

STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS FOR CITIZEN DELIBERATION: A CONCEPTUAL SCHEME FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF «NEW» PARTIES

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to elaborate a conceptual scheme for assessing deliberative spaces within political parties that propose the direct input of citizens in policy-making as a possible solution for the crisis that representative democracy is facing. Theory on deliberative democracy has long been concerned with the question on how to assess the structural conditions for deliberation and the advantages deliberation has for the democratic process. Building on existing dimensions, we used a qualitative research design with data from observation, interviews and document analysis to investigate a neighbourhood group of «Barcelona en Comú» (BComú). This recently formed political party experiments with the incorporation of horizontal decision-making practices facilitated through ICTs to establish modes and bodies for citizen deliberation. We discovered relevant themes that allowed us to develop a conceptual scheme when critically assessing deliberative structural conditions. This scheme can serve as a map and a monitoring device for evaluating the actual practice of parties that claim to engage in citizen deliberation. We conclude by indicating the performance of BComú and by asking if the successful implementation of deliberative spaces can lead to a new party model and new trends in political practice including recommendations for further research.

KEYWORDS: crisis of democracy, citizen deliberation, participatory democracy, political parties, technopolitics.

1. INTRODUCTION

For the last two decades, scholars and experts in western democracies have been projecting the approaching end of representative democracy, especially in European countries with established parliamentary systems. Low turnout rates in elections, party membership decline and disinterest in politics have led authorities to question whether democracy can be saved (Della Porta, 2014) or in the most radical postulation, whether it is already dead (Keane, 2009). Studies pertaining to the shortcomings of democracy

have seen an increased revival in the past five years, questioning where the crisis of representative democracy comes from and what it means for the direction that politics is heading in. There is a rich spectrum of terms used for describing the current state of democracy, ranging from «bad-faith democracy» (Flinders, 2012), «audience democracy» (Manin, 1997), «monitory democracy» (Keane, 2011), «counter-democracy» (Rosanvalon, 2008), the beginning of «post-democracy» (Crouch, 2004) or a stealth democracy where citizens avoid «the distasteful elements inevitably associated with democratic processes» (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002). All the authors cited above have found similar reasons for –and at the same time– results of the crisis: political fatigue and the citizens' distrust of their representatives, based on the perception that the «control over political decision-making sometimes lies beyond the reach of the ordinary citizen» (Mair, 2013: 1f.). This gives rise to the sensation of a distinct sphere –the political– to which the citizens do not have any connections to.

Departing from the general problems democracy is facing, a special focus has been on the role of political parties and their contribution to the crisis. Authors are substantially in agreement on party decline (Ignazi, 1996) and claim that the symptoms of the failing of democracy have «to do with the failings of political parties» (Mair, 2013: 2). One of the central critiques is over the prevailing model of political parties, the mass-party model (Katz & Mair, 1995), which is based on a specific conception of democracy and of an idealized social structure, «neither of which is characteristic of post-industrial societies» (ibid.: p.6). Scholars accordingly tend to follow the assumption that the age of «party democracy has passed» (Mair, 2013: 1) and that parties are subject to a devolution process.

In a more optimistic approach, other authors are beginning to identify some citizen activities that, under the generic name of «technopolitics» (Lebkowsky, 1997), are engaging in political actions in allegedly new –and positive– ways: new communicational practices (Fernández-Planells et al., 2013), new para-institutions (Peña-López et al., 2014), new distributed leadership (Margetts et al., 2015), new political architectures of communication and participation combining 'vertical' with 'horizontal' (Tormey, 2015), new collective identities (Monterde et al. 2015), or new levels of engagement (Peña-López, 2014). A much-debated scenario appears to be the vision of internet-based citizen participation and deliberation, either in a direct democracy procedure or as a supplement to existing political institutions (Heidar & Saglie, 2003). These practices have been experimented with in social movements in 2011 and afterwards, most substantially in the 15M movement in Spain and the Occupy Movements.

The participants of the social movements relied heavily on social media and other web-based technologies for communication, diffusion of information and internal organization (Monterde et al., 2015). Three observations are significant: Firstly, the spirit and narrative of the movements show that the general public is not disinterested in political issues in general but distrusts the institutions of democracy. Secondly, the

democratic practice successfully employed by the people, such as assemblies and self-organization, leads to the question if a new age of politics has arrived. And thirdly, whether Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can help facilitate and foster the incorporation of these practices within the traditional bodies of representative democracies. In the aftermaths of these social movements, specific questions remain regarding how the internal organization of traditional political bodies such as political parties can adapt to the demands of the citizens. Specifically, whether it is possible to combine the vertical mode of the political party and their decision-making strategies based on efficiency with the open horizontal decision-making processes endorsed by the spirit of «new» politics based on legitimacy and consensus-based decisions.

This paper explores the neighbourhood group of a recently formed party –Barcelona en Comú (BComú)– that since its electoral success in the Spanish local elections of May 2015 for the city council of Barcelona, finds itself in a transitional phase, exploring uncharted political practices of citizen engagement. These practices are fostered through new ad-hoc spaces and facilitated by a combination of network-like organizational architectures and an intensive use of ICTs. Since this form of party organization is somewhat «new» (Tormey, 2015), the academic field still lacks an adequate methodological approach towards the phenomenon. We want to ask how to approach the set-up of political parties that incorporate the characteristics of BComú and elaborate a scheme for the assessment of deliberation spaces within them. This scheme is a compilation of dimensions we found in the literature and findings we obtained first hand through a qualitative investigation of one neighbourhood group of BComú.

2. DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF ITS STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS

Philosophical and political theorists have long searched for a more deliberative, inclusive and more participatory form of democratic practice within democratic governance. Deliberation in the democratic context describes a form of communication that is traditionally based on normative democratic values such as equality, inclusion and fairness in arriving at decisions that serve the public good (Dahl, 1989; Habermas, 1989; Cohen, 1996). Different implications are endorsed by the deliberative argument: On a political level, citizen engagement through deliberation might enhance interest in politics and end political apathy. Since citizens would have more immediate connections to decisions being made, they would develop a stronger interest in political issues. Obviously, policy decisions would have a more consensual basis and would be perceived as more just and legitimate. Secondly, on a social dimension, deliberation would lead to an enhanced exchange between citizens, fostering relationships and linkages, which provide an important base for productive and lively political culture (Burkhalter et al,

2002). Thirdly, on a related note, deliberation practices contribute to a more informed and educated individual through the exchange of ideas and perspectives, and the process of opinion-forming opens up possibilities for individual growth (Pateman, 1970).

Deliberation is a complex issue to investigate. Diverse approaches need to be taken into account if a holistic understanding about a deliberative process wants to be achieved: Structural dimensions, individual preferences and motivation, group dynamics, issues of power—all these elements constitute the deliberation process and are themselves tricky concepts.

Most recently, Borge and Santamarina (2015) developed criteria for the communicative dimension to assess the quality of two online deliberation processes of Podemos and Barcelona en Comú. These criteria, such as equality, reciprocity etc. based on Kies (2010) and Friess and Elders (2014), provide a useful and important tool for evaluating the transformative implementation of online deliberation platforms within «new» parties. Complementary to the communicative dimension, in this article we focus on the structural dimensions of deliberation by examining the internal organizational set-up of the party and not the online deliberation platforms. However, we want to argue that a combination of both, the communicative and the structural dimension of different deliberation bodies can add to a more holistic understanding of the performance of these parties.

Therefore, we situate our research within the area of the systemic approach towards deliberative democracy presented by Mansbridge et al (2012). The authors outline the distinct levels in which deliberation can take place within a system: the binding decisions of the state (both in law itself and its implementation), activities directly related to preparation for those binding decisions, informal discussion related to those binding decisions, and arenas of formal or informal discussion related to decisions about issues of common concern that are not intended for binding decisions by the state.

Our focus will be on the second level the preparation for binding decisions; in our case, the link between the citizens and the institutional space of a political party. It is important to note that we share the overall understanding that deliberative democracy is not a distinct type of democracy, but a medium and complements existing forms of democracy, in our case, representative democracy (ibid.). We also employ a narrow understanding of democratic deliberation: the cooperative discourse that results in decisions made by citizens that affect policy-development. Conceived of in this way, deliberation would be a discursive and participatory process that manifests itself in the «codetermination or shared decision-making among equals (...) in the common decision which bind all the members in the group» (Gould, 1988: 85). Based on Habermas' (1996) connotation of rational discourse, the deliberative model underscores the importance of the very process through which opinions are formed, ideally with the force of the better argument. The obligation of political parties in this context is that they «would have to participate in the opinion- and will- formation from the public's own perspective, rather

than patronizing the public sphere for the purposes of maintaining their own power» (ibid.: 379).

The deliberative approach has been discussed in theory (Martí, 2006) and has been implemented in political practice (Fung & Wright, 2003). Empirically, it been investigated in distinct levels of political deliberation i.e. in the context of social movements (Rose & Sæbø, 2010), in the area of local policy-making (Rosenberg, 2007), within representatives in formal governmental institutions (Gastil & Black, 2007), and within the set-up of political parties and their internal deliberation forums (Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-García, 2012). It is in this last aspect, deliberation within internal deliberation forums of political parties, that we want to elaborate on to provide a conceptual scheme for assessment. Table 1 gives an overview of the dimensions developed by scholars for conceptualising the structure and functionality of deliberative spaces within parties, which form the basic criteria for our investigation.

Table 1. Criteria for Structure and Functionality

Approach	Criteria	Description
TYPE: Deliberative model of intra-party democracy (Wolkenstein, 2015),	Problem-oriented forum	Assembly for deliberation over one or multiple predetermined issues
	Partisan deliberative networks	Dispersed forums of deliberation within the party that are linked together
	Partisan deliberative conference	Encounter of grassroots members with party elites
GOAL: Key Features of Legislative deliberation (Gastil & Black, 2007),	Agenda setting actions	Identifying and prioritizing issues on which decision is based upon
	Issue consideration actions	Considering information of issues included and consideration of long-term impact of proposed legislation and its alternatives before decision is made
MODE: Member Participation in Policy Development (Gauja, 2013),	Direct participation	Immediate influence of member within policy-development
	Representative participation	Decision making by the elite in the pursued interest of the members
	Delegate participation	Decision based on delegated vote
	Consultative Participation	Deliberation to enlarge the information base of elite
ALLOCATION: Forms of deliberation within democratic processes (Thompson, 2008),	Distributed Deliberation	Assignment of different aspects of the «deliberative task» to different institutions
	Decentralized Deliberation	Unified deliberative processes in many different entities
	Iterated Deliberation	Dynamic policy development through constant submission and revision of content before enactment
	Meta-Deliberation	Identification of the place of deliberation in the larger process open to the participants

These approaches provide useful components for a qualitative assessment of the structure and function of deliberative spaces within the political context. From a structural perspective, they allow for the critical reflection upon the variety of engagement opportunities. Citizens should have the possibility to engage in different types of forums, ranging from problem-oriented forums to networks and conferences. Secondly, they should have the opportunity to shape agendas and also to participate in issue-related content. A direct democracy approach would evidently prefer the direct mode of participation in all decision-making processes. Since we are looking at the bodies of a political party within representative democracies, the consideration of delegates, representatives and consultative modes of participation need to be taken into account as well. The criterion 'allocation of deliberation' serves the purpose for assessing the role deliberation plays in the space. It is especially significant in the dimension 'meta-deliberation', since it allows the participants to explore the role and the very design of their engagement itself. To conclude, we found that embracing a combination of these criteria, firstly, provides a holistic description of the structural conditions of deliberative spaces within political bodies and, secondly, that they serve as a tool for evaluating their performance. However, when engaging in the empirical investigation of BComú, we found missing criteria necessary to fully reflect upon the expectations citizens have towards deliberative spaces and, following on from that, which issues need to be considered when evaluating opportunities for citizen input in policy-making. With the elaboration on these criteria, our study attempts to contribute to the operationalisation of deliberative practices in terms of their structural conditions. After introducing the political context and design of BComú, we will present three further dimensions that encompass and advance these approaches based on critical issues discussed within deliberative set-ups.

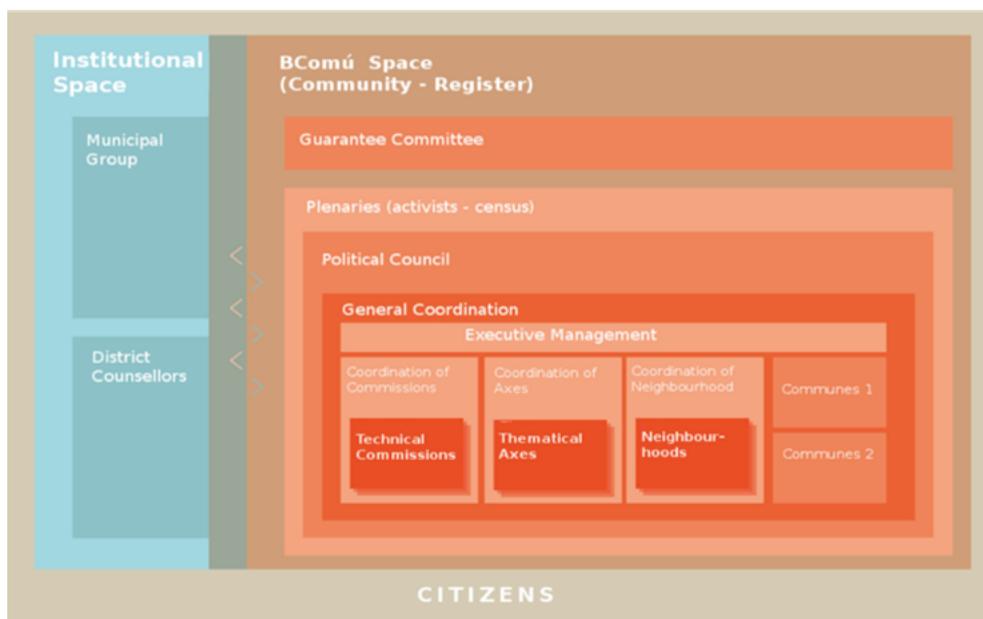
3. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Founded in June 2014, the story of BComú cannot be understood without taking into account the major socio-political events that happened in Spain in the preceding decade. As it is explained in Peña-López (2013), the terrorist attacks of March 11, 2004 and the events of that weekend (*Traficantes de Sueños*, 2004), represented a definitive turning point in Spanish politics. Confidence in politicians and in representative democracy institutions began a decade long plummet that had its major event in the May 15, 2011 *Indignados* movement sit-ins in dozens of cities in Spain. Confidence was only partially recovered by end of 2013, when *Podemos*, a new political party, was created as a means to channel the huge momentum gained by the 15M Spanish *Indignados* Movement. Two years before, the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) had been created to organize the fight against massive evictions taking place in Spain – yet another side-effect of the 2008 financial crisis. The PAH also embodied the growing discontent against the Spanish government on housing policies, which sparked several protests in 2006

and aimed at changing the regulatory framework in the matter. Ada Colau, the spokeswoman for PAH, followed the path initiated by Podemos in 2014, and shortly afterwards, fostered the creation of BComú, a melting pot of civic movements, platforms and local delegations of left-wing parties, among them, the Podemos chapter for Barcelona.

The party managed to be the most voted for in the 2015 municipal elections (with 25.2% votes and 11 out of 41 seats) and came into office despite their narrow majority, thanks to the temporary support of other left-wing parties. The party describes itself as a citizen platform whose aim is to bring together progressive social and political organizations. Having its roots in the 15M Spanish Indignados movement and PAH, the platform supports participative democratic approaches, attempting to create the opportunity for the citizens of Barcelona to decide on the city's future according to their districts. They explicitly state their goal as «moving towards open democracy, giving voice to the collective intelligence in decision-making, design and management of the city, (...) and creating institutions more effective and less bureaucratized to solve the concrete problems of the people» (BarrioEnComu, 2015) with direct «contributions from citizens» (BComú, 2015a). BComú claims to be highly focused on enabling collective intelligent processes and maintaining an advanced level of participation and deliberation possibilities for citizens but nevertheless they rely heavily on a well-established organizational structure as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Organigram of BComú



Source: <https://barcelonaencomu.cat> (own translation)

A crucial element of BComú is the extensive use of online forums for policy development, which permit as many people as possible to contribute to specific issues: The candidate list for the municipal elections in May 2015, the programme on which the platform based their participation in the election, and the ethical code were developed and decided upon via the combination of online tools Democracy OS and Agoravoting. When deciding to run in the national elections in December 2015, 400 people participated in the election program's development process and the proposal was opened up to Democracy OS, where over 1000 people shaped the final result.

Besides the online deliberation forums that represent once-off opportunities for citizen deliberation and influence and the official party in the city hall itself, represented in Figure 1 as the institutional space, the intended core decision-making bodies of the party are the different neighbourhoods where the party meets the public. BComú claims to build their policies on their deliberative outcomes to «value the collective intelligence of the people in the neighbourhood districts» (BComú, 2015b). For this reason, we find it necessary to critically investigate how the neighbourhood groups enable members on the ground to participate and whether citizens are actually enabled to contribute in shaping the party's decisions and express their opinions. To ensure and promote the connection between citizens (members of BComú and non-members) and the institutional space in both directions, the neighbourhood groups are establishing different deliberative spaces «to help channel the concerns, opinions and demands of the neighbourhoods to the institution and to facilitate knowledge, monitoring and evaluation of institutional action by citizens» (BarrioEnComu, 2015). They therefore can be perceived as official local political networks, located in the BComú space to bridge the citizens with the institutional space (see Figure 1.)

4. RESEARCH METHOD

The research study focuses on the question to what extent citizen involvement was enabled by BComú. We decided to approach the topic with a broad ethnographic design for investigating the implementation of deliberative spaces within a neighbourhood district of Barcelona where BComú is strongly established.

Our data were derived mainly from an analysis of secondary sources used for the comparison between official statements in party narratives and internal documents such as summary files of meetings and e-mail conversations. These were distributed via mailing lists to members of the neighbourhood district. Since we were particularly concerned with the possibilities of citizen involvement, the documents and conversations have been sampled due to their treatment of the concepts deliberation and participation. The selection is based on statements regarding institutional and structural dimensions of direct citizen participation in deliberative spaces to identify the characteristics of deliberative spaces of «new» parties (Tormey, 2015).

Primary data were collected via participant observation of the neighbourhood assemblies, which we attended over a two-month period. Additionally, we participated in a meeting of the coordination group and had the support of one member that facilitated the participation and clarified unfamiliar topics of discussion and concepts (see Appendix I). It has to be noted that although we made our position as researcher clear and hired a translator to facilitate the translation from Catalan to Spanish, there was no sign that the members felt uncomfortable with the observation. On the contrary, the discussions were mostly heated and criticisms towards some internal processes were discussed in an open manner.

In the first step we identified the different bodies for citizen engagement within the neighbourhood group using the set of criteria outlined above. In the second step we discovered emerging themes that, in our understanding, shape a more advanced assessment tool for structural conditions for citizen deliberation. In the following section we will present, in purely qualitative terms, the most prevalent themes emerging from this investigation and link them to existing literature.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: ELEMENTS OF A CONCEPTUAL SCHEME FOR ASSESSING STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS OF INTRA-PARTY DELIBERATION

5.1. Structure and Functionality

Recognising the limitations of a purely descriptive assessment, we argue that for describing deliberative spaces for members on the ground with the set of criteria combined above provides clarification of the goals and the purpose of deliberation. To test whether the members in the neighbourhood group had the possibility to engage in a diversity of ways, we investigated the different spaces following the criteria of structure and functionality as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Structure and Functionality of Deliberative Spaces Within The Neighbourhood Group

	Type	Goal	Mode	Allocation
General Assembly	Partisan deliberative conference; Problem-oriented forum	Agenda; Issue	Direct; Delegate; Consultative	Iterated
Plenary	Partisan deliberative network	Agenda; Issue	Delegate	Decentralized
Coordination Team	Partisan deliberative network	Agenda	Consultative	Decentralized; Meta-deliberation
Commissions	Problem-oriented forum	Issue	Direct	Distributed
Municipal District Group	Problem-oriented forum	Agenda; Issue	Representative	Iterated

The neighbourhood group under investigation consists of diverse spaces, each of them said to fulfil a certain function: The general assembly indicates to be the highest decision-making body. It also claims to provide the possibility for participation to all citizens in the neighbourhood that have their residency in the neighbourhood, are over 16 years old and do not belong to another party that is not collaborating with BComú. Since representatives of the elite are participating and singular issues are being discussed, this space is supposed to shift between the partisan deliberative conference and the problem-oriented forum outlined by Wolkenstein (2015). Their participation modes for citizens vary between all four modes of participation outlined by Gauja (2013) and the form of deliberation is iterative (Thompson, 2008).

The second body is the plenary that consists of the directors, councillors and members of the census. The census includes people who are actively involved in both regular meetings and in the realization of the planned tasks. The coordination team is concerned with organization of coordination and coherence of actions between various committees of the district, the Municipal District Group, the General Coordinator of BComú and other areas of the organization. 9 to 11 people take part in the meetings. They have been elected in the assembly in respect to their expertise, age and district and include two representatives of the municipal district group. The two spaces are partisan deliberative networks, where participation is representative and the form of deliberation is decentralized, the coordination team furthermore provides the opportunity for meta-deliberation and consultative agenda-setting.

The thematic axes are represented in the diverse commissions –at the time of the study six of them– that develop and provide special topic-related and territorial-related content as well as reflection, innovation and support for the formulation and implementation of public policies. These represent the typical problem-oriented forums, developing issue-related content where deliberation is distributed and participation is direct. Finally, the municipal district group is the neighbourhoods' representation within the institutional space. Its job is the positioning and decision-making about local issues (politicians and management), in line with the agreements of the Plenary and General Coordinator.

5.2. Accessibility and Transparency

We argue that a holistic approach should advance the purely descriptive perspective on deliberation bodies and modes with accessibility criteria and transparency of the outcomes obtained in the spaces. Accessibility to the deliberation processes has prevalent been treated as «inclusion» and is connected to the communicative dimension (Borge & Santamarina, 2015) of deliberative processes. In the communicative dimension, a deliberative process is inclusive if «all those parties potentially affected or of all the relevant points of view» (Rosenberg, 2007: 9) are integrated shaping the discussion. However, in respect to the design of the bodies of political parties, we argue that this dimension is al-

ready relevant in the structural sense, namely, to what extent members on the base, party-affiliated individuals and citizens have the opportunity to participate. We therefore introduce accessibility as a concept and ground it on the work of Arnstein (1969). His distinctions regarding citizen participation and influence proves to be a very useful tool to approximate how these actors can be added to the decision-making process. The last stages of the «ladder of participation» –citizen power: partnership, delegated power and citizen control– can be interpreted, in terms of deliberation, as ways that citizens can be part of a structure of decision-making or about how different actors can coordinate.

From the optimistic perspective of internet-enhanced democratic practices, this interpretation is strengthened by the new roles that a «Fifth Estate» (Dutton, 2007) can have in politics in general and in decision-making in particular. In a preliminary definition of «networked individuals and networked institutions», the author states that «(b)y enabling a huge range of people across the globe to reconfigure their access to information, people, services and technologies, the Internet and related ICTs have the potential to reshape the communicative power of individuals and groups in numerous ways» (ibid.: 8) and goes on by identifying how several institutions and individuals change roles around information (press and media, governments, research, education), the architecture of organizations and how they coordinate and interact (government, businesses, the workforce).

Connected to the concept of accessibility is the question for transparency of the spaces. This is based on the normative assumption that valuable participation is only possible if all information necessary to fully perform in group deliberation is delivered to the individuals. The information must be public to the participants «so that all those affected but not directly involved can be apprised of and can potentially respond to the substance of the deliberations» (Rosenberg, 2007: 9).

Accessibility and Transparency emerged as important concepts in explaining how BComú as a «new» party negotiates between traditional hierarchy and transformative narratives as being horizontal: The question of the criteria for inclusion of citizens in deliberation was a critical discussion point within the communication of the neighbourhood group. Analysis of discussion in the mailing list revealed the pressing issue of whether there should be one open mailing list for every registered member and another closed group, in which sensitive information is discussed amongst the most active members. The categories, however, were not clear. During the observation of the coordination team meeting this topic emerged as well, with the decision that each topic should be labelled with different accessibility degrees and then distributed accordingly. This raises an important issue since, on one hand, the ideology of the party is to be open to all citizens and transparent in their operations and on the other hand, some sensitive information requires privacy. Therefore, the neighbourhood group decided to establish assessment criteria for each topic. This suggests the immediate tension between openness and closeness for parties that are derived from social movements and highlights the

question to what extent citizens should get involved in important topics without risking the integrity of the party.

5.3. Hybridity and Coordination

One crucial element of BComú is the extensive use of online deliberation platforms for policy-development but a simple account of deliberation in either online or offline spaces does not contribute to the whole picture –assessing both spheres with a systemized account on how and what information is discussed, who it is shared with and at what point in time provides a richer understanding of the impact of deliberation. Accordingly, the more challenging question is how the different spaces are linked together, touching upon the hybridity of on- and offline deliberation and decision-making, thus reaching synchronicity of the different layers of participation and deliberation (Monterde, et al., 2015). Chadwick (2009) famously points out that modern political action is largely shaped by hybrid systems: actors who blend traditional and new media logics. Conforming to this statement is the observation about the hybrid use of offline and online spaces in social movements, such as 15-M and Occupy, as the distinguishing element of these movements (Monterde, et al., 2015). The same logic applies to organisations such as new political parties that use multiple communication channels, online or offline, to disseminate information (offline: assemblies, meetings, plenums; online: mailing lists, Whatsapp, Telegram) and for decision-making purposes (offline: assemblies, meetings, plenums; online: Democracy OS, AgoraVoting etc.). Our case study is one of the examples for a complex hybrid system, therefore an assessment of the relationship amongst the different communication and organization channels is justified. The related aspect of coordination refers to the successful implementation of the channels, namely, a logic and sound system for tailoring the different channels according to their deliberation purposes.

As we observed, a strong emphasis in the discussions within the assembly and the coordination group often focused on the question of how to coordinate tools and manage channels of participation and communication and on the question of whether to use new technologies. For example, the neighbourhood group has diverse Google-groups in which information is disseminated as well as mailing lists for informing members and people of interest, and additionally WhatsApp groups for the commissions. An important finding that was also accentuated in a follow-up interview was the difficulty of systematising the communication tools used for specific purposes. A central discussion in the internal communication related to the possible exclusive nature of new technologies, for example, how elderly people, who might not have access or digital skills, will be able to engage in deliberation processes.

Another dominant concern was the coordination between the spaces for citizen participation around singular issues. The question was where to position topics such as education, employment, environment, basic rights, health, gender, etc. within the

commissions without creating too many small spaces and how one space could have information about the decisions of the others.

A final point was the preference for offline deliberation over online deliberation: When talking about the possibility to transfer more communication online, the majority of participants argued against this option, preferring face-to-face deliberation. A conclusion drawn from this observation is that physical deliberation was perceived as more important, but that ICTs were seen as indispensable for the dissemination and evaluation of information. Drawing on this finding it can be hypothesised that deliberation at the local level mostly happens offline –even if the coordination of the organization is mainly online–, while online tools are aimed at bringing the discussion to the macro level, thus connecting the different nodes made up by neighbourhoods or even «friend» parties and governments in other cities.

5.4. Outcome and Accountability

The topic most frequently discussed by the participants of the neighbourhood groups was how to implement actual decision-making and how to develop mechanisms to ensure accountability at the municipal level. An emerging topic in this context was over the logic in engaging in a deliberation process about a decision that had already been made. This was in reference to the development of the electoral campaign during an open assembly where some participants had the impression that they had no actual vote within the program. The debate highlights a crucial component: The outcome perspective of deliberative processes namely if and how the decisions find their ways to the institutional. The finding indicates a contradiction between the claim of the party that «(a)ll decisions that have a significant impact (...) should be subject to binding public consultations» (BComú, 2015a). and the actual practice since the majority of members perceived the topic as a significant one that had already been decided upon.

Several authors have referred to this as the outcome dimension (Borge & Santamarina, 2015) or the question for the external impact. It is being argued that for an effective deliberative process the deliberation «must have some bearing on the formulation of public policy. This may involve playing an advisory role relative to elected officials or public administrators. Alternatively, the deliberation body may be more directly involved in the formulation of law or policy» (Rosenberg, 2007: 9). This dimension overlaps with some concepts used in the first axe of our framework regarding structure and functionality. Agenda-shaping deliberation, for example, automatically implies an implementation of the deliberative result in a defined outcome –the agenda. However, taking this dimension as own criteria provides the possibility to enlarge the focus on different forms of implementation, for example, if the agenda was considered in the formulation of a public policy.

Another problem that was accentuated within the neighbourhood group's general assembly was the fact that no decision was actually made. This paradox (the assembly is

described as the highest decision-making body) reveals the necessity to determine precise strategies to reach to decisions on well-defined issues. Tracing these decisions from the assemblies and the decision-making processes to deliberation in the higher instance will reveal how and to what extent they have an actual impact.

Hand in hand with the outcome perspective comes the question for accountability, a concept aligned to the role of representatives and delegates. Since «political parties are *the* central mechanism to make the constitutional chain of political delegation and accountability work in practice» (Müller, 2000: 330), we argue that this concept must be considered in a framework that looks at horizontally organized parties. New parties seem to struggle between the traditional paradigm of representation (delegating the responsibility towards a representative) and direct or participatory democracy (inclusion of citizens in deliberation processes). Therefore, defining, explaining and defending which outcome of the citizen deliberation process could be included in a policy design and which not, is essential.

6. CONCLUSION

This research analysed how BComú puts into practice its commitment to citizen deliberation both as a means to respond to the many criticisms against representative democracy, and to maintain its original nature as a civic movement, arguably two of the main reasons for its success in the elections. It is important to note that BComú – as a very recently formed party – is in a transition phase, and is still experimenting how to implement deliberation practices that ensure the participation of citizens in policy-development. We found a variety of possibilities for citizens to engage in a political deliberation process and, additionally, we developed further criteria to assess deliberative spaces for a more elaborated perspective on the structural conditions of deliberation as provided by the academic literature, issues that BComú still needs to improve. We argue that an effective approach then evolves as a compilation of the four dimensions: structure and functionality, accessibility and transparency, hybridity and coordination and outcome and accountability.

It has to be mentioned that the findings are based on an observation of a single neighbourhood group within one political party and that furthermore time constraints did not allow in-depth follow-up on how the group dealt with the highlighted issues after the fieldwork period. However, the emerging themes are described broadly for emphasising important implications for the design of deliberative spaces in general and can therefore be applied to all kind of political organizations that seek to incorporate all the members within the decision-making process. This might contribute to a critical and more objective perspective on the actual practices of deliberation within new party formations.

In conclusion, we want to illustrate possible implications that these political experiments might have for the future of democracy. A few attempts have been made to predict and characterize the direction in which the organizational structure of political parties is going (Margetts, 2001) in response to the crisis of representative democracies. Building on these attempts, we want to hypothesize that parties will change internally following the strategies that BComú is experimenting with. However, it remains to be seen whether the set-up described above will prove to be successful or if we are observing another example of «uneasy tensions between normative aspirations (...), social expectations, party rhetoric, the actual operation and organization of parties, and the broader design of representative democracy and politics» (Gauja, 2013: 118).

In any case, BComú has already proven to be influential in providing new approaches to the increased critique from both empirical and normative standpoints of party models. Maybe a new party model could be useful to coherently assess the effects of traditional political science parameters such as membership or candidate selection processes in light of the digital revolution, or the relationship between technopolitical social movements –such as the Spanish Indignados– and traditional democratic institutions such as parliaments, governments or other parties.

Further research could also advance the field of technopolitics. As we argued above, the development of technological innovation can facilitate deliberative processes. However, the findings outline that despite of dedicated web-deliberation about singular issues such as the programme development ICTs are mere enablers of political projects, not their essential features. They are means, not ends in themselves. That said, the field of technopolitics could greatly benefit from an analysis of how various technological innovations are implemented within different political strategies, ranging from their use within social movements to the usage of political deliberation platforms as described above.

The question of scalability is another important question to consider. The case described above could turn out to be successful because of the scale of deliberation. People in a neighbourhood district share common issues, ranging from territorial to thematic, for example urban development issues. The question to ask here is whether a new party model based on BComú can be applied on a larger scale, on a national or even international level? Podemos and the Pirate Party Germany would serve as adequate examples to begin seeking an answer. Also, we recommend investigating more cases on how deliberation and participation structures differ from case to case and which are successful and which not. Besides the often mentioned case of the Icelandic constitutional process in 2012 (Landemore, 2015), a particularly useful case would be an investigation of the Pirate Party that has gained electoral success in Germany and Scandinavia, who propose a ‘liquid feedback’ initiative. The liquid feedback strategy (Paulin, 2014) is interesting because it provides the opportunity for direct citizen involvement without setting aside the role of experts in policy development. A deeper investigation into these strategies will provide both normative and empirical insights into the future of party organization, and the transformation of representative democracy.

APPENDIX I: Primary Data Overview

Participant Observation			
Activity	Date	Topics Discussed	No of Participants
General Assembly	26.11.2015	- Preparation Plenary - PAM, PAD	24
General Assembly	05.12.2015	- electoral campaign	18
Coordination Group	02.11.2015	Linkages between spaces; Information Dissemination; Inclusion of elderly	5
Follow-Up Interviews			
PID	Date	Occupation	Topics
01	13.11.2015	Agent for occupation in city hall and member	Organization of neighbourhood group; Linkages between spaces; Decision-making processes and implementation
02	13.03.2016	Web-designer and member	Organization of neighbourhood group; Linkages between spaces; Decision-making processes and implementation
03	15.04.2016	Member of Barcelona Activa	Decision-making processes and implementation
04	17.03.2016	Pensioneer and member	Organization of neighbourhood group; Linkages between spaces; Decision-making processes and implementation
05	22.04.2016	Journalist	Organization of BComú and critical
06	05.05.2016	Political Scientist and Member	Organization of neighbourhood group; Linkages between spaces; Decision-making processes and implementation
Document Analysis			
Name	Date Publication		
Acta reunió equip de coordinació	02.11.2015		
Acta assemblea	01.12.2015		
Convocatoria Plenari	02.12.2015		
Nota de informació ajuntament	03.12.2015		
Reflexions de 6 mesos	04.12.2015		
Prova canal Telegram	17.01.2016		
Proposa espais pel debat de PAD	17.01.2016		
Acta de plenari	20.02.2016		
Acta Coordinadora	13.03.2016		

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