

CONNECTIONS

An Annual Journal of the Kettering Foundation | 2016

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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.

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Citizens in a Global Society

By David Mathews



This year, I am writing the same article for all three of Kettering’s major publications—*Connections*, the *Kettering Review*, and the *Higher Education Exchange (HEX)*. My objective is for readers of each of the publications to know what is being reported in the other two. Together, they tell a more complete story of what’s needed to make our democracy work as it faces global forces that threaten to disempower citizens.

All three periodicals have the same subject—Kettering’s multinational studies, which is the focus of this year’s research review. Their job is to share what we are learning in all of the multinational research and to solicit thoughts from readers. *Connections* will carry stories, not

about Kettering, but about civic organizations in other countries, written whenever possible by the people in those organizations. The *Review* will acknowledge our debt to the articles and books from outside the United States that have had a significant influence on how the foundation has come to understand democracy. And *HEX* will speak to American institutions of higher education about their role in democracy at a time when democracy around the world is in trouble.

TWO CATEGORIES OF MULTINATIONAL RESEARCH

The foundation’s multinational research falls into two broad categories or groups. In the first category, the foundation collaborates with nongovernmental organizations outside the United States that are interested in what Kettering is studying about how people do or don’t become engaged as citizens who exercise sound judgment, the work citizens do in communities to solve problems and educate the young, and productive ways that people can engage large institutions, both governmental and nongovernmental, as those institutions try to engage them. This research is the way the foundation organizes its study of democracy.

At the heart of the word *democracy* is the *demos*, or “citizenry,” and Kettering refers to the ways citizens



go about their work as “democratic practices.” (*Kratos*, or “power,” is the other root of democracy.) The democratic practices that Kettering studies require self-responsibility, which can’t be exported or imported. So the focus of our research is on the United States, not other countries. Yet our studies have been greatly enriched by what the foundation has learned from nongovernmental organizations in some 100 other countries spread across the globe.

Organizations in other countries interested in this research come to summer learning exchanges called the Deliberative Democracy Institutes (DDIs) to share their experiences with one another and the foundation. Some of the participants come back to enter Kettering’s multinational residency program, which now has a large alumni group. These alumni often return as faculty for the institutes.

Kettering’s second category of multinational research is on citizen diplomacy, and it centers on three countries—Russia, China, and Cuba. The governments in these countries

have or have had serious differences with the government in the United States; communications have broken down or been problematic.



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The premise of the studies, as the late Hal Saunders, Kettering's long-time director of international affairs, explained to the *New York Times*, is that we live in a time when governments face a growing number of problems they cannot deal with alone, so citizens outside government have to fill that void. Citizen diplomacy is not intended to replace or compete with government diplomacy but to supplement it. And from Kettering's perspective, this research gives the foundation a way to study dangerous conflicts, which are, unfortunately, an inescapable part of politics.

RUSSIA

Beginning during the Cold War, the Dartmouth Conference, a joint venture with Russian partners, developed a new process for dealing with conflict that Hal Saunders called "Sustained Dialogue." This dialogue fits between what governments do

and people-to-people programs. When Dartmouth began, nuclear conflict was a real possibility, and Dartmouth opened a line of communication that took advantage of the perspective of citizens. As political scientist James C. Scott has pointed out in his writing, people don't "see like a state" and can convey the concerns of the nation as a whole. That is, citizens who do not have the responsibilities of government have experiences from other walks of life to bring to bear on problems between countries.

The challenges Dartmouth has faced have been almost overwhelming. The possibilities for a nuclear holocaust—even if begun unintentionally—have been real. Kettering got involved because it was, in light of the enormity of the threat, simply the right thing to do. The foundation could never prove that this dialogue was or would be effective. However, it has been going on for 56 years, which is one indication of its value. For much of that time, the larger conference has been augmented by a Dartmouth task force on regional conflicts. Most recently, new task forces have been created to foster cooperative ventures. The first promotes cooperation in medicine.

Recently, during the Ukraine crisis, when the two governments reduced their bilateral contacts, both sides agreed to reinstitute the

“ Dartmouth has provided Kettering a unique opportunity to look at what citizens can do to reduce the possibilities for violent conflict.



Dennis Meadows, Yuri Zhukov, Yevgeny Fedorov, Harrison Brown, Norman Cousins, and Bob Chollar at Dartmouth VII, Hanover, New Hampshire, December 1972

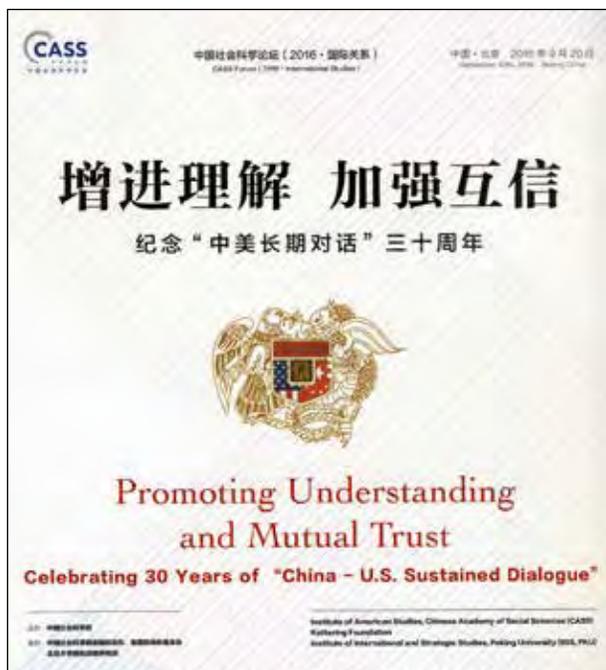
citizen-to-citizen meetings of the large Dartmouth Conference. The conference has reconvened four times in less than two years. The next meeting has already been scheduled for early 2017, with elections in this country over and the Trump administration in place.

Dartmouth has provided Kettering a unique opportunity to look at what citizens can do to reduce the possibilities for violent conflict. The dialogue involves digging behind official positions and stated interests to try to uncover what is really valuable in human, not just geopolitical, terms. Then, proceeding from that, the two sides try to imagine scenarios of reciprocal steps that the countries could take to relieve tensions and build confidence—while recognizing differences.

Conference participants on the US side have ranged from business leaders like David Rockefeller to journalists like Harrison Salisbury, from scientists like Paul Doty to small-town mayors like Scott Clemons and National Issues Forums leaders like Nancy Kranich. The Russians reciprocated in kind with cosmonauts, scientists, and scholars selected initially by the Russian Institute for US and Canadian Studies, which was led by Georgy Arbatov and later by a group headed by the former energy minister Yuri Shafranik.

CHINA

In 1985, the foundation proposed, and the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping agreed, to begin nongovernmental dialogues to supplement



the resumption of formal, government-to-government contact. The topics were contentious, such as an increasingly independent Taiwan, which China saw as belonging to them. Deng assigned the Institute of American Studies under Li Shenzhi the responsibility for working with Kettering. This year in Beijing we recognized more than 30 years of collaboration, which has included people like newspaper editor Katherine Fanning, former government official Robert McNamara, and community leader Anna Faith Jones, from the Boston Foundation.

In time, this exchange went beyond two-day conferences to take new forms. The Chinese Institute arranged meetings with others, like the China Institute for International Strategic Studies and the Central Party School of the Chinese Communist

Party. The institute and Kettering also undertook joint studies that are described in a volume, *China-United States Sustained Dialogues: 1986-2001*, edited by Zhao Mei and Maxine Thomas. In addition, Kettering added a program of fellowships to the exchange, which draws scholars from both the institute and Peking University.

Kettering doesn't study China, per se, any more than it studies Russia or any other country. That research is best done by universities and policy institutes. The foundation concentrates on relationships between countries as a whole.

A full account of the roles our foundation has played in China is included in *The Destiny of Wealth*, written by Zi Zhongyun, a leading authority on the United States. The current exchange is built on earlier exchanges going back to 1972. The Chinese have put Kettering in the category of "old friends" and consider the relationship a special one.

CUBA

The relationship between the governments of the United States and Cuba has been disrupted for more than 50 years. Only recently has the relationship begun to change. But nearly 20 years ago, the foundation began a research exchange with a nongovernmental organization in Cuba, the

Antonio Núñez Jiménez Foundation for Nature and Humanity. The exchange didn't take the form of Sustained Dialogue; instead, it has been based on studying comparable problems, such as community responses to natural disasters and environmental damage on the Gulf Coast. Kettering also has provided fellowships in Dayton for staff from Núñez who want to become familiar with the foundation's studies and its methods for doing the research.

The principal joint venture with Núñez is a biannual conference on "active citizenship," a term the Cubans chose. The focus is not on the government-to-government relationship, but rather on similar problems in both societies, like the role of communities in sustainable

economic development and active citizenship in urban renewal. The major papers from these conferences are published in books that are shared in the United States, Cuba, and other Latin American countries. Even though the conferences are a Cuban-US collaborative venture, participants have come from across the Americas, from Canada to Brazil. What began as a bilateral project has evolved into a multilateral one.

CROSS-POLLINATION

Kettering has benefited greatly from the cross-pollination of its two lines of multinational research. As I mentioned, in its study of politics, Kettering has to acknowledge the human potential for violent conflict and have something to say about



how it could be avoided, something that is compatible with democracy. Sustained Dialogue does that. Kettering has also found that, whether in citizen diplomacy or in the citizen deliberations of the National Issues Forums (and similar forums now in other countries), people are more likely to understand one another, avoid conflicts, and maybe even work together when they focus on what is deeply valuable to all human beings, the ends and means of life itself, and not just on facts, ideology, or interests.

What connects the research on Sustained Dialogue and deliberative practices is the same thing that connects all of the foundation's research—it is the focus on citizens and what citizens can do to make a difference. This research is relevant today because so many Americans aren't sure they can make a difference, even in an election season. Votes certainly count. But do they result in meaningful change in an age beset with what seem to be intractable problems—some generated here, some coming from far away? Many Americans aren't sure.

The airwaves today are filled with promises to “empower” people. Yet the true power citizens have is the power they generate themselves by working with others to produce things that can benefit everyone. The democratic practices Kettering

studies are ways this work can be done that will give citizens the power to shape their future. You may recall that in 2009, a Nobel Prize went to Elinor Ostrom, for proving that the products of the work of citizens are essential to making governments and large institutions more effective and responsive.

While the work of citizens might be accepted as essential in local matters and in communities, its value is questioned when the arena is national and international. Nonetheless, there are instances where “just citizens” have had a global impact. Environmental initiatives are evidence of that. Diplomacy, on the other hand, has always been the province of governments. Admittedly, the citizens involved in supplemental diplomacy haven't generally been rank-and-file. And certainly the pseudo-populist argument that skilled, professional diplomats can be replaced by the man or woman on the street is absurd. Sustained Dialogue, however, doesn't draw on professional expertise as much as recognize the importance of the things that human beings hold dear and the value of the distinctive perspective that citizens can bring to the table. It was Hal Saunders' sensibilities as a human being, not just his long experience in government, that led to his insights about what citizens could contribute. Just

as certainly, it was using citizens as a touchstone that has allowed the Kettering Foundation to draw rich lessons from both citizen diplomacy and citizen democracy.

Kettering board member and Dartmouth cofounder Norman Cousins spoke about the role of citizens in his remarks to Dartmouth XV in 1986:

Our meetings have come to occupy a very special place in the relationships between the United States and the Soviet Union. They have justified, I believe, the hopes of President Eisenhower in initiating the project. His deep conviction, as I think you know, was that private citizens who are well informed and who have the confidence of their governments may be able to play a useful role by probing for possible openings that, for one reason or another, do not always surface in the meetings of diplomats.

This does not mean that citizens should be expected to imitate or supercede the diplomats. Quite the contrary. Our role is to raise questions and seek answers that do not ordinarily come up in the official exchanges. We can think and speak in a larger context. We are not obligated to defend every action or decision that occurs on the official level. We can afford to think in terms of historical principle. We need not shrink



The true power citizens have is the power they generate themselves by working with others to produce things that can benefit everyone.

from the moral issues that often underlay the political problems or confrontations. We cannot be expected to commit our governments but, just in the act of identifying such issues, we may be able to invoke the process by which public opinion has a creative and constructive effect on national policies.

Norman makes a similar distinction to the one I made earlier: citizens can bring to diplomacy experiences outside of government. The foundation hopes that in the future its multinational research will show more about the unique contributions that citizens, in tandem with diplomats, can make. These contributions to relationships between countries are what Elinor Ostrom called “coproduction.” ■

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