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## Review of Governing Biodiversity through Democratic Deliberation by Mikko Rask and Richard Worthington (New York: Routledge, 2015.)

Desirée A. Fiske

Colorado State University - Fort Collins, [desiree.fiske@colostate.edu](mailto:desiree.fiske@colostate.edu)

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**Abstract**

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**Keywords**

citizen deliberation; democratic deliberation; global governance; deliberative system; mini-public; biodiversity; transnational network

In the context of global environmental issues such as biodiversity or climate change, political theorists and practitioners often confront a significant ‘democratic gap’ or deficit between policymakers’ decisions and citizens’ deliberative opinions. Although these issues impact the lives of billions of citizens, those citizens are rarely gathered into deliberative bodies that might register a public voice. In September of 2012, an ambitious initiative by the World Wide Views Alliance (WWViews) gathered 3,000 citizens around the world to participate in a single ‘Day of Deliberation’ on international biodiversity policy. *Governing Biodiversity through Democratic Deliberation* is a reflection on this event and it deals with the intersecting problems of global governance, democratic deliberation, and transnational biodiversity policies. Covering scales of participant conceptions, national contexts, and international coordination, *Governing Biodiversity* provides scholars with meaningful insight into the limitations and possibilities of global scale mini-public deliberations.

The fifteen chapters of the volume explore political landscapes and contexts for the World Wide Views on Biodiversity (WWVB) event, situating case studies and analytical reviews within broader discussions of governing biodiversity. WWVB was a global citizen deliberation (34 deliberations in 25 countries) with citizen samples of 100 participants representative of the demographic diversity of host region, conducted simultaneously on September 15, 2012. Deliberation results on global biodiversity issues were presented as a report of ‘global citizen voices’ to the 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP 11) to the United Nation’s Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The result of this initiative provided insight on citizen views for CBD delegates and the process was encouraged since it fulfilled CBD Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

*Governing Biodiversity* is the second volume presented by WWViews. The first volume followed the WWViews on Global Warming event; see *Citizen Participation in Global Environmental Governance* (Rask, Worthington, & Lammi, 2012). Chapter contributions represent perspectives from various academic fields, practitioners, and global locations and highlight the nuance around organizing a transnational network. *Governing Biodiversity* is organized into four main sections: “Global biodiversity policy perspectives,” “Constructing a global citizens’ voice,” “The art of amplification,” and “Reflecting institutional design.” Introducing the event and engaging the reader in biodiversity policies and goals of WWVB, the chapters following describe the intricacies and experiences of the network and critiques of design limitations, including result method design, quality of results, and levels of legit participation. The volume traces the process, introducing the reader into a holistic review of WWVB. The interesting aspect and value of this volume emerges from perspectives of the

network in an ongoing trial and error process of initiating a global citizen deliberation on biodiversity loss. Engaging the successes and limitations of the process, the 30 contributors to this volume construct a story of a network alliance envisioning an ongoing process to fulfill ambitious goals. As this volume went to press, the network was working on a third global deliberation: World Wide Views on Climate and Energy.<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter 2, Bedsted et al. elaborate on the motivations of global organizers, outlining the complexity of integrating an event that is relevant to COP delegates, practical in application, and establishes a demand for global citizen deliberations. The principle argument suggests there is a democratic deficit in international negotiations. While the facilitated deliberation design posed questions derived from the COP 11 negotiations, there was a relative disconnect from lay citizen interpretations of international biodiversity policy. Through an analysis of citizen constructions during the Denmark deliberation, Phillips et al. (Chapter 6) argue that WWVB initiated an articulated concept of ‘global citizenship’ in design and process of the deliberations. The construct of ‘global citizen’ was empowered through WWVB. Observing citizen dialogue, the concept of ‘we’ relates to global and national identities, but citizens often scaled to personal stories and relations to their personal identity to biodiversity. Moreover, an analysis of deliberation transcripts revealed participant confusions of WWVB, including a critique of questions and education materials forming an agenda in the deliberations (Mikami & Yagi, Chapter 8). The design of WWVB sets its frame around the COP negotiations and does not represent qualitative responses and testimonies. Instead, the design collects ‘deliberative citizen opinions’ through individual polling responses. Although the project illuminates global citizen identities, contributors to the volume find critique in project design.

Methods of representation are evaluated throughout the volume with concerns of validity and legitimacy. Reviewing gender roles and differences in female and male perspectives, Goldschmit et al. (Chapter 7) use data from both WWViews events to show specific differences in gender responses. Goldschmit et al. find lower participation rates of females in developing countries while transitional and developed countries had lower male participation. Variance in recruitment methods are assessed and highlighted to encourage adequate representation. For example, cultural considerations for recruitment in Jerusalem “ensured higher female participation by inviting both the man and woman in a marriage or when inviting a male with a sister, inviting the sister as well” (p. 145). The volume

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<sup>1</sup> For information, see <http://climateandenergy.wwviews.org/features/>

provides space for reviews of deliberations within international, national and regional contexts. Worthington and Egelhoff (Chapter 3) provide the reader with a review of the “landscape” of international biodiversity policy, situating WWViews in the international context. Regional and national contexts are reflected through case studies of citizen deliberation in the European Union (Gallais, Chapter 4) and participant support in the context of WWVB Nepal (Rai et al., Chapter 5).

Scholars of deliberative democracy struggle with the complexity of applying theory to practice, legitimizing outcomes, and building support for relevancy of deliberations in the socio-political arena. The context of a single event aiming to standardize the process throughout the world confronts problems of citizen needs, organizer capacities, and relevancy to international negotiations. While a network can form around a composed idea of global deliberations, sharing the process and results becomes a battle of its own. Various sites found ways to amplify results and continue the process through networked museums and inspiring target-group educational experiences (Gano & Sittenfeld, Chapter 11), but media amplification efforts were not successful (Geddes & Choi, Chapter 10). With limited success in extending the project, a question still remains: “Could global citizen deliberation become a meaningful concept in international politics, a tool that enhances prospects for more sustainable decisions and global environmental problem-solving?” (p. 291).

The editors use the “deliberative system” framework to integrate the chapters as an ongoing process of scaling citizen input to global relevance. In the concluding chapter Worthington and Rask conceptualize WWViews as a modeling process representing deliberated citizen opinions. An internal critique arises out of the volume, offering alternative models to amplify representation and empowerment and create a greater connection to participant experiences. Lack of collective decision making techniques, a better link of local perspectives to global questions, and extension of deliberative methods address questions of relevancy and accessibility of the process. Furthermore, recommendations inspire a more qualitative, bottom-up approach that seeks to enhance citizen competency to tackle the questions being asked of them (p. 301). Nonetheless, the WWVB model is valued as an ongoing experiment to establish a deliberative system and a successful experiment in engaging high-level policymakers to support the process and reflect on citizen results.

The story of WWVB is unique in its scale of engaging global governance and inspires the reader to think of a dramatic shift in international negotiations. The challenges of designing the event reflect a network of academics and practitioners

working through these problems of structure, legitimacy, and relevancy, but the emphasis on scale could better be reflected, particularly on post-event inspired projects and disseminating process at local, national and global levels. Although adopting the deliberative system framework, it is unclear how well received the network is outside of its own community. Overall, *Governing Biodiversity through Democratic Deliberation* offers a glimpse of the successes and limitations of an amazingly ambitious initiative to bridge the democratic gap, so prominent in deliberation literature. In a deliberative system frame, the volume emphasizes the opportunity of a promising mini-public arrangement that empowers space for global citizens and a “global citizen voice.”

## References

Rask, M., Worthington, R., & Minna, L. (2012). *Citizen Participation in Global Environmental Governance*. New York: Earthscan.