Doctoral Program in Political Science and Sociology

Scuola Normale Superiore

Research project

Noemi Cipriano

Toward inclusion in participatory deliberative processes

Introduction

The search for tools of political participation based on horizontal forms of listening/co-decision has led since the turn of the millennium to the construction of new democratic arenas centered on deliberative methods.

In some cases, these tools have been adopted by institutions, which have designed functional innovations to improve and increase citizen participation in the political decision-making process. In other cases, however, the political administration has not been able to manage these resources in a functional manner, leading to disillusionment and distrust (Talpin, 2015).

Specifically, the point mentioned before one of the criticisms made by social movements, who often critical to the way local governments manage these processes (especially vis-à-vis those implemented in the top-down version[1]). These latter are often considered as a merely symbolic representation of citizen participation, responding to a renewed and more sophisticated consensus strategy. Indeed, several case studies of participatory-deliberative processes managed in top-down ways have confirmed the inauthentic nature of deliberative processes aimed at 'democratically' legitimizing decisions or proposals 'lowered' from above (Della Porta 2011, Talpin 2015).

Although in fact deliberative democracy is formally based on the principle of equality[2], in practical implementation equality is not always respected.

Equality, together with non-coercion, reflexivity, mutual listening, respect, and reciprocity are the main fundamental principles in deliberative processes (Habermas, 2023).

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[1] Font J., Della Porta D., Sintomer Y., *Participatory Democracy in Southern Europe: Causes, Characteristics end Consequences*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2014

[2] 'Legitimate decisions require equality in two senses: first, citizens must be equal; and second, their reasons must receive equal consideration' (Bohman, J. (1998). Survey Article: The Coming of Age of Deliberative Democracy. The Journal of Political Philosophy, 6, 400-425)

The principle of equality – definable as the assumption that everyone within the deliberative process is free and equal- is compromised mainly because the participatory-deliberative space reflects the inequalities of gender, class and race that characterize our society (Marion Young,2003).

Deliberation in participatory spaces, starting from a previous unequal social context, could led to inequal outcomes and decisions that favor the formerly most privileged subjects. This can occur through the voluntary or involuntary exclusion of subjects who cannot participate or express themselves for reasons of time, linguistic ability, character, handicap etc.

The theme of exclusion in participatory- deliberative processes involves different aspects and forms: from lexical and decision-making coercion to inequalities in resources and possibilities, poor facilitation skills, lack of means to help overcome communication barriers (lack of incentives to participate, difficulty in encouraging and managing interventions, few means to allow everyone to intervene and feel listened to as equals).

Marion Young in the essay Inclusion and Democracy emphasizes the need to find tools of inclusion that can break the vicious cycle[3] that relegates actors with social and economic inequalities to the margins of political debate (Young, 2003). Her contribution, focused especially to the study of communicative exclusion inside the part-del[4] processes, has highlighted how structural inequalities on the social and economic levels inhibit the participation of certain citizens while empowering others. This statement was largely agreed by Jacques Rancière, who has used the notion of disagreement" to describe the failure of consensus-based and deliberative models to effectively include demands for greater equality and social justice made by the less privileged (Rancière, 1995).

In even counterproductive cases, formal processes constituted to give voice to all actors end up exacerbating existing inequalities rather than promoting greater social justice[5].

Inside the deliberation: the role of communication in determining the level of inclusion in the participatory- deliberative experiments.

Mansbridge, starting by her empirical research, emphasized how asymmetry of communicative power could be an important factor in social discrimination "*speech-centered forms of decision making may disempower those who, for class, gender, or cultural reasons, are less comfortable with public speaking or less skilled in dominant forms of discourse*" (J.Mansbridge, 1983).

The choice of the type of communicative expressions, as well as the form to be used should be problematized and analyzed considering the consequences it may entail inside decision-making fora. Forms of marginalization can emerge not only in a blatant way (i.e., with the absence of

[3] "In actually existing democracies there tends to be a reinforcing circle between social and economic inequality and political inequality that allows the powerful to use formally democratic processes to perpetuate injustice or preserve privilege". Iris Marion Young, Inclusion and Democracy, pag. 17

[4] Participatory-deliberative

[5] Young I. M., *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford Scholarship Online, November 2003

certain groups within the process, or the evident silencing of their interventions), but also in a more unconscious way (such as the absence of listening and reciprocity) (Doerr,2018; Steiner,2017). These themes draw attention to studies regarding the difference in level of communicative power within our society, and in a micro form they highlight how communication is a very decisive element. Moreover, Walter Benjamin himself suggests that the conflict between the power of language and the violence of the speaker should be observed in all political breadth (W. Benjamin, 2021). That, therefore, the lexicon is not only a communicative vehicle, but a political agent that can have a different impact and weight depending on what is said and how it is said. Indeed, the cultural hegemony[6] of the dominant class concerns a wide spectrum of thinking, within which we certainly include the problem of communicative power exercised through language, its inherent power, and its spaces of action.

Transversely to the fields of political theory and sociology, an important contribution comes from linguistics. Language philosopher Claudia Bianchi has coined the term 'discursive injustice' to refer to forms of exclusive linguistic domination in society.

"*Discursive injustice is that phenomenon whereby your words have less power to be heard, to make things happen, to function. In short, you can do fewer things with words*"[7].

Recent research (Felicetti, Castelli, 2018) highlights, through a case study, how discursive marginality is very neglected, but serious and worrying. And this is not because the spaces for deliberation in the public debate profess to be closed (they are formally open), but because certain voices are silenced, and others are over-represented.

The effects of this silencing are reflected in the biases that emerge in democratic fora. "That is, segregation exacerbates the prejudicial attitudes that group members may have toward others, thus making it difficult to engage in productive debates and discussions (Young,2003)".

An issue that also needs to be critically addressed in relation to the normative theory of deliberative democracy, starting from the critical questioning how dialogue per se could really be a glue that would be able to overcome the limits of political delegation and provide more equitable opportunities for mutual confrontation.

State of the art and research goals

In the field of political sociology, Nicole Doerr, championing the need to work on the inclusive language front, has studied with a comparative approach how the technique of political translation[8] could be a valuable aid in smoothing out communicative inequalities within multilingual arenas.

[6] A. Gramsci, The Cultural Hegemony, Historica Editions, 2022

[7] Claudia Bianchi, Hate language, authority, and discursive injustice. Discrimination in philosphy presso: https://journals.openedition.org/estetica/2059

[8] N Doerr N., *Political Translation: How Social Movement Democracies Survive*, Cambridge, University Press, 2018

Nicole Doerr has shown that through the introduction of political translators who are neither neutral nor literal, consensus-oriented deliberative decision-making becomes more balanced in practice.

A possibility, that of the introduction of third-party figures-political translators-that would have allowed a kind of defensive balancing, witnessing hidden inequalities conveyed through the use of language. Doer, by addressing the issue of the lexical gap, is committed to formulating a useful proposal to bridge internal communication inequalities and promote the inclusiveness of all within the deliberative arenas.

While being one of the best pioneering studies, I found some critical elements in Nicole Doerr's work, from which I will start to formulate my research project more specifically:

-Does the use of political translators, whose job is to act as a conduit between various unequal actors, come into conflict with the principle on which deliberative democracy is based, namely, to give direct voice back to citizens, activists, individual or directly organized individuals?

-Are the figures of political translators functional in reducing communicative gaps only around multilingualism? If so, how does their limited function relate to and affect communicative inequalities related not so much to origin as to class or gender?

- Is it possible to think of direct solutions that promote inclusiveness, exploiting non-verbal or creative forms of communication? Could this lead to enrichment in terms of inclusiveness and strengthening of deliberation?

Recent studies on communication show how an important part of our communication is connected to non-verbal communication. The use of images and the emphasis on the visual and sound dimensions are part of our communication and cannot be overlooked (Mendoca, Asenbaum, 2020).

The visual, sonic and physical dimensions do not simply amplify or change the meaning of spoken or written content. Instead, the use of images, sounds and embodied presence is meaningful in itself. They are not primarily by-products or conveyers of words[9]. In fact, in the last century there have been many innovations brought within the deliberative fora, with a view to overcoming the highly rational deliberative ideal conceived by Habermas.

Human communication is not based only on words, but there are many communication possibilities that we set in motion when we communicate, many of which are not yet sufficiently known. For example, images can make arguments more easily accessible and thus potentially have inclusive effects. In addition, the emotional qualities of some images may make other people's views and realities more comprehensible, thus nurturing other-regarding views (Mendoca, Asenbaum, 2020). Even the timbre and color of the voice, as well as our stage presence - our being with the body in places - are bearers of meaning.

In order to consider communication in its multidimensionality, my goal is to bring new knowledge on the potential that a more 'creative' (non-logocentric) communication can bring in terms of inclusiveness within deliberative experiments. Specifically, considering the relational interaction that characterizes deliberative processes, I would like to understand whether communication forms

[9] Mendoca, Arcan, Asenbaum, More than Words: A Multidimensional Approach to Deliberative Democracy,Political Studies Associations, 2020

belonging to the language of the senses (body, sounds, images) can help marginal actors to feel directly more included and involved.

With the aim of deepen the possible ways of inclusion inside participatory-deliberative experiments, my goal is to provide new analytical tools as well as empirical and experimental examples aimed at overcoming the obstacle of communication inequalities in the broad sphere of social marginality.

Case selection

The units of analysis on which I intend to focus my study are dynamic European realities, such as common goods, which operate within multicultural neighborhoods, very diversified in terms of identities and social actors.

In the literature, urban commons are described as natural or urban resources managed collectively by members of a community and which have a horizontal value (Nonini 2007). Within urban spaces, common goods can carry out prefigurative and alternative actions, in a climate of sharing and rooting with the territory in which they operate. Within the territory in which they develop, common goods have become protagonists - especially self-organized ones - of direct social actions whose aim is the transformation of reality through the action itself. They are therefore considered as innovative and dynamic actors. It is no coincidence that thanks to their work, new democratic practices of horizontal interaction between citizens have developed, such as assemblies, participatory budgeting, and neighborhood meetings. Within the vast range of practices of sociality and connection with the territory, the common goods have in recent years implemented various experiences of sociality that exploit a broader dimension of social interaction. For example, we can include experiences of "urban gardening" and collective management of otherwise neglected portions of public space (Caciagli, 2021). Some social spaces have also implemented highly recreational activities with a view to greater participation and inclusion of the territory (such as theaters and outdoor events), but also using sport, such as self-organised sporting events or the creation of football pitches.

Through care actions towards the territory, aggregative initiatives can be established that make the spaces the object of care increasingly participatory and inclusive. For these reasons, I therefore believe that these realities represent a source of important resources in relation to my research question.

Sub-units of research:

Specifically, my aim is to develop a comparative study between two Mediterranean cities, namely Palermo and Marseille, in a comparative Italy-France perspective, places where deliberative participatory processes take place in significantly different ways. The two cities, despite the different ways in which the participatory-deliberative processes are organized, have numerous characteristics in common. Both cities present many elements of social conflict, as well as the presence of very different identities.

Focus on the recent urban transformations that have occurred between Marseille and Palermo:

Marseille and Palermo are Mediterranean cities that in recent years have experienced strong processes of gentrification and tin the historic center with major consequences in terms of conflict between historic residents and new residents. This has led to the spread of neighborhood assemblies, citizen forums and participatory-deliberative events from below promoted by individuals, local associations and citizen committees operating in the area.

Horizontal confrontational movements from below have sprung up in the Marseille territory in response to the Euroméditerranée plan, desired by the municipal administrations and extended from the first to the third district to the northeastern part of the Canabiére. The goal of the plan was to "redevelop the urban space" with a view to cultural and service renewal, geared toward making the city more attractive to investment and profit growth of the tourism sector[10].

In the Palermo area, on the other hand, the gentrification process put in place in the Kalsa and Albergheria neighborhoods has seen the proliferation of activities in the streets, neighborhood committees promoted by local associations and associations in order to find horizontal solutions in response to the gentrification of the historic center and the privatization of areas previously inhabited by less affluent social classes.

These processes include, for example, activities of confrontation and sharing of public space, within which we certainly include the project "Mediterraneo Antirazzista": a three-day citizen engagement with the aim of promoting *intercultural relations among the different citizens living in the metropolitan city, trying to question the dichotomies of center/periphery and inclusion/exclusion*[11].

Framing of research and focus on methodology: discourse analysis and participant observation.

Since my research is driven by a strongly inductive approach, the methodological choice has fallen on qualitative methods. Unlike quantitative methodology, where theories and concepts to be tested pre-exist empirical analysis, *in qualitative research problems are constructed in part during empirical work, in which additional new concepts might emerge*[12].

Within the broad field of qualitative methodology, my choice has leaned toward the combination of ethnographic technique and discourse analysis.

In particular, the choice of participant observation-an ethnographic field research technique-is related to the need to produce new knowledge on the topic, which is difficult to 'find' through other research techniques. Researchers who have analyzed power relations in assembly contexts-such as Julien Talpin-have emphasized the importance of this research technique in producing new

[10] https://metropolitiques.eu/Euromediterranee-faire-la-ville-sans-ses-habitants.html

[11] https://cesie.org/project/mediterraneo-antirazzista-2/

[12] Della Porta D., *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*, Oxford University Press, 2014

knowledge in complex dynamics such as those of interaction between individuals, social groups, and collective formations[13].

Doing participant observation means and implies:

o Collecting first-hand data

o Making field observations by moving the scale of observation from the outside to the inside

o Experiencing: taking part in the phenomenon studied to understand the contradictions, stakes and social expectations that the people studied experience.

Moreover, the "mobility" in data collection that characterizes this research technique would allow me to deepen not only the dynamics of the phenomenon being observed, but also the context in which it takes place: the actors who take part in it, the identities present, the organization behind it, and the type of paper materials distributed and produced.

The desire to frame the phenomena being analyzed in an overall perspective that holds within various aspects at various levels of inquiry is behind the choice to employ discourse analysis as a technique for processing and organizing the data collected during the first phase of participant observation.

On the epistemological level, therefore, my choice falls on the technique of discourse analysis inspired by Norman Fairclough[14] since:

- It is based on inductive process

- It bases its level of analysis on microsociology, macrosociology, and linguistics

- Discourse analysis is most often related to small-n studies based on theoretical/intentional case selection.

- It concerns with investigating specific contextual phenomena in relation to broader frameworks of analysis

<u>Provisional programmatic steps of using the discourse analysis technique in my case study:</u>

The initial macro-frame of analysis (participatory-deliberative experiments in the who specific territorial sub-units) will be narrowed down more and more-as in zoom mode-for each territorial sub-unit of investigation.

[13] J. Talpin, Yves Sintomer, La démocratie partecipative au-delà de la proximitè: Le Poitou-Charentes et l'échelle régionale, Res Pubblica, 2015

[14] Norman Fairclough, Critical Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language, Routledge; 2° edizione (13 settember 2013)

Within each unit, cases of particularly relevant participatory-deliberative experiments will be selected. Therefore, inductive coding work (category production, central word codes, challenges to discourse order, communicatives codes, etc.) will begin from the analysis of communication in a deliberative study perspective (semiotics in interaction with social processes).

Once relevant data on communicative inclusive forms of language are obtained, these will be analyzed with reference to the macro sociological context of initial investigation and could be generalized and compared with each other with reference to the initial variables chosen.

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