

German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ)

DIJ Social Science Study Group



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Merits and Challenges of Deliberative Democracy in Japan

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Like other representative democracies, Japan has been facing democratic challenges which have eroded democratic representation, political accountability and legitimacy. The voter-turnout for the last Lower House elections, for instance, was at a record low. Consequently, the legitimacy of the parliamentary representatives was diminished. Decreasing trust in state elites has additionally fueled the political abstinence. To counteract this (partial) democratic “crisis”, Japanese national and local governments have implemented numerous democratic innovations, or in other words new institutionalized forms of participatory decision-making processes, especially deliberations. Deliberations are here defined as participatory methods where randomly selected citizens are discussing a given political topic among each other.

Based on theoretical concepts dealing with the quality of democracy and with democratic innovations (Diamond and Morlino 2005; Smith 2009; Geissel 2012), this talk asks whether implementing deliberations can counteract the “crisis” of Japanese representative democracy. Therefore, two deliberative methods, namely mini-publics and deliberative polls, are evaluated in this talk. Local mini-publics (*shimin tōgikai*) are the most frequent form of deliberations in Japan. Randomly selected citizens are asked to develop recommendations for local policies. The first national deliberative poll (*tōrongata yoronchōsa*) was held in Japan in 2012 under the impression of the triple disaster on 3/11. A random sample of 285 citizens deliberated national energy strategies until the year 2030. The presentation evaluates these cases carefully by conceptual criteria, and thus highlights the merits and the challenges of improving the quality of representative democracy.

Momoyo Hüstebeck holds as a postdoctoral research position at the Institute of East Asian Studies at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany. As the principal investigator of a project funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (2018 - 2021), she is researching deliberative methods in Japan and Germany from a comparative perspective. She scrutinizes the implementations of deliberations and their outputs for both representative democracies with a focus on political cultures. Her previous research projects cover civil society, democratic innovations, decentralization, local governance and political representation of women in Japan and Germany.

About:

The DIJ Social Science Study Group is a forum for scholars conducting research on contemporary Japan. Meetings are held once a month and are open to speakers from all disciplines of the social sciences. The event is open to all. Registration is not necessary but appreciated, online at www.dijtokyo.org.

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