

## On Deadlocks and Simulations (Editorial)

By Oscar Hemer<sup>1</sup>

In Sweden we have still not recovered from the shock after the general election in September, when the expected change of government, from the centre-right Alliance to a coalition between the Social Democrats and the Green party, was overshadowed by the fact that the neo-fascist party “Sweden Democrats” reached 13 per cent of the poll. Although they had entered Parliament already in 2010, many among the 87 per cent who didn’t vote them liked to believe that Sweden remained an exception to the European rule, and even to the situation in the neighbouring Scandinavian countries, where right-wing populist parties have long since played an influential political role (in Norway they are even in government.) As this new issue of *Glocal Times* goes online, only two months after the formation of the new Swedish red-green government, their budget proposition was outvoted in Parliament, after the Sweden Democrats supported the competing budget from the right-centre opposition and the prime minister failed to reach a strategic agreement with any of the former government parties. Hence, for the first time since 1958, there will be an extra election, in March 2015, in order to break the current political deadlock and solve the paradoxical situation where the new government administers the opposition’s budget.

There is little reason to believe that the result of the new election will be substantially different from the recent one. The Sweden Democrats may be punished by the electorate for obstructing the codex of parliamentary behaviour, but they may just as well gain even stronger support. They are already the third largest party, and they have self-assuredly declared that they will fail every government that holds on to the country’s current, by European standards very generous, immigration policy. (Sweden is, in proportion to its population, by far the biggest recipient of refugees from Iraq and Syria within the EU, and the prognosis is an ever-increasing number of asylum-seekers, who are guaranteed to find shelter if they manage to reach Sweden.) Even if the right-centre opposition in the extra election again becomes bigger than the red-green block, they will hence not be able to govern either, without approval from the cocksure neo-fascists, who have clearly demonstrated that they intend to fully exercise their position as balance of power

The cynical comment may be: “Welcome to Reality!” This is what the situation looks like all over Europe. This time of season is normally depressing in the Northern hemisphere, but this year the darkness appears remarkably unbearable, partly due to the fact that I have just returned from spring in Australia. We were a large delegation from Malmö University at Flinders University in Adelaide, where we did a joint ComDev conference and workshop as part of the on-going *Glocal Classroom* project of collaboration between four universities on four continents for the advancement of web-based pedagogy.

The theme of the two-day event was “Timor-Leste: Challenges of a New State in The Asian Century”, and the prospects for the youngest state in the Asia-Pacific were thoroughly examined from all angles. Most Europeans (with the exception of the Portuguese) are most likely not even aware of the existence, let alone the location, of this former Portuguese colony on the island of Timor (East Timor), which was occupied by neighbouring Indonesia from

1974 to 1999 and became independent only in 2002. In the Asia-Pacific perspective, however, this tiny republic has a very strategic position between the regional powers and in the crossroads of the interest spheres of the new rivals for global hegemony, USA and China. Looking at the world from another viewpoint is an illuminating experience. The perspective from “down under” has certainly changed in the last decades. From having been regarded (and seeing itself) as a European outpost at the end of the world, Australia is now assuming its strategic position in the Asia Pacific powerhouse, with India and China competing over its favours, and with emerging Indonesia on its doorstep. The huge but sparsely populated country has a severe legacy of racism and discrimination of its aboriginal population – way up until the 1970s, non-white immigrants were not allowed – and the waters to the north are the grave for thousands of wrecked refugees, just like the Mediterranean. But the new *Australasian* profile is very tangible in the cosmopolitan urban centres. Australian universities attract students from all over South and East Asia, making education one of the major industries. Apart from the Ivy League institutions in the UK and US, nearby Australia is simply more attractive to aspiring Asian students than far-away Europe and North America.

The Timor-Leste conference at Flinders contained a one-day “hypothetical” workshop where ComDev students from Malmö and Flinders students in Development studies and International Relations acted as counsellors to the East Timorese government, whose part was played by a group of Timorese civil servants who happened to be in Adelaide on an English training course. It was the first time on the ComDev programme that *simulation* was applied as a pedagogical tool, and we were all overwhelmed by its potential, even though the 9,5 hour time difference complicated the interaction between students online and in situ. The Timorese played their part of the simulation very well, and found it rewarding to have their home country examined by foreign eyes. Next year we intend to recreate the collaboration with Flinders in another *Glocal Classroom* experiment, the nature of which remains to be decided. One suggestion that came up at the debriefing after the conference was to do a similar case study on a small nation in the European margin. Like Denmark – or Sweden. Would there be a ComDev strategy to tackle the current Swedish deadlock – or the European crisis? Think about that while you enjoy this issue of *Glocal Times*! And look forward to a new prosperous year for ComDev!

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