A flourishing exchange of ideas at “Democracy: A Citizen Perspective” conference

As the Centre of Excellence in democracy research (D:CE) in Åbo Akademi University reached its final year, an international conference was held to mark the completion of activities in the centre that has been in operation since 2006. D:CE has been run by Professor Lauri Karvonen (director of the D:CE) and Professor Kimmo Grönlund (deputy director of D:CE) and an array of other researchers have been involved in the work of the Center. Cecilia Fredriksson, PhD Student, functioned as the Conference Secretary.

The conference “Democracy: A Citizen Perspective” was held on May 27-28, 2015. It consisted of five panels chaired by members of the D:CE International Advisory Board, a special session as well as of keynote addresses by Professor Diana C. Mutz and Professor David Farrell. By bringing together 60 researchers from 14 different countries, the conference portrayed the state of the art in central fields of democracy research.

- The conference represents a perfect mix of long-time collaborators and partners and new acquaintances, Professor Lauri Karvonen, D:CE director, said in his opening remarks.

Mikko Hupa, Rector of Åbo Akademi University and professor of Inorganic Chemistry, greeted the conference. Hupa stated that experimental research in political science brings social sciences and natural sciences closer to one another. The Rector was impressed by how experimental research enables scholars from very different kinds of areas of research to communicate in similar terms.
Key note speeches

The key note speeches were on extending the potential of survey experiments and learning from the experiences from deliberation in practice. **Diana C. Mutz**, Samuel A. Stouffer Professor of Communication and Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania, demonstrated in a fascinating way the potential in conducting population-based survey experiments in the field of political science. As one of the pioneers in this field, Mutz illustrated how external validity can be enhanced and how causal relationships can be detected better with this technique. Her intriguing illustrations included examples on how citizens differ in their way of relating to international trade and globalization and to social welfare benefits. Mutz pointed out that there are basically no limits in terms of what can be studied with population-based survey experiments.

- Everything that I originally imagined that could not be studied has been done by now, Mutz underlined.
Professor **David M. Farrell** of the University College, Dublin told about deliberation in Practice and what could be learnt from the Irish Constitutional Convention. The idea for the Constitutional Convention arose in the midst of Ireland’s economic crisis, and was brought forward in the 2011 general election with the new government committing to a political and economic reform. The Irish Constitutional Convention was comprised of 66 randomly selected citizens and 33 politicians and it led to encouraging results throughout the process. The agenda covered, for instance, the electoral reform, same-sex marriages and the length of the presidential term. The citizens found it useful to work with the elected members and their attitudes towards politicians improved as a result of the Convention. The citizen members became more positive towards same-sex marriages due to the Convention.

- The attitudinal change towards same-sex marriages was fascinating. You could see the shift in opinions. It really happened in front of your eyes, Farrell underlined.

The Irish government accepted the recommendations on marriage equality, and it was passed in a referendum in May, 2015. It was the very first time that such a process has led to constitutional change. The Constitutional Convention took the party politics out of the topic, and it was seen as the key to the outcome of the referendum.

- Deliberation can have real policy outcomes, Farrell emphasized.
Panel 1: Citizens Representative democracy

There were altogether five panels at the conference. The panels were chaired by Professor Emeritus Sören Holmberg (University of Gothenburg), Professor Rachel Gibson (Manchester University), Professor Brigitte Geissel (Goethe University), Professor Detlef Jahn (University of Greifswald) and by Professor Henry Milner (University of Montreal). The discussants represented the universities of Leuven, Luzern, Åbo Akademi and Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz.

The papers in the first panel “Citizens and representative democracy” emphasized the need and will to move beyond representative democracy. The support for democratic innovations, preferences for direct democracy and responsiveness were discussed and the effect of the democratic ideals on political trust and support for direct democracy were debated. The papers that were presented were “Who wants democratic innovations, and why?” by Claudia Landwehr and Thorsten Faas, “Direct democracy and responsiveness” by Joan Font and José Luis Fernández, “Popular Support for Direct Democracy in Europe” by Arndt Leininger and “Great Expectations: The Effect of Democratic Ideals on Political Trust. A Comparative Investigation of the 2012 European Social Survey” by Sofie Marien, Marc Hooghe and Jennifer Oser. The chair in the panel was Professor Emeritus Sören Holmberg while Åsa von Schoultz was discussant.

Panel 2: Political participation through social media

The second panel concentrated on political participation through social media. The papers dealt with anonymous signatures, online deliberation among new parties in Spain, segregated deliberation and innovative digital tools in boosting political participation. The papers that were presented were “The dark side of e-petitions? Exploring anonymous signatures” by Janne Berg, “From protest to political parties: online deliberation in the new parties in arising in Spain” by Rosa Borge and Eduardo Santamarina, “The Voice of Care and the Voice of Justice: Segregated Deliberation in a State of Exception” by Nicole Curato and “Society Kit: An innovative digital tool boosting political participation” by Georgios Moukazis and Panu Kouri. The chair of the panel was Professor Rachel Gibson and Kim Strandberg was discussant.
Special session: The D:CE experiments

In a special session on experimental research “What do we know about enclave deliberation?”, Kimmo Grönlund presented the deliberative experiments that have been organized by the D:CE team at Åbo Akademi University since 2006. The paper related to the special session was “Does Enclave Deliberation Polarize Opinions?” by Kimmo Grönlund, Kaisa Herne and Maija Setälä. The themes of the ‘mini-publics’ have included nuclear power, immigration and the status of the Swedish language in Finland. The results show that enclave deliberation, if structured according to deliberative rules is not necessarily a harmful thing. Deliberative norms can be useful in trying to achieve political or societal de-polarization. Especially online discussion forums can benefit from them. André Bächtiger was discussant at this special session.

Panel 3: Democratic innovations

The third panel centered on the relationship between democratic innovations and the quality of democracy. The evidence on the role of empathy in citizen deliberation, participatory budgeting, the differences in online and offline participation and the deliberative capacity of democratic polities were highlighted. The papers that were presented were “Understanding the Other Side – Experimental Evidence on the Role of Empathy in Citizen Deliberation” by Kimmo Grönlund, Kaisa Herne and Maija Setälä, “Participatory budgeting in Lodz, Greater Manchester and Tampere: Translating global democratic innovation to urban contexts” by Pauliina Lehtonen, Liisa Häikiö and Jarkko Salminen, “Online or Offline Participation?” by Norbert Kersting and “Assessing the deliberative capacity of democratic polities and the factors that contribute to it” by Simon Niemeyer, André Bächtiger and Nicole Curato. The chair of the panel was Professor Brigitte Geissel while Claudia Landwehr was discussant.
Panel 4: The distinction between political left and right

The fourth panel was entitled “Left and right: a valid distinction for citizens in the 21st century?” The papers built on evidence from Italy, Germany and comparisons between West European countries and they reflected on the nature of party competition in multidimensional party systems. The papers that were presented were “What is Left for the Radical Left?” by Andreas Fagerholm, “Left and Right as adaptive categories: evidence from an Italian community study” by Giulia D’Alimonte and “The relevance of left and right in EU affairs: a case study of German parliament debates on the Greek crisis” by Caroline Werner. Professor Detlef Jahn was chair while Peter Söderlund was discussant.

Panel 5: The informed citizen

The fifth panel “The informed citizen” reflected on the role of political knowledge and political competence as well as the mobilization of citizens under the age of 18 in politics. The papers that were presented were “Voting once at 16 – long lasting effects? Comparing young people in Scotland with the rest of the UK” by Jan Eichhorn, Internet Use, Political Knowledge and Political Participation Among Young Voters in Australia by Ian MacAllister, “Why did they vote? Voting at 16 and the mobilization of young voters in the 2011 Norwegian local elections” by Guro Ødegård, Johannes Bergh and Jo Saglie and “Does citizen competence matter for electoral outcomes?” by Lauri Rapeli. The chair of the panel was Professor Henry Milner and Marc Hooghe was discussant.
Out in the Åbo Archipelago and dinner at Hus Lindman

Since the conference was held in sunny May in Finland, a dinner excursion on board M/S Rudolfina was arranged in the beautiful Åbo Archipelago. On the second day of the conference, a dinner was held at Hus Lindman. Incidentally, this was the building in which the ÅA Department of Political Science was previously located.
The Conference Program

Wednesday, 27 May 2015
10:00 Greetings by Professor Mikko Hupa, Rector of Åbo Akademi University
10:10 Opening words, Professor Lauri Karvonen, Director of D:CE
10:20 – 11:30 Keynote speech: Professor Diana C. Mutz, University of Pennsylvania: ‘Extending the Potential of Survey Experiments’
11:45 – 13:15 Panel I, ‘Citizens and Representative Democracy’. Chair: Professor Sören Holmberg, University of Gothenburg
14:15 – 15:45 Panel II, ‘Political Participation through Social Media’. Chair: Professor Rachel Gibson, Manchester University
16:10 – 17:00 Special Session, ‘What do we know about enclave deliberation? The D:CE experiments.’ Professor Kimmo Grönlund, Åbo Akademi University
18:00 – 21:15 Excursion & dinner on the boat M/S Rudolfina

Thursday, 28 May 2015
10:00 – 11:10 Keynote speech: Professor David M. Farrell, University College, Dublin: ‘Deliberation in Practice: Lessons from the Irish Constitutional Convention’
11:30 – 13:00 Panel III, ‘Do Democratic Innovations Improve the Quality of Democracy?’, Chair: Professor Brigitte Geissel, Goethe University
15:30 – 17:00 Panel V, ‘The Informed Citizen’, Chair: Professor Henry Milner, University of Montreal
Wrap up session
19:30 Cocktail and Conference dinner at restaurant Hus Lindman