



Institut für Föderalismus
Institut du Fédéralisme
Institute of Federalism

Report – Summer University on Federalism, Decentralisation and Conflict Resolution 2022

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University of Fribourg



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1. Introduction

The 29th edition of the Summer University on Federalism, Decentralisation and Conflict Resolution took place in Fribourg from 15 August to 2 September 2022. The three-week course was designed to increase awareness of federalism, to meet the needs of a growing generation of scholars and practitioners of federalism and to foster international cooperation. The participants came from across the globe and had different educational backgrounds. With participants from 20 countries and representing most geographic regions of the world, the Summer University 2022 was a truly international experience. Lecturers were invited from Europe, Asia, Australia, and Africa. Their lectures were of an interdisciplinary nature, with lawyers, political scientists, sociologists, etc. leading the sessions.

2. Organisation

2.1 Media and information

Information about the Summer University was published in December 2021 on the IFF website and on its Facebook page. It was also published on the website of the International Association of Centres for Federal Studies. At the same time emails were sent out to our network of alumni participants and lecturers, to key partners including the Swiss Development Cooperation, and to various embassies and university contacts across the world. Emails were sent out within the University of Fribourg as well as to other Swiss universities.

Our official means of communication was done through Moodle: all information, the readings, presentations and announcements were made on there. Access to Moodle had been explained and granted a few months before the start of the Summer University.

A few weeks before the beginning of the Summer University, we created a (facultative) Facebook group in order to start building a strong communication within our group. We posted four videos of interviews presenting the various internal actors of the Summer University. During the Summer University, we also opened a non-mandatory WhatsApp group to share news, pictures and messages between the participants.

Besides this internal communication, we also published externally. Each week on our official IFF Facebook page, "Summaries of the Day" from participants were posted to reflect feedbacks and understanding of the lectures they received. We also published interviews of lecturers and pictures on Twitter and LinkedIn. Our post reached an important audience with around 700 to 1.000 persons reached per post, while we usually reach around 100 to 200 persons with our regular posts.

Finally, we coordinate with the Department of Communication from the University of Fribourg. A short video is currently being edited to present the Summer University 2022 in our internal and external networks. More videos will also be prepared in order to have material for the outreach of our Summer Universities in the future.

2.2 Finances

For the Summer University 2022, the financial situation was different compared to previous editions. Unlike previous editions, this time the participants had to pay for the course and accommodation which amounted to a total cost of CHF 4'500 for each participant. Therefore, finding funding for the



participants was an imperative with several attempts made to secure funding from sources within the University and outside. Models like scholarships were discussed and contacts were made. The basic funding available to the Institute of Federalism was not intended to cover the additional personnel costs that are inherent to our Summer University. Furthermore, a number of scholarships were offered by the Swiss FDFA, the Hanns Seidel Stiftung, the Toni Hagen Stiftung, Helvetas Ethiopia, and the World Bank. Additional funding came from the International Relations Department of the University of Fribourg and the Aargauer Foundation. Finally, partial funding/deficit guarantees were obtained from the International Relations Department of the University of Fribourg and the International Relations Commission of the Faculty of Law.

2.3 Personnel

The Summer University team consisted of Prof Eva Maria Belser (Co-Director of the Institute), Dr Soeren Keil (Academic Head of the Institute), Dr Rekha Oleschak (Senior Research Fellow), Dr Verena Richardier (Senior Research Fellow and Head of Communication), Mr Daan Smeekens (Research Fellow), Ms Yvonne Heiter (overall administration, logistics, contacts with participants), Mr Jean-Pierre Blickle (finances), Mr Julien Volery (Civil Service), and Mr Alistair Macdonald (Civil Service).

2.4 Venue

The Summer University took place at the university premises at Pérolles. A large lecture room was available for the duration of the school, with two extra rooms for group work. Overall, the premises are well-suited to hold an event of this size and duration. On the first day of the Summer University, due to Fribourg's public holiday on August 15th, the course took place at the University of Bern.

2.5 Accommodation and travel (participants & lecturers)

The participants were accommodated with half board and lodging in two different residences in Fribourg, Convict Salesianum and Cité St-Justin. The use of student accommodation allowed us to keep the participation fees lower than going into hotels or workshop and seminar venues. Students also received breakfast and dinner at the accommodation. Students from the University of Fribourg and Erasmus students were not offered accommodation. The organisation of the accommodation, and the reception of the participants (Saturday and Sunday) before the start of the Summer University was handled by Ms Heiter, with help from Mr Smeekens and Mr Macdonald.

Guest lecturers stayed at Hotel de la Rose in the city centre.

2.6 Visas for participants

As we knew from experience, visas may form obstacles to potential participants. There were two visa rejections (one regarding a participant from Ethiopia and the other regarding a participant from Pakistan). There were also visa issues with participants from Sri Lanka. Finally, one participant from Morocco received a visa that started on 15 August 2022, which meant he missed the first day of the Summer University.

The visa rejection rate has been higher than in previous years. We will discuss this further and seek clarification with SDFA and other relevant offices on this issue, as it begins to have an effect on student numbers, fee paying participants and our recruitment strategy.



2.7 Excursions/Extracurricular

Different excursions and after-dinner activities were planned by the organisational team throughout the Summer University.

During the first week, a movie night was hosted by the organisational team. The first week also included a team building exercise, the “Tower of Power”, where the participants wholeheartedly pushed their limits to find consensus and the federal spirit by building a tower. The first week ended with a tour of the Federal Parliament in Bern.

During the second week, a quiz game related to federalism was held at the Salesianum residence. The week ended with a trip to a cheese factory, the castle of Gruyères and the Cailler chocolate factory.

On the final week the participants enjoyed a tour of Fribourg.

We have also facilitated two library sessions at our Institute for the participants to get to know our library and get to use our books, read, do research and make copies.

3. Academic Organisation

3.1 Selection of lecturers/topics

The selection of lecturers was made by considering past teaching experiences and evaluations from previous Summer Universities. Additionally, new lecturers were invited and new topics discussed during this year’s Summer University.

3.2 Applications and selection of participants

After the initial call for applications, a large number of applications from around the world were accepted to participate. After an initial assessment, the selection of participants was done considering educational background, gender, geographic representation, work experience and language. 55 participants were selected, whereas 45 actually participated.

3.3 Academic tools (Moodle)

Our communication platform Moodle was used for all formal information. Thus included, the readings for the Summer University and the presentations were made available on Moodle. Participants logged onto the website via a guest account (the instructions on how to access the website were sent by mail before the start of the Summer University). All announcements were made via Moodle, so as not to exclude anyone who does not use WhatsApp or Facebook.

3.4 Topics covered

Week 1 was devoted to understanding the interdisciplinary approaches to federalism, decentralisation and conflict resolution. This included a course on the concept of a state, an introduction to theories of federalism, a presentation on the use of comparative constitutional law in constitution-making processes, a comparison of federal systems, a course on fundamental rights, one on fiscal federalism and case studies on Switzerland and India. The lecturers in Week 1 were Prof Eva Maria Belser, Dr Rekha Oleschak-Pillai, Dr Soeren Keil, Dr Nicolas Schmitt (Institute of Federalism) and Dr Alice Valdesalici (Eurac Research). Cheryl Saunders (University of Melbourne) also gave an online lecture.



At the end of each day, tutorials were held in order for participants to talk about the readings they had received on Moodle. These tutorials were led by staff from the Institute.

Week 2 was devoted to power-sharing and conflict resolution. Week 2 started off with a lecture by Prof Evelyne Schmid (University of Lausanne) on the role and reception of international law in multilevel governance. Dr Julian Hottinger (Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs) then gave a presentation on peace mediation and negotiations. That lecture was followed in the afternoon by a lecture on the sociological approach to conflicts and interactions by Dr Verena Richardier. Dr Soeren Keil gave a lecture on federalism as a tool of conflict resolution, and in the afternoon conducted a case study on Bosnia and Herzegovina. On Thursday, Dr Jayampathy Wickramaratne (Constitutional Lawyer and former MP) taught the participants about conflict resolution in Sri Lanka and conducted a case study on the same country in the afternoon. To finish the week, Prof Assefa Fiseha (Addis Ababa University) talked about federal and devolved systems in Africa and gave a case study on Ethiopia in the afternoon.

Week 3 started by a presentation by Prof Nico Steytler (University of Western Cape) on federalism in South Africa. He continued on Tuesday with a workshop, after which the participants had a free afternoon to prepare for the exam on Wednesday. Thursday and Friday morning were devoted to a simulation on conflict resolution on a fictitious case study, where participants had to take up several roles and had to find solutions. The Summer University closed on Friday 2 September with a diploma ceremony. There was a farewell dinner on Thursday.

3.5 Evaluation by participants

The overall evaluation of the participants was very positive, both with respect to academic content and the organisation. Some of the positive comments were the following:

- I would recommend the Summer University for its high academic standard, for its resourceful professors brought from all over the world and for its flawless management.
- The Summer University allowed to reflect on the topics of federalism, decentralisation and conflict resolution and gave us the opportunity to meet and exchange with people from around the world.
- In just three weeks, the Summer University provides a rich experience by meeting experts, academics, lawyers, etc. working on federalism throughout the world. Such international experience on federalism is very rare.
- A perfect platform to gain more knowledge on federalism, not only from a theoretical aspect but also from discussions and workshops. You can have fun and learn at the same time.
- The Summer University is the place for those interested in the topics of federalism, policy making and constitutionalism. It is a place of diversity where people can share their culture, opinions, thoughts and history.
- The selection of participants with very diverse backgrounds was really good and I was able to learn more through interactions with all of them.
- Thank you for all your efforts, we enjoyed all the sessions, group works, excursions and social activities.

Some of the more critical points were the following:

- We should have less lectures and more interactive sessions.
- One big simulation instead of many would have made more sense and would have made the final simulation more exciting.



- Give more time to the participants to present their papers and discuss them afterwards.
- Visits to cantonal and local governments should be organized.

3.6 Gaps to be addressed and further improvements for next Summer University

Organisationally, we could have made for a better planning regarding earlier and broader calls for applications, earlier selection of candidates, and more time to find relevant funders, as well as to find the needed support for visas. Those issues had to be resolved quite shortly before the Summer University, and we had to accept certain participants as close to two months before the start. This should be done timelier next time.

We should also rethink arrangement for breakfast on weekends at the accommodations. Instead of IFF staff coming in on weekend mornings, we should find alternatives to provide breakfast. We should also revisit food arrangements in general (e.g. provide lunch instead of dinner), as well as accommodation arrangement (e.g. let all participants stay at the same place, though this was impossible this year, and may prove so next time as well).

Academically, we need to revisit the selection of lecturers based on feedback, as we always do. We also need to revisit the input from the Fribourg team: what can be done in-house, should be done in-house. Secondly, we need to further revise and develop our simulation for week 3, and ensure that students are not overloaded with simulations throughout the three weeks.

3.7 Dates Summer University 2024

The Summer University 2024 will take place either from 12.8. – 30.08., or from 19.8. – 6.9.

4. Final Comments

The Summer University of 2022 was in many respects a new beginning. The Covid-19 pandemic made it necessary to postpone the Summer University both in 2020 and in 2021, so the 2022 edition took place 4 years after the last one. Even for the 2022 edition, it was not clear for a long time if and how it would work, considering that it relies on more than 40 people travelling to Fribourg from all over the world, and the continued restrictions we faced for a long time due to the ongoing pandemic. It was also a new beginning in terms of financial framework – with a new funding regime in place and the need to find sponsors for scholarships. This worked very well, and we are grateful to all financial assistance received from the different partners. The Summer University 2022 also brought to the forefront the restructuring of the International Research and Consulting Center (IRCC) at the Institute of Federalism. More sessions were covered by in-house experts, as the IRCC team has grown in recent years, which also enhanced the interdisciplinary nature of the Summer University. Finally, the 2022 edition aimed to adjust to previous feedback, focusing more strongly on theory in week 1, and on case studies in week 2 and 3. We developed our own simulation for week 3 as well, which was a big success and will be further refined and developed in years to come.