

## Abstract

The powerholders of democratic innovations:

To what extent is local governance in Australia an institution for deliberative power-sharing?

This presentation aims to examine to what extent local governance in Australia is an institution for deliberative power-sharing between democratically elected councillors and community members. The outcomes of it seek to contribute to the wider literature on power, democratic innovations and deliberative democracy in the context of local governance in OECD countries. Australia is a particularly relevant geographical case to explore in this context because there has been a rapid decrease in trust in politics and government throughout the last decade. This is reflected in the democratic dissatisfaction, particularly in political leaders' inability to address public policy issues, with only 43% of citizens who indicate they have a medium to high trust in Australian local governments (OECD 2023). The use of deliberative power-sharing can potentially contribute to higher trust for citizens in political leaders and public government institutions because this type of power-sharing assumes the power that is shared between councillors and community members is the power to directly impact political decision-making. Australia is one of the leading OECD countries in representative deliberative processes, but they do not give community members any binding power neither does it require councillors to implement the recommendations. Deliberative power-sharing hence offers a new and deliberative approach to trust building and shared decision-making power between councillors and community members in Australian local governance.

In this presentation, I argue that we need a nuanced understanding of how councillors share power with community members in Australian local governance. I build this argument in two parts. First, I present the findings of my systematic review of how power is shared in 34 Australian local governments catalogued in the Participedia database. Second, I present the findings from my 27 in-depth qualitative interviews with councillors, community engagement officers and deliberative democracy practitioners in three case studies of Australian local governance. These interviews explored how power is experienced, exercised, and shared, and to what extent power-sharing has deliberative dimensions. In this study, I found that there are four ways councillors share power with community members in Australian local governance: (1) Deliberative power-sharing, (2) the sharing of power with deliberation, (3) power-sharing with deliberative elements, and (4) deliberation with limited to no sharing of power. This research has scholarly significance because of Australia's existing initiatives at bridging the voices of community members and councillors. Theoretical implications include advancing how power is conceptualised and empirically operationalised in deliberative democracy. Practical implications include exemplifying for local governments and deliberative democracy practitioners what democratic, political, and institutional conditions can enable a best-practice model for deliberative power-sharing in local governance in Australia and in OECD countries more broadly.

## Bio

Anne Nygaard Jedzini is a PhD researcher on power-sharing at Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance at University of Canberra.

Anne is the recipient of the Australian Research Council Special Research Initiative 2021 PhD Scholarship and is the former Vice Mayor and city council member of her hometown the City of Aarhus in Denmark where she held public office from 2014-2018.

For her PhD, Anne examines how power is experienced, exercised and shared, and to what extent power-sharing has deliberative dimensions in political decision-making processes in Australian local governance. More specifically, her PhD examines the democratic, political and institutional conditions for power-sharing through deliberation between powerholders (councillors, community engagement officers and deliberative democracy practitioners) and community members in three comparative case studies of Australian local governance. She is set to complete her PhD in 2024.



Anne has extensive experience from Danish politics. As Vice Mayor, she served as a member of five political committees. Two of these committees were deliberative co-creation task committees (similar to deliberative mini-publics) with both councillors and community members who had been selected through sortition. During her time in public office, she focused on how members of the community could have more direct impact on public policymaking. She also focused on how to create the best possible conditions for startups, entrepreneurs and small business owners by leading deliberative co-creation processes herself.

Anne's research on deliberative power-sharing in local governments has been published in The Loop, the European Consortium's Political Science blog. She has also presented her research on deliberative power-sharing and deliberative co-creation in Australian and Danish local governments at academic conferences such as the Deliberative Democracy Summer School in Canberra in 2024, Australian Political Studies Association Annual Conference at University of Sydney in 2023, Summer School in Deliberative Democracy and Public Opinion at Aabo Akademi in 2022, and The Transatlantic Dialogue at Roskilde School of Governance in 2022.

Anne's research interests include power and power-sharing in institutions/organisations, democratic innovations, public governance, political leadership, Australian politics and qualitative research methods.