

Foreword

Politics can be viewed as a game where actors with different beliefs, resources and preferences pursue their – often mutually incompatible and occasionally even internally inconsistent – goals, resorting to strategies that involve varying degrees of cooperation and conflict with other actors. The stage of the games is set by institutions, i.e. the rules of the game, structuring individual and group decision-making and distribution of power at all levels of politics, from elections and public opinion to voting in national and European level legislatures or, indeed, to determination of global order. As a game politics is certainly a serious one, producing winners and losers among political actors from individual citizens and political parties to countries and even civilizations. In a world characterized by scarcity of resources, game outcomes are bound to produce uneven distributions of satisfaction. Hence, nearly all outcomes of political games can be viewed as status quo states from which new games emerge.

These remarks are more than familiar to Professor Matti Wiberg, for whom we are proud to dedicate this collection of essays. Wiberg always reminds us that politics is indeed a serious game, highlighting the various possibilities for actors to influence decision-making. Importantly, his perceptive and inquisitive mind never fails to pay attention to those hidden or less obvious features of policy-making that less attentive colleagues might not notice. In the Finnish context Wiberg is particularly known for his relentless and razor-sharp critique of opinion polls, the institution of the president, or the non-transparent conduct of the government and ministries – or indeed of those ‘talking heads’ colleagues who regularly appear in the media as ‘scientific experts’ without any real academic merits. International conferences and workshops have repeatedly benefited from his analytical and often colourful speeches and comments. In his esteemed international publications, Wiberg has, for example, emphasized the many functions of parliamentary questions or the government-driven law production of European democracies.

On his university homepage, Wiberg declares his research interests to be simply ‘politics’. In this era of increased specialization, this probably appears unrealistically ambitious. However, remarkably enough Wiberg has managed to publish on a dazzling array of topics ranging from political behaviour, agenda-setting, the language of politics, to Finnish and Nordic politics, to name just a few. Internationally Wiberg is

best known as a scholar of parliaments and political institutions. Hence the main focus of this collection of essays is on legislatures and other institutions, but also included are selected themes of Wiberg's other research output, e.g. political trust and legitimacy of governments, the topic of his doctoral thesis defended at the University of Turku in 1988. Throughout his academic career, Turku has been the home base of Wiberg, even when he worked as the professor of political science in the University of Tampere between 1994 and 2001. Since 2002 Wiberg has been a professor of political science in Turku. In 2003 he became a Member of Finnish Academy of Science and Letters. Wiberg has also contributed actively to political science organisations, for example through serving as a long-time board member and vice-chair of the Finnish Political Science Association, on the board of the Nordic Political Science Association and as the convenor of ECPR Standing Group of Parliaments.

To mark the occasion of Professor Wiberg's 60th birthday, we – a group of his collaborators, colleagues and friends – are honoured to present this collection of essays on parliaments and institutions as a token of our appreciation of Wiberg's academic career and friendship. We already look forward to future conferences and publications where we can enjoy both his analytical skills and sharp wit. Happy birthday, Matti!

The editors