University of Zurich UZH

11th Swiss Summer School in Democracy Studies and
7th Deliberative Democracy Summer School

INEQUALITY AND DELIBERATION
University of Zurich

PUBLIC PROGRAMME

Monday 23 June 2025

UZH KOL G 217

KEYNOTE LECTURE   h.16:00

Cristina Lafont Northwestern University   Moderated by Hannah Werner University of Zurich

Deliberative Minipublics and the Struggle for Political Equality

The rise of inequality in recent decades has led to an unequal concentration of political power that threatens to wipe out the achievements of centuries of democratic struggles for political equality. This concern explains the appeal of deliberative minipublics such as citizens' assemblies, citizens' juries, or deliberative polls. By empowering ordinary citizens to participate in political decision-making, these institutions can offer citizens a powerful tool to counteract the oligarchic tendencies of electoral democracies. Many argue that since random selection provides all citizens equal chances to exercise political power, citizens' assemblies promote political equality better than electing representatives from political elites. This view fuels proposals for conferring legislative authority to minipublics, either to complement or to replace electoral institutions. In this talk, I analyze the interpretation of political equality that guides these proposals and show its undemocratic features. It justifies a form of 'rule by the few' that would disempower the citizenry even more. I argue in favor of proposals for institutionalizing minipublics that would empower the citizenry and thus improve democratic equality.

ROUNDTABLE   h.17:30

Céline Colombo Office for Participation, Canton of Zurich   Moderated by Daniel Kübler University of Zurich
John Gastil Penn State University
André Bächtiger University of Stuttgart
Fabian Reidinger State Ministry Baden-Württemberg

Followed by an aperitif

Register now
www.ema.uzh.ch/register/s3ds2025.html

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

CENTRE FOR
DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY
AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Mercator
Foundation
Switzerland