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Oguz N Baburoglu and Gulru Z Goker

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# Going large scale: The Polling Conference process for participatory constitution making in Turkey

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**Oguz N Baburoglu**

Sabancı School of Management, Sabancı University, Turkey

**Gulru Z Goker**

International Relations Department and the Center for Gender Studies, Koc University, Turkey

## Abstract

This paper narrates the story of large-scale, nation-wide intervention for participatory constitution making in Turkey. The process of democratic involvement in the making of Turkey's new Constitution has been an action research engagement since 2007 for the authors of this paper. In due process, a deliberative democracy-inspired large-scale conferencing, i.e., the Polling Conference [*Tarama Konferansı*], was designed. Ordinary, unaffiliated citizens and local nongovernmental organization (NGO) members participated in the constitution-making process via attending these conferences across the nation. Reflecting upon Turkey's first participatory constitution-making initiative and our intervention, we came to develop certain emergent themes, decisions and actions necessary for the successful realization of large-scale action research in polarized political contexts. These themes range from the establishment of a convening body and legitimate links to decision making and society, to the industrious preparation of a social-ecology on local and national levels. Our intervention is thoroughly embedded in the Turkish context; nevertheless, we came to develop a thematic approach that could set an example to nation-wide participatory initiatives in similar democratic trajectories.

## Keywords

Deliberation, large-scale, participatory constitution making, Polling Conference, Turkey

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## Corresponding author:

Gulru Z Goker, International Relations Department and the Center for Gender Studies, Koc University, Rumeli Feneri Yolu, 34450 Sariyer/Istanbul, Turkey.

Email: zgoker@ku.edu.tr

## Introduction

Constitutions are made in many different ways. Historically, they have been created by revolutionary or elected constituent assemblies, regular parliaments, executives using referendums as in the case of the 1961 and 1982 Turkish Constitutions, or in multi-stage efforts (Arato, 2010). The constitution-making process gains its significance from the idea that constitutions gain legitimacy through public deliberation (Ghai & Galli, 2006, p. 14; Habermas, 1996). During constitutional moments, citizens engage in higher lawmaking, a democratically superior political experience that mobilizes the citizenry in enlightened public discussion (Ackerman, 1991, p. 322). Today's participation into constitution making increasingly takes on a deeper meaning that extends ratification by vote. Wide public involvement in the process generates legitimacy and commitment to the constitution and longevity to the political system (Ginsburg, Elkins, & Blount, 2009, p. 208). Large-scale participatory intervention in Turkey is at least 20 years old; however, the use of large-scale participation in constitution making is a novelty. Since the mid-2000s, the need for a new Turkish Constitution is a pressing reality. There is widespread consensus that the new constitution, unlike the present and the previous one, should be made by legitimate civilian parties. Non-elected bodies had drafted Turkey's 1961 and 1982 Constitutions in the aftermath of military interventions. Since 2007, unfolding political and constitutional crises have paved the way to the voicing of demands of a new constitution mainly by civil society organizations (see Table 1). Since then, various civil society platforms initiated participatory involvement of the wider society into the constitution-making process. Upon the elections in 2010, the Constitution Reconciliation Committee summoned with the participation of equal representatives from all parties in the Parliament.

Since 2007, we, the authors—ARAMA-affiliated researchers—and the Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) are designing and implementing venues for fostering widespread participation into constitution making. ARAMA is a change agent and a participatory management consulting company located in Istanbul, focusing on managing strategic change using conferencing methodology within a framework of developing micro-democracies. TEPAV is a think tank that was designed after one of ARAMA's search conferences with the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey, a quasi-NGO. The two institutions, one based in Istanbul and the other in Ankara, have worked together in various action research projects. We designed the Polling Conference as an efficient vehicle in collecting informed, deliberated opinion on the Constitution. The Polling Conference is a daylong meeting of randomly selected unaffiliated citizens and local NGO members in a selected city to discuss, vote, and state opinion on the Constitution's content. Teleconferencing, remote polling devices, and moderated discussion were used in conferences participated by 500–1000 people in 12 different cities in Turkey. We have come to develop certain emergent themes, actions, and decisions vital for success in going large scale with action research interventions in polarized settings. These are (1) the emergence of a

**Table 1.** 2007–2013: What happened?

Date	Event
2007	
April	Presidential crisis over a renewed term
July	Election campaigns signal a new constitution
September	CP summons
October	CP demands a transparent constitution-making process and a roadmap from the government
November	The governing Justice and Development Party starts talks about the new constitution draft
December	CP's Search Conference and press statement: give this process a chance
2008	
January–February	The headscarf crisis in the parliament and constitutional change regarding the wearing of headscarves in higher education institutions
June	Change is overruled by the Constitutional Court
2010	
September	Referendum for constitutional amendments
2011	
June	General elections—all parties express the need for a new constitution
September	Constitution Reconciliation Committee summons
2012	
	Polling conference in 12 cities
2013	
	The committee finds consensus on 59 articles out of 172

CP: Constitution Platform.

relevant referent organization, (2) the establishment of legitimate links with the parliament and the society, (3) the design of the appropriate conference method, (4) the design of a participatory process in structuring the conference content, (5) the decision to have blended participation, that is, unaffiliated citizens and local NGO members, and (6) maintaining flexibility in designing the follow-up processes.

## Themes of intervention

### *The emergence of a relevant referent organization*

Since 2007, Constitution Platform (CP) has actively pressured the government for a consensual and participatory constitution-making process. The CP is fundamentally a citizens' platform formed by numerous nationally organized public institutions including occupational groups, labor, and employee unions, confederations, and business associations (see [www.anayasaplatformu.net](http://www.anayasaplatformu.net)). Two hundred fifty people representing a total of 83 occupational and civil society organizations participated the 2007 search conference upon which widespread request for a participative constitution making was publicly declared. Since 2007, participatory designs

brought together CP with other civil society platforms and political officials on constitutional matters, and in 2012 alone, randomly selected citizens joined this community via the Polling Conferences. Mobilizing multiple actors on local and national levels, on civic and political platforms, and creating a collaborative alliance for large-scale intervention in a polarized environment have been challenging, costly, and strenuous. The quest to bring the stakeholders together without jeopardizing the legitimacy of the intervention was equally important. The organizational and geographical diversity within the CP enabled undertaking such a costly large-scale endeavor requiring extensive preparation.

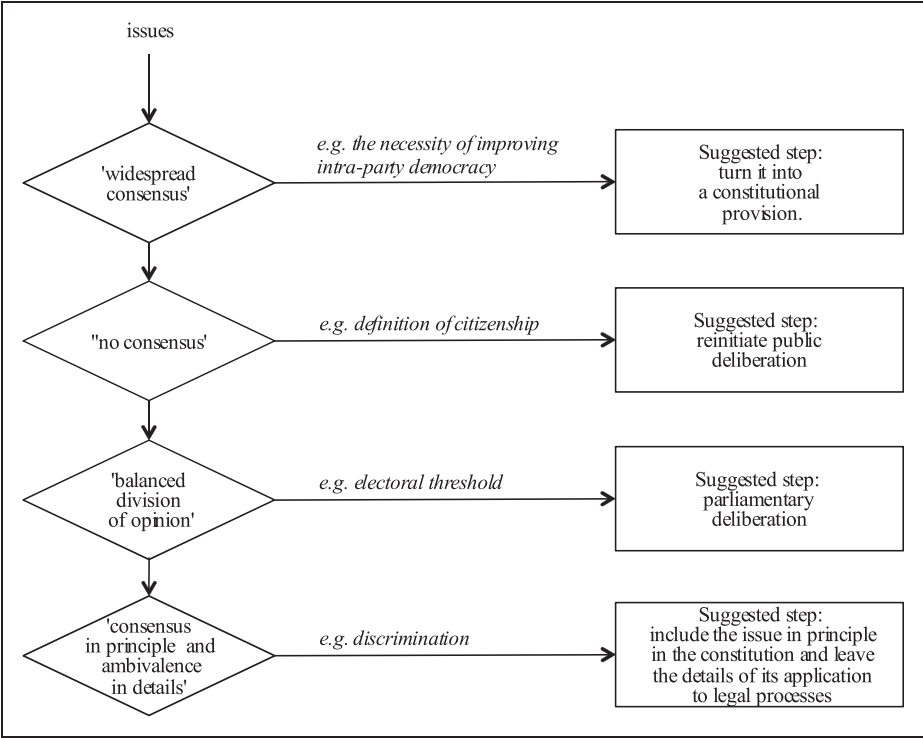
### *Designing legitimate links with the legislature and the society*

CP was the appropriate convener that was able to establish legitimate links with the Parliament and the grassroots communities. The Constitutional Reconciliation Committee enthusiastically accepted CP's large-scale conferencing project. Committee members endorsed the project, agreed to show up to the meetings, and take their results seriously. They regarded the CP as a credible ally because of its nation-wide representation of civil society groups. Citizens also perceived the CP as a legitimate and neutral platform and agreed to utilize the conferences as a vehicle for providing input to constitution making. The establishment of such two-way legitimacy was absent in the ecology of other organizations and platforms involved in constitutional debates. The organizational capacity at different levels enabled a setting where citizens could come together with public institutions and elected lawmakers. The conferences acted as channels between citizens and decision makers in a country populated by close to 80 million people.

The parliamentary committee has adopted the three-track model of constitution making. The drafting of the Constitution follows public deliberation, and the draft is to be opened once again to public deliberation to be possibly ratified in a referendum as a final step (Gonenc, 2011). The intervention was planned as an interface between constitution making and constitution writing. Citizens debated constitutional preferences and deliberated on constitutional positions. The outcomes were analyzed by experts who suggested constitutional provisions to the committee (see Figure 1). The cycle was planned to unfold from constitutional positions to constitutional provisions. As consensus forms, the points of difference were to be analyzed with a new set of questions, to initiate a new iterative action research cycle. As such, the design allowed for direct feedback from the Polling Conference to constitution making.

### *Designing the appropriate conference-method*

The Polling Conference is a daylong large-group meeting where participants engage in a moderated discussion and vote on constructed alternatives about the issue at stake. A prominent example of large-scale deliberative policy-making is AmericaSpeaks' 21st Century Town Hall Meetings, defined by Lukensmeyer and



**Figure 1.** From positions to provisions: the deliberative cycle.

Jacobson (2007) as public forums that link teleconferencing technology with simultaneous deliberation (p. 393). The 21st Century Town Hall meetings have certainly, albeit not completely, influenced the Polling Conference in Turkey. Other examples that have originated from deliberative democracy are Deliberative Polling (Fishkin, 2011) and the Australian Citizens' Parliament (Dryzek, 2009) and from action research, the Search Conference (Emery, 1982; Weisbord, 1992), the Dialogue Conference (Engelstad & Gustavsen, 1993; Pålshaugen, 2001), and Appreciative Inquiry Summit (Whitney & Cooperrider, 1998). We discussed whether Search and Dialogue conferences could be scaled up and in what ways the 21st Century Town Hall meetings or other initiatives for constitution making could be helpful in designing ours; one inspiration was the Icelandic National Forum for constitution making. The Polling Conference was designed as a deliberative democracy-inspired method appropriate to the context of citizens' assembly for constitution making.

The Polling Conference is significantly more structured in comparison to the Search and Dialogue conferences that we have popularly utilized in Turkey. In a Search Conference, the locus of control is shared between the facilitator and the

participants with the purpose of transferring both the content and the process to the participants. In a Dialogue Conference, the process is almost completely in the control of the participants, while the content is continuously transformed through discussion. In the Polling Conference, both the process and the content are set up beforehand. The participants control their discussions within the allotted time and the selection of opinions in the aftermath. The ultimate emphasis is on informed decision making, which makes it suitable to cases when the issue requires a high level of abstraction. The participants are to discuss the expert-constructed, carefully prepared issues, arrive at understandings through iterative checks for convergence and divergence, and make informed *individualized* decisions. As such, the design combines the participatory and liberal strains of democracy. The Polling Conference also shows similarities to Deliberative Polling, where random sampling is combined with deliberation to achieve political equality, in the form of equal consideration of all views, and deliberation (Fishkin, 2011, p. 613; Fishkin & Farrar, 2006).

We saw that the structuring of the questions enabled participants to engage in an informed discussion on matters relevant to the Constitution while they had enough room to consider different alternatives. Bringing together the process of deliberation with the act of voting allowed citizens an experience of different democratic processes. Voting spurred the participants' interest in deliberation. The participants had to discuss the question itself, state their opinions regarding the issue, deliberate, and then vote after the discussion. As such, the Polling Conference provided the participants with many levels of input that are lacking in ordinary representative politics and produced a huge database of recorded deliberations. Knowing that they were to vote at the end, the participants felt more confidence on the impact of their arguments and hence genuinely tried to purvey their ideas and persuade one another.

We argue that the Polling Conference is a successful large-scale method. By the expression large scale, we mean large-group participation of up to 1000 people per conference and large-scale inter-organizational mobilization. We also have to consider the Polling Conference in terms of the institutional capacity it mobilized. Multiple actors on many national and local levels were involved at each stage of the process, such as its design, development, preparation, implementation, and follow-up. Given its scope, the Polling Conference became a medium for public deliberation and a vehicle that was able to approximate nation-wide public opinion. As Martin (2008) argues, the guiding principles of action research (as laid out in Greenwood & Levin, 1998) can be conceptually consistent with both small and large-scale projects (p. 396). In Turkey, with a population of approximately 80 million, in a unitary, highly centralized regime, this largeness of scale provides avenues for comparing and contrasting between geographically and ideologically diverse domains. The replicable character of the Polling Conference allowed its same implementation in 12 cities. The Polling Conference is decidedly a good instrument to draw comparisons between regions and citizens as well as help generate points of consensus, disagreement, and ambiguity.

### *Structuring the conference content*

The Polling Conference cannot be taken on its own as a single day event. To quote Bunker and Alban (2006), we believed that planning was not something to simply get through before the conference but “a critical factor in the method’s success” (p. 45). Action researchers must be able to introduce critical capacities to promote radical change and to initiate a move from power play to deliberation in large-scale projects (Johnsen & Normann, 2004, p. 230). To be able to provide a suitable environment for such a mental shift (Shotter & Gustavsen, 1999), the action researcher has to engage in a complex and extensive process of preparation under conditions of democratic dialog and mutual learning. Particularly in polarized environments, history of dialog and mutual trust and acquaintance are necessary for the legitimacy of the endeavor and for enabling reflexivity for the action researcher at each stage of the process. Since 2007, we used participatory methodologies at each step. The CP assembled with similar other platforms, professional, and civic organizations in a series of search conferences in order to determine and verify the issues. The questions were prepared as part of a dialogic process in line with action research’s participatory and democratic principles. Once determined, the parliamentary committee, the legitimate body responsible from drafting the Constitution, verified the questions. The process moved from the discussion of abstract principles to the laying out of issues, and finally, the construction of specific questions in 10 issue headings (see Tables 2 and 3). Questions had to be comprehensible and properly structured. They had to convey transparent positions to enable diversity and generate independent, collaborative wisdom instead of reinforcing existing polarities.

On the conference day, the presentation of each issue was followed by a series of questions. The participants were asked to make three forms of contribution, all of which were recorded. Participants were allotted a time for each question and encouraged to interact with each other and vote *after* the discussion. Each participant was given a remote polling device that pooled the votes to a central database. Projectors stationed in various locations within the venue displayed the questions and the outcomes of the poll. The participants were also expected to have their feedback and criticism recorded. Table moderators recorded any questions the participants thought were impartial so that the objectivity of the questions could be improved in the coming meetings. At the end, the participants were asked questions that measure their interest in what they experience and whether they would like to participate in other such meetings.

### *Blended participation*

One issue we debated was whether to hold the meetings with NGO members or with ordinary citizens. Some of us had doubts about citizen apathy and ability to engage in informed discussion on higher lawmaking. However, we came to realize that if people were willing to show up at the conferences, their presence alone



**Table 2.** The list of discussed issues.

No.	Issues
1	Freedom of expression and association
2	Quality of public services and impartiality
3	Checks on political power
4	Elections and political parties
5	Economic and social rights
6	Positive discrimination
7	State-religion relationship
8	Natural resources
9	Local governance
10	Living together
11	The system of government

**Table 3.** Question types and examples.

Question type	Example	
	Issue	Question phrase
Open-ended question	Living together	Who are we, as people living in this country?
Funneling question	Freedom of expression and association	Do you think that being able to freely express different ideas and opinions, however disagreeable you might find them, is a constitutional right the government should protect?
Close-ended question		Do you believe that political parties should be free to express different ideas and opinions, however disagreeable you might find them to be, and that political parties should not face closure as long as they do not provoke violence and hatred?
Probing new questions		What are Turkey's most important problems?

would constitute a good enough voice and that no deliberative microcosm can completely represent a society. In general, elections or referendums do not have hundred percent turnout either. Random sampling enables a wide array of individuals the opportunity to participate and those who are genuinely interested do so. The CP organizers selected 12 cities based on regional representation.

Major telephone operators used random number generators to send out more than 20,000 invitations to local citizens per conference. The collection of positive responses revealed a turnout of approximately 500–1000 people on conference day. While two-thirds of the participants were determined through this process, the remaining third constituted members of local NGOs. All NGOs in a given city received a call by the Governor to send two participants each. Women and young people were especially encouraged to participate. Child nurseries were set up, lunch and dinner were served, transportation costs were covered for the needy, and a shuttle service was arranged for the disabled. Heedful attention was given to reaching the disadvantaged and traditionally underrepresented groups at each stage.

We also had to decide whether the NGO members and unaffiliated citizens should discuss issues together. We feared that, given their experience, NGO members would be more opinionated and inclined to dominate the discussion. We decided to arrange each table to include a ratio of one-third NGO members and two-thirds unaffiliated citizens. What we came to observe was that an active unaffiliated citizen could as much try to lead the discussion, as does an NGO member. The discussion we had can also be considered as a reflection of participatory democracy's recent shift toward a notion of democratic governance that embodies forms of consensus-seeking vis-à-vis many agencies (Pearce, 2010, p. 14). Pearce argues that while the "third sector," the civil society, is now an established actor in democratic politics in most democratized parts of the world, citizen participant without any connection to an organized institution is increasingly becoming an important agent of self-governance (p.12).

On the day of the conference, a special software evenly distributed men and women, unaffiliated citizens, and NGO members to tables of 10 participants. People carrying the same last name could not join the same table. Each table had a trained moderator, a political science or law student, responsible for recording and facilitating. The records were simultaneously transferred to a central database. The moderators' role in discussions was limited to ensuring all participants speak. Moderators did not participate in discussions. Two lead moderators, responsible for content and method, upfront facilitated the event. The conference started with the method-moderator's explanation of the process and the rules of discussion: fair and equal terms of participation, necessity for clarity and harmony, tolerance, and orientation toward a common future. All questions were read aloud and explained. Other content and method experts were present throughout the conference, and constitutional law professors circulated around the tables for assistance and clarification. Additionally, each table was supplemented with accompanying written material: the current Constitution and other relevant references and guidelines for discussion.

## *Results and impacts*

In this section, we offer some macro and micro insights from the conferences to highlight some points of consensus and no consensus. The most striking result is

that 58% the total participants of all 13 conferences chose “justice” as the principle that should be held as priority in making the new constitution. The other principles were equality, liberty, welfare, and stability. Justice was the principle that received the majority of votes in 12 cities except for Diyarbakır, where the percentage of people who voted for justice was equal to those who voted for liberty. Given the history of the Kurdish issue in Turkey, it is not surprising that Diyarbakır’s majority Kurdish population would consider liberty to be a priority alongside justice.

One issue on which citizens could not find consensus at all was definition of citizenship. The recorded deliberations upon the questions, “Who are we? How do you define people living in this country?” show that participants were more comfortable defining who they individually were rather than whom Turkey’s citizens are. That is why politicians are yet to summon a sense of “we the people” in the citizenry.

Difference, cohabitation, and discrimination were issues that probed consensus in principle but ambivalence in details. The deliberations show that citizens perceive differences on the grounds of disabilities, sexual orientations, religious sects, and ethnic identities. When citizens were asked if additional regulations are required to accommodate differences and to promote equal access to public services, deliberations take clearly differentiated directions according to regional socio-political priorities. For instance, whereas “lifting the ban on headscarves” is considered a necessity for promoting equal access in a mostly conservative city such as Konya, citizens of Kurdish-populated Diyarbakır consider bilingual state services to be the condition of equal access and in Edirne, where a significant Roma population exists, and citizens considered affirmative action a much needed additional regulation.

While 77% of the participants are happy with the system of popular election of the president, there is no consensus regarding how presidential powers shall be distributed. Overall results gathered from all conferences show that there are roughly an equal number of participants who think that president’s power should stay as it is, should be decreased or increased. An important result is that participants prefer the current parliamentary system to a presidential system. However, the complexity of the issue is revealed when we look at deliberations at the micro level. One table’s recorded discussions show this complexity as the deliberation unfolds. A participant states that an increase in presidential powers would cause deadlocks between the government and the president causing the country to move closer to a presidential system, others support a semi-presidential system as a transitory stage to full presidentialism. One participant rejects this idea stating that Turkey’s current problems are not related to the system itself but to the individuals who are part of the system.

Political Party closures are another important issue in Turkey. Turkish courts have closed 28 political parties since multiparty politics was endorsed.

The recorded discussions of a group of participants in Ankara show how the deliberation proceeds toward consensus, when all vote yes in the end for

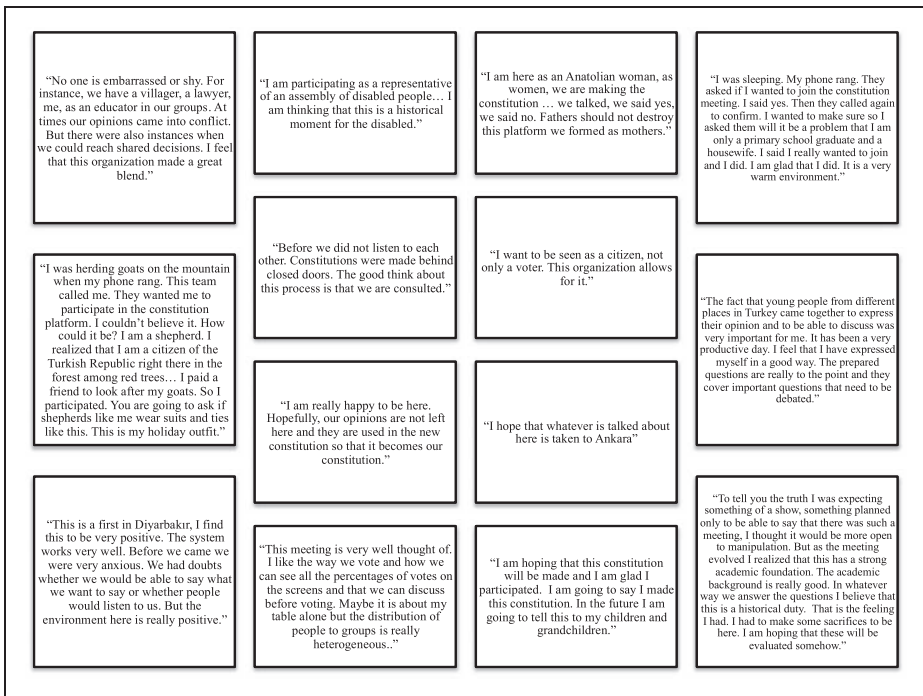
Do you believe that political parties should be free to express different ideas and opinions, however disagreeable you might find them to be, and that political parties should not face closure as long as they do not provoke violence and hatred?

Although some participants initially state their dislike for political parties who are organized on ethnic or regional lines (referring to Kurdish parties), they still think that “all opinions but violence can be discussed” and that “to know a group means to be able to listen to their opinions.” The participants then proceed with a discussion about freedom itself, thinking whether it belongs to the individual, a group, or the state. Some argue that “it is not the state but the individual that is sacred,” and all agree that it is wrong to limit freedom of expression and to close political parties. While another group of participants in Trabzon cannot find consensus on this issue fearing that it could pave the way to the expression of secessionist thoughts or those opinions that would cause injury to national and religious sensitivities.

Aside from the results, the conferences clearly had positive impacts on the participants. Many talked about how important it was for them to be able to express themselves and to be listened to by a group of people who come from very different backgrounds and who hold different opinions. Many expressed their surprise in being taken seriously as ordinary citizens. Another point most participants stressed was the uniqueness of this constitution-making process for consulting the citizenry. Some were happy because they conceived this as a unique opportunity where they could fulfill their duty as citizens in making Turkey’s new constitution. Some shared their initial skepticism and later change of opinion when they saw how well prepared the organization is and that they could actually discuss and get along with fellow citizens who hold different opinions. Many celebrated the conferences for allowing an environment in which they could freely think and express. Many hoped that politicians would take their opinions seriously. Young people were also happy to be taken seriously (Figure 2, also see: The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (2012)).

## Reflective lessons

Self-governance is the essence of action research; deliberative democracy is one such model of self-governance and its tool. We have successfully executed an initiative in self-governance and participatory constitution making in a country where constitutions were previously drafted without societal input. If the above processes are followed closely, there is no reason why this intervention cannot be applied in similarly developing democracies. An encompassing, representative civil society organization is used to set up a platform of larger numbers of NGOs; legitimate



**Figure 2.** Participant comments.

links are established with the legislature and the society; an appropriate mechanism for participation, the Polling Conference, is designed; the content is structured; questions are prepared in line with action research's principles; and the conferences are held as deliberative democratic interventions to inspire further deliberative cycles for the drafting of the Constitution.

Our story taught us three lessons. *The first lesson concerns the role of the action researcher.* As action researchers, we have to be experienced enough to set up connections with a wide network but also neutral enough so that we encourage people's trust in the method and the process. Trust plays a very important role in the facilitation of self-governed change in a politicized environment. The making of the Turkish Constitution is not simply a legal undertaking because of a wide range of issues, such as national identity, secularism, and the role of religion all open a Pandora's box in Turkey. Each requires the enactment of continuous cycles of emotionally and politically heated debate. ARAMA's 25 years of experience in managing change through participative methodologies and TEPAV's perceived neutrality as a think tank gave us competency and credibility as agents in moderation. Maintaining the legitimacy of this intervention to the legacy of top-down constitution making was difficult. At each stage, we had to justify our role, and to

the rest of the public, this endeavor's objectivity. All action research processes include an element of history making where the researcher is involved, engaged, and not necessarily value free. To be involved and engaged without discrediting the legitimacy of the moderating entity was a difficult undertaking in a setting of political conflict. Some participants approached the conferences with cynicism, and a few perceived them as mere public relations events. Nevertheless, participants constructively engaged this process, and we managed to forge a productive deliberative arena.

*The second lesson concerns the way in which action researchers interact with dynamic agenda.* All action research includes elements of unpredictability as meanings and decisions are reconstructed through mutual action and dialog. You can plan the next step but what comes out is subject to revision. However, political conflict is different. In politics, agendas and policies can change overnight. That kind of unpredictability makes the role of the action researcher more difficult albeit not irrelevant. We learned to keep our expectations moderate. Because starting and successfully managing a participatory constitution-making exercise was itself groundbreaking; we had to level our expectations on having direct impact on constitution-drafting. The impact of our intervention has to be considered on two levels: upon the participants, namely, the transformative and informative effects of deliberation; and on constitution making itself.

Deliberation implies the presence of the issues and attitudes that people bring to the table and the way in which they reach a new understanding that none could have reached singly (Davies, Wetherell, & Barnett, 2006, p. 5). When the dynamics of deliberation are considered, it is important to highlight an unfortunate, yet not so surprising acknowledgment: achieving diversity during the Polling Conference was difficult. We held two trans-regional conferences, women-only and young people-only, to compensate for the low levels of attendance of these demographic groups. The usefulness of small-group method must also be acknowledged. Face-to-face deliberation can reduce conflict and build citizen competence (Lukensmeyer & Torres, 2006, p. 22). Our experience shows that given an environment suitable for fair and equal communication, citizens are willing to listen and accept each other's good arguments. No major conflict has taken place in any of the conferences aside from a few instances where participants indicated distrust in politics, or on the impact of their opinions on policy-making. Upon the final question that measured the level of interest in the conference, positive answers reached up to 90%.

It is more difficult to reflect on the macro impacts of the process as the new Turkish Constitution is not yet written and Turkey faces an extremely dynamic political agenda. Moreover, two major processes, constitution making and conflict resolution, are simultaneously unfolding. Added to this mix are the most current *Gezi Park protests* that have spurred a nation-wide reaction against the perceived authoritarianism of the government in the recent months. Upon the eviction of trees for the construction of a shopping mall in the place of the historic Gezi Park in Istanbul, a sit-in was organized by citizens to protect the park from being

demolished. The use of brute force by the police to force out the people from the park caused many more to take the streets in peaceful protests across the country. Although it was the protection of trees that sparked the events, people also protested the government's top-down urban transformation policies and its perceived authoritarianism in the recent years.

When an agenda is so dynamic, the right timing becomes an important issue. As action researchers, we had no effective role in moderating the actual constitution-drafting. However, hindsight enables our reflection on two issues that could have been better executed: more responsibility could have been attained concerning the actual drafting of the Constitution; better feedback could have been given to the participants and the society at large. That said one must be aware of the limits of deliberation and careful not to assume the existence of participatory events as sole indicators of democracy. In this entire process, deliberation has been only one source of action among many. As Levine, Fung, and Gastil (2005) argue, deliberation does not generate full consensus especially in larger public bodies, thus the designers should not have unrealistic expectations (p. 276). There was no initial assumption that the Polling Conferences would be the only source of the Constitution's content. Other initiatives have also been taking place in order to influence constitution-drafting. In this respect, success and failure of these initiatives cannot be measured simply by looking at their effect on the new Constitution's content.

*Our third lesson has to do with connecting related fields of thought.* Along the way, we have come to realize a hitherto fore-understudied potential and productive exchange between action research and deliberative democracy. Thus far only Cunningham and McKinney (2010) have identified this nexus and underlined their integrative potential of action research and deliberative democracy particularly in small-scale community-based and outreach research. Deliberative democracy refers to the process of collective will-formation where political legitimacy is derived from public deliberation (Bohman & Rehg, 1997). Deliberation has been conceived as a means to effective citizen participation in policy-making. Along with deliberative democrats, action researchers have acknowledged the success of democracy not in the aggregation of votes, but in relationship formation (Gergen, 2003, p. 46). The communicative perspective of action research emphasizes the co-generation of meaning with the assumption that most rational solutions appear in open discussions (Gustavsen & Engelstad, 1986, p. 105). As a key feature of action research, dialog encourages processes of change, learning, and knowledge transfer and is the only mode of communication that allows linking one's experiences with those of others (Ennals & Gustavsen, 1999, p. 81). The socio-ecological perspective of action research regards the interactions and interrelations of organizations as a shared field and targets this domain for interventions (Baburoglu & Ravn, 1992; Finsrud, 1999).

Students of deliberative democracy are predominantly interested in normative questions and induce lower degrees of reflection on their exchange with empirical work; notable exceptions are Fung, 2007; Mutz, 2006; Neblo, Esterling, Kennedy,



and Lazer, 2010; Niemeyer, 2011; Rosenberg, 2007. In contrast, action research's main interest is to design directions upon which participants can collaboratively decide for their respective desirable futures (Baburoglu & Ravn, 1992). Such research dwells on questions about how to determine appropriate strategies, the amount of control given to participants, the generation of meaning, and the organization of the follow-up (Baburoglu, Topkaya, & Ates, 1996). Deliberative democracy possesses common values with the communicative perspective of action research and has a good deal to acquire from its socio-ecological perspective. In order to speak about meaningful deliberation leading into effective decision-making, a social-ecology has to be understood and developed iteratively and a legitimate basis has to be provided for actors, their connections, and communications. Deliberative democrats can help extract normative reflections from interventions and bring their experience in dealing with potentially divisive political issues, an arena in which action research has limited experience. The exchange between these two schools of thought shall provide an important area of further research for both academic communities.

## Conclusion

Upon the 13th conference, the first plan was to implement a reflection conference at the national level to bring together a representative sample of participants from each city in the capital, Ankara. We aimed to initiate comparative reflection. However, the design of a reflection conference derailed because the Constitution Reconciliation Committee could not reach consensus on many issues. Many constitutional issues that did not probe consensus, e.g., citizenship definition, pertain to the Kurdish issue in Turkey, making it a crucial cycle of public debate. Although constitution making and conflict resolution processes cannot be reductively combined, it is crucial to note such parallel processes are necessary in bringing about large-scale change.

The participatory initiatives in Turkey have to be considered within the process of democratization Turkey underwent in the 1990s when major actors of civil society came to the foreground as *the* agents of reform (Keyman & Icduygu, 2003). This process was accompanied by the rising popularity of conferencing as the model of national intervention. Baburoglu (1996) refers to conferencing as a collective searching process that has become an indigenous Turkish experience in action research (p. 120). Since mid-1990s, societal connectivity has been realized through social-ecological interventions not as isolated experiments, but in alliance with policy-makers and leading civil society actors. What is presented in this paper belongs to the story of an evolving tradition of participatory change that is neither completely developed from the bottom up nor initiated from the top, for instance by military coups, which are infamously responsible for constitutional change in Turkey up to and including the 1980s. The Polling Conference brought together civil society actors with ordinary citizens for the first time in such large-scale deliberative democratic experiment.



In this paper, we presented a rounded story of action research. We not only portrayed the development and utilization of a new conference method but also described it within the context where it was implemented, the process in which its leadership and constituents were mobilized, and the networks involved, in short, the story of structuring a particular social-ecology for action/democratic engagement. Acknowledging the unique characteristics of this engagement of action research and building from there is important, as it could fortunately create its iterative domain for future participatory change in Turkey and elsewhere in similar geographies and social-ecologies.

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### Author biographies

**Oguz N Baburoglu**, is an associate professor at the School of Management of the Sabanci University in Istanbul, Turkey. His teaching and research focuses on the practice of management and the development of enterprises. As an entrepreneur he has translated action research methodologies into participatory consulting and has worked with over 750 settings primarily in Turkey and Europe. He serves on a number of boards of corporations and civil society organizations.

**Gulru Z Goker**, works as a postdoctoral researcher at the Center for Gender Studies at Koc University in Istanbul, Turkey and teaches political science in the International Relations Department. Her research focuses on deliberative democracy, democratic theory and gender, political participation and women's movements. She received her Ph.D. from the City University of New York Graduate Center in 2011.