12:15–13:30 Lunch served at Safnahúsið / The House of Collections

13:30–15:00 **Peter Stone, Trinity College Dublin**
Deliberation and Democracy Reconsidered
Deliberation and democracy are normally associated together by contemporary political theorists. But the rise of “authoritarian deliberation” in China, involving the use of deliberative instruments such as the Deliberative opinion poll, challenges this association. This talk will examine the relationship between deliberation and democracy. It will argue that while democracy is inherently deliberative in nature, deliberation need not be democratic. The non-democratic forms that deliberation takes raises the question of how to assess the overall democratic credentials of any “deliberative system”.

15:15–16:45 **Jón Ólafsson, University of Iceland**
Deliberative Standards or Keeping Deliberation Pure
One of the main worries about ordinary discussion about political issues as well as about debates in parliaments and other public institutions where democratic policy- and decision-making takes place, is that it falls short of being true deliberation: The public is, so the thinking goes, misled, and deluded on social media through disinformation and fake news, interests and emotions disorient discussion and polarization makes communication toxic. In my paper I question these worries and argue that the ideal of neutral, civil, interest-free, and algorithm-immune deliberation is not only an illusion but inherently undesirable.

Wine reception at Safnahúsið / The House of Collections after the programme.

Veröld – House of Vigdís, University of Iceland
Brynjólfsgata 1, Reykjavík

9:00–11:50 **Presentations of Doctoral Candidates**
Sævar Finnbogason **Working with Mini-Publics. Sortition and Democratic Legitimacy**

Valgerður Björk Pálsdóttir **Democratic Innovations. Legitimacy, Impact and Policymakers**

Eileen Jerrett **Storytelling, Cultural Understanding and Constitutional Design**

Milica Minić **Democratic Accountability. Promises and Challenges**

Jeremias Schledorn **Redescription as a Challenge for Democratic Deliberation**

Jenny Fadranski **Liveable Futures. Social Aesthetic Practice and Democratic Agency**

13:00–14:00 **Iceland’s “Crowdsourced Constitution”. Where Is It?**
Kári Hólmarr Ragnarsson **The “New Constitution” as Corpse, Zombie, and Mutant**

Víktor Orri Valgarðsson **Perspectives from an Activist Academic**

14:10–15:00 **Keynote: The Civic Value of Solitude**
Robert Talisse, Vanderbilt University
Discussions of civic virtue tend to focus on the public and collective aspects of democratic citizenship. “This is what democracy looks like” is typically the caption to a photo of citizens publicly assembled to express a common political sentiment. Democracy indeed needs an active citizenry. However, democracy also needs citizens to be reflective. And common modes of collective democratic action can dismantle our reflective capacities. It turns out that there are certain civic virtues that can be cultivated and exercised only in solitude.

15:10–16:00 **Keynote: Intercultural Praxis and Democratic Constitutional Design in Ecuador**
Cricket Keating, University of Washington
Ecuador’s 2008 constitution has deservedly garnered much attention for the groundbreaking ways that it redefines the state, the economy, and the family with innovative political concepts such as plurinationalism, buen vivir (living well), and the diverse family. This essay explores ways that different social movement groups involved in the Constituent Assembly process shaped these ideas and concepts through a praxis of epistemic pluralism marked by intercultural dialogue and deliberation, intra-cultural critique and analysis, and coalitional visioning.

16:10–17:00 **Keynote: What Kind of Epistemology Is Required for Democratic Renewal?**
Just Serrano Zamora, University of Málaga
Current attempts at responding to the crisis of liberal democracies through democratic renewal have been limited in many ways. In my talk, I will argue that citizens’ epistemological orientations often play a crucial role in this limitation. To illustrate this point, I will show how current populist and liberal epistemologies tend to undermine the radical potential of current endeavours to promote political participation. Finally, I will consider an alternative epistemological orientation that better suits the project of democratic renewal.