

Frames of Power

Producer: Amith WG

Model created on: 28.10.2020

Link: <http://framesofpower.org/view-model/84>

"There are those that look at things the way they are, and ask why? I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?" — George Bernard Shaw.

Building on the critically acclaimed Corridors of Power collaboration (<http://corridorsofpower.org>), Frames of Power enables the creation of a 3D model based on the subjective interpretation or perception of the Sri Lankan constitution. 10 simple questions guided the creation of this model and its constituent parts.

"The idea is also broader or more profound than just a critique of Sri Lanka's constitutional evolution. Though the initial website is geared to focus on a domestic audience, the idea of this project, Welikala's questions, Daswatta's basic building blocks and the technology employed can be used to create a platform, or many, that critique any constitutional model, in any country. 'Frames of Power' is an entirely novel critique, democratic by design, that helps us understand better the political landscapes and context we subjectively perceive, often socially construct, politically respond to and collectively inhabit.

Not unlike Lego, the guiding vision for this project was to create a way in which a visual pastiche of models, which can also be 3D printed physically, reflected how differently – based on geographic location, age, gender or religion – contemporary Sri Lankan society looked at constitutional authority and political power. Through this, I hope to frame and flag a greater truth – that it is only through the open recognition of difference and its underlying drivers that we can create the kind of conversations necessary to envision a future that more fully captures our democratic potential. Or to recall Shaw, to think of why what someone else created looks very different to what we want to see, and then ask, without venom or violence, how we can build better, together."

Curator

Sanjana Hattotuwa

<http://framesofpower.org/notes>

Question 1 / Model Part - bb1

State-wide Structure of Government

Asanga's question

The basic unit is the territorial, political and legal construct called the state. The essential institutions for a state to function is an executive which can govern, and a law-making legislature.

Channa's representation

The basic unit is the territorial, political and legal construct called the state. The essential institutions for a state to function is an executive which can govern, and a law-making legislature.

The ability of the state to function more or Less efficiently will depend of the relationship between the executive and the legislature. The nature of governance will depend on the actual relationship between the two. If the legislature is powerful then the voice of the Governed people are likes to prevail while the executive being powerful may mean that the voice of a privileged few prevail.

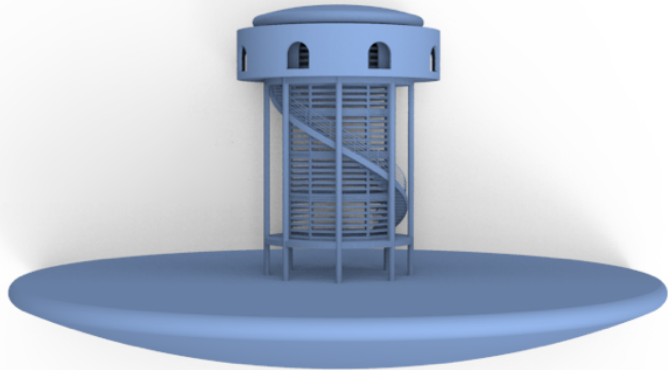
(1) for a strong executive (e.g. a fully fledged monarchy with a board of ministers or privy council to advice and make laws).

(10) for a strong legislature (e.g. a fully fledged Democracy with a non-executive head of state).

Spatial Manifestation

Here space shows a relationship between the executive and the legislature, through a spatial connection to each other. the relationship between the two range between one in end the legislative space dominates or controls access to the executive to one in which the executive controls access and dominates movement into and through the space representing the legislature. This is manifested in the kind of openings between the places and the connecting spaces between them being direct or convoluted.

Score - 3



Question 2 / Model Part - bb2

Sub-state Structure of Government

Asanga's question

These may be fully-fledged democratic structures, or merely centrally appointed institutions. In the latter case, there may not be a separate legislature. Sub-state structures may serve to manage societal pluralism within the state, to democratise decision-making, or merely for administrative convenience.

Channa's representation

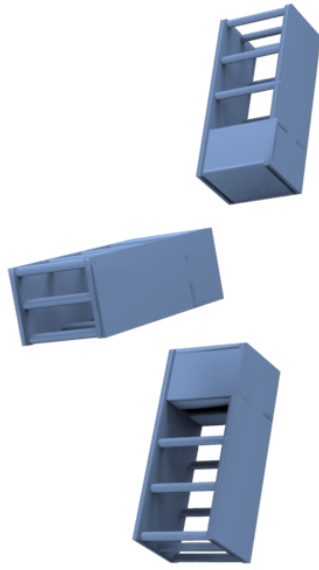
Not all states may have a sub-state level of government, although most increasingly do. These may be fully-fledged democratic structures, or merely centrally appointed institutions. In the latter case, there may not be a separate legislature. Sub-state structures may serve to manage societal pluralism within the state, to democratise decision-making, or merely for administrative convenience.

Substructures and their effectiveness is based on the relationship it has with the state. On one end they will be governed by democratic decision making at the level of the substructure (5) while at the other end of the spectrum will be mere administrative convenience (1).

Spatial manifestation

Here the relationship of spaces should be about the spatial connection between the main state structure and the substate structure. It may be manifested in the way the spaces representing the executive and the legislative in the Sub state structure relates to the main legislative and executive spaces. In a situation in which the Substate structures are independent it may show that the these support and hold up the super state structure whereas in a situation where they are only organs of government to spread out the writ of the main state structure they will appear linked and even held from above by it.

Score - 2



Question 3 / Model Part - bb3

The Courts

Asanga's question

The judiciary is often separate if not independent of the executive and legislature. Its role may be minimal – as a dispute resolution mechanism among individuals and between individuals and the state – or it may be more maximal – serving as a guarantor of the constitution against the executive and the legislature.

Channa's representation

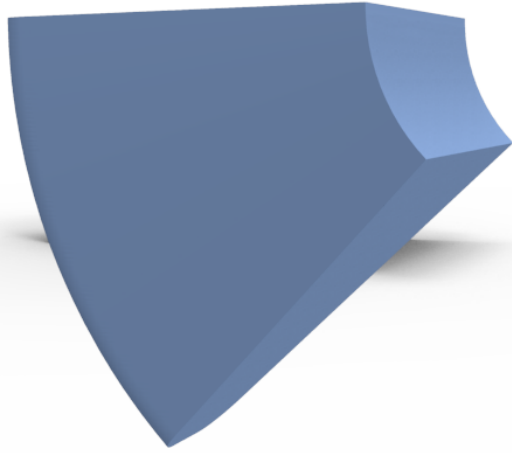
The judiciary is often separate if not independent of the executive and legislature. Its role may be minimal – as a dispute resolution mechanism among individuals and between individuals and the state – or it may be more maximal – serving as a guarantor of the constitution against the executive and the legislature.

To define how this will relate to the final objective of how these various aspects of the constitution works within a given situation, relationships need to be established. In the case of the courts it will then be about understanding its relationship to the executive and the legislature. It could at one end (1) be dictated to by the executive or legislature, where justice is meted out by the executive, the legislature, or both (as in an absolute monarchy). At the other end (10), it could remain totally independent as a guarantor of the constitution against the executive and the legislature.

Spatial Manifestation

Here the space representing the Judiciary will at one end be completely integrated with that of the legislature/executive. At the other end, it will be completely independent but connected to the two spaces representing the executive and the legislative. The model will possibly feature one-way entrances where the judiciary has independent access to the executive/legislature and controls it.

Score - 1



Question 4 / Model Part - bb4

Electoral Framework

Asanga's question

There can be no democracy without procedures and institutions for elections. But even some formally non-democratic states have limited provision for elections.

Channa's representation

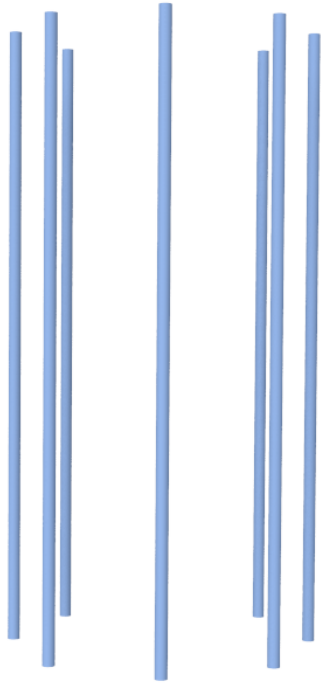
There can be no democracy without procedures and institutions for elections. But even some formally non-democratic states have limited provision for elections.

The electoral framework is a fundamental relationship between the people and the body of governance. In any democratic process, the level of democratic freedom in a structure of governance will be essentially defined here. At one end all officials in the structure of governance structure would be elected by the people (10). On the other, the whole structure of governance would be wielded by a person or body whose authority ultimately comes from violent submission often clothed in the idea of divine right (1).

Spatial Manifestation

Here is the very foundation of the relationship between the governed and the government. At one end the electoral system is the foundation of all elements of the government where the choice remains totally and wholly with those electing. At the other end, the foundation of the elements of government are perhaps non-existent, or pinned down violently from above.

Score - 1



Question 5 / Model Part - bb5

Constitutional Rights

Asanga's question

Every democratic constitution nowadays includes some statement of rights, although there are wide variances with regard the scope, range and depth of their protection, and of course their practical implementation.

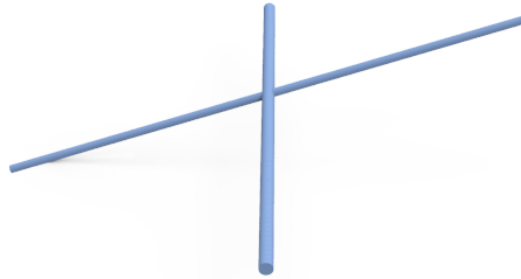
Channa's representation

Every democratic constitution nowadays includes some statement of rights, although there are wide variances with regard the scope, range and depth of their protection, and of course their practical implementation.

Spatial Manifestation

The relationship of the rights and the nature of the rights offered to the governed by a constitution defines in many ways the relationship between the executive and the legislature. Where rights are most highly respected and open (5) then the nature of the relationship defined for the executive, legislative and judicial in models BB1 and BB2 will tend towards (5) as well and the contrary would be true on the other.

Score - 1



Question 6 / Model Part - bb6

Foundational Principles of Government

Asanga's question

Most constitutions would set down the basic principles of government, such as the separation of powers. This may be expressed in purely functional terms, merely describing the roles of the institutions of government and their interrelationship. Increasingly however these take on an overtly normative character in the way they are articulated in constitutions. In this sense, they go beyond functional allocation of roles to a statement of values by which the society is to be governed.

Channa's representation

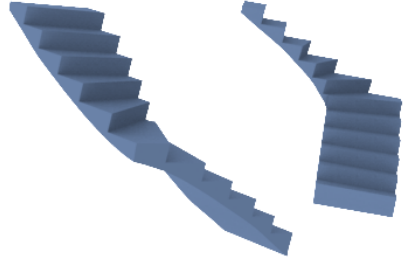
Most constitutions would set down the basic principles of government, such as the separation of powers. This may be expressed in purely functional terms, merely describing the roles of the institutions of government and their interrelationship. Increasingly however these take on an overtly normative character in the way they are articulated in constitutions. In this sense, they go beyond functional allocation of roles to a statement of values by which the society is to be governed.

The statement of values of how a state is governed, will define the relationship between the State and the People and the rights guaranteed by the state and enshrined in the constitution. This then clearly sets up the relationship between the executive , legislative and judicial arms of the state.

Spatial Manifestation

Spatially this will manifest itself in the way each arm of government relates to each other. An open and multidimensional set of spaces will indicate values that are more about individual liberty and the guarantee of it. A more convoluted relationship may indicate values that support one or other interests of different groups in society where individual liberty must succumb to those of different power groups be they nationalist, racist, religious or others.

Score - 2



Question 7 / Model Part - bb7

Local Government

Asanga's question

This is not essential but is extremely widespread.

Channa's representation

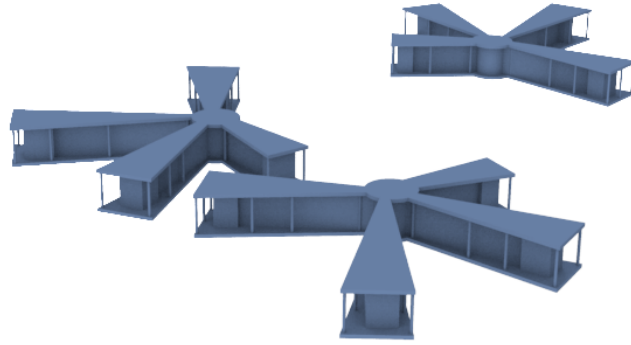
This is not essential but is extremely widespread.

Where full democratic freedoms of local government with decentralisation of power is seen in a structure of governance, then the more likely that BB1, BB2 and BB5 will tend towards (10). Where local government structures are weak, or non-existent these will all tend to (1).

Spatial Manifestation

This will be similar to the spatial manifestation seen on models BB1, BB2 and BB5. The answers and scale will help fine tune the exact nuances of the sp

Score - 2



Question 8 / Model Part - bb8

Procedures for Constitutional Change

Asanga's question

All constitutions set down procedures for their amendment, although these are extremely heterogeneous.

Channa's representation

The elements here will define the nuances of the relationship between the main instruments of government and also the nature of the foundation of these instruments of government. Constituent parts of the 3D model will reflect the procedural changes selected. No new part will be created or rendered."

Spatial Manifestation

The elements here will define the nuances of the relationship between the main instruments of government and also the nature of the foundation of these instruments of government.

Score - 1

Question 9 / Model Part - bb9

Independent Bodies

Asanga's question

The use of de-politicisation institutions is becoming more and more widespread (some would now call them 'the fourth pillar of government') in weak political cultures to ensure independence, integrity, and professionalism in the delivery of public services, as well as to pursue certain normative goals such as human rights.

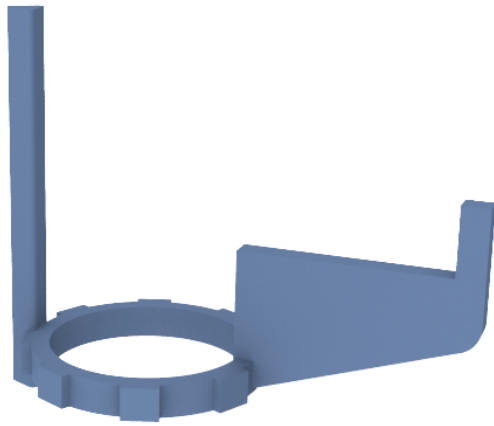
Channa's representation

The use of de-politicisation institutions is becoming more and more widespread (some would now call them 'the fourth pillar of government') in weak political cultures to ensure independence, integrity, and professionalism in the delivery of public services, as well as to pursue certain normative goals such as human rights.

Spatial Manifestation

Independent bodies bear on the three most important pillars of government to respect the rights and laws and regulations defined by the constitution. The process of defining the constitutional role of independent bodies is also linked to their relationship with representatives of the people in the legislature. Once appointed, checks and balances may need to be put in place to maintain independence from executive, legislative and judicial overreach. This will require a clear definition of relationships to all three branches of government.

Score - 1



Question 10 / Model Part - bb10

Symbols of Culture and Identity

Asanga's question

Although often of little or no legal force, constitutional symbols are powerful devices of building a cohesive polity around a constitution. In preambles or other preliminary provisions, it is quite common to see constitutions making reference to the society's past, present, and future, its nature and culture, its values and aspirations, and appeals to unity and diversity.

Channa's representation

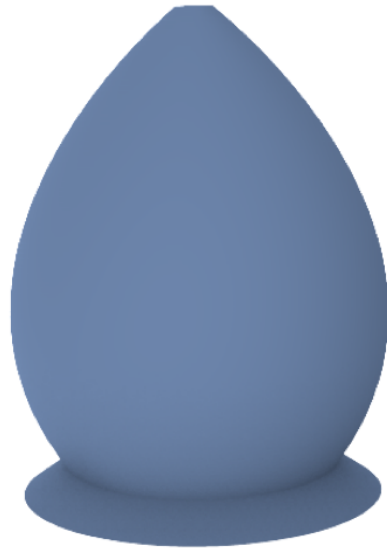
Although often of little or no legal force, constitutional symbols are powerful devices of building a cohesive polity around a constitution. In preambles or other preliminary provisions, it is quite common to see constitutions making reference to the society's past, present, and future, its nature and culture, its values and aspirations, and appeals to unity and diversity.

This may not have a specific spatial Manifestation. However may have a more material manifestation and could perhaps be included in some form of objective attribute. Often these values are associated with the executive- more specifically the head of government or state as embodied within them and one who is inspired by them in their life and this setting the example to the rest of the population.

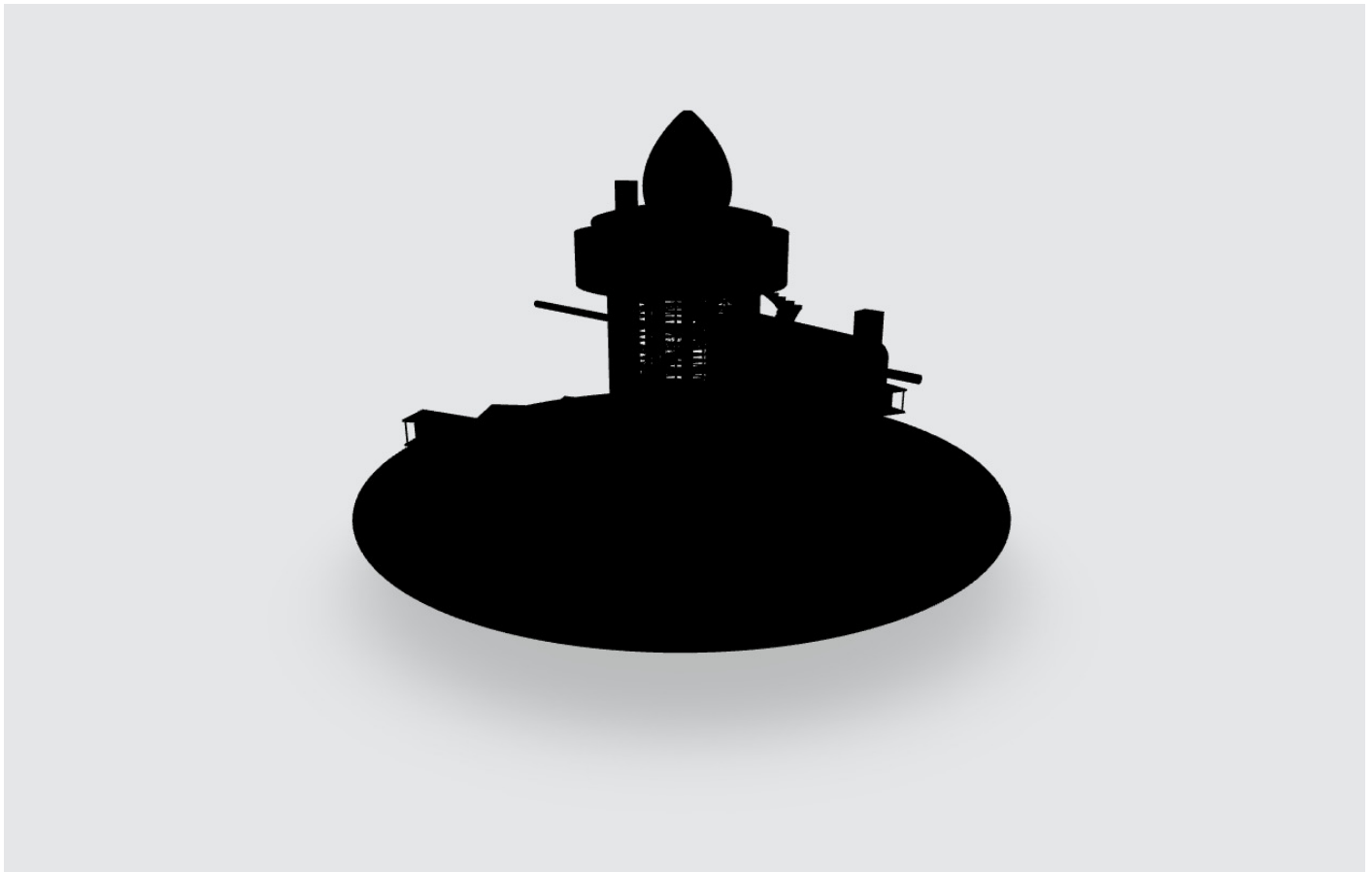
Spatial Manifestation

While spatially this will have a clear relationship to the executive and access to it is through the legislature and executive, they are more an objective manifestation that will define a final form to the object. Symbols of culture and identity may include overarching ones that define inclusivity and other forms which define the public perception of unity and other tenets of governance. The overall appearance of the constitutional edifice may be changed to cosmetically reflect something that is not the reality of the spaces within. However, through symbols, the government can shape how certain elements of governance are perceived, and by extension, engaged with.

Score - 4



Final Model



Attribution and sharing

All the models are copyleft and published under a Creative Commons Attribution-Sharealike 4.0 International license that allows for sharing, adaptation and commercial use, with clear attribution. The use of these models in other projects, programmes, educational material, lectures, academic curricula, in the media as well as for advocacy and activism is strongly encouraged. For more details see <http://framesofpower.org/how-to-use>

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom (<https://fnst.org>) supported the design and development of Frames of Power, which was launched in 2020.