

# CONNECTIONS

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## Kettering's Multinational Research



The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering's primary research question is, what makes democracy work as it should? Kettering's research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through inter-related program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. The foundation collaborates with an extensive network of community groups, professional associations, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation's website at [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org).

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# Learning with the Citizens' Accord Forum: Building a Shared Society in a Sustainable Democracy in Israel

By Phillip D. Lurie

**T**he Citizens' Accord Forum (CAF) has a daunting mission: to build a shared society in a sustainable democracy in Israel by working to mend rifts between groups in conflict by building bridges, encouraging constructive engagement, and promoting and empowering civic leadership. The Kettering Foundation has been working with this organization for more than three years as they've been naming and framing issues for public



deliberation among Israeli citizens, both Jews and Arabs. Kettering has experimented with a number of organizations attempting to create pathways for citizens to engage with one another over the problems they face in daily life. In these experiments, one aim is for citizens to see themselves implicated in the work of public life, and thus, take responsibility for it. This project is particularly interesting because it's rooted in a longstanding conflict among societies characterized, in part, by different cultural traditions. Moreover, CAF is interested in addressing problems that Arabs and Jews face in daily life, in the context of that conflict.

Kettering's research with CAF is rooted in our concept of joint learning, which focuses on developing shared research questions, exploring these questions through ongoing face-to-face exchanges, and learning. Building on his participation at the Deliberative Democracy Institute, Udi Cohen, codirector of CAF, received a grant from the European Union to convene a series of dialogues among Arab and Israeli citizens to build capacity and trust. CAF has a self-interest in experimenting with innovations in affecting the civic discourse among deeply divided people, and Kettering has an opportunity to learn from those experiences. Together, we want to learn more about:

1. How issue guides can affect the civic discourse among people with different cultures of discussion;
2. How a focus on everyday problems can affect the deliberations and address the underlying issues of conflict;
3. What outcomes emerge from the deliberations;
4. How to convey the outcomes of deliberative forums to policy makers; and
5. How to affect policy decisions.

We've learned some interesting things from their various reports and from meeting together, including:

- **Anecdotal evidence about the true messiness of practicing deliberative politics.** It's also a good example of how practice and



process collide. In fact, it's worth noting that Cohen is, in a sense, a collector of processes, picking out and melding together the parts that he deems necessary to accomplish the goals he shares with CAF ("a shared society in a sustainable democracy"). This isn't meant to be a criticism, but rather an explanation of why there are elements of Kettering's democratic practices, Hal Saunders' "Sustained Dialogue," and John Paul Lederach's "conflict transformation," among others.

- **The importance of concern gathering.** CAF spends a great



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deal of its effort working with citizen groups to identify concerns, recognizing how crucial this is to ensuring that people can see themselves implicated in the issue, both emotionally and as an actor. The process of identifying concerns is done similarly to how one might begin a deliberative forum with a "personal stake" story, while also allowing for discussion and reflection on that story.

- **The challenges of moving from deliberation to action.** The deliberations that CAF convenes are important, if only because they serve as one of the only opportunities for people in this conflict to come together to talk and to be heard. Yet, they recognize that voice alone isn't enough; people have to act in order to truly have agency. One of their struggles remains in how to move from deliberation to action.
- **Democratic practices challenge participants to rethink and learn from their efforts.** It's interesting to see participants struggle with and push against the incorrect notion that the practices of deliberative politics are meant to be a linear process. This was demonstrated in their desire to continue to go back and examine and readdress the things they've already done, suggesting a good example of what happens when this work is thought of less as a



step-by-step process and more as practices through which citizens can address problems.

- **Citizens can learn to work together to solve shared problems by working together to solve shared problems.** That is to say, the joint work on addressing shared problems, while constantly dealing with the question “what can we do?” is a fascinating and effective way to deal with the ethnonational conflict dividing these citizens. CAF learned that a more sustainable democracy creates and builds the content for a shared society and vice versa: “the shared society,” in which its members find ways to work together on solving shared problems, will in turn create the civic content of a sustainable democracy.
- **While various organizations in Israel are working to advance a**

**shared society in development, economy, and education, the added value of CAF’s work is in the “democratic content and values” that guide the different initiatives they’re involved in.** They found that activities that advance joint economic initiatives require joint civic activity, addressing questions including: What is the nature of this economy? What is the proper relationship between the power of the market and the place of the government in economic activity? What is the place in this process for future generations? There is a need to build relations based on mutual trust and recognition and on a shared democratic agenda. This agenda includes the involvement of all citizens making informed choices in joint decision-making processes. The agenda must



**This research is ongoing. Still, our work with CAF suggests some interesting approaches for moving forward in the future.**

reflect all citizens of all sectors and social classes. Initiatives that lack these components and that are not built on deliberative practices can only go so far.

In support of this work, the foundation has engaged in a range of ancillary activities. One such example was attending a conference in Jerusalem in October 2014. The purpose of the event was to talk about how to build a “shared society in a sustainable democracy,” both from a theoretical and a practical standpoint. One of the challenges CAF faces is the way that they’ve framed the challenge: shared society in sustainable democracy. What does that mean? Each of these terms and their meanings are open for interpretation, and it’s difficult to come to definitive, agreed-upon definitions. Indeed, much of the time at this conference was spent unpacking the meaning of these terms and how people might act on those definitions. Rabbi Michael Melchior, who

delivered the opening remarks, immediately noted the importance of, and fundamental grounding of, this work in the values that people share, and the necessity for people to work through tensions that arise in that context. This seemed to be accepted by all people in the room as well, and provided a common starting point for participants.

In addition to the conference, my colleagues and I attended a concern-gathering session among a mixed Arab and Jewish (all Israeli citizens) group representing two communities. The issue was focused around a recent war with Gaza and how it affected them, particularly around day-to-day challenges that stem from being neighboring communities. Indeed, it is one of the only places where children from each community (Arab and Jewish) attend a joint school. It was incredibly powerful and a pleasure to be a part of.

We also had a chance to see CAF test out one of their issue frameworks, among staff, on the topic of the 2014 war in Gaza. The guide focuses on what citizens could do in response to this crisis. The three options are 1) War on Racism and Extremism; 2) We Must Talk—We Must Proceed Together; and 3) The Reality Calls for Separation. While only a draft, the book certainly engendered an interesting conversation and was a solid foundation on which to build future deliberative forums.

Finally, CAF has worked specifically toward getting two groups of women (Arabs and Orthodox Jews) to work on framing their own issues for public deliberation. The Arab group framed the issue of women in society, whereas the Jewish women framed the topic of family relationships. In both cases, the women struggled with finding a comfort zone in which they could share their personal thoughts and stories. In each group, the issue caused emotions to run high, and it was necessary to address and work through what was shared. Moreover, both groups seem to be making a conceptual shift from issue framing to a way of collectively solving a problem by getting people to see themselves as implicated and responsible for doing something about it.

Indeed, this last point is crucial, and was recently demonstrated at the CAF exchange in Dayton, Ohio, in July 2016. The mixed group of Jews and Arabs was very well suited to talking with one another about the everyday issues they face together, which in this case was about troubled youth. They could understand the other's point of view, they could recognize the underlying values and commiserate with them, and they could identify and begin working through the tensions that arose during their conversations. In short, these two groups, which usually

find themselves at loggerheads, were able to deliberate together. These efforts could be derailed, however, when participants, as they invariably would, brought the larger struggle between Jews and Arabs into the conversation. The tenor of the conversation would completely change, and the progress they were making in working through their shared problems was lost, as they reverted to an "us vs. them" dynamic. However, their ability to refocus on everyday issues allowed them to recognize that they do share values, in spite of their differences, and that they need to find ways to go beyond simple discovery to the actual hard task of working together.

This research is ongoing. Still, our work with CAF suggests some interesting approaches for moving forward in the future. Such research opportunities include continuing to learn about 1) innovations in practice that would affect the civic discourse among deeply divided people on everyday issues; 2) how the work of a deliberative public can contribute to the work of governmental institutions; and 3) what policymakers (Knesset members, in particular) want to know from a deliberative public about emerging issues. ■

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