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# Deliberative and Participatory Democracy in the UK

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In recent years the study of deliberative democracy has taken an empirical turn, as political scientists have sought to test the normative claims of its theoreticians by examining deliberation in real-world settings (see, *inter alia*, Luskin et al. 2002; Baiocchi 2003; Steiner et al. 2004; Parkinson 2006; Fishkin 2009; Elstub 2010; Davidson and Stark 2011; Fournier et al. 2011). Furthermore, the focus of deliberative scholars has increasingly shifted from studying discrete discursive mechanisms in isolation to the development of 'deliberative systems' (see Chambers 2003; Dryzek 2010; Mansbridge et al. 2011). This has generated new challenges: in theory it has been suggested that deliberative democracy is universal, that the transposition of deliberation from one form of polity to another is unproblematic (Habermas 1990; Rawls 1993; Sen 2009) and that institutions and processes designed to enhance deliberation and participation can follow a standardised format in all countries (Fishkin 1995). However, the raft of empirical evidence now available indicates that in practice there may be considerable context-specific barriers to the widespread use of deliberative techniques and thereby the development of a deliberative system, with institutions being employed differently depending on the political system (Steiner et al. 2004; Fishkin et al. 2006; Smith 2009; Sass & Dryzek 2011; Fournier et al. 2011). Indeed, it follows from the fact that deliberation is a social activity that there may well be tremendous

variation in 'national repertoires' (Tilly 1978), and several theorists have suggested that deliberative democracy is culturally biased (Young 1996; Gambetta 1998; Min 2009).

Saward (2003) is correct, therefore, to call for a more 'reflexive' and context-specific approach to the study of democracy, and this is a call that deliberative and participatory democrats should heed. This special section contributes to this process of contextualisation by studying developments in, obstacles to, and prospects for, a more deliberative and participatory democracy in the UK. The UK has a distinct political culture and political system, which generates both opportunities and barriers to the institutionalisation of deliberative and participatory processes. Although these opportunities and barriers are not always exclusive to the UK, they nonetheless manifest themselves in distinct ways and must therefore be considered in a specific UK context. For example, the combination of a devolved political system within a Westminster model is distinct to the UK. It is therefore vital that we take note of these contextual factors, which include a devolved and multi-level political system, distinct modes of path dependency and the particular cultural characteristics of the citizenry. Consequently, in the papers that make up this special section different levels of governance are considered (Elstub), from the national (Cinalli & O'Flynn; Moss and Coleman) to the regional (Davidson and Elstub) and the local (Davidson and Elstub). In addition, different participatory and deliberative mechanisms situated at varying locations are explored, including online experiments (Moss and Coleman) newspapers and social networks (Cinalli & O'Flynn), mini-publics, and participatory budgeting (Davidson and Elstub). Moreover, these mechanisms are compared (Elstub) in order to determine key similarities and differences, and to advance our understanding of the practical operation of deliberative experiments in the UK at the macro level. The special section therefore forms

the basis for comparative research between the UK and other polities with respect to institutionalising deliberative and participatory democracy.

The need to improve our understanding of the contextual factors which impact upon the institutionalisation of citizen participation and deliberation is particularly pressing given the erosion of citizen support in advanced industrial democracies. Focussing on the UK specifically, citizens are becoming increasingly disillusioned, dissatisfied and disenfranchised by the dominant political institutions and decision-making processes. There has been a marked decline in voter turnout, party membership and trust in politicians and political institutions (Dalton 2004; 2006; Pattie et al 2004; Power Inquiry 2006; Stoker 2006; Bogdanor 2009; Hay 2010).

This decline in citizen support has precipitated calls for democratic reform and an injection of citizen participation into political decision-making, while recent shifts in academic trends have stimulated a preference for participation of a deliberative flavour. In the last two decades in particular deliberative democracy has installed itself as the academy's favoured antidote to the ailments of liberal democracy and has come to dominate not just democratic theory but political theory more generally (Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Dryzek 2010). Advocates of deliberative democracy argue that the institutionalisation of a greater degree of citizen participation and deliberation in the processes of political decision-making will improve the legitimacy of decisions by fostering mutual understanding, improving the quality of decisions, and by developing better citizens (see, *inter alia*, Cohen 1989; Habermas 1996; Gutmann and Thompson 1996).

Given these claims it should come as little surprise that scholars concerned with the health of a UK democratic system characterised by Wright (1994, 6) as 'notoriously weak in terms of such democratic criteria as representation, accountability, participation and openness' have been drawn towards participatory and deliberative ideas. Bogdanor (2009) believes that tackling the deficits in legitimacy and accountability in the UK will require us 'to go beyond the traditional agenda of constitutional reform, to refashion our democracy so that it meets the needs of a new age, an age in which participation has to reach beyond party' (Bogdanor 2009, 194). What is needed is a transfer of power from politicians to the people via electoral reform, an increased use of referendums and the adoption of a citizen's assembly model similar to that employed in British Columbia, where a sample of citizens participated in deliberations over electoral reform (Bogdanor 2009: 289; see Fournier et al. 2011 for more details on this process). Gerry Stoker, on the other hand, bemoans the fact that, despite a resilient public interest in politics, the UK picture is one of 'many citizens alienated from formal politics' (Stoker 2006, 35). This is problematic, as citizen engagement is vital to the responsiveness and quality of elite decisions. Politics in the UK therefore needs to 'become less a vocation for the few, and more an opportunity for the many' (Stoker 2006, 149-150) and, although Stoker is wary of overly restrictive 'rule-bound' forms of civic engagement, and of overestimating peoples' enthusiasm for politics, he nonetheless recognises that 'opportunities for deliberation should be part of the toolkit of any democratic governance' (Stoker 2006, 156).

It is also the case that calls for more deliberation and participation in the UK are increasingly emanating, not only from the halls of academia, but from practitioners, stakeholder organisations and state managers alike. The UK Power Inquiry announced that 'participatory

approaches to democratic decision-making are now coming of age' (Power Inquiry 2006, 228), while its chair, Helena Kennedy, recently described the question of whether to move towards a more deliberative model of democracy as 'a no-brainer' (Kennedy 2010). Furthermore, as explored below, successive UK governments have employed the rhetoric of participatory and deliberative democracy. For example, in 2007 Gordon Brown spoke of the need to 'expand opportunities for deliberation' (Brown 2007).

This introductory article contributes to the aforementioned process of contextualisation, and lays the foundations for comparison between the UK and other relevant political systems. Indeed, brief comparisons are made here with countries from Europe and North and Latin America, which could be built upon by future research. It also provides some background to the developments discussed in the proceeding papers. The first section reviews the New Labour and coalition governments' attempts at constitutional reform and assesses the implications these endeavours have had, and continue to have, for the institutionalisation of a more participatory and deliberative model of democracy in the UK. The story told in this respect is one of largely unrealised rhetoric due to the lack of a coherent and comprehensive elite strategy and the adherence of successive UK governments to a constraining Westminster model of parliamentary government. The 'largely' qualifier is included, however, in recognition of the space created by Labour's constitutional reforms in particular for participation at the peripheries of governance (see Judge 2006; Flinders 2009b; Flinders and Curry 2008). The second section of the article focuses on these spaces. It comments briefly on the question of whether the participatory aspirations of the architects of Scottish devolution have been realised before concentrating on the use of specific deliberative mechanisms, such as citizens' juries, deliberative polls and

participatory budgeting. Here we find evidence of democratic innovation but are forced to temper our optimism, as progress is often hampered by the lack of a facilitating institutional landscape. Finally, an overview is provided of the three articles that make up the section.

### **Constitutional Reform and Democratic Renewal**

New Labour's attempts at revitalising the UK's democratic system were bound-up with its broader efforts at constitutional reform. However, it is important to note that for the majority of its existence the Labour Party's approach to constitutional issues was conservative and antipathetic (see Dorey 2008). Indeed, as Jack Straw (2010, 358) explains, it was not until the 1980s that the experience of being in opposition to Mrs Thatcher's Conservative government 'served as the unlikely catalyst for a growing interest in constitutional questions' (Straw 2010, 358). The result of the subsequent policy review was a 1992 election manifesto that committed the party to purportedly 'radical constitutional reforms' – reforms that would 'modernise' and 'give renewed vitality' to the UK democratic system: devolution in Scotland and Wales; a Freedom of Information Act that would 'open up government to the people'; a Charter of Rights; and the creation of an elected Greater London Assembly (Labour Party 1992).

Labour lost the 1992 election but under Tony Blair's leadership the party's commitment to constitutional reform was retained and its list of pledges extended (see Straw 2010, 358-359). Moreover, Blair, influenced by his academic 'guru' Anthony Giddens, signed the party up to the philosophy of the 'third way' and thereby to cultivating a 'new politics' that is

consensual, participatory and departs from the confrontational politics of 'old' (see Giddens 1998). In practice, however, 'New' Labour's commitment to 'third way' reforms was distinctly partial. As Flinders and Curry (2008) explain, rather than pursuing a completely new constitutional settlement, New Labour was culpable of 'bi-constitutionality': 'third way' democratic reforms designed to stimulate 'new politics' – the lynchpin of which was the introduction of proportional electoral systems – were pursued at the devolved and local levels; however, the very same reforms were resisted at the national level, where an adherence to the Westminster model remained (Flinders 2009a, 249; see also Judge 2006; Dorey 2008). Judge (2006) claims that New Labour's democratic vision was therefore afflicted by 'institutional macular degeneration', having 'a blind spot at the centre (Westminster) yet with clear peripheral vision (both in terms of decentralisation and participation beyond Westminster)'.

As Hazell (2007, 18-19) observes, 'it is a commonplace amongst critics to say that the first wave of [New Labour's] reforms were introduced in a piecemeal, disconnected fashion, with no overarching explanation or justification'. Norton (2007, 271) refuses to break with this tradition: 'The consequence of the Blair premiership has been a paradox: major constitutional change – on a scale not seen for nearly three centuries – carried out without any clear idea of where this was actually leading'. However, any hope that Gordon Brown's premiership would inject some coherence or radicalism into proceedings was soon dashed by the Government's 2007 Green Paper, *The Governance of Britain*, which Hay and Stoker (2007, 8) liken in its futility to 'moving deckchairs around on the Titanic'. Recapitulating the 'new politics' rhetoric inherited from Blair and Giddens, the Green Paper promised to 'reinvigorate' democracy by 'entrust[ing] Parliament and the people with more power' (Cm.



7170, 5). The measures it advocated would purportedly challenge executive dominance, make government more accountable and improve direct democracy. However, as Flinders (2009b, 409; 2010, 67) observes, in spite of the lofty rhetoric the actual proposals contained in the document are often nebulous and there are several glaring omissions: the West Lothian question was left unasked; the role of a reformed House of Lords was left unclear; Labour's reluctance to countenance electoral reform at Westminster remained steadfast; and there was scant engagement with recent innovations in participatory and deliberative democracy. Moreover, in addition to the questionable manner in which the debate was framed, several prominent members of the Political Studies Association criticised a perceived paucity of evidence connecting the proposed reforms to the desired effects and found the Green Paper's diagnosis of the issue of political disaffection to lack analytical depth (Russell and Stoker 2007, 2).

Even the 2009 parliamentary expenses scandal failed to provide the impetus for a more thoroughgoing constitutional review. As Flinders (2010, 67-68) reports, this crisis – regarded as a 'window of opportunity' by some advocates of reform, it coinciding with poll results suggesting that Labour would soon be warming the opposition benches – prompted Brown to introduce limited measures designed specifically to combat the misuse of MPs' expenses and allowances, such as the creation of a statutory Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority; however the government again shied away from the far-reaching reforms required to fundamentally alter the locus of power in the UK democratic system. This is particularly disappointing given that connecting with the state's legitimation imperative is often presented as a potential path to democratisation. Dryzek (1992, 33) suggests that it is when faced with deficits in institutional legitimacy that state actors are most likely to offer

‘concessions to a more participatory model of democracy’. Indeed, during periods of extreme vulnerability it may even be possible to overcome ‘the conundrum’ that ‘executive hegemony ... needs to be addressed by executive action itself’ (Judge 2006, 390-391). However, as Flinders (2010, 67) notes, ‘If the MP expenses scandal opened a “window of opportunity”, then it was an opportunity wasted’. Bogdanor (2009, 297) concludes that ‘The real achievement of constitutional reform is to have redistributed power, but it has redistributed power between elites, not between elites and the people’.

Shifting the focus to the Conservatives, given the party’s longstanding ideological opposition to radical reform participatory democrats would be forgiven for viewing their rise to power in 2010 as an unmitigated disaster, even though their failure to kill-off Labour has forced them into coalition with the Liberal Democrats. However, the election of David Cameron as leader had brought with it a shift in rhetoric on this front as he embarked upon a process of modernisation and brand detoxification. As part of this a ‘Democracy Taskforce’ headed-up by Ken Clarke was set up in 2006. However, as Flinders (2009a, 252-254) illustrates, the narrow range of options considered by the Taskforce reveals how its considerations were straitjacketed by established party policy and, like New Labour, by a continuing commitment to the Westminster model. Indeed, the ‘constraining influence’ of the latter ‘removed the Taskforce’s capacity to engage in those more innovative and dynamic (centrifugal) political processes that are being developed in other countries under the rubric of “deliberative democracy” or “participatory governance”’ (Flinders, 2009a, 254).

Nonetheless, greater levels of direct democracy and power-sharing may be a potential by-product of the Conservative Party’s efforts to inculcate ‘The Big Society’, which is primarily

an attempt to resolve, at least in rhetoric, the seeming contradiction between forcing through swinging spending cuts and protecting key elements of welfare provision (Smith 2010, 828). The former is seen to rule out state solutions, whereas the latter is perceived as unattainable through purely market-based solutions. The answer, according to Cameron, is to be found between these spheres – in society. Welfare provision is to be provided by a mix of social enterprises, voluntary associations and private companies (Smith 2010, 829). Cameron's speeches on the Big Society are therefore reminiscent of Disraeli's appeals to voluntarism, obligation and duty. And surviving within this broader 'Big Society' discourse is the narrative of 'new politics' inherited from Blair, and an attendant emphasis upon power sharing. As Cameron (2010) stated in the run-up to the 2010 general election, 'We're going to give communities the chance to take control ... Have no doubt: if we win on May 6<sup>th</sup>, the people will have the opportunity to take power on May 7<sup>th</sup>.

Whether this rhetoric will ever be matched in practice remains to be seen. There are, however, grounds for pessimism: as noted, it would appear that the Westminster model will continue to shape the contours of the Conservatives' attempts at democratic reform; the 'Big Society' idea remains notoriously vague; the party's commitment to other policy initiatives associated with brand detoxification, such as the environment, has been spasmodic; and the failed AV referendum cast further doubt on the capacity of the Liberal Democrats to force through progressive reforms.

In sum then, the previous Labour and current coalition governments have proclaimed a wish to reform and rejuvenate democracy in the UK. In particular both have expressed a commitment to enhancing deliberation and participation. However, the radical

constitutional changes required to enable this have yet to be delivered. The Westminster model remains dominant and opportunities for meaningful citizen participation remain limited. What we have witnessed, therefore, has been the triumph of rhetoric over substance, with political elites – perhaps unsurprisingly – unwilling to relinquish more power to the people. Moreover, it is important to stress that a failure to bring about far-reaching constitutional reforms impacts negatively, not only on the institutionalisation of *public* deliberation within existing representative institutions, but also on the quality of *elite* deliberations. Steiner et al.'s (2004) comparative study of elite deliberation in Switzerland, the US, Germany and the UK found that a better quality of deliberation was evidenced in consensus democracies, second chambers, non-public arenas and, to a lesser extent, presidential systems. The UK system of competitive parliamentary democracy is therefore far from optimal in this sense and Steiner et al. (2004) found debates in the House of Commons in particular to be characterised by low levels of justification, respect and constructive politics. For the authors this 'low level of discourse' is indicative of 'a decision-making process in which deliberation plays a minor role at best' (Steiner et al. 2004, 112).

### **Participation at the Periphery?**

As noted, however, despite the questionable coherence and ambition of New Labour's constitutional reforms, they nonetheless provided space for democratic innovation at the peripheries of governance. The workings of the devolved parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are therefore interesting from a deliberative and participatory perspective,

as these systems fall within, and indeed resulted from, New Labour's 'rose-tinted peripheral vision' (Judge 2006, 398).

Looking to Scotland, where the process of devolution has progressed furthest, there was a clear emphasis on not only devolving power, but on 'doing politics differently' (Mitchell 2010, 99). The Consultative Steering Group (CSG), stressed that their aim was 'to provide an open, accessible and, *above all*, participative Parliament' (Consultative Steering Group 1999, 3, emphasis added). And there was a clear deliberative thread running through the recommendations contained in the reports that provided the framework for devolution: as per the new politics narrative there was a desire to move towards a more consensual style of politics; there was an emphasis placed upon improving the connection between Parliament and civic society, which led to the formation of the Scottish Civic Forum (see Davidson *et al.* 2011); and there were various explicitly deliberative mechanisms recommended by the CSG, such as consensus conferences, deliberative opinion polls, and citizens' juries.

The question of whether reality has matched this rhetoric, and whether a new kind of politics has taken root in Scotland that is different from that exhibited at Westminster, has yet to be answered conclusively. James Mitchell (2010, 99) is sceptical: 'there has been a tendency in much commentary to exaggerate small differences, a narcissism of small differences, that have informed many comparisons with Westminster which fail to acknowledge basic similarities'. The Parliament's own Procedures Committee conducted an inquiry in 2003 to determine the health of the Parliament in relation to the founding principles of the CSG: participation, accessibility, equality and diversity and power sharing.

The committee concluded that 'it is in relation to power sharing that most progress remains to be made (SP Paper 818 2003, para. 1003). Focusing in on deliberative participation more specifically, Davidson and Stark (2011) produced evidence which demonstrates that the committees of the Scottish Parliament have been relatively successful in institutionalising a deliberative system comprised of a range of discursive events of varying complexity and format. However, the authors are forced to temper their optimism on this front, as their data also shows this innovative deliberative system to be in decline on a number of fronts.

Large-scale public consultation programmes like the National Conversation in Scotland, on constitutional change, can also be considered from a deliberative perspective. The National Conversation spanned the first three years of the SNP's first term in office. It consisted of a series of local public events, which aimed to be 'open, inclusive process intended to encourage debate, ideas and opinions', along with web access to ministerial blogs, audio and video recordings of events, and access to relevant documents (Scottish Government 2009, para. 1.11). Harvey and Lynch (2012, 4), however, are less convinced by the process: 'the SNP chose a relatively conservative and orthodox consultation process, much of which was delivered in-house within the Scottish government and was not really driven by concerns for deliberative democracy or popular participation'.

There is therefore evidence that Bogdanor's thesis – that devolution has simply transferred power from elite to elite, and has failed to open up decision-making processes to citizens – may ultimately prove correct. However, deliberative and participatory mechanisms have also found employment in the UK at the local level and by government agencies. Indeed three participatory innovations stand out due to their usage and the support they have

garnered from those interested in promoting citizen deliberation: citizens' juries and deliberative polls – which are types of mini-public – and participatory budgeting. It is to these that we now turn.

A rejuvenation of the Athenian method of representation by lot is often the aim of those advocating mini-publics (Fishkin et al. 2006). A sample of the population is selected to achieve a 'deliberative microcosm' of the population. This sample then discusses a key issue, as well as cross-examining experts. Mini-publics are 'designed to be groups small enough to be genuinely deliberative and representative enough to be genuinely democratic' (Goodin 2008, 11) and include citizens' juries, deliberative opinion polls, planning cells, consensus conferences and citizen assemblies. They are considered by their proponents to make participants better deliberators, in that they are more willing to change preferences and more inclined to offer 'universal' reasons that all can at least potentially accept (Elstub 2006). However, mini-publics rarely result in binding decisions, which is understandable: a binding decision made by a small sample of nonpartisan participants who are not necessarily affected by a decision will struggle to garner legitimacy. Moreover, there is no mechanism to hold mini-publics accountable for their decisions, due to the absence of principal-agent bonds (Parkinson 2006; Goodin 2008; Smith 2009).

The mini-publics most commonly employed in the UK are citizens' juries and deliberative polls. In citizens' juries the number assembled is 12-24, while in deliberative polls the figure is a more representative 130-500. A common concern with citizens' juries is therefore the perceived lack of a genuinely representative sample. A different jury, with a different sample of citizens, could make different recommendations. With deliberative polls, on the

other hand, the challenge is to ensure that small minorities are not excluded from the sample. This can be avoided through appropriate scientific sampling methods, but only if the relevant groups to be included are identified in advance. In addition, effectively mediating the deliberations in deliberative polls is more problematic due to the larger group sizes (Elstub 2006). In both processes ensuring equality of participation in small group sessions remains challenging (Smith 2009: 85-86).

There has been relatively widespread use of citizens' juries in the UK, with hundreds being set up to deliberate on a vast array of issues (Delap 2001). Gordon Brown lauded them as a means of reinvigorating local democracy. For him, citizens' juries 'are not a substitute for representative democracy but an enrichment of it' (Brown 2007). Local government, government agencies and health authorities have been particularly active in utilising this form of deliberative mechanism, with many being run by the King's Fund, the Institute for Public Policy Research and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (Smith 2009, 108). As a consequence numerous health issues have been covered by citizens' juries in the UK, such as services for the dying, health care rationing and the funding and future of the NHS more generally; however, they have also been employed in relation to issues as diverse as drugs and community safety, waste management, genetic testing, graffiti and vandalism, employment, GM food and crops, and nanotechnology (Elstub 2011).

Citizens' juries have, however, been criticised for excluding partisan citizens with vested interests and technical expertise (Price 2006). Experts and affected interest groups are incorporated into the process as advisors and witnesses but, crucially, they are selected by the organisers, which can compromise the inclusivity of the process, and similar practices



occur in deliberative polls. As Smith and Wales (2000, 58) note, ‘there is a danger that even before citizens are directly involved, issues, information and witnesses might be mobilised out of the process’. Jury organisers also set the agenda and questions for discussion (Smith and Wales 2000; Price 2000) and the commissioning authority pick and choose which recommendations from the jury to accept (McLaverty 2009; Smith 2009). For some critics this means they are too easily co-opted (Price 2000; Furedi 2005, 118-19), ‘for if the jury’s recommendations are not already supported by the government, they are likely to be ignored’ (McLaverty 2009, 383; see also Smith 2009). Delap (2001) reports that, in the UK, because citizens’ juries ‘have been designed to feed into the actual decisions being taken by public bodies’, they are not ‘led by citizens, in a truly bottom-up sense’. Parkinson’s (2006) empirical evidence from two citizens’ juries – one held in Belfast looking at the planning and delivery of health services, the other in Leicester focussed on the organisation and configuration of hospital services within the city – led him to conclude that citizens’ juries in the UK have been reduced to the standing of a focus groups due to the new public management context within which they were introduced (Parkinson 2009, 10). Deliberative institutions in the UK were ‘justified and implemented not in terms of empowered citizens but in terms of the “wise fool”, untainted by knowledge of the specific public issue under discussion and thus undefiled by an “interest”’ (Parkinson 2009, 10). For Price (2000, 275) it is illogical for a public authority to dismiss the decisions of citizens’ juries if they accept their reasoning: ‘if juries made decisions which were based on reasons, then decisions would be the concluding terms of practical syllogisms and it would be illogical to accept the premises, but not the conclusions.’ Some of these problems can be partly alleviated through the use of pre-jury focus groups to contribute to the jury organisation and by placing an onus on the

commissioning authority to justify why they have departed from a jury's recommendations (Stewart et al 1994; Smith and Wales 2000, 58).

Deliberative Poll's (DP), on the other hand, are 'designed to show what the public *would* think about the issues, if it thought more earnestly and had more information about them' (Luskin et al. 2002, 258). The process involves selecting a probability sample of voters and taking an initial, pre-deliberation survey of their opinions on an issue. Participants are then invited to attend a deliberative event. If they agree, they are provided with balanced briefing materials about the topic in question before gathering together to deliberate first in small groups and second in larger plenary sessions where there is also the opportunity to question a range of experts. Their views are then surveyed again so that preference transformation can be measured, if indeed this has occurred. Evidence suggests that not only do individual preferences change as a consequence of the deliberative process, but aggregated preferences also, and to an extent greater than by chance (see Fishkin and Farrar 2005). Evidence has also been produced which demonstrates that preferences become better informed and more considered as a consequence of deliberative participation (Luskin et al. 2002), although this has been questioned, as it is difficult to determine whether preference change is the direct result of deliberation or the distributed information packs or media coverage (Shapiro 2003; Jordan 2007).

DP's are designed, as their name suggests, as a replacement for standard, aggregative opinion polls and as such are only indirectly connected to decision-making. Indeed, final preferences are merely aggregated, as participants are not required to come to a collective decision, as with citizens' juries. However, they can potentially be used as a heuristic for

other citizens who have not been involved in the poll, if they come to be trusted and receive extensive media coverage (Luskin et al. 2002, 258-9). Evidence suggests that this has occurred to a degree in polls in China, Greece, and Brazil (Fishkin and Farrar 2005, 44-45). Even if DOPs do provide guidance for citizens, however, power still lies with governments, who choose the degree to which they heed the opinions expressed in the poll.

The first ever DOP in the world was held in the UK in 1994, and since then five others have been held at the UK national level. The topics covered have been crime, the UK's role in the European Union, the Monarchy, the 1997 UK general election, health rationing, and democratic reform (Luskin et al. 2002). A sixth was held at regional level in Northern Ireland on education policy (Fishkin et al. 2009) and a further two were held at the EU level – one on social and foreign policy (Luskin et al. 2008), the other on immigration and climate change (Fishkin et al. 2011) – in which the UK was included in the deliberations. While these DP's demonstrate that that through appropriate sampling methods the processes can be inclusive, increase informed preferences amongst participants, and lead to preference change on a range policy areas and at a range of levels of governance in the UK, their influence on policy outcomes has been limited. Also, whether or not they have influenced public opinion is hard to determine and is an under-researched factor. The above events received print, radio and television coverage. Indeed, the first few DPs in the UK had their plenary sessions televised on Chanel 4, and included in the coverage were the post-deliberative preferences of participants, thus enabling the DP to act as a potential heuristic for citizens not directly involved in the debates (Fishkin and Luskin 2005). This coverage was far from perfect though. Parkinson (2005, 181) notes that the health DP 'featured little of the discussion' and was ignored by other media outlets not wishing to promote a rival

station (see Parkinson 2005, 181-183). Indeed, Parkinson concludes that the democratic credentials of the media coverage of such events will always be compromised by the need to gain and keep viewers: 'if one relies purely on the media as the means of building bridges between deliberators and audiences, then one privileges those points of view which can easily be dramatized and narrated and excludes those which cannot' (Parkinson 2005, 183). Nevertheless, this represented the height of media exposure for DPs in the UK, as subsequent polls have not experienced equivalent levels of broadcast time. Clearly more comparative research into the role of the media in covering participatory and deliberative events is required to establish whether these are UK media phenomenon or are problems found elsewhere too.

Finally, participatory budgeting (PB) has also been employed in the UK. PB has Brazilian origins, with the most notable and lauded example taking place in Porto Alegre (Baiocchi 2003; Fung 2007; Smith 2009; Blakey 2008). However, this example inspired the implementation of PB processes across Latin America, North America and Europe (Blakey 2008), often as a consequence of pressure from non-governmental organisations (Ryan 2009). As Smith (2009, 34) explains, Porto Alegre was 'an imaginative institutional arrangement where popular assemblies are combined with innovative representative forums that allow citizens to control and shape the distribution of a significant portion of the city's budget' (Smith 2009, 34). The process combined direct participation with deliberation (Blakey 2008; Avritzer 2006) and the resulting investment plan typically contained about 40% of citizens' proposals and has contributed to the alleviation of poverty in Porto Alegre (Blakey 2008, 1).

PB does, then, have great potential for enhancing and combining opportunities for participation and deliberation. Unfortunately, however, although by 2010 one hundred UK local authorities had employed PB processes (Blakey 2011) – and although there is now a national PB strategy (CLG 2008) – the UK PB cases do not reproduce the more radical participatory and deliberative nature of the Latin American cases. Rather, they tend to be small-scale, engage third sector organisations rather than individuals, are typically stand alone rather than cyclical, and are restricted by national targets and ring fenced budgets (Blakey 2008; Ryan 2009). Furthermore, in the UK PB is in essence ‘participatory grant-making’ rather than budgeting, with relatively small grants distributed to third sector organisations to fund projects that they themselves will deliver (Lavan 2007; Blakey 2008; Ryan 2009). The money comes from central funds that are ear-marked for specific geographical and policy areas, meaning their agenda setting powers are severely limited in comparison with PB in Brazil (Ryan 2009). Moreover, in contrast to the Porto Alegre case, citizens tend to have no input into reviewing and developing the decision-making process (Lavan 2007; Blakey 2008). Nor were the early UK PB examples based on deliberative participation, instead using aggregative means of decision-making: ‘In the transfer of Participatory Budgeting to the Northern Hemisphere, deliberation seems to have lost out to an emphasis for reaching set targets for community cohesion and urban renewal’ (Ryan 2009, 8; see also Blakey 2008). Dialogue mainly occurs between the bidding third sector organisations and the PB steering group, although there are exceptions like the Tower Hamlets PB (Ryan 2009).

Many of the differences between the UK and Latin American, in terms of the use of participatory budgeting, can be accounted for by differences in political system. Latin

American states seem to be in transition from a centralised state to a decentralised one with more powers for local government (Blakey 2008, 5). In contrast in the UK powers have been withdrawn from local government by the national state (Blakey 2008; Bogdanor 2009). A further cause of the disparity of PB between the UK and Latin America is that the UK has a considerably longer tradition of representative government, which has only been established in countries like Brazil relatively recently: 'Importantly, the active public value placed on the right to participate and be involved in decision-making by people who have themselves struggled for it is qualitatively different' (Blakey 2008, 5). This democratic longevity also means the UK has well established bureaucratic mechanisms which can negate 'local innovation'. However, as PB is not part of a UK national programme there is greater opportunity here to be flexible and to incorporate 'experiential democratic learning' in each case (Blakey 2011). Finally in Latin America, it has been pressure from social movements that have led to the development of participatory budgeting, but in the UK the impetus has been top down (Blakey 2008; Rocke 2008; Ryan 2009).

In sum then, although there has been much use of democratic innovations in the UK, developments towards a participatory and deliberative *system* have been limited. Participatory and deliberative mechanisms like mini-publics and participatory budgeting operate most effectively at a local level, 'where issues are more immediate, and the consequences more concretely felt' (Bogdanor 2009, 301). This being the case, if citizens participating at this level are to influence decision-making a decentralised political system is required. However, the UK is a particularly centralised system despite the rhetorical commitment of all the main UK political parties to 'a new localism' of double devolution which involves extending powers directly to citizens. As Bogdanor (2009, 239) explains, 'the

rhetoric may be decentralist, but the practice remains largely centralist' (see also Jordan 2007). This is also in spite of constitutional changes designed to enable greater decentralisation to local government and beyond through the ratification of the Charter of Local Self-Government of the Council of Europe in 1998 by the Labour Government, which is based on the principle of subsidiarity. As Bogdanor (2009, 237) explains, the Charter has not changed or improved the status of local government in the UK, with local government becoming attenuated due to a preference for centralisation amongst both the elite and citizenry. Local government, then, has been reduced to assisting in the delivery of nationally and centrally formed programmes and policies (Bogdanor 2009, 258).

It is also worth stressing that ultimately both the UK political elite *and* the citizenry itself need to be convinced of the need for greater decentralisation and a greater opportunity to participate in governance, as the 'the centralising instinct has corresponded, on the whole, with popular attitudes' (Bogdanor 2009, 236). Indeed, empirical evidence produced by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister found that most citizens did not want to participate more than they did (ODPM 2005, 73), while Meadowcroft's study into participatory mechanisms employed by UK local governments recorded a similar lack of desire for increased participation (Meadowcroft 2001, 40). It must be stressed, however, that these studies do not take into account the fact that much of this participation has little or no influence on decisions. As rational choice theory indicates, if UK citizens did have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in deliberating over and making important decisions that affect their lives, they may well desire more opportunities to participate.

There is, then, much scope to build on what has already been started, and to take the UK towards a deliberative and participatory democracy. To achieve this more research is required on the UK context, so that we can fully understand the distinct opportunities and barriers associated with the UK political system, as well as learning through comparison with other political systems. The following papers in this special section address many important themes that contribute to the plugging this gap and are briefly outlined below.

### **Overview of the Special Section**

In 'Deliberative pragmatic equilibrium review: a framework for comparing institutional devices and their enactment of deliberative democracy in the UK', Elstub notes that a prominent obstacle to institutionalising deliberative democracy in the UK is the absence of comparative understanding of what each institutional mechanism could realistically achieve in the policy process, and information about how these various mechanisms relate to each other. To fill this gap Elstub establishes the 'Deliberative Pragmatic Equilibrium Review' (DePER) framework for comparing the suitability of a range of micro institutional mechanisms to enact key principles of deliberative democracy at different stages of decision-making and at different levels of governance. He therefore starts from the premise that different institutional mechanisms will be suited to the promotion of divergent normative ends and will be able to adapt to some features of complexity and not others. This means certain institutional devices will be able to operate effectively at different levels of governance, but not at others, and contribute to some, but not all, stages of a decision-making sequence. The framework enables the systematic comparison of relevant empirical



evidence from the UK, but combined with normative theory so that an overly realist position is not adopted. This is achieved through the use of Fung's (2007) practical equilibrium, which requires the institutions advocated by deliberative democrats to be in harmony with the consequences of these institutions in practice. If equilibrium is not in place then practical reasoning is employed to create a dialectical relationship between the theory of deliberative democracy and the institutions advocated, with both the theory and the institutions to be modified. The DePER framework could therefore significantly enhance our understanding of which institutions will be best placed to enhance deliberation in different contexts in the UK, and the role the discursive mechanisms discussed above could play at different levels of decision-making in the UK.

In developing the DePER framework Elstub draws inspiration from Saward's (2003) 'reflexive proceduralism', as do Moss and Coleman in 'Deliberative manoeuvres in the digital darkness: e-democracy policy in the UK'. Saward advocates an ecumenical approach to democracy, considering its enactment in all varieties and manifestations, rather than privileging a particular approach such as the deliberative model. Elstub defends DePER's focus on deliberation arguing it is a justifiably distinct democratic approach, which needs different institutional sequences to enact it. However, although Moss and Coleman study of the use of the internet in the UK to enhance democracy concentrates on deliberative democracy, they are keen not to 'ignore the contributions that non-deliberative practices can make to enacting democratic ideals.' This is an issue of great salience; as Bogdanor notes (2009, 301) information technology has significantly alleviated the problems of complexity that in the past have formed such significant barriers to more participation in the UK. Moss and Coleman's contribution is therefore timely, as the internet is likely to be at the

forefront of any developments in citizen participation and deliberation. By analyzing progress in the utilization of the internet to facilitate citizen participation and deliberation in the UK, the research could be a catalyst for comparative research on the internet. Unfortunately, though, they demonstrate that efforts to promote open government by liberating data online, the use of e-petitioning, and more recent 'crowdsourcing' initiatives, is again one of unmet rhetoric. Despite consecutive governments claiming to value the potential of the internet to increase participation and deliberation in UK governance, this potential has largely not been realised, not because of the failings of the internet or citizenry itself, but because clear and coherent strategies from the government to use the Internet have not been developed. The micro processes of deliberation put in place by the government have failed to be genuinely deliberative and inclusive of all relevant discourses. Whereas Elstub's DePER framework focuses solely on micro sites for participation and deliberation, Moss and Coleman also engage with macro deliberation. It is now widely acknowledged that macro deliberation is essential if a deliberative system is to be approximated (Hendriks 2006). Moss and Coleman argue that the internet has a significant and yet untapped role to play in enacting macro deliberation by engaging distributed networks of civil society on-line, which should be linked to the micro sites initiated by government.

The prospect of macro deliberation is further considered by Cinalli and O'Flynn in 'Public deliberation, network analysis and the political integration of Muslims living in Britain.' In contrast to the other papers presented in this special section, rather than focusing on how deliberation can be enhanced in the UK, they employ network analysis to assess the assumption that there is a link between the quality of deliberation and the level of

integration in any given social or political field. In this study greater levels of engagement in public affairs; enhanced trust in government and faith in the democratic process; a stronger sense of political self-efficacy; increased levels of information seeking; and 'durable ties or relationships forged by and among different actors' are indicators of integration, which is important in such a diverse and multicultural society. Clearly, given the problems facing democracy in the UK discussed above, more integration is desperately needed. In particular Cinalli and O'Flynn focus on Muslim's in Britain, how they deliberate in the print media, and the link between how they deliberate and their level of integration. They conclude that although Muslims living in the UK are far from ideal deliberators, they are just as likely as other UK based actors 'to use acceptable language and, moreover, to provide a valid argument in support of the positions that they take'. However, they appeal to the common interest less frequently than other groups. On the face of it, one might therefore conclude that Muslims are not well integrated (or at least as not well integrated as those actors who score better on this measure). However, network analysis suggests that Muslims' (relative) failure to appeal the common interest is no impediment to their integration. They have deliberated effectively and with a diverse range of actors through a range of overlapping cliques. This suggests that the field of ethnic relations in Britain is robust enough to accommodate even those who do not deliberate as well as others. In other words, the broader public sphere in the UK may be ripe for deliberation, even if the government is reluctant to push through a deliberative agenda. This study then provides the starting point for comparative research between the UK and other countries, to see if there is a link between deliberative quality and integration elsewhere too.

## Conclusion

There seems to be an emerging consensus that, if democracy in the UK is to be rejuvenated, greater opportunities for citizen deliberation and participation will be required. Both the Labour and coalition governments claim to agree but, perhaps unsurprisingly, have ultimately failed to deliver meaningful change. As Moss and Coleman note in their article, 'Governments tend to be reluctant to expand the scope for public deliberation when it is seen to constrain the power of institutional representation'. Elites are not solely to blame, however; citizens themselves have not been demanding enough – at least not to an extent that threatens to render far-reaching institutional change a necessity in the eyes of political elites. As a consequence the practices, procedures and culture of the UK political system continue to obstruct the institutionalisation of citizen participation and deliberation. The work presented in this special section, however, contributes to our understanding, not only of obstacles, but of opportunities too, and therefore provides insights into how the UK can move towards a genuinely deliberative and participatory democratic system.

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