Universität Basel

Publication

A table-based turn-taking system and its political consequences: Managing participation, building opinion groups, and fostering consensus

Turn-taking in political settings faces the problem of how to enable the participation of larger numbers of speakers in orderly ways; solutions have been described as offered by constrained formats like the turn-type pre-allocation system or the mediated turn-taking system. This paper describes another specific solution, a table-based turn-taking system. The study describes how facilitators managing brainstorming sessions in a participatory project exploit the spatial distribution of the citizens around tables scattered in the meeting room. By organizing discussions table by table, rather than selecting next individual speakers, the facilitators select groups and attributes specific rights and obligations to talk to "tables", which are then treated not as a mere spatial location but as a political entity. The table-based device does not just solve problems of turn-taking management but also fosters the expression of collective opinions of the "table" as a place for building consensus.