

INTERROGATIONS, SESSION 4, OCTOBER 22
ENVISIONING REAL UTOPIAS SEMINAR

Jennifer Seminatore

In Chapter 5, Wright discusses the example of participatory democracy in Porto Alegre, noting that civil society “thickened” as the experiment continued and groups formed to represent their interests in the process. I believe this development presents a response to the skepticism of proposals to deepen democracy grounded in a belief about citizen apathy. That is, given the opportunities to see concrete results of your efforts in political processes, people may (and did in Porto Alegre) become engaged *and* organized.

In Wright’s discussion of “empowered participatory governance” *deliberation* is a key aspect of decision-making, where reason, persuasion, and consensus-making are central and replace bargaining, tyranny of the majority, and strategic compromises. I believe deliberation has the potential, too, to cultivate engagement of the citizenry, in that outcomes would be more likely to be perceived as the best of all possible solutions rather than the undesirable outcomes of opaque wheeling and dealing.

Wright discusses the potential roadblocks to informed deliberative decision-making in terms of biased and shallow information and lack of skills and expertise relevant to the issue and the decision-making process. He mentions that the only information likely available will be unevenly influenced by elites and powerful interests and will be available only through the general media. The discussion of random citizen assemblies motivates the idea of having a panel of experts and a series of presentations presented to the assembly regarding the specific issues. However, I would argue that strong, active, investigative journalistic institutions are another possible way to enhance the ability of the citizenry to engage in deliberative decision-making. Fixing the media instead of circumventing it should be central to projects of deepening democracy. **[You are obviously correct about this: it is hard to imagine how a deepened democracy could be effectively realized in the context of highly concentrated corporate media and the ways this distorts both the understanding people have of the problems we face and their beliefs about alternatives. However, I also think it is a mistake to overstate the power of the media in these terms. Citizens are capable of quite a bit of skepticism. If citizen assemblies were formed and the materials and presentations they experienced as part of the information within the deliberative context were well designed to express the spectrum of positions, then this could counteract quite a bit of the negative force of the broader media.]**

A somewhat unrelated point about “randomocracy” relates to the compensation offered to participants, specifically, the provision that after terms (in the case of the extended office-holding) citizens should be able to return to their jobs with no penalties to seniority. First, this provision assumes a level of job stability that many people do not have (and where seniority would even be a concern, rather than just will the job be there). Secondly, who is to say that most people would not mind being put back three years in their career paths, even if they do not lose seniority, they do not gain it where they would have. **[I think I must not have been clear about this: the idea is that citizens in the**

randomly selected assembly would continue to *accrue* seniority while they were on duty in the assembly. If seniority is irrelevant in the specific job they had, then they would simply return to that job in the same status. The point here is simply to eliminate any obstacles to participation that might come from their position in the labor market and job structure.]

Also, with regards the democracy debit card system, I do not understand what the benefits to having people give money before they necessarily know much about candidates might be. Why would it not be more desirable to give all the candidates who gather a certain number of signatures a reasonable amount of campaign money? Is it only to “empower” people at two stages of the process instead of one, or is there another reason? **[The idea about having individual citizens control the funds available to candidates is basically to fully restore the accountability of both potential candidates and actual candidates to equally empowered citizens. Now, the full model of Ackerman does contain a provision for candidates initially to get a flat rate grant to kick start campaigns once they have acquired signatures – which is what I think you are suggesting. But this is meant to be very modest, just enough to get the process rolling. Mostly politicians will be dependent upon citizens for funds, and the key is that citizens will be radically equal in their capacity to provide those funds.]**

Abigail Andrews

The first major question that arises for me in this chapter is: how is your vision limited by your notion of a state? You rely on the state to coordinate, manage, and enforce most of your “real utopias,” and you repeatedly refer to “citizens” who participate in self-governance. Yet, we live in a world where people live increasingly transnational lives and many reside in places where they are not officially recognized as citizens. How does the citizenship regime limit the way radical egalitarian democracy can function? Does relying on citizenship perpetuate existing forms of exclusion? By extension, how can problems that extend across state boundaries be tractable in the frameworks you’ve laid out? It seems that addressing issues that affect people transnationally would require some kind of global governance significantly more effective and expansive than any present system, such as the UN. **[There are places like Sweden in which everyone who lives on the territory can vote for local elections. Formal “citizenship” only pertains to voting for national elections. So one thing that one might want to think about is expanding the idea of citizenship and the associated political rights connected to it. It is also certainly worth thinking about transnational and global governance institutions, but it seems unlikely that these will ever – or at least for a very very long time – exist outside of the multistate framework in which it is still states that are the constituent political units within those larger governance units. On the issue of problems that extend across state boundaries: lots of governance institutions of social economy and social capitalism already extend across borders but are still organized from below, not by states. Equal exchange, for example, would be such an example – as would Wikipedia....So, not all governance does require states.]**

Second, though the benefits are obvious of state-centered institutionalization for overcoming the episodic nature of social movement-driven reforms, they face the drawback of coming from within the state. The emergence of a program such as that promulgated by the PT in Porto Alegre relies on the presence of an already functioning democracy that can elect such a party into power. How do we get to THAT point not only states that already have a relatively decent degree of democracy, such as Brazil and the USA, but also in places where democracy is superficial at best? **[This, I think, is the transformation problem, not the institutional design problem. This will be something we'll explore more next week.]**

Third, I was interested in the choice to use extraordinary examples such as the Porto Alegre participatory budgeting experiment. Clearly, such examples help us delimit the realm of the possible. However, it is also important to recognize the factors that went into making such cases outstanding. For instance, Porto Alegre is located in a region of Brazil that has a long and strong tradition of tight knit communities and associationalism. This region is also more racially homogenous (primarily composed of European, particularly Italian and German, immigrants) and wealthier than other regions of Brazil. **[This may explain why this model began in Porto Alegre rather than, say, Recife. But still, Porto Alegre is not very homogeneous by global standards, nor was the civil society of Porto Alegre very dense compared to, for example, most European countries. Still, agree that there are exceptional conditions which explain why this started in Porto Alegre, but once the design was created, it spread to other places with much less favorable conditions. Sometimes it worked well, other times not.]**

Wolford has written about the effects of this difference on one of Brazil's other major social experiments: the Landless Workers' Movement, or MST. She uses ethnography to reveal how the MST's attempts to build collectively run communities, which functioned well in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, where Porto Alegre is, faced major obstacles in the Brazilian Northeast, specifically the state of Pernambuco, where people were poorer, more racially diverse, grounded in a different economic base, and had inherited many problems associated with being at the heart of the Brazilian slave trade (to name just a few regional characteristics). When generating visions, how do we navigate such contextual differences to make extraordinary experiments more broadly applicable?

Finally, on a related note, I am somewhat fixated on how it can be possible to generate deliberation – and better yet, consensus – across entrenched social boundaries such as those of class, race, and nation. I think this may be the major challenge for some of the participatory schemes you propose. How do they have to be modified in settings that bring together people with clashing experiences, values, backgrounds, and desires? **[I don't imagine there is any abstract general answer to this question, or at least I cannot give one. I think the possibility of serious and thoughtful deliberation rests on the fact that we are moral beings, not just self-interested actors, and our moral nature pushes us towards more universalistic concerns. I think the willingness of people in very different "subject positions" to listen to each other, and take seriously the need to satisfy the interests of others not just their own, and to deliberate by reason-giving is linked to such moral capacity. This may break down, of course, especially where there are sharply opposed values – which may be more difficult to**

deal with than opposed interests. And consensus formation is always mixed with bargaining and other modes of problem-solving, not just a pure deliberation of reason given. Nevertheless, if all parties can accept the terms of reasonableness and pragmatic problem solving, than often it is possible to carve out zones within which sharp value clashes can be bracketed.]

Kate Maich

The Core Elements of the Model of Empowered Participatory Governance [EPG] strike me as a thorough and robust list of principles, yet I think we must interrogate the silences and gaps they present. When countering the claim that people are too apathetic and/or busy to invest time in participatory democracy, EOW notes that “surprisingly, poor people often participate more than wealthy ones when such opportunities are available,” (9). How best can we ensure that this empowered participation happens, though, besides just noting the empirical evidence from past examples? Can the idea of establishing a basic, across-the-board income intervene here and enable those usually too consumed by work or disenfranchised to *fully* participate, rather than just expressively or symbolically?

[I am not sure that a basic income would make a decisive difference for participation in EPG-type activities. Most adults would still probably be working full time jobs, so time constraints would continue to be an issue. The one saving grace in all this is that time pressures tend to be greater among elites than among working class people, so the bias in a participatory system will work against people in relatively privileged positions.] And just how problematic is the pragmatic orientation of EPG, most notably expressed in its tendency to deflect practical efforts from radically addressing “inequalities of power and privilege” (9)? **[The hope here is that an environment in which democratic deepening was occurring around pragmatic problem-solving would support a more egalitarian political culture even if those issues were not central to the most EPG deliberations. A political context of participation in practical decisionmaking – it might be thought – would underwrite a political cultural of egalitarianism which would facilitate political measures against inequalities of power and privilege.]**

I think we need to move from an assumption about people’s choices regarding participation to examining embedded exclusionary practices within the governance structures themselves. Considering Chantal Mouffe’s work [and others’ projects] on the way the “public realm of modern citizenship has been based on the negation of women’s experiences” can be useful, and I would add that the forward-thinking, radical egalitarian future of EPG must extend to a recognition of different social relations and positionalities, according to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc. (Mouffe, Chantal. *The Return of the Political*. New York: Verso, 2005.) So then, does EPG call for a new kind of citizen, or simply a new system of participation and empowerment for “ordinary citizens” [as they/we exist now]? What else needs to happen first before we can deepen democracy and create an “organized countervailing power” to negotiate some of these

preexisting and embedded power dynamics? **[I do not think that EPG requires that we first generate a new kind of citizen. The idea is that the kind of citizens we get is endogenous to the forms of political practice in which people live their lives, and EPG institutions would themselves contribute to forming a new kind of citizen. You raise the very interesting and important issue of “a recognition of different social relations and positionalities, according to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.” as being essential to a truly robust, deep democracy. I agree strongly with this, but a lot hinges on precisely what is meant by “recognition” here. The problem is that deliberation revolves around reason-giving and *reasonableness* – around making arguments that can be heard as reasonable to the listener. If dialogue is across identities (positionalities) this means that speakers and listeners have to be willing to go outside or beyond their “positionality” in order to generate mutual understanding and communication. This is one of the reasons for the pragmatic orientation of the EPG model, because that is a context in which such trans-positional deliberation may be most feasible, and this provides the grounding for the kind of understandings needed for other political projects. Ultimately, I think, a truly radical democratic egalitarian politics requires a universalistic set of identity-anchors interconnected with whatever positional-identity one has. Saying this, of course, invokes a somewhat old-fashioned Enlightenment perspective that argues for a fundamental commonality of the human beings as members of a potential moral community and thus the possibility of reason giving for solving problems. Oppression, inequality, domination obviously disrupt this profoundly, which is why so much of politics becomes reduced to positionality and particularism.]**

And while I agree that the first, “Bottom-Up Empowered Participation,” feels “the most obvious” of all the elements, I think it bears an important similarity to one of the foundational principles of Catholic Social Tradition—subsidiarity. The main idea behind this principle is to “regulate the movement from marginalization to participation for the sake of the common good,” in that people who are bound up with the consequences of decisions should be directly positioned to effect those decisions and participate within the deliberation and negotiation processes. (<http://socialconcerns.nd.edu/mission/cst/cst.shtml>) Though the principles of CST are largely ignored by the Church’s actual practices, groups of political activists continue to attempt to radically employ them through liberation theology and the preferential option for the poor, with varying degrees of success.

Dimitri Seals

The demand for countervailing power in the model of empowered participatory governance is rare in models for participatory democracy, and it is hugely important. Time and again, proposals for deliberative democracy get caught up in the assumption that if state representatives can just gather enough stakeholders in the room, they can work things out without replicating the power imbalances that exist outside the deliberative space. I was glad to see this chapter take a stand against this assumption, but

disappointed that the call for a countervailing power remained vague. Readers get only a few broad examples of possible countervailing powers (“popular political parties, unions, and social movement organizations”) before they are left with a very all-purpose call to action: “empowered participatory governance requires some form of organized countervailing power in order to be sustained over time” (11). Such an important and controversial principle as countervailing power calls out for clarity both in examples and in calls to action. Social movement organizations, unions, and political parties that claim to be popular too often fall victim to internal hierarchies that mirror and replicate social divisions outside the organization; most develop their own elites that tend to emulate dominant classes in order to engage with them (e.g., when leaders act as lobbyists, they tend to “talk the talk”) at the cost of closeness to the excluded classes that they nominally represent. I would have loved a call to action that acknowledges this pattern and pushes to investigate and eliminate all power differences that stand in the way of fair deliberation, both inside and out of the traditional organizational homes of countervailing power. A few tools for building a strong and coherent version of countervailing power might be too much for the narrative to bear, but they would definitely be useful. **[I would love any suggestions about how to get behind vague gestures for this problem. What it takes for countervailing power to actually work seems to heavily context-dependent that it is hard to specify any general rules or principles. Piven argues that what is really required is trouble-making capacity – the ability to actively disrupt the smooth working of the system and make life more difficult for elites. Her view is that it is only when threats are real that elites are willing to make compromises and engage in more or less good faith problem-solving. The problem, of course, is that the logic-of-threats is in a deep tension with the logic-of-deliberation. In the concluding chapter of *Deepening Democracy* Archon Fung and I talk about these issues. Perhaps I should bring some of that into the discussion here.]**

It strikes me that this push would be as valuable in representative democracy as in direct, which leads to another question: right now the narrative emphasizes the differences between the principles and strategies that apply in the three main forms of democracy discussed here. Would the point come home more strongly if the narrative emphasized continuity and harmony rather than difference? The last paragraph of the section on deepening direct democracy suggests to the reader that the core elements of empowered participatory governance lose their effect outside of direct democracy: after asserting that institutions embodying the core elements of EPG have the potential to deepen democracy, it goes on to claim that “direct democracy, however, cannot be the only pillar of a socially empowered democratic state. It is also essential to formulate real utopia designs for representative democracy and for associational democracy”. But the reform ideas in the representative democracy section fall easily into alignment with the core elements of the direct democracy section. For me, the chapter would be much more powerful if the core elements of the EPG model were treated as more or less general principles of democratization, whose application – rather than internal structure – would vary widely in response to context. The chapter could still consider how to deepen democracy in the three forms, but could use general principles of democratization – backed up by examples relevant to each form – to hammer the message home. **[We should discuss this so I understand your intuition here better. Some of the EPG**

principles might be directly relevant to representative democracy, but not all. The pragmatic orientation, for example, would not be a good constraint to impose on representative institutions. Also the “recombinant decentralization” doesn’t seem the best way to specify the relationship between decentralized representative assemblies and more centralized higher-order assemblies. There are certainly some general abstract principles of “deep democracy” that should apply to all three of these “pillars”, but I am not sure that they are *design* principles of the sort specified in EPG.]

Jorge Sola

1- The *Democracy Card* is a good and original idea. However, I wondered whether it was an American-centric one or not. I don’t know a lot about comparative politics, especially with regard to different ways to finance political parties and campaigns. But it seems to me that the extraordinary influence of money in politics is lesser in Europe than in America, because in the former there are semi-public financial systems of political parties depending on their electoral force. Unfortunately, there is also private finance, which often is neither transparent nor controlled. But it could be controlled, or even forbidden, without the *Democracy Card*. Thus, although I found it very interesting, I think that in many political systems the biggest hurdles to gain access to the political arena are other ones, as the non-proportional character of many electoral systems, which make the existence of alternative forces very difficult. **[The democracy card idea could have advantages over straight public financing of electoral campaigns because of the way it gives ordinary citizens influence over the resources available to candidates and parties. I am not sure that its only purpose is to counter *private wealth* in politics; it might also be relevant in countering state-bureaucratic control over politics as well.]**

2- I find that none of the sketched proposal affects the core of State power: either because they are municipal ones (as Participatory Budgeting) or because they are rather lateral ones (*Democracy Card* shapes electoral campaigns and Random Selection Citizen Assemblies concern specific issues). All of them are valuable proposal, but I wondered whether other more ambitious (or, at least, more related with the core of State power) proposals would be possible or not. For instance: a broader range of strong accountability measures, an empowerment of parliaments and a promotion of the publicity of debates, institutional designs to make representatives more responsive to represented people, and so on.

In this sense, I miss the role and working of political parties in your approach. Since they are one of the most important links between social power and State power, it is crucial envisioning ways to democratize them. (Of course, the importance of political parties and politicians varies: in some countries the weight of the former is bigger, while in other ones the latter have enough autonomy. So perhaps this time is my position what is Euro-centric.) Political parties are, often, if not always, apparently democratic and essentially oligarchic. That is because behind the formal rules of majority election there are strong

patronage (boss-client) networks and iron laws which consolidate professional elites running the organizations without social control. Democratization of political parties is significant, again, intrinsically and instrumentally. On the one hand, it would improve democracy. On the other hand, since political parties are a decisive organizational weapon to struggle for the proposals sketched in the book, their democratization will make these reforms more achievable.

How can we do it? I don't really know. But I would like to suggest three old-school measures, in line with the Random Election: the very Random Election to some responsibilities in local and medium levels of the party; the strict limitation of years and rotation in responsibility positions and public posts; and the shortening of time that a committee can be in office within the very party. All of them would contribute to the *diachronic* separation of powers within political parties, what would undermine the running by elites and would make possible a social empowerment from below.

[Interesting points. I agree that political parties are pivotal in any plausible deepened democracy and they constitute a central association in my concept of social empowerment. So democratizing parties seems like a central task in the subordination of the state to civil society. It is, however, a tricky business to think of a general design for democratic accountability within parties that would avoid a range of perverse effects – like making parties more amateurish, or shortening the time horizons of political actors, or undermining the continuity of leadership and thus the coherence of parties by making parties more vulnerable to aggressive takeovers by factions, etc. I don't have any great ideas on this score. One idea, that is popular in some quarters, is to shift from standard proportional representation electoral systems to what is called STV – single transferable vote – systems. In an STV system the party itself does not determine the rank ordering of its candidates in a multimember district; voters do. When a voter goes to the polls in, say, a five member multi-member district, the voter casts five rank-ordered votes for individual candidates. These can be five different candidates within a single party or across parties. There is then a procedure for redistributing votes of candidates that are eliminated, but this has the effect of making candidates within a party compete somewhat with each other in the election and this increases their accountability to voters.]

Roi Livne

The three alternative systems of democratic governance described in chapter 5 offer three fundamentally different forms of democratic decision-making. I don't think I managed to understand the merits that Erik finds in Associational Democracy from the brief outline he gives in the last section, so I will only relate to the two other systems – representative and direct democracy.

It seems to me that in all of the discussions we have had in class people were concerned about the dangers that social and political engineering entail. These dangers are particularly relevant for the chapter we read. Planning the procedures through which decisions are made in democracy is necessary in order to ensure the involvement and

influence that citizens have in politics. However, such planning puts a lot of power in the hands of the planner, which might constitute a problem in itself. I think that a project of utopist planning, such as the one Erik is trying to promote, must address this issue directly. Reflexivity and a recognition of our own social positions as academic social planners should not debunk our projects, but rather improve them, as it will help us in democratizing not only decision-making processes, but also the way in which they are planned. **[While in a book like this it may seem that the design of the institutions is being created by planners, in fact the designs develop endogenously through struggles and improvisation. I don't think this removes the problem you are raising, but in practice the participants in institutions significantly can affect the course of evolution of the designs themselves. This is certainly what happened in Porto Alegre.]**

Both the representative and the direct democratic alternatives that Erik discusses put power in the hands of the people involved in the administration of the democratic system. The system of random selection citizen assemblies, for example, will give much power to the professional classes, which will manage the sampling process, and for the media, which will hold the power to decide which “parts of the weekend events are broadcasted on television.” This might open many possibilities for manipulations of public opinion and to an undemocratic dynamics covered by a democratic façade. **[I doubt if there is any institutional design that can avoid opening “possibilities for manipulations of public opinion and to an undemocratic dynamics covered by a democratic façade.” Political theorists have a fond illusion that if only they can get the design of institutions just right then we can all relax and a stable, democracy-reproducing equilibrium will occur. But I think this is unrealistic: we can never relax. The maintenance of robust democracy requires activism and collective action, and the trajectory will inevitably go through episodes of democratic erosion and – hopefully – democratic revitalization. The best hope is that some designs will make this cycle more energetic and sustainable. So, I think it is inevitable that some people will play a bigger role in others in setting parameters of deliberation, of putting agendas on the table, of filtering information. The main issue is how transparent this is and how subject to criticism and correction.]**

Direct democracy, as manifested in the Porto Alegre model, seems less likely to concentrate power in the hands of the few. Yet, I think that its implementation in other places should be made through its adjustment to particular places and societies. I think that the success in Porto Alegre owes much to the fact that this project evolved as a grassroots movement; its application in other places as a uniform decision-making system might be harmful. The Porto Alegre model depends on citizens' political consciousness and participation, which develop in tandem with the application of the participatory model. Therefore, developing a participatory model in a certain social environment should take into consideration the specific characters of this environment and not serve as a top to bottom application of a ready-made model. **[There is a real tension – which you identify – between, on the one hand, the principle of not continually reinventing the wheel, but rather learning from best practices and experience of others, and, on the other, of flexibly adapting and modifying institutions to the specific context. Models become reified as formulas and are used as strategies by clever political actors to get their way rather than as a starting point for ongoing experimentation.]**

The idea of continuous democratic experimentalism is thus pretty important here as an overarching principle in the translation of institutional designs from one place to another.]

Fidan Elcioglu

I was very excited by this chapter, and the prospect of really thinking hard about the kinds of democratic changes we would want to see take place. As EOW points out, however, any institutional variation of democratic rule can be managed in such a way that either thin or thick/deep democracy can result. I think this is an important caveat that forces us to consider not only the outward form of a political structure, but the very intricate processes involved in making these institutions work, what kind of political culture it cultivates, what kinds of power relations the political processes are embedded in and so forth.

With that in mind, I wanted to discuss further the potential for Random Selection Citizen Assemblies. Specifically, in the British Columbia experiment, who organized the “intensive lectures, seminars and discussions” (16)? Who assembled the information that was to be presented and who decided the overall format of how this deliberation process would take place? Who paid for the delegates’ expenses and the weekend honorariums (I’m guessing it came from the state)? On a more theoretical level, how would this system make room for “ordinary” people who have very vested interests in the final decision? How would local information be systematically collected? The assumption is that when a local issue is being decided through this random assembly, at least one person will be from that local site and will be armed with the necessary “local” knowledge. Can the inclusion of local knowledge be systematically guaranteed and balanced against the need for more “technical”/ “professional” expert-related knowledge? Finally, on a perhaps more theoretical level, can this kind of democratic system really address structural inequalities? **[First, the idea of a “randomocracy” – or what some people have called “demarchy” in contrast to “democracy” – is that this would serve certain kinds of specific purposes in an overall democracy, not that it would replace electoral representation. The purpose is to undercut the role of professional politicians in the representative process by giving a role at every level of the system to ordinary citizens. In the BC assembly, the main architects of the process were faculty and students in the UBC political science department. The Provincial government paid for it, but the actual materials, seminars, discussion, etc. were organized by academics. I have a grad student, Amy Lang, who was a participant observer of the process from start to finish and is finishing her dissertation on the Assembly. One of her central interests is precisely the problem of agenda-setting and the extent to which participants operate within fixed parameters or alter those parameters in various ways. (I will send this to her so she can add her reflections as well). There was an attempt to have the assembly members participate in local listening sessions – sort of hearings – during the summer as a way of getting more local knowledge and discussion infused into the process, but I gather from Amy that this was one of the least successful parts of the process.]**

Amy Lang comments:

Theoretically, because the random sample of Assembly members was geographically stratified with 2 members from each electoral district, they could claim to have geographically local knowledge, but I think the Assembly members agreed that this geographic knowledge was not the only important consideration in choosing an electoral system. They concluded at the end of the public hearings that it was important to listen to the values expressed by the public (in over 50 hearings, again geographically scattered) but that in the end the Assembly members had to use their own judgment as well. This was the case because many people showed up at the public hearings claiming to be ordinary citizens with a vested interest in a particular electoral system (mixed member proportional) but didn't actually know the details of the system very well. (These public hearing participants had been mobilized to attend by the BC Green party, which had advocated for electoral reform for some years).

More generally, I think the idea of 'local knowledge' should not be taken only as knowledge of a locality (ie. a particular geographic area) but rather as knowledge that is particularly available to citizen-participants (as opposed to experts) by virtue of their *social* location and their relations to the state and government. Maybe it should be called "experiential knowledge" instead. Sometimes this overlaps with knowledge about a geographic area, sometimes not. In the BC case, for ex., participants expressed a frustration with the choices that were available to them on the ballot, with the lack of representation of women, ethnic minority groups & aboriginal people, with strict party discipline that meant their local representatives had to sometimes vote against the interests of their individual ridings. This is experiential knowledge that transcended geographic boundaries.

On the balance of expert & citizen knowledge: The value of the Citizens Assembly process is that it creates space for citizens to both pool their experiential knowledge and also to gain some technical knowledge as well. The point of the process is to have the citizens weigh their experiences & values against the technical options that are available, in order to choose a course of action. This is quite different from a normal consultation process in which citizens articulate values, but experts, bureaucrats or politicians get to choose from among technical options. In BC, we saw that the combination of identifying values & matching them to the available technical options produced quite a different recommendation for electoral reform than what other expert panels had recommended in the rest of Canada.

Apart from the inequality between organizers and citizen-participants, I agree there are problems of power-knowledge & social status inequalities among citizens. The goal should be to ensure that everyone's concerns are adequately addressed in the course of making a decision. I think some of the inequalities among citizens can be overcome with more attention to the processes that are used for determining their collective values, including agenda-setting, a more systematic expression of individual concerns & experiences before pooling begins, processes of preference aggregation that take into account minority viewpoints, and with extended critical reflection on what is considered common ground. Social divisions that are more contentious (for ex. Gender or racial inequalities) and/or that don't have immediate,

practical solutions will be harder to address within the context of a Citizens Assembly process.