

## **DELIBERATION, PARTICIPATION, ACCOUNTABILITY: KEY ISSUES OF DEMOCRACY**

This panel focuses on the concept of democracy from two different directions and asks two correlated questions: What are the necessary conditions of democracy? – What practices legitimize democracy? The discussion brings us to three fundamental concerns of democratic practice: Deliberation, participation and accountability.

The idea of deliberative democracy has transformed democratic theory in the last three to four decades. In deliberative democracy the quality and transparency of democratic authority depends on its deliberative qualities where the engagement of citizens in monitoring and discussing policy- and decision-making is of primary importance. Civic participation has become a prominent topic of democratic theory more recently which to some extent reflects dwindling trust in democratic institutions, doubts about democratic representation and a demand for greater civic control of public decision-making.

Participation however raises questions about accountability. Participation does not guarantee inclusion and even where robust participatory processes are in place minorities and marginal groups may still not enjoy full political access. Participatory practices also do not ensure the respect for individual differences and may we lapse into a constant need for “redescription”.

Speakers explore how deliberation, participation and accountability figure in both outlining necessary conditions of democracy and ensuring democratic legitimacy. Deliberation e.g., does not provide safeguards against special interest or guarantee the quality of decisions. Participatory processes may undermine democratic accountability and lead to doubts about the legitimacy of decisions-making.

### **Deliberation: Quality vs. Diversity as a measure of democracy**

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When deliberative democracy in its current form emerged in democratic theory the concept rested on a claim that not only is deliberation a healthy addition to democratic processes – i.e. decision-making by democratic government, policy-making in parliaments and other democratic institutions – but in fact a necessary condition of democratic legitimacy. This is a strong claim. It means that a decision can fulfill all many formal requirements of democratic procedure: i.e. it is made by a legitimate authority in a way that conforms to legal and institutional requirements and be implemented in such ways as to respect a range of concerns by stakeholders – yet be undemocratic. Public decisions deficient in reasons, transparency, accessibility or deliberative quality are democratically flawed from this point of view. I argue in this paper that the focus on the quality of deliberation as a part of institutional design can be misleading and undermine the importance of civic engagement. While the demand for reason-giving is an important part of critical civic monitoring of public institutions, and lack of transparency a source of legitimate concern about policies, the quality of deliberation itself is difficult to determine. In the paper I examine the difficulties in assessing the quality of deliberation and with some recent examples from the Nordic countries suggest that quality of deliberation and quality of democracy should not be conflated.