

Deliberative Networks

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Deliberative Networks

Deliberative systems have been proposed as a way of conceiving the complexity of real world policy making in deliberative terms. However, there is a concern that in doing so they blunt the critical edge of deliberative ideals. This paper advances an alternative concept – the ‘network’ of deliberative exchanges – that can encompass real world complexity without sacrificing deliberation’s normative bite. It sets out the components of a network approach, making clear how these are grounded in deliberative principle. It then shows how the network model can apply to actual policy processes, with an extended case study - a critique of the key stages in the Thatcher government’s decision to adopt a poll tax in the UK.

Keywords: Deliberation, Democracy, Deliberative systems, Policy networks, Political Theory, Policy making.

The ‘practical turn’ in deliberative theory concerns the vexed question of how abstract deliberative ideals might guide practical policy-making in large and sophisticated democracies (Dryzek 2010 p.8). Without such guidance deliberative theories risk being dismissed as irrelevant or ineffective. Especially when measured against rival aggregative theories of democracy, some of which allocate citizens a very limited role. Much has been learned from studying single initiatives designed to reproduce these abstract ideals as closely as possible, and assessing existing institutions for correlates of better deliberative practice. But both approaches have been criticized for failing to provide a fuller description of the wider policy-making process (Chambers 2009). A ‘systems’ account of deliberation has recently been proposed to address this deficit (Mansbridge 1999; Parkinson *et al.* 2012). Different aspects of the policy-making process are seen as contributing to a broader deliberative whole, even when they may not appear deliberative in isolation. However, the wider coverage this model seems to offer may have been bought at the price of blurring the boundary between what counts as deliberation and what does not. This could weaken the critical purchase of the principles underlying the deliberative project.

This paper advances an alternative, network, approach to deliberation, designed to inject greater analytic and critical precision into the systems approach. It will show how a network model gives practical effect to deliberative ideals in a way that mobilises their critical potential even in the face of the formidable problems of scale and complexity posed by modern democratic polities. The paper begins by briefly outlining the principles that comprise the abstract specification of the deliberative ideal. The challenges posed by operationalizing these ideals in large, real-world democracies are then considered. In section

2 the deliberative systems approach is introduced as a recent attempt to address these challenges. Yet even some advocates of the systems model recognise it risks diluting the deliberative ideal. These difficulties are examined before introducing a network concept of deliberation as a possible remedy. Of course, the term ‘network’ is already in use in policy-making. It is thus necessary, in section 3, to distinguish a deliberative network – a series of related deliberative exchanges – from these other applications. This is particularly important in respect of treatments of networks that focus on their deliberative qualities.

The fundamental elements of a deliberative network – a deliberative exchange, and the relation between two such exchanges – are then explained in detail in sections 4 and 5 respectively. The broader notion of a network composed of these elements is characterised in section 6, including the insights this formulation offers into the practical application of deliberative principles. With the benefit of this greater detail, section 7 relates the network model back to the systems approach. Systems conceptions of deliberation can be given a more precise focus within a network frame.

Having clarified the key conceptual elements of a deliberative network, the next section demonstrates their application to practice. This is illustrated in section 8 with an extended case study of real-world policy making – the UK government’s decision to adopt a poll tax. The example brings out the relevance of a deliberative network approach to policy processes carried on at the heart of the modern nation state in all their complexity, while retaining a clear critical edge. It also brings out some of the limitations of the deliberative network model.

With the benefit of these conceptual and practical insights, the article concludes that a network account of deliberation not only clarifies how deliberative principles can inform practice in modern polities, but has the potential to provide a more realistic solution to the problems of scale and limited resources that such polities throw up than deliberation’s rival aggregative model of democracy.

1. Deliberative principles

Deliberative democracy was developed in opposition to particular aggregative theories of democracy. In these aggregative theories, the role of citizens is relegated to periodically

electing a government. Between elections, citizens should keep out of politics. In a large complex modern polity citizens do not have the time or resources to contribute more (Schumpeter 1976). Deliberative theories challenge this limited role for the citizen. A central tenet of such theories is that government policies should be determined by open argument in which any citizens whose interests might be affected may participate on an equal footing.

Initially, advocates of deliberative democracy concentrated on specifying its 'theoretical principles' (Guttmann and Thompson 1996, p.1). These aimed to establish deliberation's normative credentials as an alternative theory of democratic legitimacy (e.g. Habermas 1988; Cohen 1997). The most influential statements of these principles stipulated the components of 'an *ideal deliberative procedure*' (Cohen 1997, p. 68). All those affected by a decision should be free to participate in deliberation to determine its outcome (Cohen 1997, pp. 72-75). All participants in deliberation should be free to make and challenge any assertion, and to express their 'attitudes, desires and needs' (Habermas 1990, pp. 88-89). While recognising moral diversity and pluralism (Cohen 1997, p. 72; Guttmann and Thompson 1996, Chpt 1) such an exchange should aim at consensus about the common good (Cohen 1997, p. 75). Reasons offered should therefore be 'public' in the sense they are both comprehensible, and designed to be acceptable, to all others affected by a decision (Cohen 1997, p. 74; Guttmann and Thompson 1996, p. 52). Above all, deliberation should promote 'no force except that of the better argument' (Habermas 1988, p. 108).

Later contributions pay attention to the risk the style of speech adopted in deliberation might exclude (Young 1996, 2000; Dryzek 2000) and to the space available for relatively powerless groups to develop their positions (Fraser 1992). Others have argued for broadening the type of reasons that can be legitimately deployed, to embrace private interests (Mansbridge *et al.* 2010) and the goal of a deliberation, to include meta-consensus — agreement on the *nature* of the issue in hand, in addition to agreement on the substantive issue itself (Dryzek & Niemeyer 2007).

But deliberation is more than merely an exercise in integrating abstract moral principles such as freedom, equality and reason. As a *political* theory, deliberation owes an account of how it guides practical action. And as a response to an aggregative model of democracy, it must explain how it can deal with the real-world issues of scale and constraints on time and

knowledge which the aggregative version of democracy addresses. The ‘systems’ model of deliberative democracy has recently been developed to help contend with these matters (Mansbridge 1999; Warren 2007; Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012).

2. Deliberative systems

A deliberative systems approach recognises that it is impossible for all issues to be agreed in a single deliberative exchange ‘no single forum, however ideally constituted, could possess deliberative capacity to legitimate most of the decisions and policies that democracies adopt’ (Mansbridge *et al.* 2012, p. 1). Instead, we should envisage deliberation as a system comprising inter-related parts. While individual elements might not be deliberative in themselves, taken together they contribute to a whole which is (Mansbridge *et al.* 2012, pp. 2-3). Division of labour amongst a system’s parts can thus resolve issues of scale and complexity which would otherwise make implementing deliberation in modern democratic polities intractable (Mansbridge *et al.* 2012, pp. 2-3).

A deliberative system is defined as one in which talk is the basis for collective decision (Mansbridge 1999, p. 5). The systemic framework is designed to be applicable to any set of procedures, from informal chats through parliamentary debates to international institutions, although most versions retain a focus on the nation state as the primary locus of collective decision (Mansbridge *et al.* 2012, pp. 2 & 7-10; Parkinson 2006; Habermas 1996). Further definition takes two forms, both operating at the functional level.

i. *Procedural-functional* definitions focus on the different roles to be undertaken in deliberation. Provided these are performed at some point, by some mechanism, the system as a whole is deemed deliberative. For example, Parkinson argues that a deliberative system must define, discuss, decide and implement – with different actors, including activists, experts, the media and elected assemblies playing different parts in these processes (2006). Goodin’s sequential model looks at the roles played by different institutions – caucus room, parliamentary debate, election campaign and post-election bargaining – in contributing to a system that is over time more fully deliberative (2008). On a broader scale, the ‘twin-track’ approach of Habermas, which sees deliberation delivered through a ‘wilder’ public sphere of opinion-formation which is transmitted to formally tighter deliberative mechanisms of state government provides a further functional differentiation within a broader deliberative system

(1996). However, these procedural definitions must be supplemented by a broader concept of what deliberation aims for: defining, discussing, deciding and implementing are not enough in themselves to distinguish a deliberative system in Parkinson's model; Goodin's institutions require a further standard against which their partial contribution can be assessed, as does Habermas's 'wild' public sphere.

ii. *Outcome-functional* supplement procedural-functional definitions by specifying the benefits claimed for any form of deliberation. So long as it can be shown that a particular practice contributes in some way to these benefits, it can be said to be part of a deliberative system. Epistemically, deliberation should produce better informed and more thoroughly reasoned decisions. Ethically, it should encourage mutual respect between citizens (Mansbridge *et al.* 2012, pp. 10-12). Democratically deliberation should include all those who are affected by a decision. A good deliberative system is defined as one that promotes these goals (Mansbridge *et al.* 2012, p. 13). Their achievement might be impeded by a series of systemic failings. Actors in one part of the system may colonise or distance their critics, in either case stifling challenge. One institution may dominate others, overruling dissent. Or a particular social group may dominate institutions, ensuring that the group's perspective receives preferential treatment (Mansbridge *et al.* 2012, pp. 22-23).

Despite these efforts at definition even advocates confess 'the deliberative systems approach is based on a loosening of what counts as 'reasoning together' ' (Parkinson 2012, p. 167). There is a danger that this approach could lead to 'concept stretching' (Steiner 2008), blurring the boundaries between what is and is not legitimate deliberation. Practices might count as deliberative even though they provide only a very weak link between issues of collective concern, arguments pertinent to those issues, the individuals they affect, and those charged with taking a decision. This link is not specified in current versions of the systems model, beyond the relatively imprecise criteria that all elements should be committed to using 'talk' to resolve disputes, and the general epistemic, ethical and democratic goals of deliberation which in themselves provide an insufficient teleological formulation, on which procedural-functional definitions ultimately depend. At the same time, the critical point of a deliberative analysis is its impact on practice. And in order to provide a viable guide to real-world political action, abstract statements of deliberative ideals do need to be supplemented by more detailed guidelines. Without such detail it is unclear whether deliberative theories have an answer to the challenge posed by problems of scale and economy of knowledge in

modern, complex polities, which rival aggregative accounts of democracy suggest should severely constrain citizen involvement in politics.

This paper explores a way of strengthening the systems model. It does so by first specifying a tighter notion of a deliberative *network*. A deliberative network differs from existing definitions of a deliberative system in that the components of a network are conceived of as discrete deliberative exchanges. Such exchanges may be partial in terms of their subject matter and the parties that engage in an exchange, but each exchange is conceived of as comprising all the elements of deliberation. This contrasts with the systems account of deliberation, where different elements of the system can provide different aspects of an exchange – for example, the media might present a range of views on an issue, which is ultimately decided in parliament. The tighter network version of deliberation is still able to address issues of scale, in that not everyone has to decide everything in a single face-to-face episode. However, using this model we can specify with much greater precision the link between elements in the network, and how the network mobilises the principles in the abstract ideal. Thus a network approach preserves deliberation’s critical edge, while making it serviceable to guide real-world practice.

3. Policy Networks

The concept of a ‘policy’ or ‘governance’ network has gained both descriptive and normative currency. Descriptively it is used to capture the reality of the way much policy is made (Sørensen & Torfing 2007 pp. 11-12). Normatively networks are seen as desirable for developing more responsive and ultimately legitimate policies especially in areas which are complex – both technically and in terms of affecting a plurality of interests – in an era where overarching positions can no longer be taken as either a guide for action nor guarantee of citizens’ support (Sørensen & Torfing 2007 p. 13). However, the notion of a deliberative network advanced in this article has a more specific meaning, which it is useful to distinguish before progressing.

While there is no single settled definition of the idea of governance or policy network, Sørensen and Torfing provide a list of features they claim encapsulate its ‘essence’:

1. a relatively stable horizontal articulation of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors;
2. who interact through negotiations;
3. which take place within a regulative, normative, cognitive and imaginary framework;
4. that is self-regulating, within limits set by external agencies; and
5. which contributes to the production of public purpose.

(Sørensen & Torfing 2007, p. 9)

This definition describes a particular type of relation between particular actors constituting respectively the object and subject of the approach. The object relation is negotiation. This can be deliberative, but can include self-interested bargaining. So while it aims at agreement, that may take the form of a compromise or ‘rough consensus’ rather than deliberative acceptance of a decision on the basis of shared reasons (Sørensen & Torfing 2007 p. 10). The subject of policy networks are individual actors pursuing their own interests and values – although these values may be other-regarding. The purpose of forming a network is to better co-ordinate action to achieve those interests with others who hold resources that can advance or impede their realisation (Scharpf 1997; Rhodes 1981 Chs. 1 & 2; Sørensen & Torfing 2007 p. 9). To this extent a network is self-regulating though comprised of relatively autonomous actors and focussed on producing a public purpose – giving networks their political character.

The concept of a deliberative network developed here differs primarily in its subject. Instead of individual actors pursuing self-interest, the subject of a deliberative network is a single face-to-face deliberative exchange. It is the relation between such individual deliberative exchanges, and not the relation between particular actors, which is its primary concern. This leads to a more concentrated focus on deliberation, in contrast to other forms of negotiated interaction, in two principle ways. First, each individual face-to-face exchange is characterised in deliberative terms. Whereas purely self-interested bargaining might be acceptable in a broader network model, it would detract from the weight to be given an exchange in a deliberative network. Second, the basic nexus in a deliberative network is the assessment of a completed deliberative exchange by a later deliberative exchange. This involves applying deliberative criteria. So the relation that characterises a deliberative network, or its object, is specifically deliberative too.

Others have written about the specifically deliberative aspects of policy networks. For example, Dryzek (2007) has argued for the potential of networks to promote deliberative values, concentrating on encounters between discourses rather than a focus on the state. Sørensen and Torfing (2005) argue for principles which might help ‘anchor’ governance networks, as defined above, in democratic principles, some of which are deliberative. Others contend that empirical analysis of policy networks should interpret them in deliberative terms (see Hajer & Wagenaar 2003)¹. While these contributions all shift attention to the specifically deliberative qualities of the links in a policy or governance network, they still conceive of the subject of such networks as individual actors engaged in a single deliberation. Hence the links between those actors are individual acts of communication. By contrast, this article sets out to systematically examine the relations between individual deliberations. So both the subject of a deliberative network – a particular deliberative exchange – and its object – the relation between such exchanges, rather than the individual actors engaged in those exchanges – remain distinct.

To develop this concept of a deliberative network, we thus need to examine how deliberation by one group on a particular issue might relate to deliberation by another group on a particular issue. To do this, we must outline more clearly our notion of a ‘deliberative exchange’ before going on to consider the relation between such exchanges. In doing this, we switch the focus from the implicit institutionalism of systems approaches, and the specification of abstract ‘rights’ favoured by theorists, to a more dynamic concern with the activity of deliberation itself.

4. Deliberative exchange

The basic activity involved in deliberation is an exchange of reasons. This, in turn, takes place in the medium of language, or meaningful interaction. Specifying the types of interaction that count as deliberative is therefore an important first step to defining an exchange. Interaction also presupposes the existence of different acting parties. We can

¹ The range of empirical studies that examine aspects of the relation between deliberation and networks is now too vast to summarise here (for a recent example, see Cinalli & O’Flynn 2014). Suffice to say I am unaware of any work that explicitly casts a network in terms of the relation between deliberative exchanges that I examine here.

describe these parties in relation to the type of interaction they perform by identifying a set of deliberative roles, some or all of which participants in deliberative exchange perform.

4.1. Deliberative interaction

The basic activities² which constitute any deliberative exchange can be divided into the following stages. Deliberation commences with a disagreement about the validity of a claim – to truth or moral rightness. Parties offer reasons for and against acceptance of the claim in issue. Finally, deliberation is resolved by agreement between the parties on the reasons that have been offered in argument for either the acceptance or rejection of the claim in question (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 59-62).

Such an account represents the most basic version of the components of an argument or deliberative exchange. However, combinations of these fundamental elements can be used to describe and analyse much more complex structures. So, an attempt might be made to counter one validity claim by replacing it with an alternative³. For example, the claim that those of working age should only be paid state benefits on proof they are actively looking for work could be opposed by the counter claim that this condition should not apply to those who are physically or mentally incapacitated from working, or have full-time care of any children. Strictly speaking, this starts a second argument on the acceptability of a second claim. The second may be linked to the first in the sense that arguments for the second claim are also arguments against the first (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 60 note.41). Another form of linked structure is where the argument for acceptance of an initial claim depends on acceptance of a subsidiary claim (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, p. 119). In our example, accepting that those with full-time care of children should be exempt from having to seek work in order to be paid benefits might depend on acceding to the subsidiary claims that the state should ensure children are cared for, and that this is best done by the relevant parent or guardian as opposed to, for example, directly appointed state agencies. This claim might in turn be dependent on acknowledging the primacy of children's rights, the nature of family ties, and/or the greater comparative efficiency of domestic as opposed to state care. These are just two types of more complex argument structures. They illustrate that the basic

² Despite developments in the theory of deliberation (p. 3) these activities remain central.

³ 'Meta-consensus' – agreement on the nature of an issue, rather than its substance, may be seen as an application of this strategy.

stages of the stripped-down version of this specification can be combined to account for much more complicated structures that can illuminate important aspects of real-world exchanges.

4.2. Deliberative roles

Corresponding to these interactions we can enumerate a series of deliberative roles. In the simplest version we have just two parties. One party – the proponent – makes a claim which the other – the opponent – challenges. The proponent proceeds to offer reasons for the opponent to accept the claim, while the opponent provides reasons for the proponent to reject it. The argument is resolved when they both agree on the basis of the reasons exchanged to either reject or accept the claim (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004, pp. 141-2).

Just as the actions in the simplest version may be combined in more complicated ways, so we can have different combinations of individuals performing particular roles. There may be more than one proponent or opponent of the claim in issue. Different participants may then offer reasons for or against the acceptance of the claim in issue, assuming the roles of defenders or attackers of the claim respectively. And these reasons may be addressed to an audience made up of a separate group again, whose job it is to evaluate the arguments offered to arrive at a reasoned decision on the claim in dispute. Individuals may also change sides, offering arguments both for and against a claim at different points. These variations may be combined with the more complex structures of interaction and argument outlined in section 4.1.

Whatever the combination of roles, and whoever fills them, it is vital to the proper functioning of any deliberative exchange that they are unimpeded in their exercise. So in addition to an issue in dispute and participants, an exchange requires procedures that specify how the exchange should be conducted in a way that ensures that the different roles can be exercised freely by all those taking part in an exchange⁴.

5. Deliberative exchanges related

⁴ These should themselves be open to challenge (Knops 2006, pp. 608-9)

The key to identifying a single exchange is that, regardless of the other protagonists involved, members of the same group have responsibility for taking the decision which terminates the exchange, on the basis of the reasons advanced to them by any parties. If a different group takes a decision, then we have a separate exchange. Having outlined the components of a single deliberative exchange, we can now specify the simplest relation between two such exchanges. For this we posit:

- i. a single deliberative exchange, which has concluded.
- ii. a third party, who has not been involved in the first exchange
- iii. a second deliberative exchange, of which the third party is to be part, but which has not yet begun.

In order to determine the relevance of the first exchange for the second this third party must evaluate the first exchange. The evaluation is external to that undertaken by those involved in the first exchange in reaching their decision. It does not involve a complete revisiting of all the reasons mobilised in that exchange. In this sense it is ‘vicarious’. Although undertaken at ‘one remove’, the evaluation of the previous exchange is not a matter of accepting the decision completely on trust⁵. Instead it involves an indirect assessment of the deliberative merits of the earlier exchange on the basis of its scope and strength.

5.1. Scope

The *scope* of a deliberative exchange is indicated by the decision taken on the claim in issue and the reasons for that decision. A clear statement of a decision allows a third party to assess whether they, and any deliberation they might take part in, is affected by the earlier decision. A clear statement of the reasons for that decision will allow the third party to determine the scope of the deliberative exchange that led to it. Reasons for the acceptance of a claim consist of the claim itself – the conclusion of the argument – and a further claim, known as the premisses of the argument. Premisses are advanced in the hope that they will make acceptance of the conclusion more likely. Much of what is involved in reaching an

⁵ For an argument for acceptance of deliberative findings based on trust, see Mackenzie and Warren 2012; For an objection, see Parkinson 2012, pp. 160-1.

agreement through argument comprises establishing a set of premisses which all parties can accept and which support a common conclusion. Such shared premisses comprise the reasons for that conclusion.

The core activity of deliberation is the challenging of claims. Because the premisses for the conclusion of a deliberative exchange are accepted by all, the premisses themselves are not challenged. So the premisses on which the conclusion of a deliberative exchange is justified mark the limits of that exchange. The scope of a deliberative exchange can thus be defined by specifying the conclusion reached – in simplest form, the decision to accept or reject the claim in issue – and the premisses from which that conclusion was derived. This indicates to a third party the factors that were deemed relevant to the decision, and by implication, those that were not.

For example, a commission on benefit reform might have been convinced to exempt lone-parents from proving they are seeking work before they can receive state benefits, on the grounds that this was the most cost-effective way of ensuring childcare. A later review of government expenditure, seeking economies, seeing this exemption might consult the finding of the earlier commission. Realising that in this respect the scope of the two investigations overlapped, as they shared the assumption that costs are paramount, it could decide to accept the reasoning of the earlier group and reject the withdrawal of this exemption as a cost-cutting option.

If the premisses of an earlier exchange cover all the factors that those in a later exchange deem relevant to a determination of the same issue or a narrower issue, this suggests there is no need to replicate the earlier exercise. Any such reinvestigation is likely to produce a similar conclusion. However, if there are elements that a third party deems relevant which fall outside the scope of the earlier deliberation, which it failed to take into account, this suggests a further exploration in the later exchange is warranted. As no single exchange can deal with every topic all exchanges are, in this sense, partial in their coverage. Determining the scope of a previous exchange allows the extent of that partiality to be specified in relation to the proposed subject matter of a later exchange. So, in our example, it might be that the earlier commission's decision to retain exemptions was based not on the relative economic efficiency of parental childcare but rather on arguments about the need for the state to support the moral primacy of parents' duty to care for their children. Considering the economic

dimension, a later review might recognise the lack of overlap in its scope and that of the earlier commission, prompting it to seek further argument about economic implications of the exemption.

5.2. Strength

In addition to evaluating the scope of an earlier deliberative exchange it is also important to assess *membership* - who filled the roles in that earlier exchange - and its *procedures*. Although an exchange has ranged widely, its conclusions might be biased if the participants did not reflect a balanced cross-section of those likely to be affected, technical issues were not adequately addressed or the exchange of reasons was not free and equal. Again, all deliberative exchanges will be constrained in some way along these dimensions – time and resources are limited. The important point is to determine in what way they have been so constrained. On any claim in issue, a balanced cross-section of people whose interests are likely to be affected should be represented. While a third party will want to check there are representatives of their own position, they will also want opposing positions to be represented to ensure robust challenge. Similarly, if the claim relates to areas of specialist knowledge, it is important that participants have access to relevant expertise, and that such knowledge itself has been exposed to challenge, for example through expert review processes. It is also important to ensure that the procedures for conducting the previous deliberative exchange permitted free and equal participation by all concerned, and to clearly recognise any limitations on this. Such limitations do not invalidate the earlier exchange *per se*. But they do weaken it in respect of those whose participation has been compromised. Returning to our example, the initial commission’s conclusion that lone-parents should be exempt from actively seeking work would be strengthened if that commission had consulted those in the opposing camp in a process where they were free to state their position, or expert studies on child-care and its costs which were open to peer-review.

Based on knowledge of the decision taken in a deliberative exchange, the reasons for it, the participants and the procedures for their interaction, a third party who was not involved in that exchange can arrive at a deliberative evaluation of it in relation to a claim in issue in a second deliberative exchange in which that third party is proposing to engage. Both the scope of the earlier deliberative exchange and its strength may be gauged. These elements will determine the relative impact of the earlier deliberative exchange on the later. If the

scope of the earlier decision covers issues seen as relevant to the claim under scrutiny in a second exchange, the participants are judged representative and balanced and the procedures robust, it would be unusual for a second exchange to rehash the ground covered by the earlier. By considering the limits of the earlier decision's scope, representation or procedures, participants in a later exchange can identify any areas that were not covered properly, and limit themselves to discussing these. In the process they may challenge these aspects of the earlier decision. By defining the deliberative limits of a previous decision, therefore, participants in a later exchange can precisely articulate the relationship between that exchange and their own, and act accordingly.

5.3. Transparency

Obviously such an evaluation requires that the information it is based on is made available to the third party evaluator. Where details of the decision taken, the reasons for the decision, the parties involved and the procedures followed are clearly stated, a deliberative exchange may be termed deliberatively transparent. Transparency is thus an important property of deliberative relations. A deliberatively transparent exchange is open to evaluation in other deliberative exchanges. This may result in that exchange influencing other deliberative exchanges, or it may result in that exchange being challenged in later exchanges. In either case, however, transparency facilitates a continuing open dialogue. On the other hand, if elements of transparency are lacking, it becomes more difficult for others to gauge the relevance or weight that one deliberative exchange has for another⁶.

Note also that just as any single deliberative exchange is partial, so the way it is evaluated is also partial. Such an evaluation will always be from another, limited, perspective. No evaluation can take into account all the matters that were not considered in an earlier exchange, or all who might have been included, or all aspects of procedure. A later exchange will focus on those aspects of the earlier decision that are especially relevant to the subsequent decision and those who are going to take it. That does not completely deprive such an evaluation of utility. Any evaluation is helpful as far as it goes. However, it does emphasise the need for transparency in the evaluation itself. Any evaluation of a deliberative exchange should clearly state which exchange it is evaluating, and its premisses – the aspects

⁶ New information technologies greatly enhance the potential to access such information.

of the scope and strength of that exchange which define its limits, as well as the aspects (if any) of coverage or representation relevant to the later decision that the earlier exchange is felt to lack. This helps specify the way in which the evaluation might be partial too.

6. Deliberative networks

Having specified more clearly the essential elements of a deliberative exchange, and of the simplest form of relation between two such exchanges, we are now able to describe a deliberative network and its dynamics. The relation between one deliberative exchange and another forms the basic unit of a deliberative network. A deliberative network comprises many such relations between many different deliberative exchanges. The relation between each exchange in the network, however, remains in essence one of vicarious evaluation, based on transparency.

As we saw above, transparency permits an open engagement across deliberative exchanges. If the decision of an earlier exchange is relevant to a later exchange – in terms of scope, and adequate – in terms of the reasons offered and the strength of that decision, those in the later exchange can *vicariously* accept the conclusion of the earlier exchange as a premiss of the later deliberation. The later exchange is thus spared the effort of (i) assembling the reasons for the conclusion in the earlier exchange from scratch (ii) interrogating them to locate those that should found acceptance of the conclusion – the process of exchanging reasons in argument and (iii) consulting the various parties to the earlier exchange. Instead, they can vicariously accept the conclusion on the basis of the final set of reasons accepted by the earlier exchange, and the strength of the process by which that conclusion was reached. In situations where those in a later exchange are not satisfied with aspects of the earlier exchange, they will characterise it as more partial, along dimensions of scope and/or strength. Even where the conclusions, though relevant, are rejected the work done by an earlier exchange will often save some effort in assembling, and possibly in interrogating, the reasons for a conclusion.

In this way, while no one forum can undertake to deliberate on every possible issue, it is possible to accumulate the results of multiple exchanges across the network, the findings of one exchange forming premisses in another, and so on. A division of labour is therefore possible, while the dialogue across deliberative exchanges remains deliberative, in that it is

based on claims which form the conclusions or premisses of the arguments that traverse them. The difference is that in a network these claims are accepted or rejected on *vicarious* deliberative criteria for evaluating deliberation carried on in an earlier exchange. This division of labour allows citizens to select the areas on which they wish to concentrate, so that they are not overburdened with the task, and to best mobilise their particular experience, knowledge and motivation, while still contributing to the overall debate.

So the commission in our example might have had their decision to continue to exempt lone parents from the need to actively seek work in order to claim benefits influenced by a group of lone parents. That group may in turn have supported their position with a review they had undertaken of published research into the comparative costs to the state of enforcing or not enforcing this condition. Here a group of those directly affected draw on the conclusions of others – guided by reference to the scope of any premisses assumed, and the procedures adopted, including openness to the criticism of other experts – in forming their own conclusions. This is then transmitted to inform the commission's conclusions, which incorporates the reasoning in the original research and work done by the lone parent group in summarising and reviewing it. Finally, the commission's conclusions and the scope of its premisses, including all the above material, and the strength of the procedures by which it has been generated, can be taken into account by the final efficiency review. This spares that review considerable effort in assembling these reasons from scratch. And it allows multiple actors to contribute to this final decision, without having to engage constantly in face-to-face exchange, while not compromising the purposes or opinions of any of those actors.

Of course, all this depends on undertaking an evaluation of previous decisions. This is in turn facilitated by the provision of information on which a vicarious evaluation can be based - transparency. Both of these operations take effort. However, the extensive efficiencies of vicarious evaluation for a later exchange – avoiding the need to assemble reasons from scratch, to engage with them in detail to identify those underpinning a conclusion, and to consult a range of parties – provide considerable positive motivation to pursue such information. Conversely, the normative and practical dangers of relying on a decision that is relatively partial – in the assumptions on which it is based, the rigour of the procedures with which it has been deliberated or the range of those affected – but which has not been assessed as such constitute corresponding negative incentives for full transparency and systematic vicarious evaluation.

Given these pressures for a later exchange to demand transparency from an earlier exchange, it is in the interests of those in the earlier exchange to produce as strong and clear a result as possible on the issue under discussion, with robust premisses, since this will carry more weight with a wider audience. It is also in their interests to make the exchange deliberatively transparent to make their deliberations accessible. Without this it will be impossible to assess its scope and weight. If a later exchange is aware of a lack of transparency, they will be reluctant to accept or act on such an opaque decision. Conversely, a strong decision with wide scope clearly stated will have maximum impact, enhancing the practical effectiveness of the originating exchange by extending their influence while minimising the need for them to engage in further detailed face-to-face deliberation⁷.

Of course if those in a later exchange are not alert to a lack of transparency about a decision, they might still accept it. So it would still have extended impact. However, by defining a deliberative exchange as a conclusion reached by a particular group of people, a deliberative network model promotes accountability for such a step which further motivates transparency. Should adverse consequences stem from action based on acceptance of inadequately supported conclusions they can be traced back to those assumptions, and the process and group by which they were adopted. To the extent their adoption resulted from lack of vigilance on the part of a later exchange, they can be held responsible. To the extent that it was caused by calculated deception or misrepresentation by an earlier exchange, the blame can be allocated them (and see below, pp. 22-3).

In this way, therefore, a deliberative network model relates the principles of the deliberative ideal to the practical exigencies of the real world. The ideal specifies the elements of the activity of deliberation at its highest level of abstraction, conceived as rights that those affected should have to carry out such activities. The basic unit of a network model – a single, actual deliberative exchange – is described in terms of these activities. Having defined a single exchange, aspects of that exchange – the decision taken, its premisses, those represented in the exchange and the procedures that governed it – are used to evaluate its scope and strength, from the perspective of another exchange. The potential division of labour and attendant economies this vicarious evaluation promises, then provide the

⁷ For empirical evidence that when deliberation results in a clear conclusion this carries more weight, see de Cindio & Schuler (2007).

motivation for those in the network to both seek and supply the information necessary for the transparency that forms the links between nodes. In turn, the transparency facilitates the continued application of critical deliberative standards by providing the information for vicarious evaluation. Not only does a deliberative network model show that it is possible to apply deliberative principles to inform practise without diminishing their critical bite; it demonstrates how practical motivations can positively drive the critical application of those principles.

7. Deliberative networks related to deliberative systems

This paper started by proposing deliberative networks as a way of strengthening the notion of a deliberative system, in which different inter-related parts functioned together to achieve deliberative goals in a way that could guide decision-making in large, diverse and complex modern democracies. Having developed the conception of a network as a relationship between discrete deliberative exchanges, explained its key features and outlined some of its advantages for this task, it is now possible to describe more precisely the relationship between the concept of a deliberative network advanced here and that of a deliberative system, and the way in which the former strengthens the latter .

There are two main differences between a deliberative network and a deliberative system. First, the elements of a deliberative network are only individual deliberative exchanges. Each exchange contains all the elements of deliberation – a disagreement, exchange of reasons, and a decision. However, the components of a deliberative system might only perform one of these functions, as in our earlier example where the media presented a range of reasons, but a decision was taken by another body. The second difference lies in the level at which the two formulations are pitched. A network account models the dynamics of a set of interactions, whereas the systems account has a more functional focus on institutions.

Yet although discussion of deliberative systems has been dominated by an institutional register, it is quite possible to define a system in terms of a particular issue (Mansbridge *et al.* 2012, p. 8). To specify a particular deliberative system from this alternative perspective we would first need to identify a particular claim in dispute, and the parties to that dispute. We would then need to locate the reasons being exchanged, and the parties who carried out the exchange, along with those charged with reaching a decision. Clearly these elements might

be fragmented. In particular, there may be many different parties offering reasons, both for and against the relevant questions in dispute. These may also influence decisions across a broad range of individuals, in different forms of association, on this issue. Strictly speaking the decisions of each association would form separate systems under a network approach (above p. 11). Only if it was possible to identify some overarching decision resulting from these disparate associations on the same issue would it be possible to characterise them as part of the same system, even though they refer to the same reasons, offered by the same protagonists, on the same issue.

Relativising a deliberative system to a particular issue and the decision by which it is collectively resolved does allow us to integrate the deliberative systems and network approaches. In this light a deliberative system is conceived with respect to a deliberative exchange. Different institutions making different functional contributions to the system can be re-described as groups, or associations, performing different roles and hence different aspects of the interactions involved in a single deliberative exchange, without losing anything. The members of those associations, their procedures and their audiences are then simply viewed as aspects of the more comprehensive exchange of which they are part, which is fully characterised by taking together these elements for each of the institutions that are seen as part of the system.

Seen from this perspective, a deliberative system is coterminous with a deliberative exchange in a network. A network comprises two or more deliberative exchanges and the relationship between them. This has the advantage of clearly distinguishing between the components of a particular exchange on a particular issue, and the components of a network – the exchanges themselves. It also gives a clearer focus to the notion of a deliberative system, since its elements must be specified in terms of the deliberative activities of making or rejecting claims, supporting or challenging claims with reasons, or evaluating those reasons in order to decide whether or not to accept a claim. Greater clarity on which of these activities, and what specific decision, components of the system contribute to will enhance the analytical rigour of the concept of a system.

8. Application

The dimensions of a network conception of deliberation, and a fuller description of its relation to the notion of a deliberative system, have now been set out. The point of developing such a conception is to bring deliberative principles to bear on political practice. Accordingly, this section demonstrates the utility of the network model for analysing real world policy processes by applying it to a particularly significant example of one such process – the UK government’s decision to introduce a poll tax. Not only is it possible to describe the key features of this process in network terms, but doing so provides insight into their deliberative quality, demonstrating the critical purchase of deliberative principles on such real world practices.

The Thatcher government’s adoption of poll tax comprised two central elements: a Department of the Environment review, commissioned in late 1984, which recommended it, and a meeting of the Prime Minister and members of cabinet at Chequers, her country retreat, on 31 March 1985, which endorsed that recommendation. From a network perspective, these two elements represent exchanges linked by a deliberative nexus. A clear decision taken by one body – the review – is evaluated by a separate group – cabinet, led by the Prime Minister.

Having identified this central deliberative nexus, we can now consider its components: the first exchange – the Departmental review – and its representation to the second exchange at Chequers. Deploying the network frame, the decision taken in the first exchange will be analysed for strength and scope. That decision’s presentation to the second exchange can then be assessed for transparency. The analysis will show that on the crucial issues of the fairness and practical feasibility of the poll tax the presentation of the review’s findings to the Chequers meeting lacked transparency. The consequences of this deficiency will be traced, demonstrating the considerable incentives for ensuring transparency in a deliberative network.

8.1 Background

Poll tax replaced domestic rates as a source of local government revenue. Domestic rates were set by local authorities and paid by householders in the local authority area based on the estimated value of their property. Others, such as many renting accommodation, were not liable to pay (King and Crewe 2013, p. 44). Tories had long been critical of the rates. They objected to inter-household inequities: equally valued houses attracted the same liability

regardless of the number and income of occupants. Periodic revisions to estimated property values could lead to considerable increases in liability, disproportionately effecting property-owning Tory supporters. Non-householders were not liable for rates, while many had the full amount rebated. Tories felt these voters would support high-spending policies that benefitted them at no personal cost (Butler *et al.* 1994, pp. 51-3; King and Crewe 2013, pp. 42, 44). In opposition Thatcher inserted a promise to abolish rates in the Conservative's unsuccessful 1974 election manifesto (Conservative Party 1974, p.6). At the time she favoured a local sales tax. But a 1975 review found no workable alternative to rates (Butler *et al.* 1994, p. 25), and the 1979 manifesto downplayed their reform in favour of income tax cuts (Conservative Party 1979, p.14).

In power a 1981 Green Paper (Department of the Environment 1981) reviewed rates, local income tax, local sales tax and poll tax against systematic criteria. Poll tax was rejected as too difficult and expensive to administer. These obstacles were so great that it was not even assessed against the review's fairness criteria (Butler *et al.* 1994, pp. 33-4). A subsequent House of Commons Committee enquiry echoed these findings. The 1983 White Paper *Rates* stated the Government's commitment to rates 'for the foreseeable future' (Department of the Environment 1983, p. 14).

However, within a year rates reform was back. Central government attempts to control local authority expenditure had met increasingly radical defiance. Opposition to the abolition of the Greater London Council (GLC) and refusal by some far-left councillors to set a rate had exposed the ineffectiveness of the complex system of local authority grant limitations. In late 1984 Patrick Jenkin, Secretary of State for the Environment – the department responsible for this field – obtained the Prime Minister's backing for a series of 'studies' into local government finance to address this issue (Butler 1994, pp. 41-5). The studies recommended adoption of a poll tax. They constitute this case-study's first 'deliberative exchange'.

8.2 Initial exchange – the Departmental 'studies'

A deliberative exchange will always be partial. As detailed (pp. 11-14) partiality can be characterised along two dimensions: strength – membership and procedures, and scope – the decisions reached, their attendant reasons and premisses.

8.2.1 Strength: Membership

The studies were led by two junior ministers: William Waldegrave and Kenneth Baker, both keen to earn Thatcher's recognition as 'One of Us.' Apart from an official seconded from the Treasury and one from the Department of Health and Social Security (DHSS), civil servants were from Environment (Butler *et al.* 1994, pp. 47-8). Four specialist 'assessors' from outside government advised the team. Lord Rothschild had headed the Conservative's Central Policy Review Staff 'think tank'. He suggested Leonard Hoffmann QC, although Hoffmann left in March 1985 to become a judge. Waldegrave asked Tom Wilson, a retired academic economist from Glasgow University, and Christopher Foster, who had been an LSE economist and government advisor, completed this group (Butler *et al.* 1994, pp. 48-9).

Of the assessors, only Foster was an expert in local government finance, having co-authored an important survey including an appraisal of poll tax (Foster *et al.* 1980). While team members were experts in local government finance, this was only from the perspective of central government design and oversight. Detailed knowledge of its administration lay with local authorities, especially their treasuries. Yet neither had a presence (Butler *et al.* 1994, pp. 213, 6 & 9; 220-1). Much pressure for rates reform had come from individual rate payers who felt they had suffered financial injustice. Any new system would also be likely to impact individuals. A regressive measure like the poll tax was particularly likely to hit the poor. However there was no attempt to represent these groups directly by including any of their members, or organisations that lobby on their behalf, on the team. The DHSS secondment was primarily to consider administrative integration of any tax with the benefits system.

8.2.2 Strength: Procedure

In line with the 'activist mentality' of officials of the day, the studies united a small, tight, high-quality 'project team' to provide solutions to particular government policy problems in a matter of months (Butler *et al.* 1994, pp. 209, 214). There was also a degree of alignment between government and officials' interests. The Department of the Environment administered the cumbersome system of local authority grant controls. The team's proposals promised to replace much of this with pressure from a poll tax paying local electorate (Butler

et al. 1994, p.222). This led to an ‘unusually strong’ shared sense of purpose (Butler et al. 1994, p.50) muting challenges to emerging proposals (King and Crewe 2013, p. 46).

Internally close, the team’s procedures were also relatively closed to outside influence. The absence of members from other government departments, local authorities or citizens’ interest groups could have been addressed with sustained dialogue enabling these bodies to fully express their views and raise objections. Advice was sought from outside sources, including other departments, but was limited to specific information points (Foster 2005, p.103; King and Crewe 2013, p. 45). The team’s assessors appear to have been side lined to the extent they disagreed with the emerging consensus behind poll tax within the team. (Butler *et al.* 1994, pp. 60, 66).

8.2.3 Scope

The studies proceeded from two basic premisses. First: if residents bore more of the cost of local spending currently obscured by central grants and two-tier authorities, they would oppose increases. Second: because they did not pay rates, many local voters received the benefits of expensive policies for free. Making all voters liable for the cost of local services would improve accountability (Butler *et al.* 1994, pp. 51-4). The Prime Minister’s opposition to rates was well known, reinforced by a disastrous Scottish re-valuation in 1984-5 (Butler *et al.* 1994, pp. 61-5). The rates, and by association any property tax, appear to have been assumed ‘beyond the terms of reference of the studies’ (study official quoted in Butler *et al.* 1994, p. 55). The other two options: local income or sales taxes, were peremptorily ruled out. The former was contrary to the Government’s determination to reduce income tax, the latter impractical. (Butler *et al.* 1994, pp. 55-6). The team concentrated on the benefits of the remaining choice – poll tax – in light of their two foundational tenets of accountability.

From this perspective the poll tax held practical, ideological and political appeal. Practically, the increased pressure it was assumed spreading liability through a per-capita tax would bring would reduce the need for central controls, allowing considerable simplification. Ideologically, this extension of liability was conceived as the extension of free-market discipline to the (local) state – the heart of the Thatcher project. Politically the same mechanism would redress the inter-household and re-evaluation injustices that had so animated the Tory rank-and-file. The attractions of the tax framed in this way seem to have

constrained the team's ability to entertain challenges to this picture and the assumptions on which it was based along two key dimensions (Foster 2005, p. 106).

Unfairness. The same principle of flat-rate liability per person that held out the promise of greater local accountability meant the poll tax regressively bore no relation to ability to pay. Perhaps because of this, the team paid little attention to the fairness of the poll tax as opposed to its capacity to redress inequitable features of the rates. In particular, there would be considerable losses in the switch to the new tax, especially among the 'nearly poor'. We have seen the interests of this group were not represented in the composition of the team. Whether any attempt was made to calculate these effects or bring them to the attention of team ministers is unclear. They certainly seem to have been accorded little weight (Butler *et al.* 1994, pp. 216, 221).

Impracticality. The individual basis of poll tax liability required tracking the people to whom liability attached. As the 1981 Green Paper acknowledged, this is much more difficult than locating property and its ownership. Again, whether or not the team were aware of them, they appear to have glossed over these inconvenient features. This was probably exacerbated by the failure to represent or consult with local authority officials with experience of these issues. The relative difficulties of administering individual versus a property based liability may also have been obscured by the team's *a priori* dismissal of the latter, ruling out such comparison.

The fairness and practicality of the poll tax were challenged in detail in a paper by Hoffmann, one of the team's assessors, cautioning against the poll tax once it had become clear this was the team's preferred option. That it was ignored (Butler *et al.* 1994, p.68) provides perhaps the starkest evidence of the critical limitations of the study on both these issues.

So, framing a poll tax within free-market assumptions meant it promised considerable practical, ideological and political advantages. Concentrating on these benefits, the team refused to engage with two main challenges to the free-market model, that might undermine them. Concerns about poll tax's fairness could obscure free-market accountability. Problems of practicality threatened to overthrow the tax entirely, in favour of alternatives the team already assumed unacceptable. These assumptions – about the schemes operation on free-market principles, its fairness and its relative practicality – constitute unquestioned premisses

that limit the scope of the team's decision to adopt poll tax. These limitations were buttressed by the weaknesses identified in the team's membership and procedures. In these ways, the study was *partial*. It failed to inquire fully into the tax's fairness and practicality, and too readily dismissed alternatives.

8.3 Transparency

The findings of the first exchange – the studies – were presented for evaluation by a second exchange, a dedicated 'awayday' at Chequers, the Prime Minister's country retreat, on Sunday 31 March 1985. That meeting was attended by the Prime minister and almost half her cabinet. These included Lord Whitelaw, the Deputy Prime Minister, fresh from an excoriating encounter with Scottish Tories making plain their discontent with rates, and the Home, Welsh and Northern Irish secretaries. The party Chairman and a junior Scottish Office minister arrived late by plane from Edinburgh. The Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, was absent. He had been told this was 'a preliminary discussion' where 'no decisions would be taken' (Lawson 1992, p. 571). Peter Rees, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, went instead, briefed to register the Treasury's opposition to poll tax. Jenkin attended, along with Waldegrave, Baker, the lead civil servant from the team and the principal secretary for the Department. No-one else from the study team was present. No local authority representatives were invited, no papers circulated in advance (Butler *et al* 1994, pp. 68; 70-1).

Baker led with an analysis of the problems with the existing system of local government finance – the equity and accountability problems already outlined (pp. 15, 19). Waldegrave followed with solutions – including the poll tax – emphasising the advantages the studies team identified (pp. 19-20). Prompted by Jenkin, he ended by reminding the Prime Minister its introduction would deliver her pledge to abolish rates (Baker 1993, p. 122; Crick and Klavereren 1991, p. 409). There followed a long discussion. Thatcher declared herself well-disposed to the arguments advanced for poll tax at the start (Foster 2005, p. 104). Emphasis was again on the tax's potential benefits. The Home Secretary did worry that constructing a register might have civil liberties implications, and that it might be seen as a tax on voting. Rees presented the Treasury's objections. But they were the minority. The regressive effect of the tax on winners and losers was not interrogated in any detail (Foster 2005, p. 104). When asked the cost of administering the tax, the Department of the Environment replied it was 'not a great amount more' than rates. A Departmental minister suggested it was 'easily

collectable' (Butler *et al.* 1994, p. 75). Again this issue received limited attention (Foster 2005, p. 104).

The most explicit failure to be transparent about the partiality of the studies related to practical difficulties and costs. Despite being aware of the limitations of their inquiries, team members minimised the problems the tax might face (Foster 2005, p. 104). Their lack of transparency on fairness involved a failure to alert the Chequers meeting to the salience of the issue for a regressive poll tax, requiring more detailed investigation. The doubts transparency on these two issues would have raised may have thrown the question of their ready dismissal of alternatives into greater relief. Given the Chequers meeting was looking for a workable source of local, domestic revenue, the team's peremptory dismissal of any form of property tax constitutes a further unquestioned premiss the team should have made explicit.

8.6 Consequences & insights

The immediate consequence of this lack of transparency was that the Chequers meeting approved the team's recommendation of a poll tax, with no dissenters, 'not provisionally... subject to overcoming problems of its regressiveness and collectability' but wholesale (Foster 2005, p. 104). The support given, in particular by the Prime Minister and her Deputy, seems to have been sufficient to counter any subsequent direct opposition, even from the Chancellor. The Prime Minister had been converted (Butler *et al.* 1994 p. 76).

Longer term repercussions were drastic. The tax was widely perceived as unfair, largely because of its regressive nature and the large amounts those on relatively modest incomes stood to lose. Widespread resistance to payment meant collecting the tax became extremely difficult and costly. Nationwide protests led to some of the worst rioting seen in mainland post-war Britain (Butler *et al.* 1994 pp. 126-153). These difficulties were a significant factor in Thatcher being voted out of office by her own Party (Butler *et al.* 1994, pp.1; 168-70). Within a year of winning the 1992 election her successor, John Major, abolished poll tax replacing it with a banded property tax – the Council Tax – still in force today (Butler *et al.* 1994, pp. 170-83; King and Crewe 2013 pp. 62-3). Significantly, these dire consequences stemmed from precisely the gaps in their investigation the studies team failed to make clear: fairness, practicality and the failure to explore alternatives (Butler *et al.* 1994, p.67).

Thus, in addition to demonstrating that a network model can critically apply clear deliberative standards to detailed practical policy processes, this brief case-study also demonstrates the considerable incentives for observing such standards a network model can bring to bear. It clearly links the deliberative failings of limitations in strength and scope and lack of transparency to the political failings of the tax. Through identifying groups of actors with decisions taken, it assists the allocation of responsibility for these shortcomings.

Of course what it also shows is that, while a deliberative network model can help expose the incentives for transparency, the information required for effective vicarious evaluation, and the mechanism for allocating deliberative responsibility, other factors will effect whether, in any given case, transparency is actually demanded, evaluations are actually carried out and acted upon, and blame is actually allocated. The deliberative network model shows it is possible to do this, and indeed there are incentives. Nonetheless, it is still no guarantee actors will take these opportunities. While an account was finally demanded in our poll tax case study, if deliberative principles had been mobilised earlier it is arguable that much of the waste, harm and suffering caused by the Tax could have been avoided. That it was not suggests there remain considerable costs involved in deliberating even within a network – in providing, gathering and evaluating, even vicariously, information about a completed deliberative exchange. There are also countervailing pressures – apparent short-term gain, personal ambition and hegemonic assumptions such as the overweening free-market liberalism in our example. A deliberative network has the potential to counter these factors, but it still requires action to realise that potential.

9. Conclusion

No single real-world deliberative exchange can cover all the issues faced by a modern democratic polity. However, a deliberative network model characterises the partial coverage of those issues achieved in a single exchange by reference to the ideal principles of free and equal challenge in reasoned debate. It then uses this characterisation as the link between discrete exchanges that allows for a wider dialogue *across* individual exchanges through which those deliberative ideals can be more closely approached. Integrated with a systems approach, the network model demonstrates there is no need to loosen the standards that constitute ‘reasoning together on an issue’ in order to think about larger-scale, real-world decision-making processes. This network model mobilises deliberative principles to confront

the pressures of scale, diversity and the relative limitations of situated knowledge and resources that some aggregative theories of democracy highlight. In fact a deliberative network analysis exposes the comparative weakness of the approach to these problems against of the aggregative formulations against which deliberation has been developed (p. 3). In these aggregative models, citizens are asked to take a decision on the full range of possible government activity over the next term of office, having refrained from any engagement with these issues in the interim. This is a huge task, well beyond the reach of most citizens. It is likely to make most feel disempowered and disaffected with a government of which they may have unrealistic expectations. A deliberative network model demonstrates how deliberative principles can inform a system in which individual citizens, participating in a limited sphere about which they feel motivated and are able to inform themselves, can make meaningful contributions to a much broader dialogue which as a whole has the potential to cover the full range of political activity, in a way that can challenge the status-quo and prevailing assumptions, including those of government. In this a network approach presents a more workable answer to these practical problems than the limited involvement of aggregation, while remaining rooted in the ideals of deliberative participation.

10, 716 words

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