

DEMOCRACY: A CITIZEN PERSPECTIVE

Democratic Innovations, Interview with Prof. Brigitte Geissel

Professor **Brigitte Geissel**, Technische Universität Darmstadt, visiting Marie Curie Fellow at D:CE in 2008.

Why did You choose to come to Åbo Akademi?

- I had met colleagues from the department at international conferences and familiarized myself with the research agenda of D:CE. It was a perfect fit with my own interests. Also the opportunity to stay in Finland and its oldest city was appealing.

You are interested in democratic innovations. What do you mean by that?

- Old representative democracies are facing problems. There is a growing distrust of political elites and institutions. People doubt the abilities of representative systems to govern complex societies or solve current problems. Many citizens, politicians and political scientists pin their hopes on the “democratization” of democracy. Especially participatory innovations through which citizens are included in the processes of political will-formation and decision-making are often believed to help in improving the quality of democracy and to overcome political apathy and dissatisfaction.



Photo: Åbo Akademi

What is your own research agenda?

- My research reviews arguments and evidence for and against different democratic innovations in order to create a pool of theoretical and empirical knowledge. I am also developing a theoretical framework with criteria for the evaluation of democratic innovations. Being part of the D:CE community was a great opportunity.

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Upcoming Conferences

D:CE Hosts a Section at the ECPR General Conference

Prof. Brigitte Geissel and Prof. Marko Joas Chair a Section in Potsdam

The 5th ECPR General Conference will be held 10-12 September 2009 in Potsdam, Germany. D:CE hosts a whole section of panels, titled *Democratic Innovations and Innovative Democracy in Europe*.

There will be seven panels in the section. For more information, visit the ECPR website at: www.ecpr.org.uk/potsdam



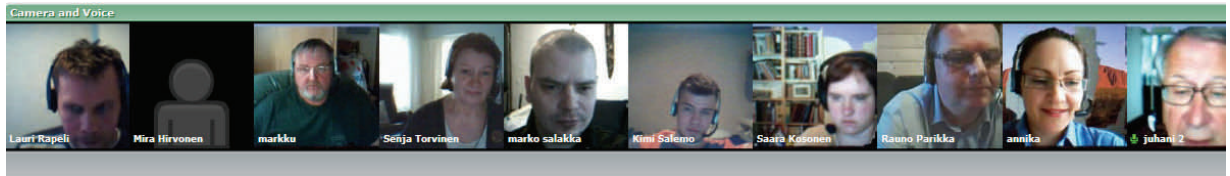
european consortium for political research

NORDKOM 2009 in Åbo

XVIII Nordic Local Government Research Conference will take place in Åbo in late November 2009 and is co-hosted by Public Administration and D:CE.

Several papers on local democracy and participation will be presented.

Research and Events 2008



Board Meeting in Åbo

Our International Advisory Board met in Åbo 3-4 April at a seminar where ongoing research at D:CE was presented by six fellows. Also a poster session by six doctoral students was carried out. All board members were present. They are

- * Prof. **Rachel Gibson** (University of Manchester)
- * Prof. **Sören Holmberg** (Göteborg)
- * Prof. **Detlef Jahn** (Greifswald)
- * Prof. **Henry Milner** (Montréal)
- * Prof. **Poul Erik Mouritzen** (Odense).



Rachel Gibson

(Photo: Helena Hurme)

Virtual Experiment

In April 2008, D:CE replicated its face-to-face experiment from 2006 on Citizen Deliberation in small groups. The theme was unchanged: "Should a sixth nuclear power plant be built in Finland?"

This time, however, the whole procedure was online. Opinion surveys, information materials including expert presentations were put on an online platform. Also group discussions took place in the virtual environment. With the help of web cameras, microphones and headsets, the participants deliberated in their own groups.

The research team consisting of Kimmo Grönlund, Kim Strandberg and Staffan Himmelroos is currently analyzing the results.

Seminar on Swedish Politics

An open seminar with the title: "Two Years of Bourgeois Government in Sweden" was organized in Åbo on 2 October. Journalist **Barbro Hedvall** from the largest Swedish Daily *Dagens Nyheter* analyzed the politics and prospects of the Swedish coalition government.

Editor-in-chief Hannu Olkinuora from Hufvudstadsbladet commented on Ms. Hedvall's analysis and compared Swedish politics with the political constellation in Finland.



Barbro Hedvall and Kimmo Grönlund
(Photo: Peter Sandström)

Doctoral Students on the Move



He took part in a course on Qualitative data analysis: methodologies for analysing text and talk.

Staffan Himmelroos, who is working on a thesis on the discursive quality of political discussions in deliberative minipublics, attended the ECPR Summer School in Social Science Data Analysis at the University of Essex in 2008.

He took part in a course on Qualitative data analysis: methodologies for analysing text and talk.



Marta Miklikowska is working on a thesis on family influence on the democratic orientation of adolescents. She took part in the ECPR Summer School in Methods and Techniques in Ljubljana in 2008. She attended courses on Inferential statistics and Multivariate/cross-national survey analysis.

She also presented a poster (together with Prof. Hurme) at the Annual Scientific Meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP) in Paris in July.

New Book on the Least Democratic States Interview with Prof. Lauri Karvonen, Director of D:CE

D:CE research focuses on the current state and future prospects of democracy in countries with a long record of liberal democracy. *“Diktatur”* deals with the least democratic political systems. What is the reason you chose this particular theme?

- I think we need to contrast stable democracies with systems that represent the opposite end of the continuum. This helps us distinguish between the fundamentals of democracy from the *differentia specifica* of various democratic systems. Then it is a different matter and a separate motive behind this book that there are much too few comparative studies of the least democratic states in the world.

Describe the book in a few words!

- It discusses various theories of dictatorship and then applies these to the least democratic countries during the past three decades. Five case studies representing different kinds of dictatorships (North Korea, Brunei, Belarus, Libya and Burma) illustrate the concrete functioning of dictatorial government and its effects on society.

What general conclusions do you draw?

- The explanatory power of socioeconomic theories – we often talk about modernization theory – has declined. Cultural factors, religion in particular, have gained in importance. It is of some concern that there is today a contiguous belt of states with Muslim majorities that are governed dictatorially. Non-democratic political practices are increasingly justified with reference to religious and cultural traditions. In many countries, the relative prosperity created by oil helps protect dictatorial governments.

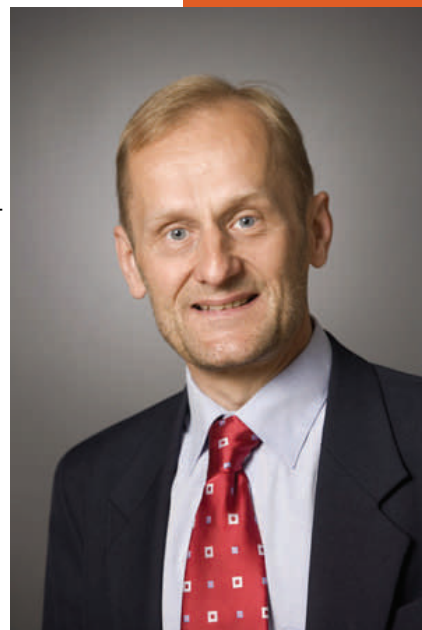


Photo: Åbo Akademi

D:CE Positively Evaluated

A Nordic panel, consisting of Professors Lars Bäckman, Ole Elgström, Bjørn Tore Gjertsen, and Gunnar Svedberg, carried out a mid-term evaluation of the four Centers of Excellence (CoE) at Åbo Akademi.

The evaluation was based on written reports from the CoEs. All four CoEs were positively evaluated. Based on the evaluation,

additional funding for 2009 was granted by the university.

Further, the panel recommends ÅA “to demand an International Advisory Board in the management structure of all future CoEs. Chosen with care regarding scientific expertise and avoiding apparent biases, an Advisory Board introduces continual constructive criticism to the project.” The international advisory board of D:CE

served as a model for this recommendation.

By the end of May 2008, the researchers of D:CE had produced some 25 articles in international refereed journals, 13 scientific monographs and 6 doctoral theses. Moreover, 6 licentiate theses and 59 master’s theses with a relevant theme were inspected in the first 2.5 years.





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

Steering Group

Director: Lauri Karvonen, Professor of Political Science

Associate director: Kimmo Grönlund, Director of Research (Social Science Research Institute)

Members: Göran Djupsund, Professor of Political Science and Political Communication, Helena Hurme, Professor of Developmental Psychology, Marko Joas, Professor of Public Administration

Associated Institutions

- * BIDS, Bern Interdisciplinary Center for Deliberative Studies, Universität Bern
- * DCERN, Democracy, Citizens and Elections Research Network, University of Manchester
- * NED, Nordic Elections and Democracy Research Consortium

Recent Publications

Carsten Anckar (2008). On the Applicability of the Most Similar Systems Design and the Most Different Systems Design in Comparative Research, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 11(5), 389-401.

Carsten Anckar (2008). Size, Islandness, and Democracy: A Global Comparison, *International Political Science Review* 29(4) 433-459.

Maria Bäck & Elina Kestilä (2008). Social Capital and Individual Trust in Finland - An Individual-level Assessment, *Scandinavian Political Studies* 31(4).

Tom Carlson & Kim Strandberg (2008). Riding the Web 2.0 Wave: Candidates on YouTube in the 2007 Finnish National Elections. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 5(2), 159-174.

Thomas Denk (2008). *Kultur eller struktur? Studie om den representativa demokratis regionala förutsättningar*. Åbo: Meddelanden från Ekonomisk-statsvetenskapliga

fakulteten vid Åbo Akademi, Statskunskap Ser. A:560.

Marko Joas, Detlef Jahn & Kristine Kern (eds) (2008). *Governing a Common Sea. Environmental Policies in the Baltic Sea Region*. London: Earthscan, 238 pp.

Lauri Karvonen (2008). *Diktatur. Om ofrihetens politiska system*. Stockholm: SNS förlag, 202 pp.

Lauri Karvonen (2008). *Statsskick. Att bygga demokrati*. Stockholm: SNS förlag, 191 pp.

Krister Lundell (2008). Electoral Reform and Party System Change: An Analysis of Nordic Elections with Two Different Electoral Systems, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 31(4), 363-383.

Kim Strandberg (2008). Public Deliberation goes On-Line? – An Analysis of Citizens' Political Discussions on the Internet prior to the Finnish Parliamentary Elections in 2007, *Javnost- The Public*.

Kim Strandberg (2008). On-line Campaigning in Different Settings: A Comparative Meta-Analysis of the Research on Party Websites and Electoral Competition, *Party Politics* 14(2), 223-244.

Peter Söderlund (2008). Retrospective Voting and Electoral Volatility: A Nordic Perspective, *Scandinavian Political Studies* 31(2) 2008, 217-240.



Editor of this Issue: Kimmo Grönlund