



An Interdisciplinary Centre of Excellence at Åbo Akademi University

DEMOCRACY: A CITIZEN PERSPECTIVE

Virtual Polity – An Online Research Environment

D:CE is

- An Interdisciplinary Centre of Excellence...
- ...at Åbo Akademi University...
- ...running from 2006 through 2010 and...
- ...funded by Åbo Akademi University and Åbo Akademi Foundation...
- ...and in separate projects also by Academy of Finland, Society of Swedish Literature in Finland, Nessling Foundation.

One of D:CE's core projects is called Virtual Polity. Virtual Polity is an online platform for various types of experimental research based on a concept developed at the Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

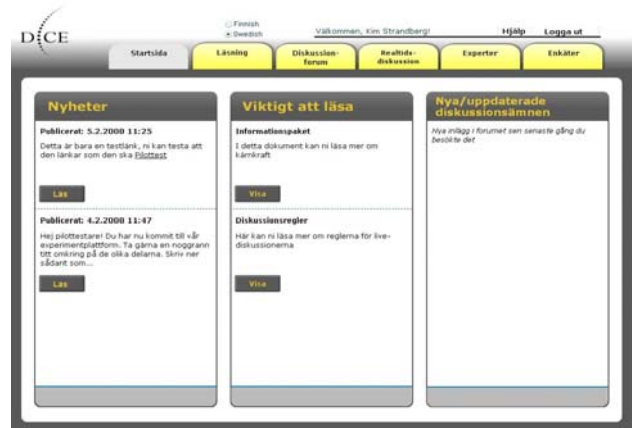
Virtual Polity allows for precise manipulation of key variables according to the needs of the researchers. Participants can, for instance, easily be divided into subgroups with different contents in the Virtual Polity. Researchers can also conduct surveys via the platform, which allows for stringent experimental designs such as the pre-post-test design. Re-

searchers are also free to edit all content in the platform, both text-based and multimedia, separately for each participant.

In the first wave of experiments that will be held in spring 2008, a large-scale deliberative experiment will be carried out. The experiment comprises

roughly 150 participants who will take part in small-group deliberative discussions via the Virtual Polity platform. This experiment is a replication of the deliberative experiment carried out off-line by D:CE in Åbo in November 2006.

This is the start page of the platform which outlines the different sections and also highlights important news and readings.



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Dissertation projects



Marta Miklikowska: Family influence on democratic orientation of adolescents

Adolescence is a period when young people become aware of their place in the society, develop values and begin to take stands on issues - in short develop civic and political orientations. Marta's dissertation deals with the role of the family in political socialization. In particular, she examines the way in which the family is linked to the construction of democratic values, citizenship and trust. This question has received comparatively little attention in research so far.

Marta works in the field of developmental psychology and is based at Åbo Akademi in Vasa.



Staffan Himmelroos: Deliberation in Practice – Analysis of Discourses in a Deliberative Mini-Demos

Studies of deliberative democracy have devoted relatively little attention to the concrete discourse that takes place in a deliberative situation. Staffan's dissertation will provide a thorough analysis of the deliberation that took place in twelve small groups in connection with a deliberative experiment on nuclear energy in November, 2006. This experiment will be repeated on-line in 2008. The study will present the anatomy of a deliberative discourse and an evaluative assessment of its quality.

Staffan's field is political science and he is based at Åbo Akademi in Åbo.

Democracy: A Citizen Perspective – The Research Outline

To what extent has a transition to Audience Democracy taken place?

What are its consequences from the point of view of the citizen, and what action do they call for?

The research carried out within the realm of the Centre examines the development of modern democracy from the point of view of the citizen.

It probes the notion that modern democracy has, as a result a fundamental social transformation during recent decades, left its earlier class- and party-based forms and developed into an Audience Democracy. By combining an interdisciplinary approach with the possibilities offered by information technology and new methods, it aims at an analysis which is both comprehensive and innovative. As it brings together scholars from five different disciplines in Åbo and Vasa the Centre bridges both disciplinary and geographical boundaries.

The objectives of the project can be summarized in the form of two broad research questions:

1. To what extent has a transition to Audience Democracy taken place?
2. What are its consequences from the point of view of the citizen, and what action do they call for?

The first research question will be addressed along four thematic dimensions: Political Participation, Public Institutions, Media, and Individual, Group and Society. Under each theme, research is structured according to three central aspects: Citizens, Channels and Political System. Both syntheses of earlier research and new studies will be presented. Theoretically formulated hypotheses are consistently exam-

ined with the aid of systematic empirical data. The research is comparative throughout and based on quantitative data, systematic content analyses and comparative case studies.

In order to answer the second question, a platform for several kinds of experimental studies will be constructed. This *Virtual Polity* simulates a real-life society and will supply tools for deliberation among citizens, between the people and their representatives and within the political elite. It will also allow for testing of various mechanisms for electronic governance.

The Full Research Plan at: www.dce.abo.fi/



Johanna Jääsaari
Photo: Åbo Akademi

Recent Research Johanna Jääsaari: Consistency and Change in Finnish Broadcasting Policy: the Implementation of Digital Television and Lessons from the Canadian Experience

This dissertation charts the policy processes that transformed the face of television in Finland in the late 1990s. It provides a detailed account of the marketization of Finnish television.

Jääsaari shows how the introduction of digital television, designed to increase the

competitiveness of broadcasting industry, was shaped by ideas and power structures embedded in the past. A comparison of Finnish and Canadian responses to technological convergence highlights the acceptance of a neoliberal corporate agenda by governments in both countries. The comparison

draws attention to the elitist and technocratic character of Finnish media and communications policy, suggesting that this is one of the factors behind the current state of confusion and erosion in Finnish public service broadcasting.

For bibliographical details, see Recent Publications on page 4.

New book on Political Participation – Interview with Åsa Bengtsson

In addition to new empirical and experimental research, the D:CE research plan envisages syntheses of current research in areas central to the study of democracy. Can *Politiskt deltagande* be regarded as one such synthesis?

I have endeavored to portray the frontline of contemporary research and to present a broad spectrum of phenomena related to political participation, including both traditional forms such as voting and alternative and innovative modes of participation. In that sense there is certainly a synthesizing ambition behind this book.

Is this a textbook or an empirical investigation?

I really hope its both. I have had the advantage

of access to comprehensive comparative databases within the realm of D:CE as well as to several international data banks. Consequently, there is a strong element of systematic empirical evidence present in my book. In fact, several of the best textbooks that I have read have had this double aim.

What areas of participation research would require major additional efforts?

We still have much too little comparative knowledge about the factors that account for participation patterns in various countries. What it is that makes citizens choose a certain mix of participatory activities in a given context? We have a fair amount of knowledge of how the

patterns look, but we know less about the causal mechanisms. A second area concerns the ongoing attempts to revitalize democracy. Declining electoral participation has been met with a wide variety of participatory innovations particularly on the part of local governments. They may come to have far-reaching consequences for the role of representative democracy in the future, but our knowledge of these effects is still fragmented.

For bibliographical details, see Recent Publications on page 4.



Åsa Bengtsson
Photo: Åbo Akademi



D:CE Steering Group:

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The D:CE/SAMFORSK Vasa Location
Photo: Åbo Akademi



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D:CE in Åbo: Hus Lindman. Photo: Marko Joas

DEMOCRACY: A CITIZEN PERSPECTIVE An Interdisciplinary Centre of Excellence

A Cooperation Between:
Political Science, Public Administration, Developmental Psychology,
and SAMFORSK – Swedish Institute for Social Research in Finland and
Institute for Comparative Nordic Politics and Administration

News * Events * Publications

Dr. Brigitte Geissel, Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB), has been awarded a Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowship by the European Commission based on her research proposal entitled *Democratic Innovations and Citizens in the EU*. She will spend a year as D:CE Guest Researcher starting in April 2008. The next issue of the D:CE Newsletter will present Dr. Geissel and her research in greater detail.

Professor Henry Milner, Université de Montreal and Member of the D:CE International Advisory Board, will be working as D:CE Guest Professor in Åbo during a four-week period starting around March 20, 2008. He will also teach a postgraduate course on civic education.

The D:CE International Advisory Board will meet in Åbo on April 3-4, 2008. The program will include a presentation of *Virtual Polity*, the D:CE internet platform for online experiments, as well as paper and poster presentations by D:CE researchers.

Recent Publications

Åsa Bengtsson (2007), *Politiskt deltagande*,

Lund: Studentlitteratur, 234 pp.

Kimmo Grönlund (2007), *Knowing and Not Knowing. The Internet and Political Information*, *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30:3, 397-418.

Kimmo Grönlund & Maija Setälä (2007), *Political Trust, Satisfaction and Voter Turnout*, *Comparative European Politics*, Volume 5 Number 4 December 2007, 400-422.

Johanna Jääsaari (2007), *Consistency and Change in Finnish Broadcasting Policy*, Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 223 pp.

Lauri Karvonen (2007), *Legislation on Political Parties: A Global Comparison*, *Party Politics*, Volume 13, Number 4, 437-455.

Lauri Karvonen (2007), *Europe's Spaces and Boundaries*, *Comparative European Politics*, Volume 5 Number 4 December 2007, 441-460.

Elina Kestilä and Peter Söderlund (2007), *Local Determinants of Radical Right-Wing Voting: The Case of the Norwegian Progress Party*, *West European Politics* 30 (3), 549-572.

Elina Kestilä and Peter Söderlund (2007), *Subnational Political Opportunity Structures and the Success of the Radical Right: Evidence from the March 2004 Regional Elections in France*, *European Journal of Political Research* 46 (6), 773-796.

Kim Strandberg (2007), *It's the Inside that Counts? An Explorative Analysis of Finnish Parties' Opinions Concerning the Importance and Use of Their Websites, and Website Contents, in Relation to Party Characteristics*, *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30:4, 419-443.