An introduction to deliberative theory: challenges and opportunities

Ernesto Ganuza
IESA/CSIC
eganuza@iesa.csic.es

Political theory has taken a deliberative shift in recent years placing deliberation in a privileged position. Dryzek (2000), one of its most important promotors, even states that many of the innovations that take place in the theory of politics nowadays feed from it. Dryzek’s statement gives an idea of the scope and importance that deliberative theory has attained, however this does not mean that there is total agreement regarding its limits and fallibility. The reasons that have favoured this upsurge are certainly not related to the simplicity and clarity of the theory. Neither can we resort to its ability to explain the political phenomena as the cause of its expansion. Literature gathered about deliberation is anything but conclusive (Thompson, 2008; delli Carpini, 2004). This has not hindered, however, an outbreak of normative discussions and empirical studies aimed at contrasting, making more precise or studying in depth all elements related to deliberation.

Deliberation brings to mind in many aspects what Kuhn would describe as a change in the scientific paradigm: a progressive as well as general change in the manner of understanding the phenomena. This, of course, is not the work of one particular person, as Kuhn pointed out; on the contrary, it is fed by numerous sources which overlap and, little by little create a path to which contemporary thought refers. This is not the moment to discuss if deliberation actually constitutes or not a new paradigm. Let us say, in short, that deliberation has managed to establish a new political horizon under which many of the usual problems of the modern theory of politics are modulated: equality, power distribution, participation and influence.

The relevance of deliberation today is very much related to the problem that it attempts to resolve: how power in a society identified with pluralism and equality of its citizens can be legitimised. According to Habermas and Rawls, once we accept these premises— which would take us to accept that deliberation only has sense in an historical political process—, the problem about legitimacy of political power emerges, as both characteristics (pluralism and equality) impose normatively a practical horizon which 1) makes any political system pivot between diversity and difference; and 2) make intolerable the admission of injustice and the lack of equality in treatment. In this situation, there is a lack of a perspective above the parts or an externality which permits us to establish priorities. This means that there is a problem when establishing an order in the conflicts of values or in objectives which very probably exist in a society whose

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citizens claim the right to decide by themselves and question even the stands taken by the public powers (Rawls, 1993).

The dilemma faced by deliberative theory is already outlined by Max Weber, when he analyzed the problems emerging in a society characterized by the polytheism of values. The increasing legalization of social relationships produced, according to Weber, a sphere of autonomy for individuals in which they could develop their own goals without heeding a superior order of constraint. For Weber this process contained a dark area from which it was difficult, even impossible, to get out. The fact that each individual could follow his/her own goals would come together with the establishment of a political order based on bureaucracy. Despite the new air of liberty that would flow in this process, Weber would not stop mentioning the dangers of a social bureaucratic order, for instance, when constraining individual liberty and autonomy. The emergence of the polytheism of values concealed, for Weber, a conflict of domination (instrumental). For deliberative theory, especially for Habermas (1988), the polytheism of values opens up, on the contrary, the question of political legitimacy to a setting which did not exist previously and can not be resolved only from rational action in accordance with goals. In opposition to teleological domination, Habermas gives attention to communicative development which emerges from the legalization of social relations and confronts this new sphere of socialization with the expansion of bureaucracy. They are not antagonist forces for Habermas, but different. The first presents an action directed towards understanding, which serves as a privileged framework for all individuals within a singular context interwoven with life experiences, cultural norms and values. In contrast to the action orientated towards goals, which permits a strategic action based on individual interest, in the communicative action cooperation and solidarity bonds take priority, insofar as actions are resolved through understanding and not in the individual interest for obtaining previously set goals. In opposition to a coordination of actions in instrumental terms, there is a coordination of actions based on mutual understanding, which means taking into consideration values and norms in life contexts.

For deliberative theory, the main problem then would be the impossibility of justifying conflicts of values and goals in an external source. It must be possible to interweave justifications and the life experience of those involved. The problem for Habermas (2000) is self-legislation, as it is for Rawls (1993): in a democratic framework, nobody can follow a norm if he/she does not feel linked to it. Bureaucracy, although it coordinates action in instrumental terms, has necessarily to adapt, from the point of view of deliberative theory, to the life contexts of individuals, a process in which both spheres (in this case bureaucracy and society) will influence each other. In this way, the instrumental bureaucratic action is not a problem in itself, but when it neutralizes the possibility of individuals having an influence over it. The objective of deliberative theory would be to conceptualize this political setting in which individuals talk about public affairs and can influence the formation of political will, so that they can take part in the conflicts of values and goals from their own life contexts (Habermas, 2000) or from their comprehensive visions of the world (Rawls, 1993).

For deliberative theory, the problem of politics in a pluralist society can be understood as a problem about the foundation of public decisions. Being unable to either appeal to sacred reasons, or force imperatives is what makes society seek a new framework of legitimization which includes in its process the direct involvement of individuals from their life contexts and visions of the world. Otherwise, the norm could be interpreted as
alien and bureaucracy would create indifference. The challenge which deliberative theory attempts to answer is precisely the uncovering of this process by which political authority acquires sufficient power to coordinate social actions, without detriment to individual liberty. This challenge has to do, as Thompson (2008:502) mentions, with the sufficient delimitation of that authority to reach, in the case of disagreement, a legitimate decision for all, independent of if one agrees or not with the result obtained. In other words, following Rawls (1993), the problem is how we can base the structure of a society in a manner in which all those affected could reasonably accept it.

**Normative principles**

Deliberative theory is not opposed to liberal principles; most academics take them as a basis with more (Rawls, 1993) or less (Habermas, 2000 or Dryzek, 2000) intensity. It must be kept in mind that for liberalism, the main problem is the reconciliation of liberties and equality of the individual with the action of public power which can always constrain them. Deliberation is placed in this debate in a peculiar tradition opened up by Rousseau which presents this reconciliation as a problem of self-legislation, that is, the solution to this problem can only be conceived when individuals feel connected to the political decisions that affect them. Kant used to say that Rousseau had awakened him from his lethargy, though he would not accept the Rousseauian solution. Ultimately, according to Kant, the author of *The Social Contract* would dissolve the individual in the general will. In contrast, the German philosopher tried to offer a solution to the problem of self-legislation by saving individuality and the liberty associated with it. To do so, he based norms on a rational and subjective process, by reconciling the authority of the norms with the development of individual liberty through the categorical imperative: “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law”, which still today forms part of the foundation on which deliberative theory rests (Rawls, 1993; Habermas, 2000). From this perspective, morals become something created, a kind of political truth opposed to the type of truth which results from theoretical-scientific knowledge, or to the type of norm which emanates from tradition or sacred books. It is not a knowledge based on empirical exactitude, but a kind of knowledge based on the inner dialogue of the individual when taking the position of another.

The limits of Kantian formulation are those which serve as a source for deliberative theory, which will reformulate the categorical imperative from intersubjectivity, avoiding as far as possible problems of solipsism (and mentalism) which would derive from a norm only based on the conscience of individuals. Intersubjectivity offers a scenario which does not belong to a single individual, but is generated precisely in the interaction of different rational individuals. The authority of norms would not then come from a rational ideal which has been presupposed, it would be interwoven in the deliberative act itself. In this sense, it would not be just a case of putting oneself in the place of the other, that also, but to accept a public norm because everybody could reasonably accept and follow it. From here, the categorical imperative is reformulated in a process in which public norms can be “rationally” accepted by all individuals.

As presented by Rawls (1993) behind the veil of ignorance in a pluralist society or by Habermas (1999), behind the pragmatic conditions of communication, the deliberative process holds, with its nuances and differences, the foundations of political authority. The fact that this authority resides in the possible acceptability of norms by all offers deliberative theory certain operative principles, which entail, of course, a particular idea
of society and individuals, which does not always result in a consensus in political theory.

The image of individuals and society that we find behind the foundations of deliberative theory requires, normatively, an active or, at least, a reflective individual. The simple fact that individuals can become active agents in the concrete formulation of laws and norms, provokes an intense debate with some liberal traditions which have made the division of political work (between representatives and those represented) the driving element of the political system, for instance, Sartori (1988). However, from the paradigm of self-legislation, such division could not be accepted. This does not mean that deliberative theory questions the political architecture of modern democracies, based on the representation of interests\(^2\). The problem is how its legislative capacity is legitimised and from where that representation is obtained. Is delegation of the vote sufficient? For deliberative theory it is not enough. It is not a matter of adding “interests”, partly because that would mean assuming that it would be easy to group and identify them as if it were possible to obtain a fixed image. Representativeness as a mechanism favours moreover the creation of an external power, which easily eludes interweaving with the citizens’ life experiences. As Manin (1987:352) states in an already classic work, mentioning precisely the possibility that representativeness has of diluting individuality: “We must affirm, under the risk of contradicting a long tradition, that legitimate law is the result of general deliberation and not the expression of general will”.

For deliberative theory this means that individuals are reflective agents, whose preferences, wishes and attitudes are not previously fixed. Let us say that this agent can therefore be incorporated into a debate and change preferences during its course. In addition, it implies that norms may be discussed, and consequently, that there is space for discussion open to diversity which entitles every individual to say “yes” or “no”. The dilemma of political theory to which deliberation wishes to offer a solution has to do, then, with the place offered in politics to the reflective individual, capable of initiative, but also capable of disagreeing or not accepting rationally what is happening politically. This normative framework (a reflective, autonomous and equal individual) presents a non authoritarian political system, and it is there where deliberation acquires all its relevance, as its objective is to manage in that environment (plural and populated by equals) disagreement, so that political decisions are legitimised and all citizens feel bound to them, whether they agree or not (Gutmann y Thompson, 2004). The image of a rational agent with complete information and constant preferences leaves room to that other agent who learns, changes opinion and decides accordingly. Manin (1987: 351) described it briefly: “We need not argue that individuals, when they begin to deliberate political matters, know nothing of what they want. They know what they want in part: they have certain preferences and some information, but these are unsure, incomplete, often confused and opposed to one another. The process of deliberation, the confrontation of various points of view, helps to clarify information and to sharpen their own preferences. They may even modify their initial objectives, should that prove necessary”.

\(^2\) Most theorists of deliberation do no present alternatives to the representative system, but a reformulation of its process of legitimisation from a deliberative interaction. However, Dryzek (2000) presents openly the possibility of seeking an alternative to the representative system by using a deliberative theory which favours the establishment of a discursive problematization of public problems, where social groups and social movements have a relevant prominence. Dryzek’s proposal is based on the creation of institutional mechanisms which make possible such prominence and which do not depend only on the fact that elected representatives listen and incorporate into their decisions those elements that they consider convenient.
The possibility that deliberation contributes and improves how democracy works depends in some way on two elements: 1) the endogenous nature of individuals’ preferences, which means that these are objects being formed, which are not exclusively determined by material reasons external to the individual (Cohen, 1997; Besette, 1980); and 2) the argumentative nature of political decisions, that is, decisions based on the best possible arguments (Habermas, 1988; Gutman y Thompson, 2004; Mendelberg, 2002). In this sense, the potential of deliberative theory lies mainly in its capacity to embrace normatively a political process (non coercive) which rests on an individual mechanism (reflection) that demands argumentation (deliberation) as the main political process. This will be the core of empirical contrast of normative theory and the general obstacle of deliberative democracy, which does not always generate consensus: Do all individuals actually learn? Is change of opinion something generalized? Can we find plurality or diversity of opinion in deliberative contexts? Is argumentation the principal core in a discussion between individuals? Are the results of deliberation always good?

The impact of deliberation and its criticism

Chambers (2003: 318), argued that the core element of deliberation was precisely its capacity to change minds and transform opinion, which has been until not long ago a key part in the empirical work on deliberation (Andersen y Hansen, 2007: 534). Nevertheless, deliberative theory has important challenges ahead which will lead it to question and, of course, rethink its sources and its operationalization. Three different types of problems can be distinguished, which we can relate to three different dimensions of deliberation: I) Firstly, the implications of deliberation as a political process. As equality and the inclusion of different points of view in deliberation are a premise of the theory, the extent to which a deliberative procedure can effectively guarantee both principles has to be considered; II) Secondly, problems related to putting deliberation into practice emerge, where the theory debates the effect of deliberation on individuals. This is a completely empirical dimension where the support received by normative principles mentioned in “real” deliberation is assessed; and III) lastly, deliberative theory faces a legitimacy problem, where the value of the decisions resulting from a deliberative process are at stake. Next, we will look briefly at each of these three dimensions.

I) Deliberative theory has opened up a fertile process of reflection about political procedure. Despite that deliberation does not have as an objective the substitution of representative procedures, undoubtedly it establishes a process of decisions making based on debate and not so much, as Manin said, on the expression of the general will through an electoral process. This means that the importance of political procedure lies on the possibility of talking and listening while giving ones own opinions and those of others are respected. Independently of the ideal formulation of deliberation, it presents an open procedure which must integrate the abilities of all citizens in order to practice public debate on an equal basis. To what extent does deliberation effectively include this egalitarian involvement of all citizens?

The study of this problem has taken place mainly on the normative level. Habermas (2000) and Rawls (1993) suggest a deliberative political procedure in a rational environment. Both in the ideal situation of communication and in the discussion behind the veil of ignorance, the participants in the debate are rational and debate in a rational manner. The question to what deliberative theory has been subjected to is precisely if today we can accept an equal rational standard in all citizens. If it is not so, some
questions emerge which require an answer, because if we accept that we live in a pluralist society, we should assume as well that a rational pluralism exists among individuals. The criticism of Iris Young (1996) of deliberative theory deals fully with this question, as, according to her, deliberation implies that some “rational” conditions exist, that do not consider the real pluralism of contemporary societies. A plural society means a state of disagreement or the coexistence of different views and opinions. As deliberative theory offers a procedure of legitimization based on public debate, whose results can be accepted by all, the question is if deliberative procedure accepts the inclusion of different rationalities. For Iris Young (1996) or Sanders (1997) that is not the case, and they even accuse deliberative theory of a certain elitism.

The problem presented has great significance in deliberative tradition, which requires us to discuss the rational nature of the individual, which far exceeds the possibility of being dealt with in this introduction. However, this has had an immediate effect on the theorizations on deliberation. Dryzek (2000) broadly assumes Young’s criticism and opens up the procedure to other types of rationality, which are not only related to rational argumentation, but also to rhetoric, narration, etc. Bohmann and Richardson (2009), for their part, discuss broadly the principle according to which deliberative procedure is based on some results that can be assumed by all, defending a more indicative option (that what they accept) and less conditional (what is acceptable), which would probably give more possibilities to a plurality of rationalities and facilitate agreements. From an empirical point of view, Laia Jorba (2009: 166 et seq.) carried out a study on the quality of deliberation in a deliberative survey in Cordoba in which she directly analyzed the degree of deliberative inclusion of the participants. According to her study, which directly classified the involvement of participants in different categories of understanding—it could be said in an ad hoc environment—under intense deliberative conditions, the involvement of participants is very extensive, as much when speaking as well as when making an argument or giving the reasons for their positions. Baiocchi (1999), for his part, analyzed the deliberative involvement of participants in the Porto Alegre participatory budgeting process, and he concluded that a participatory process designed for public deliberation would achieve integration of most of the participants in the debate. The results of empirical studies show that in an environment designed for the citizen to participate, deliberation of all is possible, even if each individual has different abilities. A different case probably would be deliberation in environments which have not been designed in advance for deliberation, as will happen at the meetings of traditional organizations, in daily life (Mutz, 2006). This can teach us that deliberation is not an artifice which results from nothing, but it involves political procedures and investment to make it possible.

II) Empirical work aimed at revealing to what extent deliberation is right to rely on contemporary individuals and convert argumentation into a core of political action, offers certain results which are not totally conclusive. From the point of view of deliberation, it has been very important to show the positive effect that it has on three significant aspects: 1) the learning or acquisition of knowledge by individuals; 2) their change of opinion; and 3) the effects on the civic attitudes of individuals who deliberate. It has to be kept in mind that most empirical studies have been carried out based on deliberative experiments or quasi-deliberative experiments, such as deliberative surveys. This has resulted in the register of any variation in the levels of knowledge and the register of the aggregated data in changes of opinion as positive evidence of deliberation. Andersen and Hansen (2007) question if it is possible to talk about deliberative quality by just considering both elements. Taking as a starting point the
works of Papadopoulus and Warin (2007), deliberative quality is presented in a more sophisticated environment, where in addition to changes of opinion and the acquisition of knowledge, the effects on the civic behaviour of individuals who deliberate are taken into account.

Considering the three levels mentioned, existing empirical evidence is not, however, totally conclusive. Evidence regarding the acquisition of knowledge is rarely questioned. In a deliberative environment, individuals learn (Grönland et al, 2010: 104-06; Anderdsen and Hansen, 2007: 546; Fishkin, 2003). The works of Grönland (et al., 2010:106) demonstrate that the same is not learnt about a subject which is debated as about other subjects which are not treated directly (general politics). Regarding changes of opinion, evidence is not so clear. Certainly, many works indicate that opinion moves towards the deliberative consensus which is achieved (Barabas, 2004; delli Carpini et al., 2004), but it is also true that there are works which did not register significant changes of opinion (Barabas, 2004) or that such changes were not significantly representative (Grönland et al., 2010). With regard to the civic behaviour of individuals who deliberate, results are even less conclusive. In the words of Mendelberg (2002: 153), deliberation increases the political implication of individuals, tolerance and the justification of individual opinions. Andersen y Hansen (2007) confirmed the effect that deliberation has over the attitudes of individuals, such as the increase of tolerance or their greater argumentative ability. In his classical study about the town meeting in New England, Mansbridge (1983) questioned the positive effects expected in a deliberative process. Instead of expecting more political implication, greater confidence and the development of argumentative abilities, Mendelberg and Oleske (2000) presented the possibility that deliberation provoked hostility and mistrust. After analyzing the effect of deliberation on the internal political effectiveness of the individual, Morrel (2005) states that the results are not conclusive. In the same manner, Grönlund (et al., 2010) does not register significant changes in internal political effectiveness in a deliberative survey carried out in Finland, although changes in the disposition to become involved in politics or in the increase of confidence towards the political system are registered.

It seems that there is enough empirical material to support both the positive and negative versions of deliberation. In this context, Mutz (2006) has challenged some of the principles of deliberation by taking deliberative premises out of environments created ad hoc to deliberate and study the effect that discussion between individuals has on daily life. Mutz makes excessive analogies when comparing the exposition of individuals to views and discourses of other individuals in daily life, which does not necessarily mean deliberate in the dialogic sense of an argumentation (Bohman, 1996), with the exposition of other views and arguments in a deliberative context. However, her work aims at contrasting deliberative premises, and more than discourse or argumentation, she stresses the existence or not of a different social network, which could imply exposure to different ideas. The work of Diana Mutz would describe a reality in which citizens would live together in an environment without diversity of opinions, which would suggest that most daily life is developed in environments which are not very deliberative or exposed to diversity. In these environments, moreover, citizens do not debate the same, nor is deliberative quality found universally distributed among them. In a certain sense Mutz is correct in presenting one of the principal problems of deliberative democracy: to what extent is it possible in an environment where individuals are not normally open to diversity. Beyond the strong positioning of her conclusions –which delli Carpini (et al., 2004) and Huckfeldt (et al., 2004) contest and even contradict by demonstrating that Americans are actually immersed in different
The works of Mutz have been successful in establishing the necessity of approaching deliberation from individual differences and in a context not specifically designed for deliberation. This has supposed an important challenge as it has emphasized the difficulties which exist in affirming that the positive effects of deliberation may be considered universal, revealing the absence of studies whose objective is the mechanisms which allow deliberation to work, and not only registering variations in frequencies with respect to certain variables. The works of delli Carpini (et al., 2004), Barabas (2004) or Wojcieszak (et al., 2010) are included in this tendency. Their works have emphasized the importance of internal deliberative processes when analyzing the change of opinion, the acquisition of knowledge or the effects on the civic behaviour of the individual who deliberates. This stresses the importance in deliberation of the place in which it occurs. The problem of analyzing deliberation only from the variation in the frequencies aggregated takes us to a complex and contradictory debate, which does not help to understand correctly how deliberation works or the great dependency that it has on the context in which it takes place (delli Carpini et al., 2004: 336). The works of Barabas (2004) and Wojcieszak (et al., 2010) have permitted relevant conclusions to be obtained about the internal differences which occur between individuals in deliberative processes. Barabas (2004) compares what occurs in a public which has participated in an ad hoc deliberative environment and another which has not, finding significant differences in relation to learning and change in opinion in favour of deliberative processes. Wojcieszak (et al., 2010) have analyzed the differences which exist between people that had participated in an ad hoc deliberative environment and their predisposition to political participation afterwards. Having a strong opinion or ideology might condition the effects of deliberation on individuals. However, the effect of other variables, such as learning or change of opinion, does not affect significantly the predisposition to participation.

III) In addition to the impact that deliberation may have on individuals and the conditions of deliberative procedures, there is a problem which has not been considered of much importance, but which conceals a dilemma related to the process of deliberative legitimization itself. If empirical studies show that the effects of deliberation depend on context, the profile of individuals and even on the procedures employed for operationalizing deliberation, it could be assumed that its validity or the validity of its results might not always be “positive”, “correct” or even “better”. Here, the problem with deliberation has to do with the value of its results. Are they valid, let us say, on their own or can an epistemic value be applied to results which will inform us that there are both better and worse results? In short, it is about resolving if deliberation is based only on its procedure as a means to achieve the best decision or if, indeed, we may count on certain values which inform the procedure of what is a good or bad result. The studies on the subject are far from achieving consensus (Bohmann, 1998; Gutman and Thompson, 2004; Marti, 2006), but the problem is crucial. Gutman and Thompson distance themselves from giving a mere procedural value to deliberation, something usually attributed to Habermas. For the latter, the communicative act in itself includes certain pragmatic conditions without which deliberation can not happen (open access, equal participation, absence of constraints and sincerity of participants), so that it does not need to turn to elements external to deliberation to legitimise the best results. Gutman and Thompson (2004: 136), on the contrary, argue that it is necessary to establish some substantive principle to legitimise them. For them, this principle is
reciprocity\textsuperscript{3}, which would guarantee, or from which would emanate, the three principles which provide the substance of deliberative democracy: basic liberties, basic opportunities for all and distribution of equal resources among individuals. However, the principle of reciprocity does not seem to go further than the pragmatic conditions of Habermasian communication, as it feeds from the inter-subjective shift which has been given to the Kantian categorical imperative. This position affirms, generally, that a decision taken in the debate may be correct if the deliberative process is developed under determined conditions that, in brief, take into consideration liberty and equality of all participants. This would not be too far from the procedural value of deliberation.

The question highlighted by some authors is the necessity of establishing, in addition, an epistemic value to deliberation, which will help us to verify that a deliberative result is good and reasonable (Marti, 2006). This is not the best place to discuss in detail this question, but with no doubt it also constitutes a key element of the operationalization of deliberation. At stake is to understand deliberation as an argumentative procedure which, under certain conditions (for example, a procedure which guarantees equality and liberty of all involved to deliberate), guarantees legitimate results, or to understand deliberation also by means of non-argumentative procedures, which would lead deliberation to justify itself in elements external to it and, therefore outside the reciprocity approaches, using the words of Gutman and Thompson, or of the inter-subjective legitimacy of reasonable results.

We could finish by saying that the criticism of deliberative theory has contextualized the impact of deliberation on individuals, as not all learn equally, nor change their opinion the same way, nor behave the same before and after deliberation. It has helped to model a suitable type of deliberative procedure and has lead to reflection on the value of the results. It seems unquestionable that these problems will continue being a benchmark in future works on deliberation, but I do not think they will result in the deliberative ideal, rather they will help to clarify its operationalization, and will progressively feedback normative theory. In principle, it seems reasonable to think that deliberation is not a procedure belonging to alchemy, which transforms everything it touches into something positive. Who is deliberating has to be considered, as the lack of diversity may polarize the opinions of participants more than reaching a reasonable consensus (Schkade \textit{et al.}, 2010). Distribution of deliberative abilities may not be as universal as it was intended, which inevitably would lead us to think that the impact of deliberation depends on individual characteristics. Sanders (1997), for example, has mentioned this problem, expressing the necessity of lowering the conditions of accessibility to deliberation. Neither do all institutional contexts or procedures on which deliberation is carried out have the same effect on deliberative quality (Landwehr \textit{et al.}, 2010; Steiner and Bächtiger, 2005), so that this may alert when it is possible or when it is better to implement a deliberative process.

\textbf{The place of deliberation in the political space}

The development of deliberative theory feeds from the fact that less and less are we able to think of politics normatively in coercive contexts. Deliberation can not happen

\textsuperscript{3} Reciprocity would be the search of agreement on the basis of principles which can be justified to others who also share the objective of looking for a reasonable agreement. It is the principle of reason-giving (Gutman and Thompson, 2004: 133).
outside a non coercive context (Dryzek, 2000: 76). The dilemma of deliberative theory is to know if we can always think in a non-coercive political context. Barabas (2004: 689) has emphasized the importance that this procedural constraint has, which implies, for example, the presence of diversity and an open attitude towards difference, that is, a political process which distances itself from ordinary discussion and other processes of change of opinion. Precisely, this constraint is contested by Mutz (2006) in her works on deliberation in the United States, when she argues that the openness of citizens to the views of others would not be such a universal phenomenon. This was already indicated by Sunstein (2003) in relation to the usage of new technologies. The debate on this subject is and will be crucial in the next few years, as it is about deciding which elements would be necessary to create a strong deliberative setting in a representative political context. In the words of Thompson (2008: 514), this should make us think about the place that deliberation should occupy in our democratic process. This question emphasizes the complexion that the problem of deliberative democracy presents from the point of view of its implementation. A problem which despite the empirical work accumulated has not been given enough thought up to now.

John Dryzek (2001: 652) talks about the “constraint of the deliberative theory” when considering the importance in every deliberative process of the number of people participating and the time available for deliberation. Every deliberation proposal should have both elements if it is to be feasible. It is very possible that in a social environment in which instrumental relations are the priority (work and management) and with a division of political work which leaves debate of public affairs to a body of specialists, it would be difficult to find a point of equilibrium where open deliberation of citizens can be included. We can not fall into the myth of the activist (Fiorina, 1999), nor can everybody have all the necessary time to dedicate hours and days to public debate, nor has everybody the same interest and wish of doing so. Whatever is the deliberative process that we can imagine, it should take into consideration these constraints of the “deliberative economy”. Therefore, the possibilities of the institutionalization of deliberation suffer a different fate. Nobody imagines all inhabitants who have reached the age of majority in the main square of the town debating (that would be the town football pitch!) what to do with a specific norm. But deliberative democracy feeds also from a reflective individual, capable of changing his opinion if offered arguments and with the right to participate in a debate on affairs affecting him/her. Conciliating both positions is what is going to permit deliberative democracy its institutional development.

Taking into account these conditions, deliberative theory defends different forms that Thompson (2008: 513 et seq.) summarises in three scenarios: 1) distributed deliberation, according to which political institutions would be in charge of the various deliberative tasks (the Parliament debates about good reasons; through election citizens debate about the common good, etc.); 2) decentralized deliberation, according to which citizens enter a process of fragmented public debate, so that an undetermined number of people can participate in a decentralized manner; and 3) continuous deliberation, according to which a body of representatives propose a policy to a deliberative body constituted by citizens. The results of this debate return to the political body, which can debate the new policy once more before it becomes a norm. This third procedure is very easy to assimilate into deliberative forums which are already carried out in the form of a citizens’ jury (Font and Blanco, 2007) or into a deliberative survey (Fishkin, 2003).
All these procedures have their advantages and disadvantages. Generally, they assume the qualified participation of citizens, rather than give priority to a broader participation. The distribution of deliberative tasks is mainly based on a new conceptualization of the representative system under deliberative parameters. Certainly, this means incorporating deliberative procedures into the representative mechanisms, but it has the challenge of interweaving these representative mechanisms into the lives of individuals, neutralizing the image of mechanisms distanced from the preoccupations and challenges of daily life. Participative hypotheses are based, however, on a broader concept of participation, which is managed by fragmenting the spaces for public meeting. This does not guarantee diversity as would the drawing of lots, although it presumes a direct implication of citizens in real affairs in public management, where it is easy to find a relation between deliberation and life contexts of participants. Finally, the citizens’ juries or the deliberative survey are based on a random selection of citizens, which guarantees the diversity of discursive positions and a relatively manageable forum from the point of view of deliberation. Nevertheless, it has the problem of transforming deliberation into an experimental process, far from daily life.

Deliberative institutionalization does not intend a systemic transformation of the contemporary political forum, the proposals aim at reinforcing its deliberative profile. That means, primarily, that the proposals are going to give representative spaces a key role in the promotion of deliberation, and secondly, that they design forums open to citizens which are articulated, one way or another, with representative spaces. It is not about citizens operating outside the traditional division of work in modern democracies, but about emphasizing the deliberative mechanisms of the system. In this process, citizens have an active role; the problem is to update it. There is no doubt that in the three scenarios described, new technologies can offer solutions and alternatives which can make deliberation operative. The cities of Malaga or Terrassa, for example, are already employing new technologies in the development of their participative budgets. It is true that we can not picture everybody in the main square of the town, but we can imagine an undetermined number of people connected to a network. This step provides the necessary content to think that technologically it is possible to have a conversation among many different citizens. Similar to what has happened with offline deliberation, its implementation or the capacity that digital deliberation has in fulfilling normative requirements of deliberative theory (plurality and access, equal participation, sincerity and liberty of positioning) is a question which must be explored.

Conclusions

Deliberation assumes a political setting which allows individuals to reflect upon their preferences in a non coercive context. From this perspective, deliberation has attracted a lot of attention at a time when politics is beginning to be analyzed in a different context of the exercise of power. For example, both in theory and practice governance is talked about (Papadoulus, 2003), a form of government characterized by horizontal relations of power from which unjustified decisions are not expected any longer. This opens the door to understanding political processes in a different context, characterized by the usage of the word and argumentation, from which derive the advantages that a deliberative procedure can have in democracy (Papadoulus and Warin, 2007). For political theory, deliberation presents important challenges, whose characteristics are administering to a greater or lesser extent the limits of normative theory. It is not just
that deliberative premises and communication have provoked the rethinking of the foundations of society, (Habermas, 1988; Rawls, 1978), but also they have led to rethinking representative democracy (Habermas, 2000; Urbinati, 2000; Manin, 1987). Democracy, according to Manin (1987), would not be legitimised by the unanimous wish of all, but by the deliberative process of all. This presents a new perspective in the political process, stressing the need for transparency and public deliberation in political subjects. Deliberation finds in the developments of the Sociology of Science a natural ally, as a society that can not put forward technical arguments of authority, nor refer to sacred arguments, needs argumentative procedures to legitimize its political decisions (Bohman, 1996). From this point of view, the techno-scientific area offers a particularly fertile field for deliberation (Callon et al., 2001).

It just remains to be said that the development of new technologies offers a fertile horizon for deliberation (Marti, 2008). There is no medium today which offers such a plausible form of public participation for citizens to debate on a specific matter, considering the “economy of deliberation”. Despite the difficulties of carrying out a deliberation process (diversity, equality, argumentation, etc.), its integration with new technologies can offer a qualitative step ahead. Similarly to what happened with offline deliberation, online deliberation faces huge challenges: to what point can diversity be guaranteed in a virtual forum? What kind of procedure is necessary to achieve it? What is argumentative quality like?

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