Chapter 4 of PhD thesis (draft as at 2/2/2024)

Conceptualising democratic adaptation governance: a deliberative systems approach

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Outline of thesis as a whole

1. Introduction
2. Evolving understandings of fair and inclusive adaptation *[literature review of adaptation governance, adaptation & development, and adaptation justice lit]*
3. Democratizing adaptation governance across scales: rationales, challenges, opportunities *[proposal for advanced review paper accepted by journal, co-authoring]*
4. Conceptualizing democratic adaptation governance: a deliberative systems approach *[this one: wondering if aspects of it have the potential for publication?]*
5. Methodology
6. Influencing adaptation in an authoritarian context: a deliberative system analysis of climate adaptation governance in Vietnam *[paper under review*]
7. Pluralising adaptation: mapping climate adaptation discourses in Vietnam *[paper submitted to journal, awaiting feedback]*
8. Inclusiveness, affectedness, and the politics of scale in adaptation governance
9. Conclusion

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1. Introduction

The overarching challenge that motivates my research, as outlined in chapter 1, is how those people most affected by climate change impacts, especially but by no means exclusively in developing countries, can be more democratically engaged in the global system of adaptation governance. My review of the adaptation literature in chapter 2 showed that it is now recognised that effective and equitable governance of adaptation needs to recognise the multi-level nature of the challenge. Yet while terms like participation and climate justice abound, many millions of the people most vulnerable to climate change are not yet meaningfully or consistently involved in adaptation decision-making beyond their immediate household or community, either conceptually or in practice. Effectively including the voices and interests of those most affected by climate change in the governance of adaptation globally represents a huge conceptual, political and logistical challenge, and there has been limited theoretical or empirical exploration of how to achieve it. In chapter 3, I argued that adaptation governance needs to be democratized across scales, and I made the case for a taking deliberative approach to this task.

In this chapter, I consider how a more democratic approach to adaptation governance could be conceptualised. In order to evaluate how democratic our existing multi-level system of adaptation governance is, and to explore how to make it more so, we need a conceptual framework that can describe and make sense of it. I propose applying the conceptual framework of the deliberative system to analyse how the governance of climate change adaptation works in Vietnam, recognising that the system involves multiple formal and informal actors operating across multiple levels, and explore how this governance system might more meaningfully include the voices and interests of those particularly affected by climate change.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In the second section, I introduce the main approaches and motivations put forward for a systemic approach to deliberative democracy. Then, in the third section, I discuss some of the critiques that have been levelled at this conceptual approach. In the fourth section, I review how a few other scholars have applied a deliberative systems approach to aspects of climate governance, especially climate change *mitigation*. Then, in the fifth section, I pinpoint five features of deliberative systems analysis that I consider to be particularly useful in analysing the governance of climate change *adaptation*, and explain how I propose modifying or nuancing each of these features in order to apply this analytical framework to the specific context of evaluating the democratic quality of adaptation governance in Vietnam and globally.

Having presented my conceptual framework in this chapter, I go on in chapter 5 to elaborate on the methods I use to apply it to multi-level adaptation governance in Vietnam. This sets the scene for the three subsequent chapters where I discuss the main body of my empirical findings and analysis: in chapter 6, I examine the nuanced dynamics of influence and accountability that flow between key

government and non-government, domestic and international stakeholders dealing with climate change adaptation in Vietnam; in chapter 7, I map out six distinct discourses of adaptation present in Vietnam, spanning governance levels from local to global; and in chapter 8, I evaluate the inclusiveness or otherwise of this deliberative system of adaptation governance, considering related questions of affectedness, adaptation justice, and the politics of scale.

2. Plural purposes of deliberative systems analysis

In mainstream media and public discourse, the phrase *deliberative democracy* has become heavily associated with mini-publics, events which bring together a randomly selected group of citizens to deliberate on a topic of public interest, for anywhere from a few hours to several weeks, with support and input from experts on that topic, with the goal of informing public policy. These range from small citizen juries to national-level assemblies, and even the world's first Global Assembly, held in 2021 on the topic of climate change and the ecological crisis. This emphasis brings the risk of divorcing these practical endeavours from the original more expansive normative goal of deliberative democracy.

The field of deliberative democracy has long held 'an ambition to render whole political systems more deliberatively democratic' (Dryzek 2016, 209). Before the term 'deliberative system' had been used, Habermas had described a 'two-track' model of deliberative democracy. This emphasises the idea of 'transmission' between opinion formation in public sphere, and will-formation in formal representative institutions, and as such has been described as a 'systemic approach' (Owen and Smith 2015). Young (2006) warns that a focus on face-to-face settings 'blunts' deliberative democracy's critical insight, and proposes 'de-centering' deliberative democracy and inclusion through 'linkages' between dispersed sites of deliberation. She notes that 'what happens locally is complexly conditioned by actions and decisions that are global, national, or regional in reach' and suggests that any face-to-face examples of democratic deliberation need to be 'understood as a part of a democratic process between tens of millions of strangers in multiple locales over a period of months or years'. Thus Young (2006) proposes conceptualizing processes of deliberation and decision-making as 'occurring in multiple forums and sites connected to one another over broad spans of space and time' and focusing on the 'linkages' between them to evaluate deliberative quality.

Mansbridge (1999) is credited with first using the term 'deliberative system' in what has been called both a 'somewhat tentative' introduction to the idea (Dryzek 2016, 210), and an 'expansive account' (Owen and Smith 2015, 217). Mansbridge asks us not just to look for deliberation in formal spaces designated for political engagement and deliberative communication, but to see deliberation as happening in a wider discursive context that includes and is shaped by all forms of communication

including ‘everyday talk’. Since the term ‘deliberative system’ was coined, deliberative democracy theorists and their interlocutors have discussed it incessantly, defining, refining, critiquing of course, and sometimes even applying it. As Dryzek (2016, 214) remarked, the deliberative systems approach ‘currently feature[s] a lot of theorizing […] and relatively little close study of actual deliberative systems in the terms that theorists specify’. Eight years on, this remains largely the case, though interesting empirical studies are emerging. This thesis aims to help respond to that gap.

I do not attempt in this chapter to provide a comprehensive or chronological review of the ‘systemic turn’ or ‘return’ in deliberative democracy literature; this has been undertaken elsewhere (see e.g. Elstub, Ercan, and Mendonça 2016). Rather, I am interested in how the deliberative system conceptual framework can help me illuminate and interpret my empirical case study, in order to answer my research questions outlined above. Thus, I structure the rest of this section around the main purposes that have been ascribed to deliberative systems analysis. It is notable that scholars both in favour of, and critical of, the deliberative systems conceptual framework have come to expect a lot of it. Some of these expectations are very different, which is a point to bear in mind when reading the next section summarising critiques of deliberative systems analysis.

I suggest that scholarly expectations of the deliberative system may be clustered into four main categories: explain; evaluate; diagnose; design. According to each of these categories, the purpose of deliberative systems analysis is to:

1) **Explain** how societies collectively figure out and change what they think (see e.g. Mansbridge 1999), including for example how mini-publics or even non-deliberative moments may contribute to democratic decision-making, and how discourses diffuse through a system;

2) **Evaluate** how democratic a governance system is, against a normative ideal of deliberative quality or capacity, and/or compared to other systems (see e.g. Bächtiger and Parkinson; Pickering 2019; Stevenson and Dryzek 2014);

3) **Diagnose**, and ideally suggest how to fix or improve a governance system’s deliberative problems, vulnerabilities, or pathologies (see e.g. Boswell, Hendriks, and Ercan 2016; Hendriks, Ercan, and Boswell 2020; Mansbridge et al. 2012);

4) **Design** better deliberative events or institutions, by better connecting them into the wider political system(s), to enhance their legitimacy, influence, and consequentiality (see e.g. Curato and Böker 2016; Hendriks 2016).

Of course, there is plenty of overlap across these categories, for example between explaining how a system works and evaluating its quality; between evaluating quality and diagnosing weaknesses; between proposing how to improve a deliberative institution and designing a new one. Similarly, most

scholars who develop or apply deliberative systems theory are motivated by more than one of these four categories. For the purposes of this thesis, categories 1, 2 and to a lesser extent 3 are particularly relevant.

Whereas Mansbridge (1999) initially referred to the idea of the deliberative system as a way of understanding how society at large figures out, decides, and changes what it thinks, later conceptualisations of the deliberative system (e.g. Dryzek 2009) offer a more specific and normative account of how those in the public sphere do and could assert their democratic right and responsibility to communicate their views to those who hold formal authority. Mansbridge et al's (2012) chapter, which has been called a 'manifesto' (Owen and Smith 2015), seeks to synthesise emerging scholarly efforts to make sure deliberative democracy research stays true to its normative roots as a system-wide normative theory of political legitimacy, but also sets out specific functions and pathologies of the deliberative system. Mansbridge et al. (2012) assert that taking a 'systemic approach to deliberative democracy' means not just looking at one deliberative site, but seeing multiple spaces and sites as connected, and forming a complex whole that has the potential to be greater (or less than) the sum of its parts in terms of advancing democratic values.

However, the empirical contexts that Mansbridge et al (2012, 1) have in mind are liberal democratic countries. As such, they focus on the limitations to deliberative democracy that may apply in such contexts, leaving other scholars to expand the conceptual framework to apply to a broader range of governance systems and at other scales. Furthermore, they focus on justifying the need for such an approach in the abstract, rather than explaining how to do it or applying the framework to empirical cases. As the term 'manifesto' implies, their chapter concentrates on synthesizing various versions of, and rationales for, deliberative systems analysis, rather than unpicking some of the different purposes and emphases, or even conflicts, among those deliberative democracy scholars who had begun to explore systems thinking.

Dryzek and Niemeyer (2010, 11–12) and Stevenson and Dryzek (2014, 28–29) present the idea of the deliberative system in the form of an analytical framework that can readily be applied to empirical contexts, by describing it as made up of distinct components and connections between them. This version of the deliberative system theorises a division of labour whereby some actors in 'empowered space' (including governments but it could also cover international organizations, private networks or 'experts') have formal decision-making authority, while others in 'public space' who do not have formal decision-making authority (civil society, journalists, activists, and so on) are nevertheless able to exert influence over the decisions taken in empowered space. Central heuristic components of this deliberative system are 'transmission' of influence from public space to empowered space and of 'accountability' from empowered to public space.

While a focus on these components is influenced by Habermas and the model appears analogous to

the relationship between electorate and elected authority in a democratic state, Dryzek's aspiration is that the deliberative system need not apply only to democratic polities. Stevenson and Dryzek (2014, 27) emphasise that the scheme 'is a general one and so can be applied at any level, from the local to the global'. Nevertheless, to date it has been applied most prominently at the global level (besides Stevenson and Dryzek (2014), see also Dryzek and Tanasoca (2021)2 applying it to global justice), rather than to empirical cases of local or multi-level governance. I will expand in chapter 6 on the applicability of the deliberative system to non-democratic states.

Central to the deliberative systems literature is an interest in being able to evaluate the 'deliberative quality' of a system (Elstub, Ercan, and Mendonça 2016). Dryzek (2009) proposes we do so using three criteria: inclusiveness, authenticity, and consequentiality. *Inclusiveness* is central to the concept of democracy, but sometimes gets defined quite narrowly in terms of who is invited to 'participate' in governance, or even just who is 'consulted' by those governing. Given democracy means 'rule by the people', it requires that we ask not just who is included but *how* they are included. Are they able to express themselves openly, listen respectfully, justify their opinions, reflect upon and consider changing their preferences? This is the criterion of *authentic* deliberative engagement. To what extent can they expect the outcomes of their deliberations to inform public debate, influence decision-makers, and have an impact on policy? This is described as *consequentiality*. The analytical advantage of these three criteria is that they may be applied not just to face-to-face deliberation among individuals, but also to deliberative interactions and contestation among discourses across a polity.

3. Critiques of deliberative systems analysis

Like any major theme that has quickly become influential in political theory literature, the idea of deliberative systems analysis is not without its critics. Not all of them need to be discussed here. I will briefly mention a few critiques that warrant consideration before I advance this conceptual framework, some of which inform the modifications and nuances I propose in section 5 below.

One critique is that the systemic turn has seen deliberative democracy swing too far back in the other direction since its obsession with mini-publics, from micro to macro, such that it is now too theoretical, too abstracted from real people deliberating, and thus fails to offer actionable ideas about how to improve the democratic quality of polities and governance systems. Another related concern is that of 'concept stretching' (Elstub 2010), in other words the risk of applying this conceptual framework so widely that it becomes normatively blunt, for example by potentially allowing for a system to be evaluated as 'deliberative' even where no deliberation is actually occurring in it (Owen and Smith 2015).

The 'functionalist' critique summarises a concern that the concept of the deliberative system has been

reduced to some kind of fixed model, offering too linear and simplistic an understanding of how influence is transmitted, decisions are made or discourses diffused, and accountability provided. This concern has been levelled at the component-based descriptions of the deliberative system developed by Dryzek, but also Mansbridge et al (2012) whose notion of 'differentiated but interdependent parts' is frequently cited as central to deliberative systems analysis. Warren (2014, p41) warns that such model-building strategies 'are stunting further theoretical development'. He expresses concern that the systemic turn in deliberative democracy, while effectively tackling some problems like scale, resulted in 'organising some other problems out of the picture' like distribution of power and voice, and actionable decision mechanisms. Similarly, Heller and Rao (2015, 11) warn that '[u]nless deliberative systems have teeth and can be tied to specific binding decisions, they run the risk of being ephemeral and even masking power relations'. This is a critique that I consider in the section on the most-affected principle below, and in chapter 8.

An important critique for my thesis to address is that this is a conceptual framework invented and imposed from the global North, carrying colonial overtones, which is an extension of a critique levelled at deliberative democracy more broadly, e.g. that it focuses mainly on western liberal democracies; that is assumes western liberal democracy is the 'goal' and just needs to be improved or tweaked; that deliberative democracy entails a paternalistic assumption that it offers something new to humanity when in fact human cultures have been using deliberative governance and decision-making techniques for thousands of years (refs e.g. Curato 2024).

Pickering (2019) also identifies certain limitations in the development of deliberative systems theory to date, in relation to its potential application to the complexities of global environmental governance. Yet by contrast to some of the critics above, he does not propose to resolve this by dismissing the deliberative system altogether. On the contrary, he sets out to deepen and nuance the ways in which deliberative systems analysis can be operationalised in practice, by expanding the range of notions it borrows from systems thinking. Elaborating on the 'tantalizing' (Pickering 2019, 63) mention of the term 'deliberative ecologies' in Mansbridge et al's (2012, 6) manifesto chapter, Pickering develops a *deliberative ecologies approach*, showing how a more systemic approach to deliberative systems analysis can be applied global environmental governance.

4. Applications of deliberative systems thinking to climate governance

With the concept still being defined and explored theoretically and empirically, there is no guidebook of how exactly to apply deliberative systems analysis empirically. Only a few scholars have brought ideas from deliberative democracy's systemic turn to bear on the study of climate governance, they have tended to treat climate governance in broad terms, focusing on climate change mitigation, rather

than specifically considering adaptation.

Hayward (2008) is one of the earliest scholars to allude to the idea of applying deliberative systems thinking to efforts to democratize climate change. With an empirical focus on the Pacific, her analysis encompasses adaptation as well as mitigation. Although she does not use the term ‘deliberative system’, Hayward (2008) proposes 'decentering democratic debate about climate change’ and, inspired by Young (2006), looks for ‘linkages’ that may connect up local instances of deliberation about climate change across the Pacific region. Examples of such linkages that Hayward (2006) identifies include transgovernmental networks, civil society organisations and 'moral agents'.

Focusing at a national and sub-national level, Riedy & Kent (2015) conceptualise grassroots climate action groups as forming part of Australia’s ‘deliberative system’ of climate governance, and argue that their net impact on public deliberation about climate change has been to improve it. Boswell et al (2022) consider deliberative systems theory in their analysis of the extent to which six national-level climate assemblies were integrated into their respective political and policy contexts, and critique the idea of ‘coupling’ (Hendriks 2016). De Pryck et al (forthcoming) demonstrates how a deliberative systems conceptual framework can help analyse the extent to which the Global Assembly on climate change and the ecological crisis was able to exert influence within global climate governance.

The most substantial contribution to date that applies a deliberative systems conceptual framework to global climate governance is Stevenson & Dryzek’s (2014) book-length treatment of the idea. They propose conceptualising climate governance at the global level as a deliberative system and apply a discourse analysis methodology to studying the inclusiveness and deliberative quality of that system, by examining the extent to which climate change discourses in the public sphere transmit influence to empowered space. Stevenson and Dryzek focus on mitigation rather than adaptation [as discussed in chapter 3] and they conceptualise global governance largely in terms of the ‘top level’ of governance, including intergovernmental and civil society actors or institutions that have a broadly global reach.

The above examples show various scholars applying a deliberative systems lens to study aspects of climate governance at global, national and sub-national levels, with a focus on mitigation. However, this conceptual framework had not been applied specifically to studying the governance of climate change adaptation until Conway-Lamb (forthcoming, and chapter 6 in this thesis), in which I conceptualise the governance of adaptation in Vietnam as a deliberative system. In that paper, I set out why a deliberative approach to governance is particularly appropriate – indeed necessary, I argue – for fair and effective adaptation.

5. Conceptualizing adaptation governance as a deliberative system: novelty and nuance

The first part of this chapter draws out from the literature the broad reasons why this conceptual framework appears well suited to my case study and research questions, while also highlighting some of the more ambiguous, controversial, or under-explored aspects of this analytical approach.

My overarching research question asks how people most affected by climate change (including those in climate-vulnerable developing countries, many of which are non-democratic) can be more meaningfully included in climate adaptation governance, recognising that this governance system spans multiple levels from local to global. Based on the preceding discussion of various ways in which the deliberative systems conceptual framework is understood, and has been applied to aspects of climate governance, it appears an appropriate approach for evaluating the democratic quality of adaptation governance in Vietnam. For example, as discussed above, advocates of this conceptual framework consider it applicable in any governance context, not just liberal democracies, and at any governance level (see e.g. Stevenson and Dryzek (2014, 27), and the normative principle of 'meaningful inclusion' central to my research question can readily be parsed into the three established criteria for evaluating the deliberative capacity of a governance system: inclusiveness, authenticity, and consequentiality.

Yet there are a few novel features of the way in which I propose to apply this conceptual framework for the purposes of applying it to analysing the democratic quality of climate adaptation governance, and aspects of the analytical approach that I propose to nuance or interrogate:

1. I apply the deliberative systems conceptual framework empirically to a governance system that spans local to global levels, which has not been done before. (chapter 5)

2. I develop a new analytical framework for identifying and distinguishing between adaptation discourses that is different from a classic typology of environmental discourses. (chapter 7)

3. I interrogate the blurry conceptual line between public space and empowered space, especially in authoritarian contexts and beyond national borders. (chapter 6)

4. I distinguish between coercive, persuasive and deliberative influence – analogous to Mansbridge's distinction between punitive, narrative and deliberative accountability – and I recognise these dynamics as potentially multi-directional. (chapter 6)

5. I examine whether the 'all affected' principle is appropriately democratic in the context of an issue where some people – the majority – are demonstrably more severely affected, less to blame, and less empowered to engage in decision-making than others. (chapter 8)

5.1 Empirical analysis of a multi-level deliberative system

Whether we examine how adaptation is governed globally, or how it plays out within a single country or sub-national region, the network of actors involved is far too large to be able to map all the individual instances of deliberative and non-deliberative communication among them. Actors are not restricted to 'decision-makers' in the traditional sense, but include individuals, groups or organisations who may have influence over adaptation decisions, for example by indirectly informing government views on policy or financing, or by directly implementing adaptation actions. The system's participants include not just formal adaptation 'decision-makers' such as government officials, scientists, and professionals with adaptation in their job title, but also farmers, business owners, and civil society groups. Deliberative engagement among them can take many forms including informal and indirect transmission of influence and non-traditional demands for recognition and accountability.

Perhaps partly as a result of this overwhelmingly vast cohort of potential decision-influencers, very few scholars if any have applied deliberative systems analysis empirically to a multi-level governance system, and none that I am aware of have applied it to a system or network of governance that spans levels from local to international. I am able to do so by focusing on governance of a particular issue (adaptation) in a particular geographic area (Vietnam), rather than defining the deliberative system in terms of jurisdiction or governance level.

In this thesis, I conceptualise the many actors who make and influence decisions about adaptation in Vietnam – from government agencies, and international organisations, to non-government organisations, civil society groups, business owners, and farmers – as forming a multi-level deliberative system. The system of adaptation governance in Vietnam is not a formal set of institutions or regime; there is no single legislature or formalised democratic processes. Within this system, I observe multiple actors interacting with each other across levels, and indeed many institutions such as the Vietnamese government and international development agencies operating at multiple governance levels. Indeed, the actors (formative agents?) who form this deliberative system do not necessarily even reside in Vietnam. A farming household experiencing the impacts of climate-related drought in Vietnam's Mekong Delta is part of this deliberative system, but so might be an official working for the Green Climate Fund based in South Korea. In the next chapter I will go into further details about my case study selection.

5.2 Novel approach to identifying adaptation discourses

As discussed above, Dryzek (2000, 2010) addresses the challenge of scale by inviting us to think about inclusiveness and legitimacy not in terms of individuals but of discourses. He develops a conception of discursive democracy that emphasises a contestation of discourses in the public sphere

and with empowered space. Discourses, at least in a policy context, typically contain a 'storyline' about what the problem is and what needs to be done about it (Hajer 1995). Discourse analysis allows us to explore how actors try to influence the definition of a problem, set the agenda and form coalitions to exert or perpetuate relations of power (Hajer and Versteeg 2005).

Stevenson and Dryzek (2014) demonstrate how discourse analysis can be applied to study climate (primarily mitigation) governance at the global level conceived of as a deliberative system. Besides the fact that analysing discourses is more parsimonious and manageable than analysing communicative interaction between individual actors, they argue that examining the interplay of discourses can offer distinctive insights, because discourses are more enduring than individual actors (Stevenson and Dryzek 2014, 31). Indeed discourses may play a critical coordinating role in a discursive 'soundscape' [check ref: Dryzek and Sass) where there may be no obvious or legitimate entity with the authority to do so, as in transnational 'landscapes' (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008).

Those who have used discourse analysis to study environmental governance, including climate mitigation governance, have tended to be strongly influenced by foundational scholars of environmental discourse analysis such as Hajer and Dryzek. For example, Curato et al (2023) and Sanchez (2021) draw on the typology of environmental discourses that Dryzek (1997) sets out. However, as I discuss further in chapter 7, there exists in the literature no standard typology of adaptation discourses or commonly shared methodology for identifying them. Furthermore, I argue that it is important for policy-makers, practitioners and researchers to listen to how people and governments in climate-vulnerable developing countries frame the problems associated with climate impacts and adaptation *themselves*, rather than imposing preconceived discourses on them which define the scope of the problem and what counts as a valid or possible solution or approach to tackling it. Recognising what understandings of adaptation exist is a fundamental first step towards understanding whose visions of adaptation get prioritised and implemented, and whose do not.

Therefore, it was important for me to take a grounded approach to identifying adaptation discourses based on my interviews with stakeholders. I will describe this iterative process in more detail in the next chapter and in chapter 7, but to summarise, I devise a three-part analytical framework for identifying and distinguishing between discourses of climate change adaptation based on the way they frame the problem, the solution, and the rationale for adaptation. This is inspired by Benford and Snow's (2000) distinction between diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing tasks for collective action. Examining how these three questions are answered implicitly or explicitly by different adaptation discourses, looking at whose interests and values get privileged or excluded, provides insights about the inclusiveness or otherwise of the deliberative system.

5.3 Interrogating concepts of public and empowered space

As discussed above, key components in Dryzek's conceptualisation of the deliberative system include *public space* and *empowered space*, between which, in a well-functioning deliberative system, *transmission* of influence should flow from public to empowered space, and *accountability* should flow the other way. These components are heuristics; as such their usefulness lies in the extent to which they act as a 'short-hand' to help make the world easier to understand and explain. For example, in the context of my research in Vietnam, identifying these components should allow me to ask to what extent those affected by climate change in Vietnam and their advocates are able to influence, and hold to account, government agencies and other authoritative institutions on matters of adaptation.

However, any heuristics necessarily narrow our analytical lens, and holding too tightly to these theoretical notions of public space and empowered space may risk causing us to see the world only in those terms, and to overlook elements of the governance landscape that do not appear to fit the model, especially in an authoritarian context like Vietnam, where the line between public and empowered space is often difficult to discern or controversial to define. 'Simplified models can give decision-makers a false sense of confidence that the problems are easy to identify and the solutions straightforward to implement' (Radcliffe et al. 2010, 104).

Kauffman (2017) proposes expanding our concept of 'governors' to include those who are sometimes relegated to the status of 'governed', rather than maintaining a separation between these categories, let alone a power hierarchy. Looking at Vietnam's adaptation governance landscape through a deliberative systems lens, we might describe empowered space as crowded, and public space as highly constrained, though as I discuss in chapter 6, things are inevitably more complicated than this. If empowered space is taken to include all actors with authority, we see international development organisations, both bilateral and multilateral, jostling for influence alongside the Vietnamese government, not to mention private corporations. Civil society is an amorphous term even within deliberative democracy literature (Hendriks 2006). In Vietnam, the operations of non-government organisations are tightly controlled by the party-state, and entities such as party-sponsored mass organisations commonly get included within the category of 'civil society' (ADB 2011).

Public space can be difficult to define, with some actors who might in other contexts define themselves as 'civil society' not choosing to do so in an authoritarian regime, while other actors claim to speak or act on behalf of the public but are funded by a government. International development organisations providing climate finance and expertise for adaptation sometimes appear to occupy a position that straddles public and empowered space. For example, both UN agencies and NGOs are empowered to spend international climate finance and foreign aid from governments, and the UN formally represents the collective will of its member states. However, such agencies or their

individual staff members may at times also offer independent expertise, aim to speak with a voice that is independent of governments, or even speak on behalf of people affected by climate change. Adding complexity to any attempt to analyse the system in terms of two-way interactions between public and empowered space, both public and empowered actors can be found operating at multiple governance levels in Vietnam.

In short, the concepts of public space and empowered space are useful heuristics, as long as we recognise them as such, and allow space within our empirical analysis to recognise and interrogate the implications of their complex, crowded, blurry nature. I described in section 6.2 above my decision to analyse the discursive landscape from the ground-up. One of the implications of this was that, rather than starting by attempting to identify actors that occupy public space and empowered space, and then looking for corresponding 'public discourses' and 'empowered discourses', I coded each interview transcript for distinct discourses of climate change adaptation without necessarily making assumptions in advance about whether the individual would be speaking on behalf of public, empowered, or private space. This aligns with the understanding from discursive psychology that individuals inhabit and align with multiple discourses, some of which may be in competition.

[I'm also tempted to propose an alternative term to '*empowered space*' which seems problematic for various reasons: it implies that actors and discourses in public space are not empowered, assumes or reinforces a hierarchy of power which may not be present empirically (Tamura (2014) also suggests the term 'empowered' should be applicable to other spaces); 'empowerment' is a term that in the field of international development is applied not to those with formal authority but as a normative aspiration/goal for those who lack power. I'm considering proposing '*authoritative space*' instead – as anyone can have 'power' but 'authority' is more specific, formal, recognised.]

5.4 Nuancing the dynamics of influence and accountability

I am not the first to highlight that the dynamics of influence and accountability are complex. Yet some accounts of the deliberative system imply a somewhat linear and one-way flow of influence being transmitted, at least ideally, from public to empowered space, and accountability flowing back the other way from empowered to public space. Deliberative systems theory has been critiqued for failing to adequately consider or tackle imbalances of power.

Similar to the principle discussed above of recognising that public and empowered space may be fuzzy or overlapping, I suggest it is similarly important not to assume that dynamics of influence and accountability are simple, linear, or one-way. As mentioned above, Kauffman (2017) seeks to avoid locating climate-vulnerable communities at the bottom of a hierarchy, instead recognising the ways in which they may have influence within a multi-level global governance system. Based on empirical analysis in …, he describes influence flowing between actors as 'multi-directional', and concludes

that communities at the local level may be considered ‘grassroots global governors’.

While systemic theorists have generally recognised the challenging dynamics of power imbalances within a system, these have at times been portrayed deviations from a normative ideal in which power imbalances do not exist. Curato et al (2019: 69) propose instead ‘recognising these imbalances not as pathologies but as constitutive of the deliberative system’ and exposing such inherent ambiguities and tensions.

I propose undertaking a ground-up analysis of how ideas of influence and accountability are understood and operationalised by actors involved in adaptation in Vietnam, rather than making assumptions about the directions in which these dynamics flow. Building on Mansbridge’s (2009) distinction between ‘punitive’, ‘narrative’ and ‘deliberative’ accountability, I distinguish between three different forms of influence that may flow between actors or discourses: *coercive*, *persuasive*, or *deliberative*. I expand on these distinctions in my empirical chapter 6 based on stakeholder interviews.

5.5 Attributing deliberative agency to those most affected

The word ‘democracy’ means literally ‘rule by the people’, and the question of who the people are (how to define the ‘demos’ or ‘demoi’) is the so-called boundary problem of democracy. The demos has often been delineated based on geography or jurisdiction, but of course climate-related issues do not restrict themselves within jurisdictional boundaries. Young (2006) observes that ‘[a]ll deliberative theorists specify that a process of political communication is not properly democratic unless it includes all persons likely to be affected by a decision’ but suggests ‘that the meaning and conditions of this requirement are richer than most theorists acknowledge.’

To date, any dissatisfaction with the all-affected principle has been expressed primarily in terms of the practical challenge of implementing it, given this principle for defining the demos has the potential to be impossibly expansive, as well as the conceptual challenge of how to evaluate and compare affectedness, given that it is a socially constructed idea (Ercan et al. 2016). Yet an additional concern, less thoroughly explored to date, is that an ‘*all*-affected’ principle may not adequately uphold democratic norms including the principle of procedural justice. If we want to bring global adaptation governance ‘increasingly under the control of the global demos or demoi’ (Dryzek and Stevenson 2013, 1) then for example surely we should be able to theorize a system in which a subsistence farmer in a remote low-lying coastal area has more say in how international adaptation finance should be managed than a wealthy person whose taxes partially contribute to that finance?

Some conceptions of inclusive or participatory adaptation processes, if they refer to ‘vulnerable’ or ‘marginalised’ people as distinct from decision-makers, are at risk of undermining the agency of those who are most affected by climate change. I argue not only that it is important to attribute deliberative

agency to those who are most affected by climate change, even if they are not engaged in public deliberation or activism and do not have access to formal channels of political influence; furthermore, we should consider whether and how to assign them greater influence within decision-making processes and the wider deliberative system compared to those who are less affected.

Eckersley (2012, 27) acknowledges that 'there are degrees of affectedness' and suggests that, if parties to a dialogue need to be restricted, 'those most affected should certainly not be excluded'. Afsahi (2022, 44) goes further, arguing that 'taking vulnerability seriously should lead us to reconsider core democratic precepts including the all-affected principle' which she proposes replacing with a 'most-deeply affected' principle. Brem-Wilson (2018) draws attention to the way that the Civil Society Mechanism for the Committee on World Food Security characterizes 'affectedness', not only in negative and passive terms (i.e. vulnerability to a problem) but also in active terms (highlighting affected people's role in resolving the problem).

I explore these considerations further in chapter 8, where I examine empirically how stakeholders involved in adaptation in Vietnam construct ideas of affectedness, vulnerability, and climate justice, including how scalar lenses may serve to include or exclude.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered a way to interpret and apply a deliberative systems approach to the normative project of pursuing a more democratic form of adaptation governance that can more meaningfully include those most affected by climate change impacts. I highlight five features of the deliberative systems conceptual framework that I deem particularly useful for analysing this empirical context, and which I propose applying in a new or modified way.

My interpretation of deliberative systems analysis is informed by my empirical research on the experiences and perspectives of people directly affected by climate impacts and involved in adaptation in a highly climate-vulnerable developing country. This research constitutes a contribution to deliberative systems theory, critical adaptation scholarship, climate governance, and climate justice literature. I argue that the systemic turn in deliberative democracy thinking can contribute to the advancement of a more democratic and transformative approach to climate change adaptation governance. And by the same token, I believe that the study of climate adaptation governance can make a useful contribution to the study of deliberative systems.

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