



## **Group Facilitation and Deep Listening a presentation by Rosa Zubizarreta**

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with some materials from

***Facilitators' insights from the Vorarlberg Citizens' Councils:  
A qualitative research study on the process of collaborative meaning-making***

dissertation by Rosalma (Rosa) Zubizarreta-Ada

**Context for research:**

- Bürgerräte (Citizens' Councils) in Vorarlberg, Austria
- began in 2006; in 2020, were featured in OECD report
- distinctive in their use of DF, a reflective listening approach

# Catching the Deliberative Wave: sortition-based mini-publics

including

Citizens' Assemblies

Citizens' Juries

Citizens' Councils

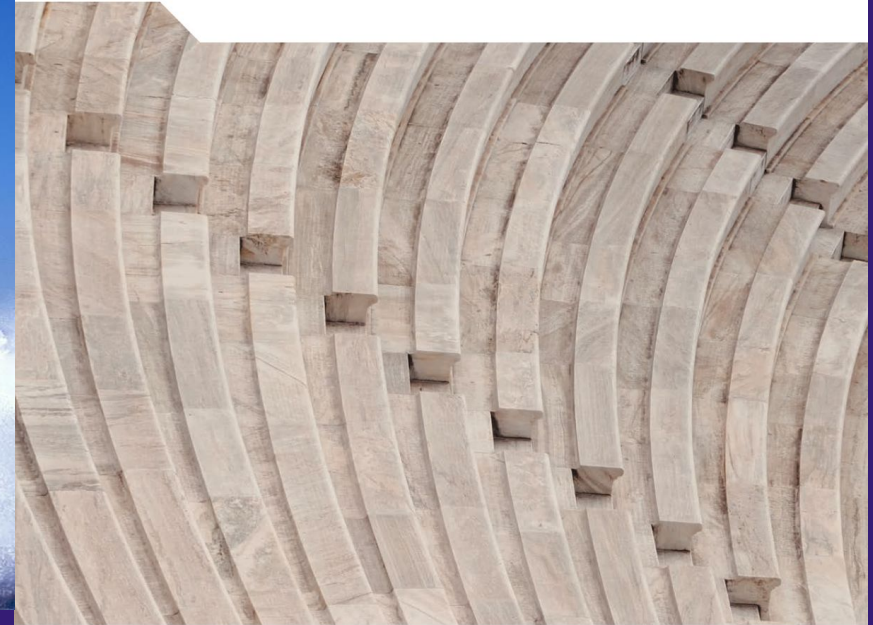
Deliberative Polling

and more....



**Innovative Citizen  
Participation and New  
Democratic Institutions**

CATCHING THE DELIBERATIVE WAVE



Citizens' Councils have been successfully institutionalized in Vorarlberg. They can be initiated by the Governor's office, by the State Congress, or by popular petition of 1,000 signatures.



# Step 1 – Planning meetings



## Step 2 – Recruiting participants



Sortition /  
Democratic Lottery /  
Stratified Sampling

to create a diverse  
microcosm of the  
larger whole

# Step 3 – Facilitated Council Sessions







Outcomes:  
shared statements  
become the Council's  
public policy  
recommendations

Den Menschen hinter  
den Zahlen sehen!!  
Menschlichkeit leben,  
Schicksale sehen

See the people behind the data!!

Es besteht ein Informationsdefizit  
→ muss behoben werden!

There is a lack of information  
→ needs to be resolved!

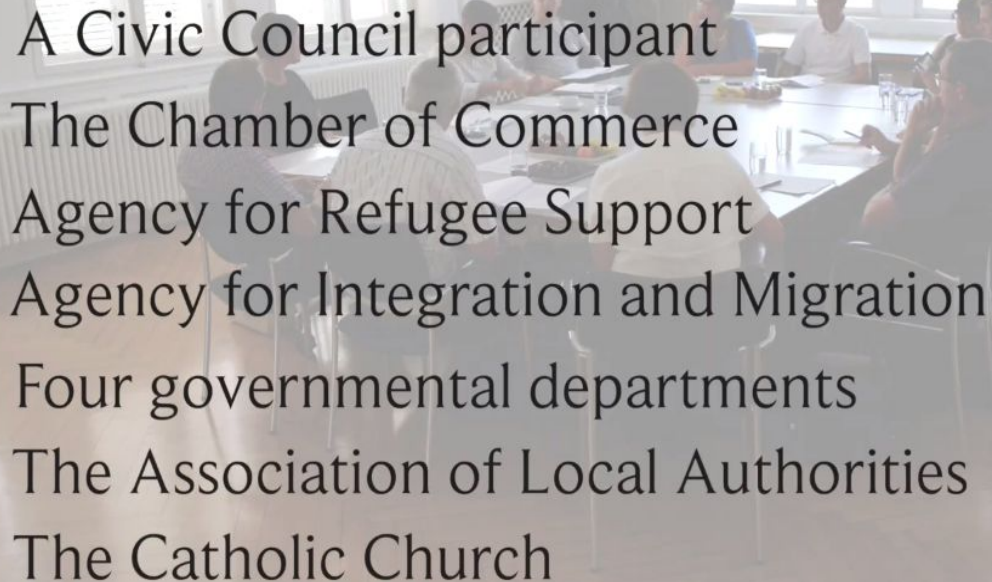
## Step 4 -

The Council presents  
their work at the  
Citizens' Café,  
a public meeting  
inspired by the  
World Café format



## Step 5: Responder Group is formed to track response & implementation of Council's recommendations

e.g from a 2015 Council on asylum seekers & refugees:



A Civic Council participant  
The Chamber of Commerce  
Agency for Refugee Support  
Agency for Integration and Migration  
Four governmental departments  
The Association of Local Authorities  
The Catholic Church

# Step 6 - Implementation & Reporting Back



From dissertation lit review –

group facilitation in deliberative democracy and related fields

- has been largely understudied;
- Is described very differently in different contexts;
- in some places, described minimalistically as:

“just making sure that people follow the rules  
and everyone has a chance to speak....”

- In other instances, facilitators are seen in a more complex light, as working to:

“create a climate of mutual respect  
and psychological safety  
that makes it possible for people  
to consider creative new solutions  
and move from preconceived positions”

James L. Creighton (2004). *The Public Participation Handbook*, Jossey-Bass, p.169.

Creighton offers echoes of Rogers:

“On the basis of my experience, I have found that if I can help bring about a climate marked by ***genuineness, prizing, and understanding***, then exciting things happen. Persons and groups in such a climate move away from rigidity and toward flexibility [...] away from dependence toward autonomy, away from defensiveness toward self-acceptance [...] They exhibit living proof of an actualizing tendency.”

Carl Rogers, 1980, pp. 43-44

## Going beyond the dissertation:

- As Focusing practitioners, we know from experience how reflective listening creates climates of “mutual respect and psychological safety,” & “genuineness, prizing, and understanding”
- DF can be a “focusing-friendly” process - i.e., a simple structure that invites and supports natural felt-sensing
- Pat Omidian has worked with DF as a part of her Community Focusing work in several countries



Back to,

Dynamic Facilitation & Citizens' Councils  
as the context for my research...



March 2000

Dynamic Facilitation Skills Seminar

Port Townsend, WA

Jim and Jean Rough  
founders of Dynamic Facilitation



## How DF got to Austria...



Matthias zur Bosen

brought Dynamic Facilitation  
to Germany in 2005, by  
inviting Jim to teach there



# Vorarlberg, Austria



Büro für Zukunftsfragen



Manfred Hellrigl,  
then director of OFRI,  
attended the seminar  
w/ Jim Rough in 2005,  
organized by  
Matthias zur Bonsen

“Office for Future-Related  
Issues” (OFRI)

(literally, “Office for  
Questions about the Future”)

- *Büro für Zukunftsfragen* is now *Büros für Freiwilliges Engagement und Beteiligung* (Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation)
- Continues to do the same kind of work:
  - civic engagement
  - citizen participation
  - social capital
  - sustainable community and regional development

- The Vorarlberg Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation continues to host Citizens' Councils based on Dynamic Facilitation
- At present (May 2023) they are preparing to host 3 state-wide Councils, each the result of citizen-initiated petitions.

The Büro continues to use DF for this work, as it:

- Generates a highly empathic environment, fostering creative engagement w/ complex societal issues
- Adapts well for local use; more cost-effective than approaches requiring greater investments of time & money to obtain similar results.

## Facilitator's role in Dynamic Facilitation:

- Highly active (“listening out loud”) yet non-directive
- Multi-partial (“taking all sides”) rather than “impartial”
- Maximizing creative tension, while minimizing interpersonal anxiety
- Creating safety by inviting participants speak “into the fire at the center” rather than directly at one another



## In sum, Vorarlberg's Bürgerräte (Citizens' Councils)

- Can be seen as a strong example of the kinds of Councils that Larry Berger recommends, based on his philosophical account of the power of attention
- Can be understood through lens of Polyvagal Theory, as described by Katarina; greater psychological safety results in more access to social engagement system
- More info on Rosa's website, [www.diapraaxis.com](http://www.diapraaxis.com)