



# The Foundations of Deliberative Democracy

Empirical Research and Normative  
Implications

JÜRGE STEINER



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

# *Contents*

<i>List of figures</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1 Citizen participation in deliberation	32
2 Rationality and stories in deliberative justification	57
3 Common good and self-interest in deliberative justification	88
4 Respect in deliberation	104
5 Public openness of deliberation	125
6 Force of better argument in deliberation	139
7 Truthfulness in deliberation	153
8 Deliberation in the media and the Internet	167
9 Favorable conditions for deliberation	183
10 Favorable consequences of deliberation	219
11 The praxis of deliberation	247
Appendix: Newest version of Discourse Quality Index (DQI)	268
<i>Index</i>	272



## *Introduction*

The deliberative model of democracy was initially developed at a normative philosophical level.<sup>1</sup> Many claims were made about favorable antecedents and the beneficial consequences of a high level of deliberation. In recent years, some of these claims have been subjected to empirical tests. In this book, I look at the interplay between normative and empirical aspects of deliberation. Empirical data, of course, cannot solve normative questions, but they can throw new light on such questions. I come from the empirical side, so I do not claim to write as a professional philosopher; I will instead take the perspective of an engaged citizen in the sense of the French *citoyen engagé*. I will begin my normative stance not with ultimate philosophical premises but will proceed with pragmatic reflections on what empirical findings may mean for the role of deliberation in a viable democracy. Let me make clear at the outset that it is not my view that a viable democracy should consist only of deliberation. Thus, the concept of *deliberative democracy* in the title of this book does not mean that this form of democracy consists only of deliberation: it only means that deliberation has an important role. Besides deliberation, a viable democracy must have space, in particular, for competitive elections, strategic bargaining, aggregative votes, and street protests. The trick is to find the right mix among all these elements, and this will depend on the context. I will argue that in this mix the role of deliberation is often not strong enough and must be strengthened.

More specifically, empirical analyses should allow answering questions such as the following: To what extent and under what circumstances can the norms and values favored by deliberative theorists be

<sup>1</sup> According to some readings, Aristotle has already made a normative deliberative argument; see, for example, James Lindley Wilson, "Deliberation, Democracy, and the Rule of Reason in Aristotle's Politics," *American Political Science Review* 105 (2011), 259–74.

put into praxis? Are there trade-offs among the various elements of deliberation in the sense that, once put in praxis, some elements may be in tension with each other? How might the feasibility of deliberation be improved? Is deliberation compatible with other valuable goals? What are the opportunity costs of deliberation? Does increased deliberation have diminishing returns? How does deliberation causally relate to policy outcomes? What are the alternative democratic models to deliberation? If we have good answers to such questions, it is easier to arrive at a judgment of how moral principles favored by deliberative theorists should be applied in the real world of politics. In this sense, this book should show how empirical research can provoke reflection on normative values. Such reflection is postulated in a concise way by Thomas Saretzki, who writes: “What we can and should try to achieve is critical reflection and cooperative conceptualization of empirical and normative aspects of deliberative democracy.”<sup>2</sup> In the same vein, Michael A. Neblo *et al.* expect that “many of the big advances in our understanding of deliberation are likely to come by carefully aligning normative and empirical inquiries in a way that allows the two to speak to each other in mutually interpretable terms.”<sup>3</sup> Maija Setälä postulates that thought experiments of deliberative philosophers “should be experimentally testable because they abstract from the real world like experiments.”<sup>4</sup> Simon Niemeyer claims that “the ‘coming of age’ of deliberative democracy requires the interplay of theoretical insight and empirical investigation.”<sup>5</sup>

If the empirical world does not correspond to the normative ideals, one may argue that the empirical world has to be changed. One may

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Saretzki, “From Bargaining to Arguing, from Strategic to Communicative Action? Theoretical Perspectives, Analytical Distinctions and Methodological Problems in Empirical Studies of Deliberative Processes,” paper presented at the Center for European Studies, University of Oslo, December 4, 2008, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Michael A. Neblo, Kevin M. Esterling, Ryan P. Kennedy, David M.J. Lazer, and Anand E. Sokhey, “Who Wants to Deliberate: And Why?,” *American Political Science Review* 104 (2010), 566.

<sup>4</sup> Maija Setälä and Kaisa Herne, “Normative Theory and Experimental Research in the Study of Deliberative Mini-Publics,” paper presented at the Workshop on the Frontiers of Deliberation, ECPR Joint Sessions, St. Gallen, April 12–17, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Simon Niemeyer, “Deliberation and the Public Sphere: Minipublics and Democratization,” paper presented at the Workshop on Unity and Diversity in Deliberative Democracy, University of Bern, October 4, 2008, p. 2.

also argue, however, that the normative ideals need to be adjusted to the world as it is. I will show that there is always tension between deliberative ideals and the praxis of deliberation. It is exactly this tension that is at the core of this book. In order to render the interplay of normative and empirical questions most visible, each chapter has three sections. The first sections deal with the normative philosophical literature on deliberation; the aim is not to give an introductory overview of the literature but rather to present the most important controversies among deliberative theorists. Having initially been trained as a historian, I will stick as much as possible to the texts, letting the theorists speak in their own words. In the second sections, I discuss the relevant empirical research for these controversies, including our own research. In the third sections, I discuss possible normative implications, relating the empirical data to the philosophical controversies.

### (a) The theoretical model of deliberation

In the philosophical literature, the deliberative model of democracy is usually constructed as a “regulative” ideal, which, according to Jane Mansbridge, “is unachievable in its full state but remains an ideal to which, all else equal, a practice should be judged as approaching more or less closely.”<sup>6</sup> This follows Immanuel Kant, who defines a “regulative principle” as a standard “with which we can compare ourselves, judging ourselves and thereby improving ourselves, even though we can never reach the standard.”<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Habermas writes in this context of “pragmatic presuppositions of discourse.”<sup>8</sup> The ideal type of deliberation can best be understood in contrast to the ideal type of strategic bargaining. The real world of politics is most often a mixture of the two ideal types. Before I address mixed types, it is conceptually helpful to present first the two ideal types. In the ideal type of strategic bargaining, political actors have fixed preferences. They know what

<sup>6</sup> Jane Mansbridge with James Bohman, Simone Chambers, David Estlund, Andreas Follesdal, Archon Fung, Christina Lafont, Bernard Manin, and José Luis Martí, “The Place of Self-Interest and the Role of Power in Deliberative Democracy,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 18 (2010), 65, footnote 3.

<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1781]), p. 552.

<sup>8</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *On the Pragmatics of Communication* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

they want when entering a political process. They maneuver to arrive at an outcome that is as close as possible to their preferences. They engage in deal-making with the motto, “if you give me this, I give you that.” In order to strengthen their bargaining position, they may work with promises and threats. Ideally, strategic bargaining results in an equilibrium win-win situation where, thanks to mutually beneficial trading, everyone is better off than before. In sophisticated models of strategic bargaining, actors are not necessarily always egotistical; they may also, for example, care for the well-being of future generations as personal preference. If new information becomes available, actors may also change their preferences; new research on the hazards of driving a car, for example, may change the preference of actors to give up the car and use public transportation instead. In such sophisticated models of strategic bargaining, the basic point remains that actors are driven by their individual preferences, whatever these preferences may be.

By contrast, in the ideal type of deliberation preferences are not fixed but open, and actors are willing to yield to the force of the better argument. What counts in a political debate is how convincing are the arguments of the various actors. Actors attempt to convince others by good arguments, but they are also open to being convinced by the arguments of others. Thus, a learning process takes place in the sense that actors learn in common debate what the best arguments are. It is not clear from the outset what the best arguments are, but it is rather through mutual dialogue that the best arguments are expected to emerge. In this sense, actors learn to think and act in new ways. Deliberation may bring a rupture with the past. Mansbridge summarizes the essence of the deliberative model in a succinct way: “We conclude by pointing out that ‘deliberation’ is not just any talk. In the ideal, democratic deliberation eschews coercive power in the process of coming to decision. Its central task is mutual justification. Ideally, participants in deliberation are engaged, with mutual respect, as free and equal citizens in a search for fair terms of cooperation.”<sup>9</sup> This definition comes close to the initial meaning of *deliberare* in Latin, where it means to weigh, to ponder, to consider, and to reflect. As Robert E. Goodin points out, such deliberation can also take place individually in the sense of inward reflection. Such individual deliberation Goodin

<sup>9</sup> Mansbridge *et al.*, “The Place of Self-Interest,” 94.

considers to be particularly fruitful before and after group deliberation.<sup>10</sup> In the same vein, Thomas Flynn and John Parkinson argue from the perspective of social psychology that inward deliberation may be helped if it confronts imagined *ideal* deliberators.<sup>11</sup> Bernard Reber insists in a particularly strong way that individual deliberation should come before group deliberation, since otherwise argumentation risks lacking coherence. First, actors have to become clear about their ethical standards before they can engage with others in fruitful deliberation.<sup>12</sup>

For a long time, scholarly interest was predominantly in the model of strategic bargaining. In recent years, however, the deliberative model has attracted more attention. As Alain Noël puts it:

Predominantly, the study of politics has been a study of interests, institutions and force, focused on bargaining and power, with some attention being occasionally paid to ideas, considered as intervening variables. In recent years, the study of democratic deliberation has brought back a more traditional understanding of politics as a forum, where ideas and arguments are exchanged, evolve over time, and matter in their own right.<sup>13</sup>

There are still many political scientists who insist that politics is nothing but strategic bargaining. How can a case be made that deliberation is not simply an ideal philosophical concept but is actually present in the real world of politics? Let me illustrate this question with the conflict in Northern Ireland, specifically with the 1998 Belfast Agreement and its implementation. Ian O'Flynn offers the following interpretation:

At bottom, Irish nationalists endorsed it because it held out the promise of achieving a united Ireland, whereas British unionists endorsed it because it held out the best opportunity of reconciling nationalists to the union. The important point about the agreement, however, is that both sets

<sup>10</sup> Robert E. Goodin, *Reflective Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> John Parkinson and Thomas Flynn, "Deliberation, Team Reasoning, and the Idealized Interlocutor: Why It May Be Better to Debate with Imagined Others," paper presented at the Workshop on the Frontiers of Deliberation, ECPR Joint Sessions, St. Gallen, April 12–17, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Reber, "Les risques de l'exposition à la deliberation des autres," *Archives de philosophie du droit* 54 (2011), 261–81.

<sup>13</sup> Alain Noël, "Democratic Deliberation in a Multinational Federation," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 9 (2006), 432.

of aspirations are underpinned by a shared commitment to principles of self-determination, democratic equality, tolerance and mutual respect. It is those principles that give the agreement legitimacy, in the eyes of both ordinary citizens and the international community, and that sustain the hope for enduring peace and stability.<sup>14</sup>

How does O’Flynn know that not only interests and power but also deliberation with tolerance and mutual respect played a role? He immersed himself in the decision process, studying documents and doing interviews. Other scholars, however, based on similar sources, see only interests and power at play.<sup>15</sup> Who is right? It is my view that neither side can prove its argument in any definitive way. One’s analysis always depends on one’s world-view, and how one sees the world depends to a large extent on how one was socialized. Some have cognitive schemata making them see politics as a pure power game. For others, their cognitive schemata are such that they also see some deliberation at play. I do not claim that the axiom of politics as a pure power game is not plausible. I only claim that the axiom that politics is not exclusively about power has plausibility. It just happened that while writing this book, I read the autobiography of Nelson Mandela; I was struck that in his concluding chapter he offers his world-view that the human heart is open for others:

I always knew that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. Even in the grimmest times in prison, when my comrades and I were pushed to our limits, I would see a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards, perhaps just for a second, but it was enough to reassure me and keep me going. Man’s goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ian O’Flynn, “Divided Societies and Deliberative Democracy,” *British Journal of Political Science* 37 (2007), 741. See also Ian O’Flynn, *Deliberative Democracy and Divided Societies* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, some of the papers in Rupert Taylor (ed.), *Consociational Theory: McGarry and O’Leary and the Northern Ireland Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), p. 622.



This world-view of Mandela is precisely the type on which the deliberative research agenda is built. Even when Mandela was treated cruelly by the white guards in prison, he was able to see sometimes a glimmer of humanity in these guards. He never completely gave up on the flame of humanity's goodness. I acknowledge with Mandela that quite often this flame is hidden, although it will never be fully extinguished. A hope in this flame is the basis for a rewarding research program, at least for me and many of my deliberative colleagues.

As Mauro Barisione has pointed out to me,<sup>17</sup> it is at the very basis of the deliberative model that all assumptions must be open to being challenged. Therefore, the assumption of human goodness cannot be taken as an unchallenged meta-assumption. In this way, however, the logic of deliberation puts in danger its very basis. Barisione is certainly correct to make this point because it is indeed a basic assumption of deliberation that everything must be open to challenge. My response is that every research agenda must start from some basic assumption about human nature, and the assumption of my research agenda is that despite all the evil in the world, at least some humans have, some of the time, a sense of goodness in truly caring for the well-being of others. It is fine for me if other researchers do not accept this assumption and create their own research agenda. After all, good research benefits from competition, including competition on basic assumptions about human nature.

Having established why working with the deliberative model makes sense, I now look more closely at the model. First I address a question on terminology. Some theorists like Dennis F. Thompson,<sup>18</sup> Joshua Cohen,<sup>19</sup> and Claudia Landwehr and Katharina Holzinger<sup>20</sup> use the term "deliberation" only for forums where a decision has to be made, such as parliamentary committees, but not, for example, for discussions on television

<sup>17</sup> Personal communication, July 30, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Deliberation for Thompson means "decision-oriented discussion." Dennis F. Thompson, "Deliberative Democratic Theory and Empirical Political Science," *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008), 503–4.

<sup>19</sup> Deliberation for Cohen means "weighing the reasons relevant to a decision with a view to making a decision on the basis of that weighing." Joshua Cohen, "Deliberative Democracy," in Shawn W. Rosenberg (ed.), *Participation and Democracy: Can the People Govern?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 219.

<sup>20</sup> Claudia Landwehr and Katharina Holzinger, "Institutional Determinants of Deliberative Interaction," *European Political Science Review* 2 (2010), 373–400.

or among neighbors. Mansbridge proposes “to use adjectives to make the important distinction between deliberation in forums empowered to make a binding decision and other forms of discussion.”<sup>21</sup> For situations in which a binding decision has to be made, she coins the term “empowered deliberation.” If no binding decision has to be made, Mansbridge uses other distinctions with the help of further adjectives such as “consultative deliberation” for “a forum empowered only to advise an authoritative decision-maker,” or “public deliberation” for “a forum that is open to the public but makes no binding decisions, such as a public hearing.”<sup>22</sup> Mansbridge uses still other adjectives to make further distinctions of deliberation. I agree that Thompson, Cohen, Landwehr, Holzinger, and Mansbridge make important distinctions. I prefer, however, to use the term deliberation in a generic form and then to verbally characterize the forums in which deliberation occurs. When I write, for example, in [Chapter 8](#) about deliberation in the media, I do not use a term such as “media deliberation,” but I rather characterize the specific media in which I am interested, for example, deliberation in elite newspapers, deliberation in boulevard newspapers, deliberation on the Internet.

Having settled this terminological issue, I take a closer look at the model of deliberation in its various expressions. Although there is consensus among deliberative theorists on the general principle that arguments should matter in a political discussion, there are quite strong disagreements on how this principle should be implemented. Mansbridge points out that these disagreements have become greater in the last few years.<sup>23</sup> Today, deliberation has become quite a fluid concept. Jensen Sass and John S. Dryzek see deliberation as a cultural practice “with a meaning and significance which varies substantially between contexts and over time ... Thus, the forms of deliberation seen in North America or Western Europe look quite different to those appearing in Botswana, Madagascar, or Yemen.”<sup>24</sup> Given such

<sup>21</sup> Jane Mansbridge, “Everyday Talk Goes Viral,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, September 2–5, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Mansbridge, “Everyday Talk Goes Viral.”

<sup>23</sup> Jane Mansbridge, “Recent Advances in Deliberative Theory,” paper presented at the Max Weber Workshop on Deliberation in Politics at New York University, October 29, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Jensen Sass and John S. Dryzek, “Deliberative Cultures,” paper presented at the Workshop on the Frontiers of Deliberation, ECPR Joint Sessions, St. Gallen, April 12–17, 2011, p. 4.

variation, it is appropriate for Sass and Dryzek that we do not use a one-size-fits-all definition of deliberation but adapt the definition to the respective historical and cultural context.<sup>25</sup> Given this broad orientation of research, it is not surprising that increasingly there are disagreements on the exact definition of deliberation. I give a first overview of these definitional disagreements, which I will discuss in greater detail in the respective chapters.

One disagreement concerns the question of how strongly ordinary citizens should be involved in the deliberative process. On one hand, you have the position that ordinary citizens should participate as much as possible in the deliberative processes. In their everyday life, they should discuss political matters in their families, with friends and neighbors, in the workplace, and in their clubs and associations. In this sense, they are also political actors, and for them, too, the principle should apply that they are willing to be convinced by the force of the better argument. Thus, at the citizen level, opinion-formation takes place in a reflective way. These reflected opinions are communicated to the political leaders through a variety of channels like personal encounters, public meetings, the media, and the Internet. On the other hand, some theorists consider this position of deliberative participation of all ordinary citizens as utterly unrealistic. In their view, it would be more realistic to expect that all citizens have the *opportunity* to participate, while in praxis only a small number would participate on a regular basis in political deliberations, for example in randomly chosen mini-publics.

One further disagreement on what is meant by deliberation concerns the justification of arguments, whether they all need to be justified in a rational, logical, and elaborate way or whether narratives of life stories can also serve as deliberative justifications. When actors present their arguments in a rational, logical, and elaborate way, their arguments can be evaluated on the basis of formal logic. To allow only rational, logical, and elaborate arguments raises the critique from some theorists that such a definition discriminates against persons with little rationalistic skill. Given the inclusionary spirit of the deliberative model, such persons should also be allowed to participate in the political process. If there is, for example, a public school board meeting in a local community, it should also count as a deliberative justification if

<sup>25</sup> Sass and Dryzek, "Deliberative Cultures," p. 11.

parents tell the stories of how their children have severe drug problems. Telling such personal stories will involve much emotion and empathy not allowed in a purely rational approach to deliberation.

There is also disagreement on whether in deliberation all arguments must refer to the public interest or whether arguments referring to self-interest or group interests also count. Clean air is an example of a public interest, since everyone profits from this good. Some theorists argue that only such public interest belongs to a deliberative discourse. Other theorists, however, would also allow self and group interests, for example that tighter clean air standards would cause unemployment and suffering for workers in the automobile industry. Generally speaking, it is not easy to make the distinction between the public interest and group interests. Group interests like those of workers in the automobile industry may cut across national borders, for example between the US and Canada. For some issues, several countries or the entire world share a common public interest. Therefore, the concepts of public interest and group interests cannot be seen only within the narrow borders of nation states.

Do all arguments have a place in deliberation? Here again there is disagreement. Some theorists take the position that all arguments, however offensive, should be listened to with respect and taken seriously. A criticism of this position is that if an argument violates core human rights, its merits should not be considered at all. If someone argues, for example, a racist position, this should not be substantively discussed because racism violates a core human right. Although the position should not be discussed, one would still have the obligation to justify why the position is racist and therefore should not be discussed.

A further disagreement concerns the question of whether deliberation does necessarily have to end with a consensus. On the one hand, there is the expectation that reasonable people will ultimately agree on the strength of the various arguments so that consensus will naturally result. This view is based on the assumption that behind all individual preferences there is a basic core of rationality that is self-evident if people use only their reasoning skills. Therefore, consensus would be built on the same reasons. A weaker form of the consensus argument is that actors may have different reasons to arrive at consensus. On the other hand, there is the view that some deep-seated values may turn out to be so irreconcilable that, despite all references to rationality, consensus is not possible nor even desirable. There is also the

pragmatic argument against consensus that time constraints often preclude talking until everyone agrees; sometimes a vote must be taken, putting some participants into a minority. The key for deliberation is that the opinions of losing minorities are treated with respect and duly considered. It is also important that majority decisions are considered as fallible and can be taken up again at a later stage if new information and new arguments arise.

For some theorists, good deliberation means transparency and openness to the public eye, while other theorists point out that under certain conditions deliberation is helped if a discussion takes place behind closed doors, so that there is less grand-standing and more serious discussion. These theorists also point out that deliberation behind closed doors may help later deliberation in the public eye.

There is also disagreement among theorists concerning the importance of truthfulness for deliberation. Some theorists are not much interested in knowing why someone engages in deliberation. What counts, according to this view, is whether participants show respect for the arguments of others, regardless of whether this respect is meant in a truthful way or not. By contrast, other theorists see truthfulness as a key element of deliberation. Untruthful deliberation would be nothing but clever strategic rhetoric. Demonstrating respect for the arguments of others would merely be to further one's own interests. This would take the essence out of deliberation, which also has an important intrinsic value for self-actualization, and this value would be negated by a lack of truthfulness.

I hope that this book will shed some light on these controversies in the theoretical deliberative literature. The empirical data to be presented can certainly not solve the controversies. How one defines a concept depends on one's research agenda, and this, in turn, depends on one's norms and values. Whether one counts, for example, storytelling as deliberative depends, among other things, on one's notion of rationality. Although empirical data cannot solve such controversies, data can help to clarify the empirical relations and causalities among the various deliberative elements. Does, for example, a logical, rational, and elaborate justification of one's arguments lead to more or less respect for the arguments of others than when one's arguments are justified with a personal story? Empirical data can also show how the antecedents and consequences of deliberation vary depending on the definition of deliberation.

## (b) Empirical research on deliberation

So what are the empirical data that I will use to shed light on the normative controversies about the deliberative model of democracy? In the literature, one finds both observational and experimental data. In our research group, we use both methods. We began with observational data of parliamentary debates in Germany, Switzerland, the UK, and the US. These analyses have been discussed in an earlier book, published by Cambridge University Press in 2004.<sup>26</sup> To measure the level of deliberation in both plenary sessions and committee meetings, we developed an index that we call *Discourse Quality Index* (DQI), which initially covered the following aspects of deliberation (how the DQI is used in practice we will show elsewhere<sup>27</sup>):

1. participation in the debate;
2. level of justification of arguments;
3. content of justification of arguments;
4. respect shown toward other groups;
5. respect shown toward demands of other participants;
6. respect shown toward counter-arguments of other participants;
7. change of positions during debate.

Critical theorists and postmodernists are usually uneasy about any attempt to measure the quality of deliberation.<sup>28</sup> They argue that measurements of deliberation are never objective but always subjective interpretations. I do not deny that our coding is subject to interpretation; in our book-length presentation of the DQI we explicitly state that “assessing the quality of discourse requires interpretation. One needs to know the culture of the political institution, the context of the debate, and the nature of the issue under debate.”<sup>29</sup> Interpretation, to

<sup>26</sup> Jürg Steiner, André Bächtiger, Markus Spörndli, and Marco R. Steenbergen, *Deliberative Politics in Action: Analysing Parliamentary Discourse* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> André Bächtiger, Jürg Steiner, and John Gastil, “The Discourse Quality Index Approach to Measuring Deliberation,” in Lyn Carson, John Gastil, Ron Lubenski, and Janette Hartz-Karp (eds.), *The Australian Citizens’ Parliament and the Future of Deliberative Democracy* (College Park: Penn State University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Martin King, “A Critical Assessment of Steenbergen *et al.*’s Discourse Quality Index,” *Roundhouse: A Journal of Critical Theory and Practice* 1 (2009), online: [www.essl.leeds.ac.uk/roundhouse](http://www.essl.leeds.ac.uk/roundhouse), pp. 6–7.

<sup>29</sup> Steiner *et al.*, *Deliberative Politics in Action*, p. 60.

be sure, can never obtain absolute objectivity. The choice is not between objectivity and subjectivity. No serious social science researcher ever claims to reach objective truth. All interpretations have a subjective element, but not all interpretations are equal. Not everything goes. The criterion for a scholarly, fruitful interpretation is whether one succeeds in attaining some level of inter-subjectivity, resulting in a sufficient degree of inter-coder reliability. This is what we attain in our research with the DQI. It was always considered as a flexible measurement instrument that needs to be adapted to specific research projects. I applaud such pluralism in research methods, which corresponds to an application of a deliberative discourse on how to do deliberative research. It is precisely the point of good deliberation that nobody claims to look at the world with absolute objectivity. This must also hold for scholarly research on deliberation.

Having attempted to measure the level of deliberation of parliamentary debates, we looked at causalities for both the antecedents and the consequences of variation in the level of deliberation. With regard to the antecedents, we were mainly interested in institutional aspects and looked at the following dimensions:

1. institutions favoring consensus versus institutions favoring competition;
2. strong versus weak veto players;
3. parliamentary versus presidential systems;
4. first versus second chambers of parliament;
5. public versus non-public arenas.

We also looked at the substantive issues under debate, focusing on the dimension of polarized versus non-polarized issues. With regard to the consequences of variation in the level of deliberation, we looked at both the formal and the substantive aspects of decision outcomes. For the formal aspect, our focus was on whether decisions were made unanimously or by majority vote; for the substantive aspect, how far the decision outcomes correspond to criteria of social justice.

Let me now describe how I will organize the empirical sections in each chapter. At the beginning of most empirical sections, I will come back to our earlier study on parliamentary debates, but only to the extent that the results shed light on the philosophical controversies and help me support my normative conclusions. I then continue with an extensive review of the empirical literature on deliberation.

Thereby, I consider all studies that I could get hold of where the level of deliberation is actually measured and not merely assumed. I attempt to give as far as possible a full review of the research where the level of deliberation is measured in a sufficiently reliable and valid way. By necessity, some countries are covered more than others, and some conflict dimensions more than others. As the final part of each empirical section, I present results of the recent experiments on deliberation that our research group has undertaken in Colombia, Bosnia–Herzegovina, Belgium, the EU, and Finland.

Why the choice of these particular countries? Most of the existing empirical literature on deliberation comes from stable democracies such as Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Canada. Such empirical data are useful for thinking in a general way about deliberative democracy. Where deliberation is most needed, however, is in deeply divided countries with internal military strife. Of course, it is in such countries that deliberation is most difficult to achieve. The most that one can probably expect is that people are willing to acknowledge that positions at the other side of the deep divide also have a legitimate point, although one does not agree. If such acknowledgment is obtained, the other side is humanized, which should make it less likely that one shoots and kills across the deep divide. If we look at the current world, the real trouble spots are deeply divided countries involved in internal military strife. My hope is that the deliberative approach can offer something to these countries so that they learn to deal peacefully with their conflicts. Thereby, my hope is more with ordinary citizens than with political leaders, who are often only interested in maintaining the deep divisions in order to stay in power. Therefore, the focus of our experiments is at the citizen level.

Colombia corresponds exactly to my research interest, with military combat still going on between leftist guerrillas and rightist paramilitaries. In Bosnia–Herzegovina, with deep divisions among Serbs, Croats, and Bosnjaks, the civil war has stopped but its consequences are still very much felt. We also include Belgium, where the linguistic divide between Flemish and Walloons grows wider and wider, although up to now without resulting in political violence. Belgium is a borderline case for my primary research interest, and it will be interesting to see how far the level of deliberation differs in Belgium from Colombia and Bosnia–Herzegovina. Finland we have included as a real contrast case, with little divide between Finnish and Swedish speakers. The



EU, finally, is an interesting case per se, with many wars among its members in past centuries and still-uneasy relations among some of its members today.

I will not present a full-fledged analysis of our experiments in these four countries and the EU, limiting myself to what is useful for this normatively oriented book. An analytically oriented, co-authored book entitled *Potential for Deliberation Across Deep Divisions* is in preparation. The collaborators for the individual parts of the experimental investigations are:

- Maria Clara Jaramillo (Colombia);
- Juan Ugarriza (Colombia);
- Simona Mameli (Bosnia–Herzegovina);
- Didier Caluwaerts (Belgium);
- Marlène Gerber (Europolis);
- Staffan Himmelroos (Finland).

Why did we choose the experimental method? One possible research method would have been to use surveys asking people how deliberative they are when they talk about politics in their families, with friends and neighbors, and in the workplace. Such surveys run the risk that respondents say what is socially desirable, namely that they are deliberative when they talk about politics, showing, for example, respect for the opinion of others and a willingness to yield to the force of the better argument. Given this problem of surveys for the present research question, we chose experiments as the appropriate method. This meant concretely that we brought ordinary citizens together to discuss a specific topic. Participants had to fill out questionnaires before and after the experiments. The discussions were taped and then coded with an expanded DQI that the reader will find in the Appendix. I now present the research designs for the five test cases.

### *Research design for Colombia*

*Maria Clara Jaramillo* and *Juan Ugarriza* are responsible for the Colombian part of our research. Initially, they planned to do the research with university students, which from an organizational perspective would have been relatively easy to do. But they looked for a greater challenge where deliberation is particularly difficult to achieve and thus all the more needed. They found this challenge with ex-combatants

of the internal armed conflict. It just happened that, when Jaramillo and Ugarriza began their research, the Colombian government had a program of decommissioning under way. This program applied to combatants of both leftist guerillas (in particular FARC, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, and some smaller guerrilla groups) and the paramilitary forces on the extreme right. Would ex-combatants who, a short while ago, were still shooting at each other be willing to participate in common deliberative experiments? This was the challenge at the beginning of the research, and it took much patience, enthusiasm, and skill on the part of Jaramillo and Ugarriza to ultimately organize 28 experiments with altogether 342 participants.

In order to get a financial stipend, the ex-combatants were required to participate in a program of the Office of the High Commissioner for Reintegration. Psychologists and social workers acted as tutors, and ex-combatants had to attend twice a month small-group sessions with these tutors. We focused our research on the greater Bogotá area, where there were about 3,000 ex-combatants participating in the reintegration program. They were mostly men, young and of little education. Initially, we attempted to select a random sample to participate in the experiments. But tutors warned us of security problems since many of the ex-combatants were severely traumatized and therefore violent or otherwise troubled. There was also a motivation problem; in the first research phase many ex-combatants invited to the experiments simply did not show up. The tutors helped us then with a solution that gave the ex-combatants the necessary incentives to come to the experiments. They could replace the bi-monthly tutorial sessions with participation in a single experiment and still get the full stipend. It also helped that the experiments could take place in the offices of the tutors. The tutors stood close by should some violence occur. Thanks to the Office of the High Commissioner for Reintegration, we have approximate data about the total population of the 3,000 ex-combatants in the Bogotá area with regard to gender, age, and education. For these criteria, the 342 ex-combatants participating in the experiments correspond roughly to the total population of ex-combatants in the Bogotá area.<sup>30</sup> This is comforting, although

<sup>30</sup> Of the ex-combatants in our experiments, 15 percent were women, compared with 16 percent among all ex-combatants in the Bogotá area. Some 30 percent in the experiments were 18 to 25 years old, compared with 37 percent in

we cannot claim that the ex-combatants we studied are a random sample of the total population of ex-combatants.

How large were the differences between the ex-guerrillas and ex-paramilitaries who volunteered to participate in the experiments? As a null hypothesis, we assume that there were no differences. This hypothesis has a certain plausibility because it could be that the ex-combatants were not ideologically driven but were simply looking for a paying job and did not care which side they joined. This would be fatal for the purpose of our experiments since we are interested in investigating political discussions across deep divisions. The null hypothesis can be rejected. The ex-guerrillas were over-represented in the youngest age group, and they also had more women in their ranks than the ex-paramilitaries. With regard to education and social class, the ex-guerrillas had less formal schooling and were poorer than the ex-paramilitaries.<sup>31</sup> Of particular importance for the interpretation of the experiments is that politically there were strong differences between the two groups. The ex-guerrillas come much more often from a leftist family background; the ex-paramilitaries from a rightist background. Therefore, it was not due to random chance on which side the ex-combatants were involved in the internal armed conflict. The clearest indicator for the still-deep divisions between the two groups came to light in response to the question about their attitudes toward the combatants still fighting in the jungles. Although the participants in the experiments had left their former comrades, they expressed a more positive attitude toward their own side than to the other side. This was not necessarily to be expected, because one could imagine that the ex-combatants left the fighting because they no longer agreed with the cause of their side. Although there were some who left the fighting for this reason, most still had more sympathy for their side than for the other side. They probably came out of the jungles because they had had enough of the fighting and were attracted by the benefits of the government program of reconciliation. The conclusion of all

the Bogotá area. For education we must differentiate between ex-guerrillas and ex-paramilitaries. Of the ex-guerrillas in the experiments, 60 percent had schooling of 11 years or less, 64 percent of all the ex-guerrillas in the Bogotá area. For the ex-paramilitaries, the corresponding figures are 41 and 36 percent.

<sup>31</sup> It has to be considered, however, that ex-guerrillas had some informal education during the time they were in the field.

these data is that the participants in the experiments formed two distinct groups, not only with regard to demographic characteristics but also in a political sense.

As an ideal research design, each experiment would have had the same number of participants with an equal distribution between ex-guerillas and ex-paramilitaries. But given all the difficulties with attendance, we were far from reaching this ideal. This was not a laboratory situation where everything can be held under control. To learn something about ex-combatants, this was the best that we could do. In the social sciences the really interesting questions often cannot be studied in a fully controlled situation, so that one has to use a less-than-perfect research design. Before and after the experiments, participants had to fill out questionnaires about demographic characteristics and political and psychological issues. These data will help to test hypotheses about the antecedents and consequences of variation in the level of deliberation among the 28 experiments and also at the level of the individual participants. Institutionally the research design had variation in the sense that for half of the groups there was no decision to be made at the end of the experiment, whereas the other half of the groups had to decide on a set of recommendations about the future of Colombia to be sent to the High Commissioner for Reintegration. Half of these decisions had to be made by majority vote, the other half by unanimity. These letters were actually sent out to the High Commissioner so that for half of the experiments the discussions had immediate policy relevance, whereas for the other half the discussions had no immediate outside effect.

For the practical organization of the experiments, at the very beginning Jaramillo and Ugarriza stated the following discussion topic: "What are your recommendations so that Colombia can have a future of peace, where people from the political left and the political right, guerillas and paramilitaries, can live peacefully together?" In contrast to other such experiments, in particular "Deliberative Polling,"<sup>32</sup> no briefing material was handed out beforehand on the topic to be discussed. Also, in contrast to Deliberative Polling, moderators did not intervene to encourage deliberative behavior. It was precisely our research interest to see to what extent ex-combatants were willing and able to behave in a deliberative way without any outside help. If,

<sup>32</sup> See below, research design for Europolis.

for example, participants did not speak up during the entire experiment, moderators did not ask them to do so. Or when opinions were expressed without justification, moderators did not ask why they held such opinions. Therefore, the discussion was free-floating within a broadly formulated topic. Not handing out briefing material before the experiments and moderators not intervening in the discussions eliminated two possibly confounding factors for our causal analyses. After about 45 minutes, Jaramillo and Ugarriza brought the discussion to an end.

### *Research design for Bosnia–Herzegovina*

Bosnia–Herzegovina, with its recent internal armed conflict, was also a difficult place to do experiments. For this part of the project, *Simona Mameli* was responsible. She organized a preliminary test experiment in Sarajevo, but came to the conclusion that this was not a good place to do her research. The reason was that she found many ethnically mixed families, so that it was difficult to construct groups with deep divisions. Mameli then chose two places where the civil war was particularly ferocious, Srebrenica and Stolac. In Srebrenica, as is well known, a large number of Muslim men were brutally murdered by Serbs. In Bosnia–Herzegovina, Muslims prefer to be called Bosnjaks, not wishing to be identified with a religion. I will also use this term. Stolac has a deep division between Croats and Bosnjaks. It is located close to the better-known town of Mostar; there was bloody fighting in both places. Mameli chose to do the experiments in Stolac because Mostar has become too much of a tourist destination.

The research design for the experiments in Bosnia–Herzegovina is basically the same as for Colombia, in the sense that no briefing material was handed out beforehand and that the moderators did not intervene to encourage deliberative behavior. In *Srebrenica*, Mameli organized six experiments with altogether 40 participants: 22 women and 18 men. For three experiments, she selected the participants with a method called “random walk.” This means that she walked the streets of Srebrenica and approached people in a random way to participate in the experiments. It would have been better to draw random samples from lists of Serb and Bosnjak inhabitants of Srebrenica, but since no such lists exist, random walk was the second-best selection method. With random walk to select participants, Mameli encountered two

difficulties. One was related to the living pattern of the Bosnjak population. It forms the numerical majority in Srebrenica, but many Bosnjaks are only formally registered in the town and prefer to spend most of their time somewhere else. Mameli has seen many empty houses belonging to Bosnjaks. It seems that many of them come back only for elections or commemorative events for the genocide, because the traumatic memories make it hard for them to permanently live in Srebrenica. It appears that more moderate Bosnjaks tend to live permanently in Srebrenica. For the experiments, this means that we likely got more moderate Bosnjaks in our sample. We had such a bias in Colombia also, where, as we have seen above, the most violent and psychologically troubled ex-combatants had to be excluded from the experiments. From a research design perspective this is not ideal, but such is life in societies with an internal armed conflict in the recent past or still ongoing. A second difficulty in searching for participants through a random walk was that some, both Serbs and Bosnjaks, were not willing to participate or, when they did promise to attend, did not show up.

For the other three experiments in Srebrenica, we wanted participants who had been exposed to a program of reconciliation and peace-building to examine whether participation in such a program made a difference to the behavior in the experiments. The Nansen Dialogue Center, a Norwegian NGO, has such a program; its main objective “is to contribute to reconciliation and peace building through interethnic dialogue.”<sup>33</sup> The staff of the center helped to recruit people who had participated in their activities, making the selection as randomly as possible. Among the persons recruited by the Nansen Dialogue Center, there were also some who did not show up. Thus, as in Colombia, the six experimental groups in Srebrenica had unequal size and not always the same number of Serbs and Bosnjaks. Again, this is the best that we could do in the place where the worst genocide in Europe since World War II had taken place. It was even somewhat of a surprise that Mameli could do the six experiments at all, since one might have expected that it would not be possible to find any Serbs and Bosnjaks willing to sit together at the same table.

The practical organization of the experiments in Srebrenica was basically the same as in Colombia. Participants had to fill out questionnaires

<sup>33</sup> See [www.nansen-dialogue.net/content](http://www.nansen-dialogue.net/content).

before and after the experiments. With the exceptions of some local adaptations, the questionnaires were the same as in Colombia. At the beginning of the experiments, Mameli, assisted by a friend from the region, gave the topic of the discussion, which was to formulate recommendations for a better future in Bosnia–Herzegovina. Participants were asked to agree on a set of recommendations to be delivered to the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. In contrast to Colombia, such a decision had to be made in all experiments; there were too few experiments to introduce another control variable. Contrary to Colombia, where, for security reasons, discussions were only audio-taped, in Srebrenica experiments were both audio- and video-taped.

In *Stolac*, the experiments were organized in the same way as in Srebrenica. As already mentioned above, the town is deeply divided between Croats and Bosnjaks. The Croats are the majority, and the mayor belongs to a Croatian nationalist party. There is supposed to be some power-sharing with a Bosnjak nationalist party, but it does not work at all well. There are Croatian flags everywhere, causing resentment among the Bosnjaks. Like in Srebrenica, there is a general feeling of fatigue and disillusionment. The High Commissioner did visit the town the year before and listened to the problems of the population, but nothing has changed since this visit. So people in Stolac are not only frustrated with their own local administration but also with the “internationals” who seem to make things even worse. Simona Mameli, again assisted by a friend familiar with the local situation, could also carry out six experiments in Stolac with a total of 35 participants: 20 women and 15 men. Like in Srebrenica, for half of the experiments participants were recruited by the Nansen Dialogue Center, for the other half by random walk in the streets of the town. Again, not everyone who had promised to show up did so, so that the number of participants varied and there was not always the same number of Croats and Bosnjaks. Like in Srebrenica, there was most likely a bias toward moderation among those who attended the experiments.

### *Research design for Belgium*

Belgium has an increasingly deep division between Flemish (Dutch-speaking) and Walloons (French-speaking). In contrast to Colombia and Bosnia–Herzegovina, there has never been an armed conflict between the two language groups, so experiments were easier to

organize. It helped, in particular, that *Didier Caluwaerts*, the organizer of the experiments, could rely on a research bureau with experience in sending out Internet surveys for social research.<sup>34</sup> Based on this survey, Caluwaerts selected people to be invited for the experiments, using the method of heterogeneity sampling. He wanted in each experimental group sufficient variation with regard to gender, age, and education. Moreover, he wanted in each group participants who felt either positively or negatively about the other side of the language cleavage. Caluwaerts undertook a total of 9 experiments, inviting 90 persons to participate; 83 actually showed up. In each experiment there were at least eight participants. As in Colombia and Bosnia–Herzegovina, no briefing material was handed out, moderators did not intervene, and participants had to fill out questionnaires before and after the experiments. Three experiments were homogeneous Flemish, three homogeneous Walloon, and three heterogeneous from both sides. Similarly to Colombia and Bosnia–Herzegovina, the discussion topic was formulated in the following broad way: “How do you see the future relation between the language groups in Belgium?” The groups were asked to make a decision on this issue: in three groups by simple majority, in three by two-thirds majority, and in three by unanimity. Combining the language composition of the groups and the decision rules gives a nine-fold table ( $3 \times 3$ ) with one experiment in each field. In a first round of the experiments of only a few minutes, participants had to say in one or two key words what they considered the most important problem or fact in Belgium. In a second round of about an hour-and-a-half, the discussion was free-floating. In a third round, also of about an hour-and-a-half, participants had to discuss specific topics on current Belgian politics with regard to the language issue. A decision had to be made after both the second and the third rounds. The experiments were held on a Saturday at the University Foundation in Brussels, which has no link to any political organization. In the three mixed-language groups there was simultaneous translation. In the Flemish groups Caluwaerts, as a native Dutch-speaker, did the moderation; in the Walloon groups a French-speaker, and in the mixed groups moderation was shared by a French- and a Flemish-speaker.

<sup>34</sup> Didier Caluwaerts, “Deliberation across Linguistic Divides: The Case of Belgium,” paper presented at the Workshop on the Frontiers of Deliberation, ECPR Joint Sessions, St. Gallen, April 12–17, 2011.



*Research design for the Europolis project  
of the European Union*

After three deeply divided nation states, I turn now to the supra-national level of the European Union (EU). Historically, the member states of the EU were often deeply divided by war; today also there are deep divisions among some of the member states, for example between Hungary and Slovakia on the status of Hungarians in Slovakia. To do experiments among ordinary EU citizens, our research team was invited to join the *Europolis* project and to code the discussions with our DQI. This project is based on the idea of Deliberative Polling developed by James S. Fishkin and Robert C. Luskin.<sup>35</sup> They raise the questions: “But what if the level of deliberation could be raised, if not for the whole public, at least for a random sample thereof? What if polling could be made deliberative?” Their answer is: “Deliberative Polling explores this possibility by exposing random samples to balanced information, encouraging them to weigh opposing arguments in discussions with heterogeneous interlocutors, and then harvesting their more considered opinions.”<sup>36</sup> The idea of Deliberative Polling has been put in practice many times, for example in 2000 in a particularly elaborate way in Denmark ahead of the referendum on the euro.<sup>37</sup>

The Europolis project is organized within the 7th Framework Program of the EU and is coordinated by Pierangelo Isernia of the University of Siena. On May 29–31, 2009, 348 randomly selected persons of all 27 EU member states assembled in Brussels and discussed in 25 small groups first immigration from outside the EU and then climate change. No decisions had to be made at the end of the small-group discussions. There were also plenary sessions with experts and politicians. Participants had to fill out four questionnaires: one back in their home countries, a second one on arrival in Brussels, a third one on departure from Brussels, and a fourth one back in their home countries again. It is important to note that in all projects organized by Deliberative Polling a special effort is made to create conditions favorable for deliberation.

<sup>35</sup> James S. Fishkin and Robert C. Luskin, “Experimenting with a Democratic Ideal: Deliberative Polling and Public Opinion,” *Acta Politica* 40 (2005), 284–98.

<sup>36</sup> Fishkin and Luskin, “Experimenting with a Democratic Ideal,” 287.

<sup>37</sup> Kasper M. Hansen, *Deliberative Democracy and Opinion Formation* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark), p. 2004.

In this sense, the research design is different from the one we used in Colombia, Bosnia–Herzegovina, and Belgium, where we made no special effort to create favorable conditions for deliberation. This was altogether different for the Europolis project. The day before the event, the moderators were trained in long sessions. They were mostly young academics with great language skills from many different EU countries. Although they were told not to intervene in a substantive way in the discussions, they were instructed to make the discussions as deliberative as possible, for example, in encouraging everyone to speak up, to justify their arguments, and to be respectful toward the arguments of others. A further contributing factor to good deliberation in Europolis was the advance briefing of the participants with a brochure of 40 pages containing information on the EU and the two topics to be discussed. Graphically, the key facts and arguments were presented in a professional way; although the participants were not tested as to whether they had read the material, most indicated in the questionnaires that they had done so. In drawing comparisons with Colombia, Bosnia–Herzegovina, and Belgium, we must be aware that the research design for Europolis was quite different. On the one hand, this makes straightforward comparisons problematic. On the other hand, however, it strengthens our conclusions if they are based on two different research designs.

All the discussions of Europolis were audio-taped. A special problem was the multilingual nature of the participants, which necessitated simultaneous translation by professional translators. To make translation manageable, there were only two or three languages represented per group. One language was chosen to be audio-taped in the original voices, the other(s) only in translation. This method has the disadvantage that for the participants for whom only the translation is recorded, the coders cannot hear possible emotions in the original voices. To code and analyze all 25 groups for their discussions on both immigration and climate change will take a long time, with other publications to come. For the current book, I take as a basis the analysis that Marlène Gerber *et al.* did for the ECPR Joint Sessions in St. Gallen, in April 2011.<sup>38</sup> They investigated 9 of the 25 groups, and

<sup>38</sup> Marlène Gerber, André Bächtiger, Susumu Shikano, Simon Reber, and Samuel Rohr, “How Deliberative Are Deliberative Opinion Polls? Measurement Tools and Evidence from Europolis,” paper presented at the Workshop on the Frontiers of Deliberation, ECPR Joint Sessions, St. Gallen, April 12–17, 2011.

this only for the sessions on immigration and not those on climate change. They chose groups where the recorded language, either in the original or in translation, was German, French, or Polish. For the Polish groups, we could rely on a native Polish speaker; her transcripts were translated into English so that we could check the reliability of her coding. The discussion of immigration came before the discussion of climate change. The first session on immigration in the small groups took place on Friday, May 29, 2009 at 4 p.m. for about an hour; after a coffee break, discussion continued for about another hour. The following day at 9 a.m., there was a plenary session on immigration with experts for an hour-and-a-half. After a coffee break there was another session of small groups, which was short and quickly drifted away from immigration to more general political questions so that we omitted this session from coding.

### *Research design for Finland*

I use Finland as a control case for the three deeply divided countries and the EU as a special case per se. Finland is a homogeneous country with a small Swedish minority, which, however, does not cause any major inter-linguistic problems. Finland can also be characterized as a consensus society. Thus, it serves well as a control case to test to what extent our findings for our deeply divided cases are specific to such cases or apply also to a homogeneous consensus society. As for the Europolis project, we joined the Finnish project while it was already under way. It was initially launched at Åbo Akademi University at Turku by a research group headed by Kimmo Grönland, Maija Setälä, and Kaisa Herne.<sup>39</sup> The coding and analysis with a modified version of our DQI was done by *Staffan Himmelroos*.<sup>40</sup> Participants in the Finnish experiments were a random sample of the Turku region. In November 2006, they discussed in eight groups the question of whether a sixth nuclear power plant should be built in Finland. Each experiment took about three hours and ended with a

<sup>39</sup> Kimmo Grönland, Maija Setälä, and Kaisa Herne, "Deliberation and Civic Virtue: Lessons from a Citizen Deliberation Experiment," *European Political Science Review* 2 (2010), 95–117.

<sup>40</sup> Staffan Himmelroos, "Democratically Speaking: Can Citizen Deliberation Be Considered Fair and Equal?," paper presented at the Workshop on the Frontiers of Deliberation, ECPR Joint Sessions, St. Gallen, April 12–17, 2011.

decision either by a vote or by consensus. The number of participants was 90, uttering a total of 1,189 relevant speech acts related to the nuclear issue. As for Europolis, but different from the experiments in Colombia, Bosnia–Herzegovina, and Belgium, in the Finnish project special efforts were undertaken to contribute to favorable conditions for deliberation. Participants received material beforehand on nuclear power and could meet with experts representing different interests on the issue. At the beginning of each group discussion, ground rules were established to remind participants to speak up and to respect the views of others. The discussions were led by trained facilitators who had been instructed not to influence the view of the participants but to intervene if the discussion lost focus or violated deliberative characteristics.

### **(c) The praxis of deliberation**

I wrote this book so that it also has relevance for political praxis. In recent years, deliberation has become prominent in political praxis with efforts to engage ordinary citizens more in the political process. These efforts go under labels such as mini-publics, citizens' juries, consensus conferences, planning cells, and so on. Such efforts in political praxis need to be accompanied by systematic normative and empirical research on deliberation. This is precisely what this book hopes to accomplish. What is the appeal of citizen deliberation for political praxis? An important appeal is to get more legitimacy for political decisions. Many citizens tend not to trust politicians to make decisions for the public good. There is widespread suspicion that many politicians just look after their career interests or are even corrupt. This suspicion is fueled by how the media tend to report politics. Amid such cynicism, there are claims of a democratic deficit. The obvious strategy to counter such a deficit is to involve ordinary citizens more in the political process. In this way, political decisions should become more acceptable to the general public. At least this is a hypothesis worth testing. Another important appeal to let ordinary citizens deliberate political issues is the expectation that fresh ideas are brought into politics, leading to better policy outcomes. Citizens are becoming less willing to accept the authority of politicians to know best. Indeed, the reputation of politicians is in many places at a dismally low level. At the same time, many citizens have expertise

from their professional and private lives that is relevant for many political decisions.

The hope to get better and more legitimate policy outcomes has led to many efforts to involve ordinary citizens in a fuller and more systematic way in the political process. I present as an illustration a project of the Regional Council of Tuscany.<sup>41</sup> In 2007, the council enacted Regional Law No. 69, entitled “Rules on the Promotion of Participation in the Formulation of Regional and Local Policies.”<sup>42</sup> Key passages for the necessity of such a law read as follows:

- Participation in the formulation and making of regional and local policies is a right. This law pro-actively promotes forms and instruments of democratic participation to render this right effective by making resources available such as money and methodological support.
- The law encourages the autonomous initiative of organized social groups such as local authorities, schools and firms to submit projects to enhance citizen participation.

With such formulations, the law-makers in the Tuscany present a deliberative agenda for their region. They emphasize a participatory form of democracy where ordinary citizens discuss policy issues and communicate their opinions to local authorities. It is also in a deliberative spirit that all interests be heard in the political process and that the political knowledge of citizens be enhanced so that they can give well-developed justifications for their arguments. In sum, a new civic culture should emerge in Tuscany according to the goals of this law. As Antonio Floridia and Rodolfo Lewanski, two deliberative scholars involved in the project, put it:

Tuscany has become a remarkable “laboratory” for empirically testing the validity of deliberative participation in the real world, verifying the effects and possible benefits of institutionalizing it, and applying a specific model aimed at making representative government and mini-publics not only co-exist alongside each other, but actually become complementary and mutually re-enforcing. One way or the other, the results will be of relevance

<sup>41</sup> For a description of the project, see Antonio Floridia and Rodolfo Lewanski, “Institutionalizing Deliberative Democracy: The Tuscany Laboratory,” paper presented at the Workshop on the Effects of Participatory Innovations, ECPR Joint Sessions, St. Gallen, April 12–17, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> See [www.consiglio.regione.toscana.it/partecipazione](http://www.consiglio.regione.toscana.it/partecipazione). The website also has an English version of the law.

to those – be they scholars, practitioners, politicians, or polities – interested in such democratic innovations.<sup>43</sup>

To implement the law, the Regional Council should appoint “an expert in public law and political science of proven experience in the methods and practices of participation.” This happened on October 1, 2008, with the appointment of Rodolfo Lewanski, a political scientist at the University of Bologna, who has published widely in the field of deliberation.<sup>44</sup> He heads the *Autorità per la Partecipazione* (Authority for Participation) with a staff to help him execute his duties. In the three years from 2008 to 2010, grants of 2,138,775 euro were awarded; the average grant was 31,453 euro.<sup>45</sup> To receive a grant, local communities, schools, businesses, and any formal or informal groups of ordinary citizens can apply. It is then the duty of the Authority for Participation to evaluate the applications and to decide who is successful. After a project has been finished, the Authority for Participation has to determine to what extent the stipulated goals of the project have been accomplished.

As an illustration of a concrete project, I use the local community of Piombino, located on the coast of the Ligurian Sea. The issue was the renovation of Piazza Bovio (the town square), located on a rock reaching out to the sea. Instead of leaving the decision to technical experts and the local authorities, the citizens of Piombino were strongly involved in the decision process. Conditions were particularly favorable for deliberation since citizens’ preferences were not yet deeply crystallized, did not depend on strong group affiliations, and did not promote identity-based appeals. Later in the book, I will discuss cases where conditions for deliberation were less favorable. By way of introduction, it seems appropriate to begin with a case where conditions are favorable for deliberation and to see what happens under these conditions.

The Piombino project began in April 2008 and ended in December 2008. In April, flyers were distributed in various places such as the main market square to inform the population about the project. On the evening of May 9, an information assembly about the project was held, in the presence of a staff member of the Authority for

<sup>43</sup> Florida and Lewanski, “Institutionalizing Deliberative Democracy,” p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> I know Rodolfo Lewanski personally, so I have good knowledge of his work for the Regional Council.

<sup>45</sup> Florida and Lewanski, “Institutionalizing Deliberative Democracy,” table 1 in Annex.

Participation. Together with the mayor of the town, this staff member presented the goal of the project: in a dialogue with the technical experts, the citizens of the town shall work out the best solution for the renovation of Piazza Bovio. Thereby, all participants shall feel free to express their opinions, and all opinions shall be respected. Discussions took place in small groups of not more than ten participants. On the one hand, participants were chosen randomly from the official lists of the town. On the other hand, townspeople could volunteer to participate. In this way, five groups were formed. Each group met three times between May and October. At these meetings, technical experts of the town (engineers and architects) were available to procure information if the citizens so desired. It was important, however, that these technical experts did not lead the discussions. It was instead one of the citizens who acted as moderator. After each meeting, the discussions were summarized in a report, containing the arguments articulated in the discussions. At the beginning of the group discussions, the participants were asked to say what the Piazza Bovio means for them. The responses were uniformly positive, for example:

- the piazza serves as a linkage among the generations, contributes to the identity of the town, it is our pride;
- on the rock reaching out to the sea, the piazza opens the town to the beauties of nature, it is a window to the infinite wide world;
- the piazza is a social location where townspeople meet, it is particularly fitted for lovers;
- the piazza is a place of tranquility allowing calm self-reflection.

Despite these generally positive reactions to the piazza, the discussion groups had many suggestions for improvement, in particular:

- So that at night the stars can better be seen, the lighting should be dimmer, especially at the outer end of the piazza. To this suggestion it was objected that with dimmer lighting security would be endangered, especially for elderly or handicapped people. To take account of these conflicting arguments, a discussion ensued about lighting methods. It was suggested to allow much light at the ground and less light toward the sky. It was also suggested that solar energy should be used for the lighting of the piazza.
- For the pavement of the piazza different suggestions were made with regard to the color and the material to be used. Participants

went into so much detail as to suggest, for example, the use of a material that would allow chewing gum dropped by children to be washed off.

- A lively discussion took place about the number and kind of trees to be planted. Here again, participants had to consider conflicting criteria. On the one hand, trees should give much shade, but they should not hide the view of the sea. The chosen trees also should not damage the pavement with their roots.

Discussing these topics and many more, the individual groups attempted to reach consensus or at least majority positions. Minority positions, however, were also included in the reports of the groups. Thus, a lonely voice demanded that all benches be removed from the piazza; although this demand did not get any support, it was mentioned in the report of the group. A particularly innovative element of the entire project was the involvement of the schoolchildren of Piombino. After school trips to the piazza, they had to make drawings of how the piazza should look. These often very colorful and joyful drawings were exhibited and also put on the website of the town. In this way, children learned a good lesson about practical politics with a very concrete case of policy-making.

The project came to an end in December 2008 when the entire population of Piombino was invited to be informed about the results of the group discussions. On this occasion, the local authorities promised to take account of the suggestions worked out in the groups, which indeed they did, especially if there was consensus on particular aspects of how the piazza should look. The citizens of the town were also encouraged to continue to be involved in the further planning and execution of the renovation of the piazza. From a deliberative perspective, it is important to note that according to the reports of the groups the discussions were led in a serious and respectful way, with arguments being weighed carefully and people being willing to change their positions if confronted with new information and good arguments. Sometimes, deliberative discussions are organized without any linkage to an ongoing policy debate. As we will see later in the book, such free-floating discussions without end point also have value in contributing to the political self-development of participants. In this chapter, however, I want to present with Piombino a case where citizen discussions are part of an ongoing policy process. In this way I want to emphasize that citizen deliberation can very well have policy relevance.



I have now presented an example to show how ordinary citizens can be involved in deliberative political issues. In recent years, there has been a great wave of such enterprises in many parts of the world. It is obvious that a need is felt to engage citizens more thoroughly in political debate. For the scholarly community, the challenge is to investigate conditions under which such experiments in citizen deliberation can be successful. I will take up this challenge in the chapters to come. In the last chapter, I will come back to the praxis of deliberation.