



# CHANGING ROLE OF DEMOCRACY IN THE ERA OF EXPERTS

Are the core principles of democracy in Finland  
threatened with the possible growth in the usage of  
experts in political decision making?

Global Politics

Internal Assessment

gwx542

## **Identification of the issue and its justification**

As the political issue discussed in this essay, whether core principles of democracy are threatened under the possible<sup>1</sup> growth in the usage of experts, will be tightly linked with the definition and justification of the core principles of democracy, they must be defined and explored in depth. As the definition of democracy itself is a political act, in its definition both theoretical aspects and their foundations in reality must be used. My personal engagement includes some of the foundations in reality. I will also elaborate on the Finnish definition of democracy through interviews. The political issue will be linked to the unit 3: development, as I will be discussing the development of political decision-making into a direction where more experts are used. I try to identify the pros and cons of this development, especially on the viewpoint of democracy.

How this issue came across is when few Finnish politicians made public claims about how the Constitution Committee of the Finnish parliament uses politically motivated experts in their hearings. They claimed that the experts were deliberately trying to stall the reforms made by democratically elected government due to having opposite political ideologies. Thus, it can be argued that a conflict does exist between democracy and expertise, not only in their values, which will be explored in more detail, but in practice as well.

## **Explanation of the engagement**

The engagement through which the issue will be explored, is when I was used as an expert due to my young age. I was asked to participate in political decision-making, as a young person and as an expert on how young people see the Regional Reform<sup>2</sup>. My engagement activity had a relatively small impact on the political decision-making

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<sup>1</sup> Exact data on this is hard to gather.

<sup>2</sup> (The official translated name of the reform is Regional, but when considering the official IB global politics levels it can be considered as the local level)

on a national scale, but I will widen the scale from local to national through interviewing members of the parliament who have been involved in the national decision-making of the reform. My main engagement activity took place on first of March in 2017 in Helsinki. I was used as an expert on the youth's point of view on regional reform where I sat across the chief strategist of the ministry of finance and could openly express my views on the reform. The second part of my engagement brought me to a Youth Forum held in Jyväskylä for the same purpose as the first one; as an expert on the Regional reform and the youth's perspective. I kept wondering on both occasions how I could say whatever I wanted, politically motivated or my subjective experiences as information and the politicians couldn't know that. The same reform came under media attention, as it was claimed that there was an issue with the experts used in the Constitution Committee providing politically motivated information. I was doing the exactly same thing, just on a smaller scale. This all was taking power away from those who have been democratically elected to make decisions. This also makes it hard to hold the politicians accountable, which is a basic pillar of democracy, when they are provided with such information.

The last part of my engagement was the visit to the Parliament House of Finland. I went there to interview my mentor, Outi Mäkelä<sup>3</sup>, a background architect in the reform, as well as another member of the Parliament, Ben Zyskowicz<sup>4</sup>, who is a member of the Constitution Committee and through that has first-hand experience on how experts can give politically motivated information and in that way, affect the decision made by politicians. Through these the national perspective on the issue could be elaborated. As the reform itself my main activity was tied to, was local, I interviewed also the youngest member of the Helsinki City Council, Dani Niskanen<sup>5</sup> to get the local perspective. I reasoned, that I needed experts view on the issue as well,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/kansanedustajat/Sivut/940.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/kansanedustajat/Sivut/301.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/fi/kaupunki-ja-hallinto/paatoksenteko/kaupunginvaltuusto/jasenet/valtuutettu?row=6>

and as all my interviews involved the same party, I widened the perspective of my material by interviewing Jani Kokko, a member of a different party and most importantly a doctor in the making, focusing on social sciences. He has also been a lot in the news commenting on politics and issues related to his field, so he had a good mandate to discuss the issue from expert's point of view.

### **Analysis of the issue**

The definition used in this essay includes the representative form of democracy, as it is what Finland uses and this can be seen as the foundation in reality of the theory. One principle of democracy can be defined as “a means for the people to choose their leaders and to hold their leaders accountable for their policies and their conduct in office.”<sup>6</sup> This includes the premise that the people can and will decide, whether through elections or other means, the people who represent them. In a democratic system, people should be able to choose their representatives at least in national as well as local level, e.g. municipal elections. In order for these elections to be truly democratic, as in free and objectively overseen, it takes years of democratic development, which Finland has.

There must also be a relationship between citizens and the elected officials. This is usually restricted to periodic elections and the recall of the elected officials is more uncommon.<sup>7</sup> This should be compensated with transparency, meaning the decision-making, the process behind it and whatever knowledge possible is open for citizens. This is how the citizens can also see what information for example experts provide to their representatives. Jani Kokko, a social scientist focusing on history, also added the long-term development of Finnish democracy has resulted in deep trust for the

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<sup>6</sup> What is Democracy, Hilla University for Humanistic Studies, Stanford Press, 2004

<sup>7</sup> <http://real.mtak.hu/29513/3/Democracy%20and%20Expertise.pdf>

institutions that govern us. Citizens trust that all people are treated equally, our bureaucrats can be trusted in and the results of elections are trusted in.

From my engagement activity, one principle of democracy can be drawn: the participation of the people. In order for democracy to work, all people need to engage, whether it is through fair and free elections or involving oneself in discussions. Kokko also said that the strong participation of the citizens in Finland makes our democracy unique. And as Finland bases its democracy on the representative form, Dani Niskanen, a youngest member of the Helsinki City Council, reminded that it is important for politicians to remember to listen to the people also after their election. After elected as officials, they are still representing a certain amount of people, not just themselves. When moving into the national level, the views on this were more divided. Zyskowicz, member of the parliament, said that the elections give good enough a mandate and listening to the people who change their minds

My usage as an expert in the engagement activity was justified by the claim, that in this reform they wanted to move power away from bureaucrats and the political elite to engage people. This justification relates to my issue: i was used as an expert in the regional reform due to my age. It caused different reactions when asked an expert and a politician to comment on this: Kokko says that one cannot be used as an expert only because one's age, while Niskanen sees this as part of democracy, the engagement of people. This also brought the contradiction between democracy and expertise eminent.

There can be a debate on the issue of expertise and political decision making, and how they even came together, but there has been clear development from the 1960s

correlating with the growing environmentalism and opposition for nuclear energy.<sup>8</sup> The experts in these areas were drawn into political decision making whether they wanted it or not, and were used to justify political motives. Ever since, politicians have used experts to their advantage and experts used their investigations to oppose politicians. This also creates the *juxtaposition* between democracy and expertise. Jani Kokko stated that from his experiences as a politician as well as an expert, the juxtaposition has diminished in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, due to legitimate knowledge and expert's statements are not held in such a high value when making political decisions. For example, my engagement activity and the Regional Reform has to do with how many regions Finland should have when creating this new level of governance. Experts say that 9-15 regions would be the most rational. Our government however, due to political aspirations decided to make 18 regions. This is clearly a contradiction between democracy and expertise: experts say that the democratic government is doing irrational decisions, but on the other hand the government has the legitimacy brought by democracy. The government has been chosen to do those decisions, not experts.

Putting expertise here in juxtaposition with democracy is controversial. If democracy involves the idea of equality in some sense, the same way expertise requires a degree of inequality.<sup>9</sup> Kokko agreed with the claim, commenting that science only provides us with some basis for pondering on what could be the most effective thing to do but it doesn't really care about equality the same way democracy does. When expertise provides us with solutions, Kokko continues that it is the job of political decision-making to transform the "most effective solutions" into more humane ones in the context of political ideology. Niskanen commented the claim that if the system would

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<sup>8</sup> Democratization of Expertise?: Exploring Novel Forms of Scientific Advice in Political Decision-Making, Sabine Maasen, P. Weingart, 2005 Springer, page 4

<sup>9</sup> Democracy and Expertise, New York State Political science conference, 2013, Online: <http://real.mtak.hu/29513/3/Democracy%20and%20Expertise.pdf> [accessed 2.1.2018]

be turned into a one which would only operate on the basis of expertise and rationality, the decisions made could possibly be better, but they would lack the legitimacy brought by democracy. It is possible to argue that for decisions to be made and executed, they need the legitimization of the people, which the democratically chosen political institutions will provide. This is why expertise needs democracy as well: they need to work together.

The struggle of different political ideologies was seen on my activities, both in Helsinki and Jyväskylä, as a heated debate between politicians from different parties, all offering their own different solutions to the same problem, mixing politics and expertise and using, of course, experts that support their own ideologies. Niskanen disagrees with the method. From the viewpoint of a politician, he argues that the distinction between expertise and politics should be made clearly. As an example he stated environmental issues: being ecological is purely a political decision, which has nothing to do with expertise or science. He continued, that not all decisions even need objective analysis or information, as they should be based on the political values of the democratically chosen representatives.

### **Synthesis and evaluation**

Political decision-making will always need specialized and focused knowledge. It can be often forgotten, that politics frankly is the sum of these different areas of knowledge and the multilateral relationship between these different areas. However, experts using their power to affect decisions made by the representatives of the people are not democratically chosen. It is their expertise, that can come from education, that gives them the mandate to control the information brought on to those decision makers elected under the democratic principle. If this goes unquestioned and unchecked, we could end up with a corrupt system where lobbyists provide all the information to our politicians.

There can be argued to be a contradiction between expertise and democracy. However, to claim that the field of expertise could threaten the basic ideas and principles promoted by democracy, is not true. As demonstrated by the Finnish democracy and explained by Kokko from the perspective of the experts, political aspirations, whether in good or bad, overrule the expertise. The Weberian school summarizes that a successful distinction between expertise and political decision-making allows for the rationalization of the means of politics while the irrationality of decisions will remain inevitable.<sup>10</sup> And that is democracy.

(scientific experts taken over the preparation of policy within Nordic commissions at the expense of political and administrative actors?<sup>11</sup>)

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<sup>10</sup> Democratization of expertise? Weingart p 1

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.sv.uio.no/arena/english/research/projects/eurex/eurex-ag11-aug-2016.pdf>