

The newDemocracy Foundation

Chairman's Report 2020

Summary

Since my last report in October 2019, our optimism for political reform continues unabated, notwithstanding the impact of Covid, and the entrenched resistance of politicians in general. We may not have achieved much in terms of tangible progress here in Australia – no new projects commissioned whether at the local government or State level – but there is a manifest and growing interest in political participation more broadly, and in our work in particular. This is reflected internationally with, for example, the not insignificant Citizens' Assembly on Climate in France, and the coverage given to deliberative democracy (and us) in last month's *The Economist* magazine.

Locally

After the successful summer school in Eupen, we were hopeful that the New South Wales Government would embrace a jury project focussed on reforming parliament, but the Premier's Department demonstrated limited appetite. Another stalled project was the NSW anti-discrimination bill. Gabrielle Upton - the Chair of the Joint Parliamentary Committee - approached us to explore a jury on that question. However, the timing was tight, and no project eventuated there either. The only silver lining is that, since Helen Minnican, the Clerk of the Parliament participated in the summer school, she's now exploring a standard approach for public consultation involving mini-publics.

A number of other projects scheduled for this year - especially Mornington Peninsula and Water NSW - have been deferred because of Covid.

We had a successful Grandstand event in December 2019, with Claudia Chwalisz interviewed by Anne Twomey, followed up by Claudia and I on ABC Radio, and then me in July talking on radio about the French Climate Assembly. A feature article on the Biennale and me in the AFR magazine in February also made reference to my work in newDemocracy, but *The Economist* article remains the big breakthrough in media for us.

Separately, we have joined with UTS locally to co-create a new course on deliberative democracy, with an emphasis on the practical aspects of facilitation and management of mini-publics.

Internationally

On the subject of an institutional home for nDF, various attempts by our CEO Iain Walker to merge the *FIDE (Federation for Innovation in Democracy Europe)* initiative (see following) with the Athens Democracy Forum (hosted by the *Culture and Democracy Foundation (CDF)* – have stalled. There may still be some prospect of a relationship, as we have an ally in Nathan Gardels, from *The Berggruen Institute*, who will join the *CDF* Board but also support *FIDE*. In any case, *FIDE* was officially launched this month with the first meeting of its

inaugural Board, chaired (in absentia) by David Van Reybrouck. Together with *G1000* from Belgium, nDF is sponsoring this initiative (with funding and Executive Board involvement) to establish a trusted advisory and advocacy group for deliberative democracy in Europe. We see this as a potential 'institutional home' for nDF. Credit to Iain, and Yves Dejaeghere, for getting FIDE to this stage. Early interest is positive, having garnered the support of many eminent academics and practitioners for the proposed Advisory Board. In addition, several other major international organisations - in particular George Soros' *Open Societies Foundation* and, as mentioned, *The Berggruen Institute* - are exploring being financial sponsors and joining the Executive Board.

The *UNDEF* project is progressing slowly. The first jury in Brazil seems to have been well received by all stakeholders, and Malawi is next, but Covid and travel restrictions are impacting. Macedonia is on the cards for the third site.

We are regularly approached by various organisations for advice. One of the most notable is *Facebook*, whose Head of Government Relations, Crystal Patterson, is having conversations with Iain on how that company - and social media in general - can respond to the ongoing criticism of fake news and political bias.

Democracy R&D- thanks to the indefatigable efforts of David Schechter - continues to do good work. In late February – fortunately just before Covid struck - 60 members convened in Manchester for an *Innovation in Democracy Week* (simultaneously with the OECD and its 'democracy' conference). The week, and the R&D meeting in particular, proved a great success, with members sharing their experiences, and fostering a sense of a global undertaking for deliberative democracy.

More Generally

We are very pleased to have appointed a new *Director of Public Engagement and Outreach* - Polita Cameron. She is tasked with building public support, and we are working on quite a radical plan - informed by traditional political campaigning techniques focussed on targeting swing electorates. Still early days, but exciting!

Prof Carson and Nivek Thompson have done a fabulous job in building the podcast '*Facilitating Public Deliberation*' (available on our website) which has had 4,000+ downloads since it began in February, and - together with our growing body of R&D Notes - is accessed by key players locally and internationally. Manuela Epstein provides, as ever, diligent support with her special attention to our banking, accounting and financial record keeping.

The core team of Iain Walker and Kyle Redman continue to do great work, nevertheless the various setbacks. Iain, as always, leads from the front with immense energy, intelligence and enthusiasm. Credit also to the Board – to Carson and Kathy Jones for, respectively, their wise counsel – and to Geoff Gallop, and Nick Greiner who leaves us at the end of this month. Geoff and Nick have worked so well together, having helped access many incumbent politicians.

Luca Belgiorno-Nettis

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