

An Interdisciplinary Centre of Excellence
at Åbo Akademi University

DEMOCRACY: A CITIZEN PERSPECTIVE

Several new projects receive funding

Åsa Bengtsson, Adjoint professor: Preferred Political Processes. Voters' Preferences for Political Decision Making

People often complain about the current operation of government, a trend that has led scientists to believe that a revision of the indirect representative system towards more inclusive participatory models of democracy is in order. But can a development towards more participatory or deliberative forms of democracy increase democratic legitimacy? These questions will be dealt with in Academy Researcher Åsa Bengtsson's new project, financed by the Academy of Finland for the period 2010-2015. The overall objective of the project is to elucidate voters' preferences for political processes and to develop instruments for future comparative research in the field.



Åsa Bengtsson,
Photo: Robert Seger

Guy-Erik Isaksson, Adjoint professor: The Anatomy of Government Formation

Guy-Erik Isaksson has been awarded a position as Advanced Research Fellow at the Academy of Finland. His project deals with government formation in parliamentary systems. The major research question is: Why do certain political parties enter government positions, while other parties remain in opposition? Special focus is on the relationship between voters and cabinets. The project is an extensive comparative study in a European context. The data base on Western Europe covers the period from 1945 to 2009 including about 1,600 cases (political parties) and about 300 cabinet formations in 16 countries. The data base on Eastern Europe covers the period 1991-2009.



Guy-Erik Isaksson,
Photo: Åbo Akademi

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Kim Strandberg, Research fellow in Political Science: The Participation of the Future? – Citizens' On-line Political Activity and Its Consequences

The project aims at assessing the ways in which new, untraditional, forms of political activity may affect general political participation, examining the consequences for the individual citizen, and exploring how opportunities/institutions for participation may be adjusted to this development. Methodologically, a paired approach in which conventional social science methods, e.g. survey analyses, are combined with experimental methods is deemed most suited for achieving the purpose of the research.



Kim Strandberg,
Photo: Åbo Akademi

Political Power in Finland: An Analysis of Central Government Institutions and Actors

This project has been awarded 550 000 € by the Academy of Finland for a 4-year period starting in January 2011. Professor Heikki Paloheimo of the University of Tampere - one of D:CE's closest associates - is project director. D:CE scholars Åsa Bengtsson, Guy-Erik Isaksson and Lauri Karvonen are members of the team. Other participants represent the universities of Helsinki, Tampere and Turku. The aim is to give a comprehensive picture of power relations in Finnish central government. Results will be compared to power studies in Finland in the 1970s and recent power studies in other Nordic countries. They will contribute to the ongoing debate on Finnish democracy.



Heikki Paloheimo,
Photo: Private

International Advisory Board (IAB) meeting in Åbo

The IAB convened in Åbo on May 25-27, 2010. Board members Brigitte Geissel (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt), Rachel Gibson (Manchester University), Detlef Jahn (Universität Greifswald) and Henry Milner (Université de Montreal) attended the meeting.

On Tuesday, May 25, Professor Jürg Steiner (University of North Carolina Chapel Hill and University of Bern) held a public lecture on deliberative democracy in Åbo. Along with IAB members and D:CE scholars, he participated in a conference on D:CE research the following day. At this conference, nine scholars presented research portraying various parts of the D:CE agenda.

On the final day of the meeting, a joint session of the International Advisory Board and the D:CE Steering Group was held. The topics discussed included priorities and themes for further experimental research, the future role of IAB, a stronger institutional focus in continued research as well as the need of a bridging document between the two phases of D:CE research.



Henry Milner,
Photo: Private

Conference presentations

Lauri Karvonen: "D:CE today: achievements, evaluations and current research"

Åsa Bengtsson: "Preferred political processes. Voters' preferences for political decision making"

Maija Setälä: "Designing issue-focused forms of citizen participation"

Kimmo Grönlund: "Future endeavors, developing the experimental basis of our research"

Kim Strandberg: "Virtual Polity II - Improving and expanding the experimental research on-line"

Krister Lundell: "The deliberative capacity of individuals and societies"

Henrik Serup Christensen: "The impact of political institutions on patterns of political participation"

Staffan Himmelroos: "Examining citizen deliberation: quality and dynamics"

Marina Lindell: "The deliberative process: effects of information and deliberation"



Detlef Jahn,
Photo: Private

Dissertation projects



Maria Bäck,
Photo: Private

In her thesis **Maria Bäck** seeks to explain the connection between social capital and political participation both at the individual and the aggregate level.

Following R.D. Putnam's ideas regarding the private and public face of social capital, the aim is also to determine whether or not the level of "contextual social capital" (the average level of social capital in a country or group of countries) plays any significant

role for the mechanisms that are found at the individual level.



Andreas Fagerholm,
Photo: Private

In his thesis **Andreas Fagerholm** intends to undertake a comparative examination of the ideological development within the West European social democratic parties during the last decades of the 20th century.

The aim is, in brief, to portray the character of ideological change and, furthermore, to explain why some of the social democratic parties have undergone distinct ideological revisions while others have maintained a more or less conventional social democratic profile.

The Personalization of Politics - a new book by Prof. Lauri Karvonen, Director of D:CE

With the weakening of the structural determinants of politics, it is commonly assumed that individual politicians mean more for voter behavior. Many observers argue that politics has become more personalized during the last few decades.

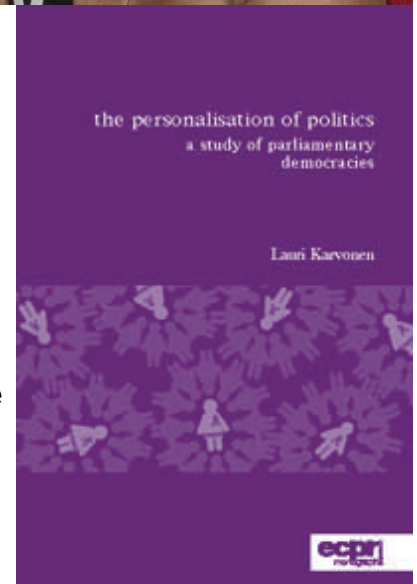
No single study so far has approached the question from a broad comparative perspective. By examining four dimensions – institutions, candidates, party leaders and media – and by including data from most parliamentary democracies, Lauri Karvonen attempts to fill part of that gap.

The book demonstrates that there is no linear trend towards more personalization. The findings are mixed at best; in some respects, they are negative. While media focus more on individual politicians, the idea that party leaders increasingly determine party choice finds little support. Most researchers agree that prime ministers have become more dominant. Here, too, a closer look results in a more complex picture. There has been a certain tendency to develop the most party-centered electoral systems in a more candidate-centered direction. On the other hand, recent reforms have altered some of the most candidate-centered systems in the opposite direction. Individual candidates mean more to voters in systems where preferential voting has been practiced a long time. This change is, however, by no means dramatic and does not apply to other systems.

Karvonen shows that the personalization thesis, while not completely erroneous, has been overstated not just by the media but in some of the research literature as well.



Lauri Karvonen, Photo: K. Grönlund



Visiting PhD student

Lorena Poncela Rodriguez, from the University of Baja California in Ensenada, Mexico, is a visiting scholar at the Department of Political Science at the Åbo Akademi University from August to December 2010 as part of a PhD program in Environment and Development .

Her project concerns a feasibility model for Local Agenda 21 in developing countries. Different



Lorena Poncela Rodriguez,
Photo: Private

modes of implementation of LA21 in international experiences, including an analysis of some environmental policies in Latin America, are analyzed.

A feasibility index for LA21 will be created in order to estimate the degree of success previous to implementation in municipalities (with application to Mexican cases). Strategies for achieving LA21 in municipalities with a low feasibility will also be developed.



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D:CE in Åbo: ASA-huset, Photo: ÅÅ:s bildbank

Steering Group

Director: Lauri Karvonen, Professor of Political Science

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

Members: Carsten Anckar, Professor of Comparative Politics, Åsa Bengtsson, Adjoint Professor of Political Science, Göran Djupsund, Professor of Political Science and Political Communication, 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

Åsa Bengtsson & Hanna Wass (2010), Styles of Political Representation: What Do Voters Expect?, *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 55-81, February 2010.

Karoline Berg, Johan Meriluoto, Siv Sandberg & Stefan Sjöblom (2010), *Försiktighet och förändring på egna villkor. Kommun- och servicestrukturreformens första skede i de svensk- och tvåspråkiga kommunerna*. Publikationer av projektet om förvaltningslösningars språkliga konsekvenser. Yliopistopaino.

Thomas Denk (2010), Comparative Multilevel Analysis: Proposal for a Methodology, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, Vol. 13, No. 1, February 2010, 29-39.

Kimmo Grönlund, Maija Setälä & Kaisa Herne (2010), Deliberation and civic virtue: lessons from a citizen deliberation experiment, *European Political Science Review* 2/1, pp. 95-117.

Kaisa Herne (2010), Sosiaalinen oikeudenmukaisuus. Teoksessa Räikkä, J. (toim.) *Yhteiskuntafilosofia*, Kuopio:

UNIpress, s. 11-28.

Staffan Himmelroos (2010), Mot en mer deliberativ politik? Utmaningen i att förena deliberation med representation, *Politiikka* 52:3, s. 234-240.

Lauri Karvonen (2010), *The Personalisation of Politics. A Study of Parliamentary Democracies*. Colchester 2010: ECPR Press.

Lauri Karvonen (2010), Seriös, professionell och lagom. Svensk statsvetenskap som kär gammal vän, in Magnus Jerneck and Björn Badersten, eds., *Kontraster och nyanser. Svensk statsvetenskap i brytningstid*, Lund: Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift, 61-73.

Siv Sandberg (2010), "Finnish Power-Shift: The Defeat of the Periphery?" In Baldersheim Harald & Lawrence Rose (eds): *Territorial Choice. The Politics of Boundaries and Borders*, Palgrave McMillan, 42-60.

Siv Sandberg (2010), "Decentralized, Unitary Welfare States. The Role of Local Government in Denmark, Finland, Norway

and Sweden" In Stein Kuhnle, Chen Yinzhang, Klaus Petersen & Pauli Kettunen (eds): *The Nordic Welfare State*, 236-253.

Maija Setälä, Kimmo Grönlund & Kaisa Herne (2010), Citizen Deliberation on Nuclear Power: A Comparison of Two Decision-Making Methods. *Political Studies* 58, 688-714.

Maija Setälä (2010), Valtaa kansalle? Suora demokratia ja sisällöllinen kansalaisaloite perustuslakiuudistuksessa. Matti Wiberg (toim.): *Perustuslakihaasteet*. Helsinki: Edita, 119-131.



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