THE FUTURE OF SELF-GOVERNING, THRIVING DEMOCRACIES

DEMOCRATIC INNOVATIONS BY, WITH AND FOR THE PEOPLE

Brigitte Geissel

The Future of Self-Governing, Thriving Democracies

This book offers a new approach for the future of democracy by advocating to give citizens the power to deliberate and to decide how to govern themselves.

Innovatively building on and integrating components of representative, deliberative and participatory theories of democracy with empirical findings, the book provides practices and procedures that support communities of all sizes to develop their own visions of democracy. It revitalizes and reinfuses the 'democratic spirit' going back to the roots of democracy as an endeavor by, with and for the people, and should inspire us in our search for the democracy we want to live in.

This book is of key interest to scholars and students in democracy, democratic innovations, deliberation, civic education and governance and further for policy-makers, civil society groups and activists. It encourages us to reshape democracy based on citizens' perspectives, aspirations and preferences.

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Routledge Studies in Democratic Innovations

Representative democracy faces several major challenges in contemporary times. Two of the most prominent challenges are the problematic functioning of its institutions and the decreasing popular legitimacy of its decision-making process. The gap between citizens and institutions widens and has major impact on politics and society. This book series aims to bridge the gap between various perspectives on democratic innovations, and examines the determinants, functioning and consequences of democratic innovations from both a theoretical and empirical perspective.

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Preface

How will people live together when they become self-governing? What might communities look like, when their members decide themselves about how to run their political affairs? These questions were and are the driving forces in my academic life. I am not the only one asking these questions. All over the world, citizens are searching for answers.

I completely agree with Jane Mansbridge's (2014, p. 8) insight that political science should "help human beings to govern themselves". This book goes further. It inspires citizens and communities to *develop their own vision of democracy* and to *decide* about the democracy they want to live in. It revitalizes and reinfuses the 'democratic spirit' often buried under layers of citizens' political dissatisfaction, distrust and anger. It reimagines democracy going back to its roots: Democracy is an endeavor by, with and for the people—to rephrase Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address. It is visionary in the best sense of the word.

Why am I interested in visions? *Visions* were and are always guiding for me. They gave direction for my journey through life. I was brought up in a Catholic, working-class family in Germany—considered as uneducated and underprivileged by all standard definitions. My parents, who received only a primary education, were able to read and to write—with no clue about grammar, orthography or punctuation. As a woman from such a low-class family in the German conservative educational system, the probability of becoming a university professor was not much higher than zero. It was an unlikely dream. But my dream materialized. Dreams and visions can offer perspective and even sometimes come true. And I am convinced we need new visions of what might be, new dreams for better democracies.

And these visions must be based on the—refined—preferences of ordinary people. Also the politically least engaged can add substantive and important contributions. Let me give a personal example. My parents had a lot of knowledge and expertise, but none in fields that were considered important by highly educated intellectuals. In public conversations they rarely, if ever, opened their mouths about politics. Nevertheless, they had high moral values and a clear vision of the kind of community they wanted to live in. Their vision was of a fair and honest community, in which people would be treated

equal and feel responsible for each other, where giving and taking would be in balance. And they applied their ethical standards to themselves. They would have never cheated on taxes. And they considered community service as pleasant civic duty. When communities decide how to govern themselves, it is essential that also people like them, the ordinary, are included.

For those who may think the ideas presented here are naïve, I can assure you: This book is based on academic debate, empirical findings and profound expertise. It advances democratic theory and develops novel scenarios that are based on existing experiences. It discusses the potentials, advantages and disadvantages of old as well as new practices and procedures for political will-formation and decision-making. In other words, this book rests on facts combined with foresight.

This book makes an original contribution to academia as well as to citizens and communities thirsty for ideas on self-governing. The visions I present here rest on and simultaneously advance academic research. In that sense, this is an academic book contributing to research on the future of democracy and democratic innovations. It intends to shift the debate toward a *citizen-driven approach*. But it is not only an academic book. I have gone to great lengths to write it in a language understandable by nonacademic individuals. Although the academic contribution is crucial, it is not the final goal. The final goal is to encourage people to develop their own visions of the democracy they want to live in. I review theoretical debates and empirical evidence, I collect, evaluate and process knowledge in order to *provide well-founded and inspiring ideas for citizens and communities*.

This book combines and advances different threads of my research conducted over the span of my 30 years as a political scientist. During my academic life, I was always interested in questions of self-governing. I studied politicians and representation, social movements and civil society, deliberative practices and direct democracy, citizens' political critique and their democratic preferences. This book weaves these threads into a new frame, a frame that enables us to *comprehend democracy as a truly citizen-driven way of governing*.

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Acknowledgments

Introduction

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at……
   Progress is the realization of utopia.

(Oscar Wilde)

Today, democracy implies being governed by elected representatives. Unfortunately, this kind of democracy is not working well, and in some cases, it works not at all. Descriptions of the current crisis of democracy are filling libraries. The representative, party-based model of democracy is under threat. We are experiencing the highest level of political dissatisfaction since 1995 as a recent report covering over 100 democracies across the planet shows (Foa et al., 2020). While in the 1990s, about two-thirds of citizens were contented with the democracies in their countries, today a majority is frustrated. Trust in politicians and parliaments shrank dramatically. The gap between citizens and decision-makers widened considerably. Increasingly, parts of society feel excluded from democratic processes and bid farewell to politics. In extreme cases, as recently witnessed in the United States, citizens take up arms and storm their capitol! It is an understatement to say current representative democracy seems to be stuck in stagnation. The promise of democracy as a 'rule of the people' has gotten lost in the Bermuda Triangle of untrustworthy, unresponsive politicians, dysfunctional institutions of representation and disenchanted citizens (Fishkin & Mansbridge, 2017; Tormey, 2015; Van Reybrouck, 2016).

We are witnessing growing, sometimes even savage hunger for transformation. Citizens want democracy. But they want a democracy, which is concerned about their needs, interests and preferences. They want a democracy that is not limited to elections and party competition. They want a democracy in which they can actually influence political decisions (see Section 4.1).[1] These desires are the impetus for a *search for new visions*.

But it is not yet clear where the journey should go. What would a new vision for democracy look like? And how would it be realized? This book intends to help communities[2] to develop ideas about how to govern themselves. It

does not advertise a certain political practice, procedure or model. It does not try to convince communities to stick with or desert electoral representation, to install deliberative citizens' assemblies, to introduce direct democracy or to opt for an expertocracy. It encourages communities to start a process of rethinking their democracy. It offers suggestions. You might call it a kind of '*democratic midwifery*' for creating new visions. Not just one, but many.

Visions are well known in the world of politics. In fact, substantial political change has always started as a visionary idea. The best example is democracy itself, which was not more than a vision 300 years ago. Thousands of people endorsed the dream of being included in political decision-making. They envisaged a system, in which citizens rule. The United States was built on a dream of a form of self-government that had not yet been implemented anywhere else before. Yet, the 'dreamers' were convinced that democracy would be a good thing. And they fought to make their visions come true. This book introduces new visions that I call Thriving Democracies.

From representative to Thriving Democracies

In general, democracy means the rule of people. A system is democratic, when it is oriented toward and driven by the preferences, interests and needs of all its people. These are the main promises of democracy. But how are these promises realized? Until recently, many citizens as well as scholars link—or even reduce—democracy to elections and party-competition. Some even consider elections and party-competition as the main characteristics of democracy. From this perspective, a political system is a democracy, when free and fair elections are held with the choice between at least two parties (see debate in Geissel et al., 2016; Marshall et al., 2012; Munck, 2016; Vanhanen, 2000).

This perspective is based on the theory of representative, party-based electoral democracy. According to this theory, citizens execute the rule of the people by electing a party. The existence of different parties allows citizens to choose which party aligns best with their preferences and interests. The elected representatives make decisions on behalf of the citizens. Thus, even though decision-making is firmly in the hands of politicians, citizens have control. This model seems logically convincing in theory.

But actual representative democracies do not necessarily function according to this logic. They are increasingly dysfunctional and outdated. The model of electoral, party-based representative democracy was developed in the 19th and 20th centuries. And it was adequate for the composition of societies in these times. Societies were divided along clear-cut cleavages, e.g., workers versus entrepreneurs or religious versus secular people. These groups shared common, specific, clear and unambiguous interests in almost all parts of life. Parties emerged out of these clear cleavages and acted as mouthpieces, transmitting the interests of 'their groups' to decision-makers. For example, the party representing the workers stood for better salaries and better working conditions as well as for a worker-friendly welfare-regime; the party

representing the entrepreneurs stood up for ownership rights, less protection for workers and a parsimonious welfare-regime (Lipset & Rokkan, 1990).

But these times are over. Societies are no longer divided along such clear-cut cleavages. Societies are fragmented and individualized. Being a worker no longer means belonging to a distinct and discrete group with common interests.[3] Some workers earn good money, others struggle to make ends meet; some workers prefer a parsimonious welfare-regime, others want generous social policies; some want more money, others opt for more free time.

Since cleavages no longer exist as they did during the time when parties emerged, today parties can hardly represent distinct, discrete groups. The growing number of new parties, which often portray themselves as 'non-party' or 'movement-party',[4] and their rising success prove the end of the above-described traditional model of parties emerging out of established clear-cut groups along enduring cleavages. France, Italy or Peru are just a few examples, where new parties are on the rise and even in the government. But the vastly changing party landscape cannot mend the disaster that most citizens neither feel represented by any party nor do they trust parties (see Chapter 5). The kind of electoral, party-based democracy we know today is a model of the past. Although recently a few scholars put new hope on parties and their contributions to well-working democracies (Biale & Ottonelli, 2019; Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2020), parties seem to be no longer sufficient to realize self-governing (Bonotti & Weinstock, 2021; see also, e.g., Invernizzi-Accetti & Wolkenstein, 2017). The crisis of democracy can hardly be solved by the renovation of established parties or the emergence of more and more new parties.

In order to address this crisis, many countries have launched and experimented with participatory reforms (Geissel & Newton, 2012). Participatory reforms are not completely new. In the 1990s, for example, many governments around the world introduced direct democratic instruments (Scarrow, 2001) and deliberative practices have been applied for two decades now (Dryzek et al., 2019; Fishkin, 2009). But recently participatory reforms and innovations are mushrooming and the OECD (2020a) even speaks of a wave of "innovative citizen participation and new democratic institutions" sweeping current democracies.[5]

Although these reforms may have great potential, I argue that they do not suffice to realize self-governing. Politicians and experts suggest reforms they consider as functional without asking what citizens actually want. For example, several reforms try to enhance the communication between citizens and representatives (Bedock, 2017; Neblo et al., 2018). But citizens might prefer to make some decisions themselves instead of only improving their interaction with politicians. And even when representatives move away from the pure representative form of democracy and embark on the journey toward more citizens' involvement, power is seldom divided. Representatives decide about the direction of the journey and where it ends. A good example is the German state Brandenburg. State parliament had allowed citizens to

initiate the recall of mayors with a rather low quorum of signatures but then raised this quorum substantially although citizens were content with the low quorum (Geissel & Jung, 2018). The reforms are not chosen, changed or cancelled on the basis of the democratic preferences of citizens and communities but based on the preferences of the political elite. The superiority of representative democracy and the monopoly of representatives remain unquestioned (see Chapter 6).

We need new visions for the future of democracy going beyond this monopoly. This book develops such novel visions, which I refer to as Thriving Democracy or plural *Thriving Democracies*. The term 'thriving' has two interconnected meanings, which enlighten our thinking about the democratic future. 'Thriving' means lively, flourishing, functioning prosperously. And 'thriving' also involves continuous progress. Few authors have applied the term Thriving Democracies, the most famous was probably the poet Walt Whitman (1819–1892). In his poems, Whitman portrays democracies as an ideal goal, which cannot be reached easily and quickly. Whitman assumes "democracy to be at present in its embryo condition" and thus "the fruition of democracy resides altogether in the future". For Whitman, democracy is a long-term, forward-looking endeavor toward a dynamic, open, inclusive way of life, which serves all people.[6] Advancing these ideas, democracy can only flourish when it is constantly improving self-governing based on the visions of communities and citizens.

But what exactly is my understanding of the term *self-governing*? Self-governing means that a community is governed by its own people. Self-governing is a continuous, collective activity. It starts with the *novelty that citizens and communities decide how they want to govern themselves* (Chapter 1). Self-governing is more than electing representatives, casting a 'yes-or no' ballot in a referendum or participating in a citizens' assembly every now and then. It is at the heart of self-governing that citizens deliberate and decide about the tenets and the setup of the democracy they want to live in. Citizens agree on how to reach collectively binding and accepted decisions. In its core, *self-governing means that citizens and communities are the creators, authors and owners of their democracy*.

Furthermore, in contrast to terms like self-government or self-governance, the term self-governing emphasizes an *active, citizen-driven, dynamic character*. Self-governing is not about a static set of institutions as the term government insinuates, but an ongoing endeavor. Political will-formation and decision-making are *lived* by all members of a community. Citizens *determine and live their democracy*.

This approach implies that there is *no one-size-fits-all democracy* (similarly Saward, 2021). In the span of my 30-year career I have travelled to diverse areas around the globe, and I have learned that communities have rather different ideas about self-governing. Just a few examples: I lived in several parts of Germany (East and West), I worked in the United States and in Finland, I taught in Vietnam and I spent many months in numerous parts

of the world. People had developed very different visions of what democracy means to them, and how they want to govern themselves. For example, most Finns seem to feel at ease living in a representative democracy. In contrast, citizens in many US states are rather dissatisfied with representation. They want more direct say. And even for the most democratic Vietnamese, the Western concept sounds less convincing, and her idea of democracy involves unique aspects. My experiences go hand in hand with current debates that democracy means different things to different people and communities (Collier & Levitsky, 1997). Democracy is context-sensitive (e.g., Abromeit, 2004; Doorenspleet, 2015). Accordingly, also studies on the quality of democracy start to bid farewell to a uniform understanding of democracy. The most recent endeavor in this field is the Varieties of Democracy Project, which distinguishes several models of democracy existing in the world, mainly electoral, participatory, deliberative and direct democratic ones (Coppedge et al., 2020). Furthermore, current studies show that countries take different participatory trajectories (Geissel & Michels, 2017, 2018)—and this is not only true for states but also for local, regional and supranational communities. For too long, scholars have considered democracy as a system to be set up in a monotonous way with elections and party competition. But communities are diverse and want to govern themselves in diverse ways. When communities decide themselves, they will not develop in uniform ways.

> Summing up: This book is about helping communities to identify the best way to govern themselves. It argues that it is our task as scholars to help communities in their search. This is the key argument, the recurring theme, the central thread woven through this book.

State of the art—what is missing

Of course, I am not the first and only scholar envisioning a better future for democracy. There is a long tradition of contemplation about alternative visions, starting with Aristoteles and many classical works like Pateman's (1970) *Participation and Democratic Theory* or Barber's (1984) *Strong Democracy*. Currently, publications on this topic are mushrooming. This comes as no surprise considering the current crisis of representative democracies. The question of how democracy can be reshaped is 'in the air'. We find an increasing body of literature on this topic but with significant gaps. This book is an attempt to close these gaps.

One shortcoming, most publications share, is their focus on specific practices or models as I explain below in more detail. Most works are more concerned about praising their 'favorites' than about helping communities to develop their own way of self-governing. They do not take into account that communities have different preferences, needs and resources—and that accordingly communities will opt for different options for governing themselves. For example, some communities might be happy with a purely

representative setup, others want more direct democracy or more deliberative practices.

In the following discussion I sort and briefly analyze the existing state of the art. I structure the literature in three bodies—(1) grand normative visions, (2) praise of single practices as potential 'redeemers', and (3) studies comparing participatory practices—and identify their limitations.

1   Several scholars of democracy elaborate inspiring *grand norma-tive visions*. For example, Christina Lafont advocates a "democracy without shortcuts" with a "long, participatory road" arguing vividly against decision-making by randomly selected citizens assemblies (mini-publics[7]). Helen Landemore promotes an "open democracy" favoring a government by mass leadership via "representing and being represented in turn" with "open mini publics" and randomly selected parliaments in the center. She imagines democracy as "lottocratic" rule combined with feedback loops with the public. Jane Mansbridge and others recommend "deliberative systems" with "nodes" and "multiple forms of communica-tion". Some scholars advocate a direct democratic model of democracy (see, e.g., Altman, 2011; Lupia & Matsusaka, 2004). Others argue for an agonistic model with continuous political conflict and contestation due to the pluralist interests in today's societies (Chambers, 2012; Mouffe, 1999). Proponents of the representative party-oriented model praise elections and representation. Tormey (2015, pp. 132–146) advocates "cre-ating impetus, resonances, clamour and turbulence", to "act in 'swarm' or 'crowd' mobilizations", to "create resonance" and to "diffuse power" in "democracy after representation". Also Michael Saward's (2021) work on *Democratic Design*, which promotes "a unique view of dem-ocracy through the lens of design thinking" and a "Democratic design framework" with "second-order modelling", might fit into this body of literature.

These grand normative visions are important to widen our horizon. They are crucial steps on the journey toward self-governing. They are instructive yet more concerned about promoting a certain normative model of democracy. They describe one option, which they insinuate as a prescriptive end point.

But some communities might not want a "deliberative system", "lottocratic rule" or "clamour and turbulence". They might choose to be governed neither by deliberative mini-publics nor by randomly selected rulers. Some might opt for a more consensus-oriented setup, others might like the agonist model. For some communities, "lottocratic rule" might work fine; others might be much more satisfied with direct democracy. Yet, this body of literature does not, or only rudimentarily, include the perspective of leaving the decision of how to govern themselves to the communities. Due to the focus on one model, *these works don't encourage and inspire communities to choose between different options to develop what fits best to their preferences.*

The second shortcoming of these publications is that normative grand ideas remain abstract, elusive and vague. They often do not provide concrete, practical suggestions for citizens and communities, what, for example, "deliberative systems", "nodes", "roads" and "turbulence" would look like in the real world of politics. For example, a community might like the agonistic model, but needs ideas for how to realize the model. Another community might find the model of 'open democracy' fascinating but needs more concrete suggestions for how to run all its political affairs accordingly. With few exceptions, these works are frugal about practices to be applied and connected or which (additional) novel public agencies would be required to make the grand visions work. Saward, for example, lists over a 100 practices, but it remains unclear how they could be combined to produce collective decisions. Landemore refers to the Icelandic participatory process of constitution-making as blueprint and Mouffe to agonist practices. But these suggestions cover only parts of the political world and say little about everyday political business. All in all, these normative, grand visions are brilliant and inspiring, but they do not deliver practical setups of how to put the grand ideas into practice.

2 Another body of literature puts its hopes on *single practices as potential 'redeemers'*. Scholars promote social movements and protest groups (Della Porta, 2013; Della Porta & Diani, 1999; Tormey, 2015), deliberation and deliberative practices (Bächtiger et al., 2018; e.g., Curato et al., 2021; Mansbridge et al., 2012), referendums (Altman, 2015, 2019; Lupia & Matsusaka, 2004; Qvortrup, 2013), participatory budgeting (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014; Sintomer et al., 2016) or liquid democracy (Valsangiacomo, 2021). Authors like van Reybrouck (2016) and Hennig (2017) envision a democracy without politicians ruled by randomly selected parliaments or "multi-body sortition". Gastil and Wright (2019) describe enthusiastically what legislature by lot could look like. Taylor et al. (2020) suggest to "reconstruct democracy from the ground up" with focus on "rebuilding" local political communities. Other scholars opt, in contrast, for an "epistocracy", "technocracy" or an "expertocracy" putting their hopes on the knowledgeable and the experts (Brennan, 2016; see for the debate also Caramani, 2017). Hendriks et al. (2020) promote in their book in *Mending Democracy* everyday activities and describe, for example, the playful protest of the 'Knitting Nannas Against Gas'.[8]

These works are exciting. However, like the body of literature on normative grand visions, they are less concerned about helping communities to develop their own way of self-governing. They overlook that communities might have different preferences, needs and resources. The approach of advertising the authors' favorite practices is important and inspiring. Yet, communities need another kind of support in their search for the practices and procedures, which fit to their specific contexts.

The second shortcoming of this body of literature, as Jäske and Setälä (2019, p. 2) rightly criticize, "is that both theoretical work and empirical studies … focus on the merits and preconditions of one particular institutional device". From my perspective, deliberative citizen assemblies, "multi-body sortition" or social movements—to mention just a few of such advocated practices— are useful components. But that is where it ends. Today's large and complex societies can hardly be governed via mini-publics, referendums, playful protest, liquid democracy or participatory budgeting. More complex suggestions are required, which combine different practices in order to enable citizens to govern themselves (see Chapter 8).

3   Currently, we find an increasing body of *studies examining and comparing the impacts of several novel participatory practices* (Bedock, 2017; Elstub & Escobar, 2019; Geissel & Newton, 2012). These studies compare, for example, the advantages and disadvantages of deliberative practices versus direct democracy (Geissel & Joas, 2013), or they examine how specific procedures like participatory budgeting work in different communities (Ryan, 2021; Sintomer et al., 2016). They also assess why some participatory procedures succeed and others fail (Ryan, 2021; Spada & Ryan, 2017).

These studies are crucial for understanding the benefits as well as the disadvantages of existing innovations. Thus, they are very instructive for developing suggestions for Thriving Democracies (see Part C). Yet, these works have similar shortcomings to the bodies of literature discussed above. They focus on the perspective of scholars. They evaluate practices according to criteria developed by the authors. Some scholars, for example, consider deliberative quality or transferability as crucial criteria (e.g., Geissel & Gherghina, 2016). But communities might want to focus on other criteria, which they consider crucial in their context. A community might want to focus on inclusion since it is severely troubled by polarization. Another community is more concerned about good deliberation. And a third community might focus on effective problem-solving. Up to now, we know very little about the criteria, citizens and communities would like to be fulfilled or achieved via such practices. *We do not know, which democratic tenets they would pursue in their democracies and which practices and procedures they would consider as suitable*.

The second shortcoming of most of these studies is that they look at participatory practices in isolation. Only very few works examine, how these practices interact with each other and with the practices of traditional representative democracy (for this critique see, e.g., Rinne, 2020). For example, the introduction of direct democratic instruments in Switzerland changed the Swiss political system fundamentally. Yet, such interaction effects are seldom scrutinized. Finally, all these studies assess the effects of practices only in the context and under the roof of representative democracy (see Chapter 6). Yet,

communities might want to change their democratic setup fundamentally and, for example, govern themselves via deliberative and direct democratic practices. Few studies have tackled these challenges.

This short tour through the literature shows that *existing publications are less concerned about citizens' and communities' democratic preferences*. Scholars (and other experts) seem to be very convinced of their grand ideas and their favorite practices. They often try to persuade their readers that their ideas are the best to build a better democracy. But such paternalistic attitudes are problematic. A citizen-driven approach is necessary, which supports communities free from bias in their search for their own way of self-governing.

Helping communities to govern themselves—the objective of this book

This book fills this gap. Going back to the roots of democracy; it *aims at helping communities to govern themselves*. It is based on the conviction that citizens and communities should decide about the democracy they want to live in—with a long, ongoing and never-ending process (Chapters 1 and 2). It envisions reshaping democracy from scratch based on citizens' preferences. In order to encourage communities in their search, this book provides a multifaceted plethora of suggestions and offers advice for successful choices.

The proposals presented in this book are not carved in stone and do not serve directly as blueprints. They cannot be transformed into reality in a copy and paste manner. They must be adapted and adjusted by communities according to their specific preferences, needs and resources. This book does not try to convince communities to decide for or against a certain practice or procedure. All in all, this book *invites readers to start a process of reconsidering their democracy*. It encourages and *sets free creative thinking without internal censorship, mental roadblocks and blinkers*. It intends to inspire.

What exactly should the search for 'another democracy' include? Democracy consists of *tenets* on the one hand and of *'operating' setups* for making the tenets come true on the other hand. Or, as Saward (2021, pp. 67–68) put it: "These are the two fundamental building blocks … of democracy". Tenets depend on setups, and vice versa.

In its attempt to push the democratic project, *this book covers and integrates visionary principles and tenets as well as visionary setups with practices and procedures through the lens of citizens' perspectives.* Accordingly, it refers to conceptual literature on democracy, works on participatory innovations and studies on citizens' conceptualizations of democracy. It integrates components of representative and participatory models of democracy in novel ways, while considering none as the predominant 'hegemonial' one (see Box 5.1). It presents one of the first comprehensive synthesis of a wide range of works from neighboring yet distinct academic (sub-)disciplines as well as real-life experiences, which it innovatively connects.

The principles, tenets, practices and procedures proposed in the following pages can be applied in political communities at all levels (local, national, supranational). This book offers suggestions that support communities of all sizes to develop their own visions. Although we do not have sufficient empirical knowledge about effects of all practices and procedures at different levels and within different contexts, we know enough to make inspiring proposals.

Legislative self-governing and 'democracy as a way of life'

This book focusses on self-governing in legislation. But what about democracy as way of life? Isn't democracy more than making legislative decisions? *I am convinced that we cannot achieve a democratic way of life without legislative self-governing and vice versa*. The relationship between legislation and way of life is a symbiotic one in the best sense of the word. Each can only thrive when the other one thrives as well. It is literally impossible to imagine self-governing as a way of life without corresponding legislative procedures. Legislative self-governing is the prerequisite, the expression and the manifestation of the democratic way of life. And the democratic way of life is the prerequisite, expression and manifestation of legislative self-governing. A positive example is a community, in which its legislative self-governing matches its way of life. Citizen involvement in collective will-formation and decision-making is realized in nonpolitical spheres, in kindergartens, schools, universities, families and workplaces. A negative example is a community trying to live a participatory way of life but impeded by a purely representative legislative system with only few options for participatory input. Its legislation is almost opposite to the participatory preferences of the community—preventing the members to live democracy the way they want. Democracy as a way of life and democracy as legislative self-governing depend on each other; each *cannot exist without the other.*

Box 0.1 Will-formation in Thriving Democracies—refining individual and collective preferences

The term will-formation might sound unfamiliar to some readers. It is often used in a philosophical context; for example, Jürgen Habermas has emphasized discursive will-formation between and among citizens as crucial for democracies. The term highlights the formation of the political 'will' of individuals and within a community.

In the context of this book, I define all political activities that seek to express and to *refine* preferences, as will-formation. Practices for individual will-formation as well as practices aiming to achieve collective will-formation of a community are explained in more detail in Chapter 7.

Thriving Democracies in consolidated democracies

Thriving Democracies rely on essential prerequisites, which are warranted only in consolidated democracies. Why? First, consolidated democracies are of course not perfect but most of them have realized a certain level of democratic core elements, i.e., basic human rights and civil liberties like minority protection and political equality. Not all rights and liberties are fully achieved in consolidated democracies, as the Amnesty International Report (2020/2021) clearly demonstrates. But most consolidated democracies are at least formally committed to function according to these values. Thriving Democracies can only flourish in communities, which have established these values. Second, Thriving Democracies require a certain level of economic development. Only when basic needs are met for most people living in a community, they do have the time and energy to realize self-governing. In other words, Thriving Democracies probably work best in middle- and high-income countries. Third, in consolidated democracies citizens already have experience with some democratic features. Thriving Democracies function better when a community has reached a certain level of such democratic competencies, which include the ability to comprehend basic political issues, to be tolerant against people with other opinions, to endorse democracy as best way of organizing communities, and to fully support human rights and liberties (see also Section 4.2). I will refer to these topics in more lengths throughout this book.

Outline of this book

This book is divided in three parts consisting of three chapters each and the conclusion. Part A lays out the *three principles of Thriving Democracies*: The first principle, namely 'citizens decide on how they govern themselves' ('citizen-driven'), is the core and the heart; the second and third principles derive from this principle. The second principle states that citizens monitor the continuous adaption of their democracy. Speaking in jurisprudential terms, the first principle is about the constitutional moment and the second one about renewal and adaption. You might call the second principle the temporal advancement of the first one. The third principle stipulates that citizens' refined will-formation is tightly coupled to decision-making. These principles are elucidated in the first three chapters. The principle 'citizens decide on how to govern themselves', i.e., the citizen-driven constitutional moment, is explained in detail in Chapter 1. The striving for adaption, which involves continuous overall monitoring of the quality of democracy, is spelled out in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 elaborates why citizens' preferences should be refined and feed systematically into political decisions.

Part B discusses *why existing democratic systems fail to realize self-governing*. Chapter 4 elaborates on citizens' democratic preferences as well as their competencies to govern themselves. Chapter 5 summarizes empirical findings on what established practices, applied in representative democracies,