

Matters of Deliberative Democracy: Is Conversation the Soul of Democracy?*

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Abstract

This study addresses the deliberative democracy from a critical perspective, highlighting the benefits of the deliberative turn. Among the deliberative democracy's benefits the study includes: community-generating power, improving the accuracy of decisions, democratic legitimation of political power, democratic accountability, shaping policy by market-testing, informing public policy process. But beyond deliberative democracy advantages which are recognized by most scholars, it still remains the issue of the possibility of real-world deliberative democracy. The study presents a number of possibility conditions for deliberative democracy and several models of deliberation that can be extended (deliberative polls, citizens' juries, national issues forums, referenda). We particularly discuss the deliberative democracy's scale problem. The most important research questions in the present study are: How do we go from micro to macro-deliberation? Who is entitled to a say? What counts as good discourse and deliberation? How citizen deliberation can have consequences in democratic practice? The main idea is that deliberative democracy in practice implies a rethinking of politics and its feasibility is part of its desirability.

Keywords: deliberative democracy, democratic accountability, decision-making process, public opinion, conversation

1. Is deliberative democracy just an ideal?

Reassigning the democratic theory in light of the deliberative turn is very much a work in progress for the

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community of democratic theorists. Using a simple definition, deliberative democracy refers to a democratic government that provides a central role for rational debate. What do we mean by deliberation? Deliberation will be an unrestrained and free exchange of arguments and practical reasoning that could change preferences and opinions. Two issues related to deliberative democracy already arise. Even if public deliberation in this regard is aimed to a rational agreement, it is likely that it will fail in reaching a consensus. Another issue related to public deliberation advanced by many authors is the cognitive dimension involved and the inquiry whether deliberation's intent is to generate a particular type of knowledge or not.

There is an obvious attraction to democratic deliberation in democracy theory literature, and the use of "deliberative" attribute by John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas to describe their normative conceptions of democracy (even different) is an additional proof to the current popularity of the concept. Why deliberative democratic model is more desirable than a non-deliberative model? This study seeks to establish the benefits of the main arguments advanced in favour of the current conception of deliberative democracy. We agree with Robert Goodin (2012) who summarizes the issues involved by deliberative democracy as in the following lines:

"Democracy should be designed in such a way as to encourage people to come together to discuss common problems and agree to solutions; as to enable citizens to see things from each other's point of view, understanding others' interests and arguments as well as one's own; as to encourage citizens to engage actively with one another in the joint management of their collective affairs, and in that way to develop their own capacities and perspectives." (Goodin 2012, 2)

Scholars spotted and agreed about numerous benefits of deliberative democracy such as: community-generating power, improving the accuracy of decisions, democratic legitimation of political power, democratic accountability, shaping policy by market-testing, informing public policy process. All these merits are not a subject for debate or controversy. But besides the benefits afore mentioned is deliberative democracy just an ideal? Deliberative democracy movement is concerned with

finding ways of putting the theory into practice. Scientists and political leaders have to find ways of connecting micro-deliberations to macro-political decision-making. There are some good practice models for public deliberations such as citizens' juries, consensus conferences, deliberative polls and others, which show how deliberative democracy could work in practice. But for deliberative democracy not to be just an ideal, we have to think about what counts as good deliberation, the effects of public deliberations and the influence of deliberations on decision-making process.

First, we have to clarify when deliberation begins. Some of deliberative democracy supporters prioritize "talking as a decision procedure", therefore discussion and deliberation are not simply an exchange of information but a procedure that leads to a decision. For others, deliberation consists principally in interpersonal communications; thus the discussion is not seen as an end in itself. It is a means to a more advised and consistent decision. Even when talk does not 'settle' things, it clarifies them. We will quote Goodin's ideas again, as we agree with the argument that deliberation has an internal-reflective sort of implication:

"Internal-reflective processes of democratic deliberation within are relatively more central to the process of democratic deliberation, and external-collective processes of formal discursive interactions less central, than commonly supposed." (Goodin 2012, 51)

To clarify the main issues involved by deliberative democracy in practice and not just as an ideal, we should emphasize the fact that there are two stages within deliberation process: information phase and discussion phase. It is perfectly possible for deliberation to have a major effect even if it does not change any attitudes by strengthening people's confidence in their prior attitudes or emboldening them to act upon them. Let us suppose that instead of highly polarized symbolic attitudes, what we have is mass ignorance or mass apathy or non-attitudes. There again, "people's engaging with the issue – focusing on it, acquiring information about it, thinking hard about it – would be something that is likely to occur earlier rather than later in the deliberative process." (Goodin 2012, 59) It is something that is most likely to occur

earlier within individuals themselves or in informal contacts, in advance of any formal, structured group discussion.

In order to become reality, we have to think of deliberative democracy as a model growing out from small-scale face-to-face interactions. In order to apply this model to a larger scale, a new institutional structure is required. The main aim for deliberative democrats is to find ways of linking the benefits of small-scale deliberation with the decision-making process for larger-scale societies. One way for deliberative democracy to be more than an ideal is to build a micro-deliberation system into the core of the formal decision-making process of the larger society (Mansbridge's approach). Another way is to create a link between micro-deliberations and the formal decision-making procedures in more diffuse ways such as something more akin to 'market-testing': will this idea sell or not? Thus the deliberation will be a marketing tool but also a deliberative one (Dryzek's approach). All the issues afore mentioned will be detailed later in the study.

First question for any democratic theory is who is included in the political arena. The same issue arises within deliberative democracy. Who gets a say or, to put it differently, who is entitled to speak? The answer to this question should solve the legitimacy problem of deliberative democracy. For some authors such as Schumpeter (2003, 5) "the characteristics ... associated with democracy pertain purely to how decisions are made, not to who makes them", so there is no need to pay much attention to the legitimation problem. This study emphasizes the opposite perspective that considers legitimation of deliberative democracy a main concern and we will discuss this at length.

Moreover, the debates about deliberative democracy are controversial in what concerns methodological issues and the conditions for deliberative democracy's possibility. First, if deliberative democracy is a normative concept that emphasizes public reasoning is all the more important that it can be defended on the basis of solid arguments. Secondly, we need arguments that can help us to make a rational choice between different models of deliberations that are offered today. As a conclusion of this brief introduction, we state that deliberative

democracy can only complement rather than replace the institutional machinery of representative democracy and we have to keep this in mind for the deliberative democracy to be more than an ideal.

2. Conditions for deliberative democracy's possibility

As we already stated, the deliberative democracy feasibility is part of its desirability. This study focuses on two main aspects regarding the possibility of deliberative democracy: making use of mini-publics as John Dryzek insists and sequencing deliberative moments.

An important question that could lead us to the conditions for deliberative democracy's possibility is how large groups of individuals could genuinely deliberate together? It seems that large groups could not have a genuine deliberation, so we have to take into consideration courts, civil society, mass-mediated deliberation, e-networks and their mini-publics. These mini-publics are considered by Robert Goodin to be "small enough to be genuinely deliberative and representative enough to be genuinely democratic." (Goodin 2012, 13) These mini-publics seldom encounter the statistical representativeness criteria, and the representativeness in the electoral sense is never accomplished. Such mini-publics might be deliberative polls (Ackerman and Fishkin have an extensive approach of this topic), consensus conferences, citizens' juries, planning cells, "AmericaSpeaks" a project that consisted in a series of 21st Century Town Meetings, national issues forums.

So, for deliberative democracy to be possible in real-world, we have to constitute micro-publics. But how do we constitute a micro-public? There are several proposals in order to constitute mini-publics. Some of them are proposals for electoral reforms, others concern improved consultative procedures, e-initiatives or instruments of direct democracy such as referenda. There is an element of self-selection in all deliberative microcosms: citizens must agree to participate. By consequence, micro-publics lack formal power or authority in the macro-political system. The principle of all affected interests, according to Dahl argues that "everyone who is affected by the decisions of a government should have the right

to participate in that government.” (Dahl 1970, 64) What is particular about mini-publics is that they neither claim electoral representation, nor statistical representativeness. The constitution of mini-publics will be a matter of selection among all the affected ones. Sometimes is difficult to deliberate even within a micro-public and a goal must be maintaining their focus on what united them. This is definitely a possibility condition for deliberative democracy.

In order for deliberative democracy to be possible, one should admit its limits. We must ask ourselves how, in general, political deliberations might contribute to the resolution of unsettled questions? Sometimes, desensitizing an issue might be a good outcome of a deliberation process, other times resolving the issue will be the goal. Where there are deep social divisions and conflicts the deliberative process is not likely to resolve the problems via information-pooling. In this case the benefit might be that talking through differences, we might find that there are certain prerequisites we share, and we can then look more closely at where exactly our approaches begin to diverge. Displaying chains of reasoning to one another in these ways shows everyone that one another’s beliefs are reasoned, even if they are not in the end persuaded that they are right. To this respect, Gutmann and Thompson write:

“Think of the requirement of actual deliberation as analogous to a feature of scientific inquiry. Reciprocity is to justice in political ethics what replication is to truth in scientific ethics...The process of deliberation has...epistemic value. Decisions are more likely to be morally justifiable if decision-makers are required to offer justifications for policies to other people, including those who are both well informed and representative of the citizens who will be most affected by the decisions.” (Gutmann and Thompson 2002, 158)

Deliberative democracy can be defined as information pooling by means of talk. My point is that if we were just pooling information in the more mechanistic ways, we might never discover that our informants were indeed biased in these ways. In other words an advantage of discursively rather than just mechanically pooling information is that that might help in reaching a consent and overcome the peril of a sequence of communication stages in which each is an exaggerated version of the last.

But macro-political decision-making process cannot be delegated to small groups of unelected deliberators. The decisions of small, unelected groups inevitably lack democratic legitimacy. Those micro-deliberative processes can be used as “focus groups” to help us discover discursively what further information we need to collect and disseminate to democratic decision-makers before mechanically aggregating their views. Thus we are in front of a new way to transform the ideal of deliberative democracy into practice.

Here one raises the question of how to link the micro-level with the macro-level? How citizens’ deliberation can be consequential in democratic practice? I have anticipated the answer in the first lines of this chapter: by sequencing deliberative moments. It is important to point out the possibility of *distributed deliberation* with different agents playing different deliberative roles as an alternative to the “unitary model of deliberation” that presently dominates discussion among deliberative democrats (for example Cohen’s deliberative democracy’s view is criticized for being too unitary). In distributed deliberation model, the deliberative virtues and arguments are on display progressively, over the course of a staged deliberation with various component parts, rather than continuously and simultaneously as they would be in the case of a unitary deliberating model. In support of this perspective we have Mansbridge’s notion of “deliberative system”.

The *deliberative system* concept was advanced by Mansbridge (2004) whose concern was to criticize the rigorous and useless deliberative standards applied in places where there is no need for them. Mansbridge speaks about a deliberative system which includes a number of forums, a series of standards extended beyond formal representative structures to include the public and private spheres. What is interesting about Mansbridge’s idea is that it offers a new way of thinking to deliberative democracy that helps us get out of the deliberative democracy’s scale problem. It is true that genuine deliberation forums can only occur in small size, but the interrelationships between communication and representation, authority and accountability within such forums create

legitimacy for deliberative democracy even if deliberative forums are not fully inclusive and representative.

A model of group deliberation based on distributed deliberation is given by the parliamentary procedures and their committees. These committees are small parts of the parent assembly. They deliberate on the issues assigned to them according to their specialization by the parent assembly. After they deliberate and reach a conclusion, they report back to the parent assembly, and their specialized reports will be a basis for subsequent deliberations of the parent assembly. In short, parent assembly delegates certain elements of its deliberative task to other subgroups. Thus we talk about delegated deliberations. My proposal here is that this type of deliberation system used in Parliaments to be generalized to deliberation processes. This model of deliberation may take place in any kind of deliberation within large groups. The deliberative aim will be achieved by dividing up the deliberative task in such ways as it is done within a Parliament. The deliberative task will be divided and then assigned to some sub-units of the larger group. These subsets of the larger group will provide a background and some informational inputs into the deliberation of the larger group with the overall deliberative responsibility and the authority of decision-making. We have already some ideational subsets namely the political parties that can be regarded as ideational facts as well as organizational ones, and they can deliberate in the system described above. There is also an inquiry in what concerns representing diversity. Democratic ideals can nonetheless be furthered, even if not perfectly accomplished, by a politics of *partial presence*, chastening decision-makers by reminding them of the sheer fact of diversity among those for whom they are legislating.

3. Deliberative democracy's scale problem

Deliberative democracy's scale problem refers to decisions made after deliberation which appear to be illegitimate for those outside the deliberation forum, while introducing more people in forum would quickly turn into a place of speech pronunciation and not one for deliberation.

Moreover, the legitimacy problem has to do with motivations. In order to have a genuine deliberation, those participants who are enrolled in the forum should meet the above minimum procedural requirements, including availability and reciprocity requirements, leaving aside strategic concerns. Even so, people's predetermined goals, interests and preferences are an essential part of what motivates them to get into political arenas from the beginning.

Dryzek (2001) comes with three solutions to the scale problem: restricting the number of opportunities for deliberation on major constitutional moments or when the stakes of deliberations impact the basic structure of society; restricting the number of people who discuss them and ensure that they are representative of those who do not; partial substitution of internal, individual deliberation with interactive social deliberation, that makes others to be present in one's own thoughts and words. As Dryzek argues, the first solution is not really a solution, since restricting the opportunities for genuine deliberation in society just narrows the number of occasions when the scale problem appears. It does not solve the problem, it just ignores it. Second, the representation solution raises the question of the criteria on which we choose our representatives and their legitimacy, so the scale problem is moved in a new direction. The third option may be attractive at some deliberative times, but is problematic if some groups of people are more "spoken for" than "speakers", as it often was in the case of women, ethnic minorities and other groups at risk of exclusion.

To provide a solution to the deliberative democracy's scale problem, Dryzek appeals particularly to the idea of discursive democracy (rather than deliberative). Following the ideas of Benhabib (1996), Dryzek argues that to the extent that public reasoning is performed by qualified and reasoned actors it exceeds time and space. However, the control of speeches of that sort can be achieved through decentralized networks with multiple actors, egalitarian structured, typical for new social movements. The same idea which overcomes the problem of deliberative democracy's scale problem is found by Habermas

(1996) who speaks of *two-track deliberation model* to some extent equivalent to Mansbridge's deliberative system.

For Dryzek, the legitimacy occurs at the interference of the public sphere with the state and not within individual deliberations on a smaller scale. But Parkinson (2003) is not convinced that legitimacy can be removed so easily at individual level. First, the speeches are not detached from the people, they are partly constitutive to identities and are tools by which people reach their goals. Secondly, the victory of a speech rationality does not depend on the speech, but depends more on the existing power structure in which discourses are embedded. Third, the views articulated in the public sphere are dependent on the number of people who subscribe, who owe allegiance or become co-authors of contesting discourses. So legitimacy is created at the intersection of the public sphere and state, thus deliberative democracy is more than a series of small and closed deliberative moments. This leads us to examine the representation solution and the rules which can legitimize it.

4. The legitimacy of representation

Representation can offer us a solution for deliberative democracy's scale problem in what concerns legitimacy, as it provides a way for people who are not physically included in a given deliberative forum, to have the impression at the same time that they have some influence. In other words, we should try to find the rules that make exclusion legitimate, rather than making legitimacy depend on full inclusion, which is impossible. We must think of this in terms of people's perceptions, which seem to be a prerequisite to free us from the deliberative democracy ideal as seen by Benhabib and Cohen.

There are many reasons why we choose representation, some of them expressed by various authors and related to elitist theorists' assumptions about the deliberative capabilities of ordinary people. In this paper, to argue the legitimacy of representation, I take an institutionalist perspective which argues that it is not that ordinary people could not deliberate, but liberal democratic structures do not give them the chance to develop these deliberative capabilities. Therefore, people may prefer legitimate representation for the following reasons as

Parkinson (2003) notes: 1) the representation can be effective in terms of non-participants because some people do not want to deliberate with respect to a given problem, but still have an interest in the results; 2) one's own perception rather than that of elite theories may lead to the idea that personal viewpoints can be better advanced by someone more competent in communication than it would do it alone; 3) the representation itself eliminates the unessential and focuses on specific items.

The next obvious question is: what should be represented? The answer would be the affected people, the legitimacy derives ultimately from society as it is structured. But those affected can not be determined with certainty, they are not unified defined by contextualized, socially-constructed multiple roles and identities as I mentioned above. What should be stressed here is that group memberships are relevant when dealing with affected groups (such as black or women), but it is up to individuals to decide what affiliations to emphasize in certain contexts and thus to determine for themselves who are those affected at any deliberative time. Thus representation becomes a problem when people have to choose other people to represent them and here we are faced with two questions: how representatives are elected? and what is their role? Scholars identify the representation based on a *delegated model* and the representation based on trust, the so-called the *trustee model*. The first model corresponds to an accountability view, the other is based on an authorization model. Arguments about which model is justified are spanning through centuries, but there can not be an answer in general terms, the type of representation depending on the functions expected from representatives at a certain moment of decision.

Hence, the legitimacy of deliberative democracy's forums is still questioned. In my opinion, the trustee model of representation is more acceptable due to the deliberation condition which predicates that all participants will be open to persuasion and influence. Actually by arguing in favor of the trustee model we confirm one of the the major advantages of deliberation, namely the idea that preferences can be changed after a confrontation. Thus, it may be that any decision taken by the deliberative assembly does not resemble with the ideas

introduced in the forum or they can be influenced by an idea held by a minority group, and the new decision not to be representative at the beginning in any way for the the majority of non-participants. This problem was highlighted by Fishkin (1997). How can non-participants to be present at the deliberations of those invested with confidence if the genuine deliberation was excluded? There is no total trust and total delegation therefore legitimate representatives behave both as delegates and as depositories of trust, having responsibility and authorization from their principal. Thus, the best arguments and motivations that convince the representatives within the deliberative sphere must also convince the represented people. It follows that legitimacy can be reached through various deliberative forums, not just within individual deliberative instants. Once the people have been exposed to those arguments by their representatives in their separate deliberations, they also should be persuaded.

The third major question concerns how the representatives are elected. People elect their representatives either directly, or they are selected by the organizers of deliberative forums based on external selection criteria. The question regarding the selection methods is related to the controversy whether different relevant groups should be represented equally or proportionately. Sometimes a legitimate deliberation in a decision-making group should use an equal representation of relevant differences (ex. the same number of men and women, regardless of their actual number in the total population). Parkinson (2004) has recommended the *statistical representation* where the purpose is to gather information and *equal representation* of parties when deliberation has as a result a decision. We note that the problem of selecting the representatives from a statistically point of view is often discussed but the issue of liability (accountability) and the authorization of representatives according to some external criteria is rarely raised.

To go ahead with suggesting wider implications, we need to synthesize the arguments already stated. So far, we tried to identify the rules that make exclusion from the deliberative forums to be legitimate to avoid what is impossible – the total

inclusion in deliberations. Representation is context-specific. The memberships that individuals consider relevant, the representative roles vis-a-vis their mandants, the selection process and the issue of proportionality, it all depends on the subject matter and the purpose of the representative body. Legitimacy depends ultimately not on technocrats assessment, but on the people themselves who decide what is relevant and what is not. The deliberative democracy should be open in the sense that those hypothetically concerned should have the chance to judge the importance (*publicity condition of deliberative democracy*) and the opportunity to influence the rules of inclusion and exclusion. Another argument is that the deliberative representation in order to be legitimate must have only the authority of recommendation and not decisive power, and deliberative groups should be proportional only if the purpose is to collect information and not when the aim is to decide.

Thus we get to the idea that deliberative representation requires representatives to act in a dual role. They should be free to be convinced of better arguments, thus behaving as depositories of confidence (trustees), but they still need to communicate with their principals as delegates, meeting the requirements of accountability and authorization. Any contradiction is overcome if one looks at deliberative moments as incorporated into a broader deliberative system (Mansbridge's perspective).

5. What counts as good discourse and deliberation?

Even if I agree with the *deliberative system* concept proposed by Mansbridge (2004) and her critics toward the rigorous and useless deliberative standards applied in places where there is no need for them, we still have to address the issue of what counts as good discourse and deliberation. In the following lines I will present a scheme that synthesizes the criteria proposed by three distinct sets of scholars: Oxford-Berkeley philosopher of language Paul Grice, a team of international relations specialists led by Knud Midgaard, and the team of comparative politics experts led by Jürg Steiner. All these scholars were preoccupied to identify some rules for what counts as a good discourse and deliberation.

Table 1. Standards for good discursive practice

Rules of political interlocution	Maxims of conversation	Indices of deliberative quality
Sense	Quantity (contribution as informative as is required)	Open participation
Sincerity	Quality (avoid lack of evidence and false statements)	Justification and validity of claims
Relevance	Relevance	Consideration of the common good
Attentiveness	Manner (avoid obscurity and ambiguity)	Respect
Respect		Rationally motivated consensus
		Authenticity
(Midgaard et al, 2008)	(Grice, 1989)	(Steiner et al, 2004)

The question is whether and how these rules might properly be used to study and to improve genuinely political conversational interactions. We cannot realistically expect all the deliberation virtues (see Table 1) to be constantly on display at every step of the decision process in a deliberative democracy. It is realistic to expect that different deliberative virtues might be on display at different steps of the process. All three perspectives argue that discourse – no matter if it is a conversation, a political interlocution, or a deliberation, it is basically about a cooperative game. But communication in the real world is not the purely cooperative game of the philosophical imagination. Instead communication and implicit

the deliberation processes are a mixed-motive game of strategy, a game of pure competition, in which one person's gains are the other's losses.

6. Reconfiguration of politics, deliberative democracy and digital citizenship

Because of the growing electoral absenteeism, the contemporaneous society requires a reconfiguration of the participatory democracy paradigm. Thus we may talk about a deliberative democracy project that progressively prevailed in the '90s, and which was aware of the participation's constraints, ending to suggesting a more "qualitative" approach of democracy theories (this development was called *deliberative turn*). This is the general meaning of the political reconfiguration we focus on in this study, and the broadcasted political debates are the deliberative tools, the means by which citizens are able to remain permanently connected to the social and political reality, being civically involved and able to put continuous pressure on their political representatives. Participating to political debates represents another form of democratic activity at least as of the same effectiveness as voting. These debates are a way of establishing authority and legitimacy which is a source and an end for the community itself (Barbaros, 2014).

I recall Seyla Benhabib's argumentation in favor of network-based model of accountability, a model supported also by Manuel Castells and his "network society" (Castells, 2005) that says: "it is through the interlocking net of these multiple forms of associations, networks, and organizations that an anonymous public conversation results" (Benhabib, 1996, 73) and by consequence this public conversation will be crystallized in public opinion and public demands and accountability toward the representatives. At this point, I admit the benefits that a community or even the society on the whole might enjoy from Internet use. Many authors speak about *digital citizenship* a concept that might be defined as the ability to participate in society online. The *digital citizens* will be those who "use the Internet regularly and effectively— that is, on a daily basis; they use technology frequently for political information to fulfill

their civic duty and use technology at work for economic gain.” (Mossberger et al. 2008) In the following lines I will try to identify the benefits and opportunities provided by the Internet for a more active citizenship, and whether individuals with the help of Internet have the capacity to participate fully in society and to make the ideal of deliberative democracy become true. It is obvious that Internet offers us an almost unlimited access to alternative information, many ways to communicate, to interact, to debate and to aggregate opinions. In the same time, digital citizenship requires educational capacities as well as access to technology and skills. The well-known problems such as poverty, illiteracy, and unequal educational opportunities prevent more people from full online participation and in society more generally. We speak about the technology inequality that disables some people from being part of the online society and to some public deliberations that might affect or interest them.

It is largely recognized that education has promoted economic growth and democracy, the question is if the Internet has the prospective to offer the same opportunities of progress for society at large, and to promote the participation of individuals within society’s affairs. Does digital citizenship encourage social inclusion, political participation and deliberation? This paper cannot answer to this question. My purpose here is just to point out the opportunity provided by Internet and the digital citizenship for political participation and deliberative democracy. It is obvious that in information age digital citizenship has the potential to encourage the political and economic engagement in society. As DiMaggio argues “the Internet is a unique technology in its varied properties and wide range of uses. It is a telephone, library and soapbox; it is a storehouse of information and channel for communication. (DiMaggio et al. 2001, 321) These diverse characteristics facilitate new forms of involvement that could change the existing social relations. We are talking about a far-reaching technology that definitely has policy implications and will also have spillover effects for society as scholars have already demonstrated (Mossberger et al. 2008). If modern technologies of communication offer new tools for contacting

officials and keep them accountable, discussing issues, and mobilizing citizens, then the network externalities exceed the expectations and facilitate the real-world deliberative democracy.

Nowadays most of the governments, community organizations, interest groups, political campaigns are hosting web sites that offer political information. Actually, we are witnessing a growth of e-government and the explosion of political information on the Web. But despite this we still have disparities in what concerns the frequency of use and digital skills required by Internet together with the fact that the motivation to go online and physical access to the Internet becomes more widespread (Van Dijk 2005, 73). Even though, we have to keep in mind Putnam's idea that "political knowledge and interest in public affairs are critical preconditions for more active forms of involvement" (Putnam 2000, 35), consequently the Internet at least provides us with a lot of information.

The literature concerned with the impact of the Internet focuses its research endeavor to answer to what extent does the Internet provide a greater access to political knowledge, facilitating democratic participation and deliberation. Does the Internet increase political interest and discussion? Which are the possible benefits of digital citizenship for inclusion and the polity? The answers to these questions will influence for sure the deliberative turn and the research concerned with the possibility conditions of deliberative democracy. Anyway, until now scholars tend to agree that civic engagement is a complex concept consisting of political interest, political discussion and political knowledge. We hypothesize that consuming political information online helps citizens obtain higher levels of political knowledge, become more interested in politics, and deliberate with their fellow citizens about politics more frequently. If the consumption of online political information encourages interest, raises political sophistication, and fuels discussion, it may somehow offset a long-lasting trend of declining participation. While the reasons for this decline in civic engagement and participation are multifaceted, and not without difficulty resolved by any single key, the Internet may be an instrument for improving citizenship in the information age, especially in the case of civic engagement among younger.

Consistent with the previous ideas, Norris (2001) argues that numerous features of online interaction may nurture the civic engagement. Among these characteristics the author enumerates the Internet's interactivity, diversity, flexibility, speed, convenience, low cost, and information capacity potentially that allow the public to become more knowledgeable about politics and government – a first step toward greater participation (Norris, 2001). Interpersonal and small group debates are also likely to happen online, in contrast to the inactive consumption of news accessible through other media. Research has shown that online debates are more open and egalitarian than face-to-face meetings. Online communication has also been found to be more diverse with regard to physical features such as race, gender, and age (Rheingold, 2000).

The Internet is said to have more influence than other media on political knowledge. We cannot state that for certain, but intuitively we may advance this idea. Also, media-use in general enables political discussion, but as the Internet provides interactive opportunities for participation, so it should lead to higher levels of political discussion. Political interest is possibly the most important dimension of civic engagement. A more varied and ideological, content available, online may stimulate greater political interest (Smith and Tolbert, 2004).

The influence of digital citizenship is most intense for young people. The young – the demographic segment with the lowest civic and political contribution – have the highest probability of looking for online political information and becoming active in online politics. Because the young are expected to have technology access and frequently use of online news (Lenhart 2003), the consequences for the constant engagement of future generations are significant.

To summarize, we have two perspectives in what concerns the effects of different forms of Internet communication. The first is inspired by the theory of deliberative democracy, which argues that the media do not have a direct relationship with political participation. Instead, media only offer topics that encourage social discourse, which is the mechanism that impacts political activities. This theory foresees that Internet should enable political participation

through opportunities for individuals to meet and participate in discourse. The second approach in which Internet may stimulate participation is through the mobilization efforts of parties and varied interest groups. Briefly, we may argue that Internet promotes participation in three ways: by offering information, by providing channels that permit individuals to meet and discuss politics, and by offering interest groups, politicians, and parties a means for invigorating the mobilization endeavor.

As a concluding thought I state that deliberative democratic theory is experiencing another one of its 'turns' as Dryzek noticed (2010). After an early period of theoretical explanations came a long period of looking for institutional arrangements, followed now by the perspective of a "deliberative system:" (Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012) Empirical studies of deliberative democracy produced rich, qualitative descriptions and explanations, uncovering new practices, and inspiring the creation of new ones (Thompson 2008). But despite the steady interest in deliberation process, unexpectedly little is known about the quality of deliberative processes. While Dryzek (2010, 9) argues that theory and empirics have never been closer, the knowledge is not so systematic. It focuses on deliberation's effects rather than its inner processes. Its normative assessments are still based on idealizations of actors, sites and processes, and it continues to reach to the conclusions in one political context and apply them to others without cautions or explanations. This paper has tried to systematize what we do know about the features and dynamics of deliberative practices. Second, it has tried to provide readers with some arguments in favour of deliberative democracy and some examples of deliberative democracy in action. Also, I have tried to present the empirical claims and questions that arise in the latest theorizing studies on deliberative democracy following the systemic turn. What this chapter has not done is to produce and test explanations concerning why sometimes the deliberation process' impact is achieved, and why sometimes it is not. In my opinion, what is most necessary is not so much more research on this question as more mini-publics – both in order to improve the social

scientist' sample and, mostly, in order to improve the democratic practice's quality.

Debating together is for sure a good way of putting all the possibilities on the table and discovering their strong and weak points. It is a good approach for informing people to the perspectives of others. It is also a good way of making people aware of just how diverse a community is, that such community will be bound by the rules that they adopt. My argumentation is favouring the existence of deliberative procedures in the middle of the political process, but the final decisions must be assumed through aggregative procedures, such as voting.

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