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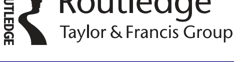

ARTICLE

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Participatory deliberative democracy: toward a new standard for assessing democracy? some insights into the Italian case

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ABSTRACT

Defining what democracy means nowadays seems increasingly problematic as several alternative democratic visions are being developed and contrasted in normative theory and political practice. On the one hand, there are traditional accounts of democracy that are highly formal and minimalistic. Citizens are endowed with political rights, which they use to advance their interests, particularly through regular elections, which delegate power to governing representatives. Representative democracy has been long identified with this conception. On the other hand, alternative perspectives have emphasised the untapped potential of liberal societies. These more radical perspectives belong to two main democratic traditions: participatory democracy and deliberative democracy. On the basis of a common framework of participatory and deliberative norms, this paper envisages an alternative and more robust idea of democracy to offer normative guidance in democratising contemporary societies. We tie our discussion to an analysis of how Italian democracy could be improved.

KEYWORDS

Radical democracy; participatory democracy; deliberative democracy; participation; deliberation

Defining what democracy means is an increasingly complex challenge as several alternative democratic visions are being developed and compared in normative theory and political practice. Traditional approaches to democratic theory have tended to converge on minimal accounts of democracy (Sartori 1993; Dahl 2013). According to this minimalistic view, citizens are endowed with political rights, including the rights of free speech, association, and suffrage; citizens advance their interests by exercising their political rights, in particular by voting for representatives in regular elections; elections are organised by competing political parties; and electoral victory means control of government, which gives winning candidates the authority to shape public policy through legislation and control of the administration. Politics – understood as a competition among private interests – designates the process of aggregating the preferences of citizens in choosing public officials and policies (Downs 1957; Dahl 1971). *Representative democracy* has long been identified with this conception.

Going beyond traditional accounts of democracy, alternative interpretations have emphasised the uncharted normative potential still present in liberal societies. According

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to them, the democratic project is one that must aim at more, rather than taking stock of the status quo. Accordingly, democrats have focused on 'democratizing' (De Sousa Santos and Arriscado Nunes 2004) or 'deepening democracy' (Fung and Wright 2003). This approach can be seen as radical in the sense that it aims to put citizens at the centre of the decision-making process: notions such as public participation, deliberation and citizen empowerment should acquire increasing political support (Rosenberg 2007; Dryzek 2009).

These more radical perspectives – while having some common normative elements – can be regarded as belonging to two distinct democratic traditions. Some of them interpret the principle of popular sovereignty as a commitment to broadening participation in public decision-making. An authentically democratic order is one that promotes the political involvement of people in arenas such as the family, the workplace and civic associations as well as public institutions (Lynd 1965; Arnstein 1969; Pateman 1970; Bachrach 1975; Barber 1984). Though maintaining several conceptual differences, these democratic visions embody the same political ideal: the tenet that democratic legitimacy is based on the active and enduring participation of ordinary citizens. Consequently, this tradition can be defined as *participatory democracy*.

Other conceptions, in contrast, stress the discursive quality of the democratic space with the aim of freeing it from inegalitarian power relations, and ir-rational attitudes. Democracy is seen here as a domain of public discussion, dominated by 'the forceless force of the better argument' (Habermas 1984) and leading to the common good. '[It] revolves around the transformation rather than simply the aggregation of preferences' (Elster 1998, 3). These democratic paradigms attempt to put the 'public reasoning of free and equal citizens' (Cohen 1989; Benhabib 1996) at the centre of the political process. They favour an idea of democracy in which people address collective problems by deliberating together about how best to solve them: democracy is thus associated with the image of deliberation. In this case, a democratic order can be defined as legitimate insofar as it is the result of reasoned discussion among all individuals. This political project is connected to the idea of *deliberative democracy.*

These traditions have contributed to expanding and deepening the meaning of democracy, enriching political debate and suggesting new arrangements for democratic institutions. Certainly, this process has not been without conflict. Leading participatory democrats such as Carole Pateman (2012) have accused proponents of the deliberative approach of promoting a sloppy and shallow process of democratisation. Deliberative democrats have rejected these criticisms, maintaining that they are in fact a straw man based on a highly stylised notion of deliberation. Critics' attacks might not do justice to recent theoretical developments in deliberative theory, which not only acknowledge the limits of deliberation but openly welcome forms of engagement which, without being deliberative in a strict sense, may still further egalitarian and rational ways of dealing with complexity (Dryzek 2017; Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012).

In an effort to promote constructive engagement between both approaches to democracy, this article attempts to inquire whether – beyond the representative model – it is possible to envisage an alternative and more robust concept of democracy based on a common framework of participatory and deliberative norms (for a similar, theoretically very well grounded, attempt see Floridia 2016). To this end, we review debates in democratic theory and ask whether the discussion on democracy is moving in the direction of a 'participatory deliberative' idea of legitimacy. Giving a positive

answer to this question, we exploit the synergies between participatory and deliberative concepts to suggest a stronger conceptualisation of the idea.

Whilst our arguments are necessarily developed at a high level of abstraction, we consider how our theoretical ideas might relate to a concrete case. In particular, we reflect on how our thoughts on normative debates could shed light on actual and potential developments in Italian democracy. Besides being our own country and object of study, the Italian case is particularly interesting to us for three main reasons. First, despite being a developed democracy, Italy, like others in this category, certainly has room for improvement in terms of democratisation (della Porta 2011). Second, particularly since the 1990s, Italian democracy has undergone a number of major changes, which, however, have regarded mainly the structure and actors of the political system (Freschi and Mete 2009). Unlike other countries, reflection on how contemporary theoretical debates could contribute to democratic change has been modest (see Fung and Wright 2003; Baiocchi and Ganuza 2015). Thirdly, concepts that originated in discussions in democratic theory seem to have surfaced in the positions of mainstream actors in current political debates. Examples range from the e-democracy and direct democracy proposals often advanced by the Five-star Movement, through the introduction of the *Debat Publique* in the last legislature to innovative regional and local measures on participation and deliberation. Whilst other studies have critically assessed these ideas in much greater depth than we could here (Bobbio 2010), we intend to provide some food for thought for reformers who might be interested in furthering democratisation in Italy.

In the first two sections, the participatory and deliberative models of democracy are presented along with their main characteristics. The third section compares their differences more closely, whereas the fourth focuses on their overlapping features. The fifth section emphasises the emerging political likeness between these two theoretical paradigms to investigate the potential for the rise of a specific participatory-deliberative model of democracy. The last section suggests, by drawing on the defining features of this innovative participatory deliberative concept, the adoption of a stronger normative standard for assessing the democratic quality of existing democratic regimes. We adopt these latter considerations to reflect critically on the main challenges in the way of the further democratisation of a developed democracy such as Italy.

Participatory democracy

Over the past forty years, liberal societies have not only faced 'undemocratic challenges' (e.g. a lack of accountability of rulers to ruled; party-system crises etc.) and 'challengers' (e.g. economic, invisible elitist supremacy): their political arrangements have also been questioned by the emergence of new social actors demanding more radical rights and by participatory ideals of democracy (Lynd 1965; Arnstein 1969; Pateman 1970). The emergence of so-called 'new social movements' (Offe 1985; della Porta and Diani 1999) has brought with itself claims for innovative and more inclusive democratic institutions.

Beginning in the 1960s, participatory thinkers and activists described a model of democracy based on the premise that citizens participating in collective decision-making on matters that affect their lives should be 'an integral moral value of contemporary democratic theory' (Bachrach 1975, 52). For them – since all social relations

are 'political' in that they revolve around a structure of authority – democratising society entails increasing and extending the scope of participation and political equality. Society 'can be seen as being composed of various political systems, the structure of authority of which has an important effect on the psychological qualities and attitudes of the individuals who interact with them; thus, for the operation of a democratic polity at national level, the necessary qualities in individuals can only be developed through the democratization of authority structures in all political systems' (Pateman 1970, 35). For this reason, 'it is important that individuals take all the possible chances to participate' (Gbikpi 2005, 109). 'Full participation' thus designates a process wherein 'each individual member of a decision-making body has equal power to determine the outcome of decisions' (Pateman 1970, 71).

According to Lynd, participatory democracy seeks to accomplish two specific goals: '[...] that each individual takes part in all decisions affecting the quality and conduct of his/her life; and that society is arranged to promote the independence of human beings and to provide the means for their common participation' (Lynd 1965). This means that the participatory ideal can be interpreted as a design for *social inclusion*, which aims at institutionalising a new form of democratic sovereignty relying on the dialectic between civil society and the political system (Santos 2002). Allegretti (2010) describes participatory democracy as a dynamic and open-ended project based on a 'game' of active confrontation between civil society and institutions. In this light, social movements are regarded as one of the most important vectors of political change and transformation. They 'carry on conflicts and antagonistic practices, breaking the limits of the systems in which such acts occur' (Melucci 1985, 795): collective mobilisation contests dominant codes and discourses of society. Furthermore, they enable the creation of a new symbolic order, offering alternative interpretations of the social universe: in this respect, movements aspire to establish innovative definitions of norms and public situations; to promote new ideas, issues and solutions, and finally to invent alternative institutions (Cini 2012). Even more radically, Santos maintains that 'democracies must transform themselves into social movements, in the sense that the State must transform itself into an [open] space of cultural experimentation' (Santos 2002, 51). In the same vein, Claude Lefort envisions modern democracy as an 'empty place' (Lefort 2007) that possesses no definitive goals – or rather, it possesses many such goals but none can succeed 'in being accepted as the incarnation of the people-as-one' (Cunningham 2002, 186). This is why participatory principles can best adhere to the dynamics of liberal society. They do not trace 'a model of democratic life [...] that maps out the external boundaries and internal procedures of democratic decision-making' (Martin, 2009, 106), but rather strive to build an inclusive political formation, advancing an idea of 'fugitive democracy' (Wolin 1996) – that is, a condition permanently open to contention and change. Democracy is envisioned here as 'a process of constant reinvention' (Little and Lloyd 2009, 205).

Participatory democracy is thus linked to a very strong notion of popular sovereignty, inasmuch as it conceives of grassroots participation as a way to constitute, demolish, and reconstitute 'the category of the people' (ibid., 5). In other words, this position does not simply assume 'the fact' of the *demos* (as a pre-existing body with a shared identity) as the basis for democratic politics. 'It argues, instead, that the demos (the democratic "we") is produced, albeit contingently, through democratic politics –

when the excluded demand to be included' (ibid., 6). This means that radical democratic sovereignty substantiates an ongoing conflict between those politically included and those not, for the 're-signification' of the boundaries and identity of the demos itself (Rancière 2004). From this perspective, democracy becomes 'a project concerned with the political potentialities of ordinary citizens', with their capacity to become 'political beings' (Wolin 1996, 31).

To synthesise, the participatory approach addresses the 'quantitative' dimension of mass democracy by emphasising the political role of civil society. Participatory theory promotes the political inclusion of all individuals, aiming at the enlargement and radicalisation of democratic citizenship.

Deliberative democracy

Deliberative democracy is closely associated with the Anglo-American and European philosophical traditions most famously connected to the work of Rawls and Habermas (Rawls 1993, 2009; Habermas 1984; Habermas 1992). Notwithstanding differences in the approach to the idea of deliberative democracy among some of the founders and early developers of the field (e.g. Bessette 1994; Cohen 1989; Manin 1987), one can identify Rawls and Habermas with a common core aspect of deliberative democracy: 'political choice, to be legitimate, must be the outcome of *deliberation about ends among free, equal and rational agents*' (Elster 1998, 5). This implies that deliberative democracy 'rests on argumentation, not only in the sense that it proceeds by argument, but also in the sense that it must be justified by argument' (ibid., 9). The aim is manifestly to tie the exercise of power to the condition of public reasoning: to establish 'all those conditions of communication under which there can come into being a discursive formation of will and opinion […] and to generate communicative power' (Habermas 1996, 446, 452) – that is, an institutionalised impact of will and opinion on political power. In short, deliberative democracy realises 'the full and equal membership of all in the sovereign body responsible for authorizing the exercise of that power, and establishes the common reason and will of that body' (Elster 1998, 222).

Nevertheless, not all versions of deliberative democracy completely share the same normative features or pursue identical political goals: some are more theoretically selective and politically 'elitist', others are more inclusive and participative. Schematically, it is possible to divide this view into two quasi-alternative patterns that emphasise different norms of action and values. The first model, rooted in the Habermasian logic of communicative action (Habermas 1984), sees 'arguing' (Elster 1998) as the legitimate form of democratic communication and the idea of rational consensus as the guiding ideal of democracy. Politics is thought of here as being a very exclusive and dispassionate activity, executed in the key institutions (i.e. legislatures, courts) of liberal democracy by means of rational discourse (Rawls 1993). By contrast, the second model is more theoretically flexible and inclusive: it maintains that alternative forms of communication – such as greeting, rhetoric, storytelling, testimony and humour (Sanders 1997) – as well as meta-consenus are potentially desirable and democratically legitimate (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2006; Bächtiger et al. 2010). From this perspective, politics does not exclusively refer to the representative institutions and their elites. Rather,

it comprises the notions of public sphere (Habermas 1992), civil society (Young 2000), and social movements (Dryzek 2000, 2010). Thus, political contention also encompasses passionate struggles for power (Mansbridge 1996), contestation (Dryzek 1990), and public activism (Young 2001; Fung 2005).

These alternative deliberative paradigms have been at the basis of several distinctions emerging in the literature since the turn of the century. The deliberative approach has been articulated in different ways, such as 'liberal, constitutional and discursive' (Dryzek 2000); 'deliberative and communicative' (Young 2000); 'deliberative and agonist' (Mouffe 2000); 'deliberative democracy and democratic deliberation' (Mansbridge 2007); 'type one and type two' (Bächtiger et al. 2010), and finally 'liberal deliberative and participatory deliberative' (della Porta 2011). This study prefers to define the first group as *classical* and the second as *radical*, for such a distinction enables both a clearer understanding and a more analytical evaluation. With this in mind, it is possible to build a conceptual scheme that summarizes the features of each model on the basis of six specific dimensions: i) *Sites of politics*: where does politics take place? ii) *Political acts*: what acts are regarded as political? iii) *Forms of communication*: how do the styles of communication manifest themselves? iv) *Ends of democracy*: what are the ideals of democracy? v) *Public outcomes*: what results does the democratic process bring about? vi) *Democratic legitimacy*: what is the source of 'ideal validity' (Habermas 1992) of a democratic order?

Comparing classical and radical deliberative democracy, one can understand how they embody two distinct political principles. On the one hand, the classical vision privileges norms such as discursive quality, top-down processes of communication, and institutional conceptions of politics and political acts. On the other hand, the radical vision emphasises values such as inclusion, bottom-up information-building processes, and ideas of politics based on civil society and its unconventional repertories of action. The former stresses the principle of institutional deliberation, the latter that of social participation. Distinguishing between classical and radical versions of deliberative democracy is not a speculative exercise; on the contrary, it is a means to better understand how participatory and deliberative theories can be integrated in a practical manner.

Participation or deliberation

As the crisis of representative democracy has become increasingly apparent (Crouch 2004; Alonso, Keane, and Merkel 2011) new and alternative democratic interpretations have acquired political legitimacy and global popularity. In particular, two of these – based on the ideal of participation and deliberation respectively – have won significant intellectual recognition (Bohman 1998; Dryzek 2000; Cohen and Fung 2004) and stimulated innovative practical experimentations over the past few decades (Baiocchi 2003, 45–76; Fung and Wright 2003, 3–42; della Porta 2009, 38–41, 73–99). These two radical democratic projects have grown from different traditions and address distinct failures of representative democracy.

Participatory and deliberative approaches, albeit both focused on radicalising the ideals of democracy, appeared originally to involve distinct political goals and normative expectations. Rooted largely in different geographical contexts with participatory experiences rooted mainly in South America and developing countries (Santos 2002; Allegretti 2009) and

deliberative ones largely in Western countries (Gastil and Levine 2005) – and oriented toward different 'publics' – participatory and deliberative theories seemed to be incompatible both philosophically or politically. The former favoured citizen participation and its increase, as much as the latter emphasised the quality of politics and the role of the public. For this reason, some political theorists argue that the values of participation and deliberation are mostly incompatible: 'attempts to realize one undermine the other' (Hauptmann 2001, 412). More specifically, Cohen and Fung detect three potential tensions between participatory and deliberative paradigms, postulating a sort of trade-off. '1. Improving the quality of deliberation may come at a cost to public participation' (Cohen and Fung 2004, 27): whenever legislators have to engage in reasonable discussion and argumentation about policies, they are bound to insulate themselves from less informed and less reasonable public sentiment. '2. Conversely, expanding participation – either numbers of people, or the range of issues under direct popular control – may diminish the quality of deliberation' (ibid.): popular initiatives and referenda, for example, allow voters to exercise more direct influence over legislation. But far from improving deliberation, such measures – by requiring a yes/no vote on a well-defined proposition – may discourage reasoned discussion in creating legislation. '3. More fundamentally, social complexity and scale limit the extent to which modern polities can be both deliberative and participatory' (ibid.): deliberation depends on participants with sufficient knowledge and interest about the substantive issues under consideration. But on any issue, the number of individuals with such knowledge and interest is bound to be small (relative to the size of the polity), and so the quality of deliberation declines with the scope of participation. This is why deliberative and participatory democracy seem to be conceptually at odds with each other, the manifestations of two incompatible political projects – a view that has continued to attract attention over the years (Talisse 2005; Pateman 2012).

Participation and deliberation

Despite these conceptual and practical tensions, those who believe that emphases on deliberation and participation pull in opposite political directions are in the minority among contemporary deliberative democrats. In confirmation of this, several converging understandings of these paradigms have been developed (Cohen and Fung 2004; Gbikpi 2005; Bobbio 2006; della Porta 2007, 2011; Floridia 2016). According to such interpretations, participatory and deliberative theories are more complementary than competitive in that 'deliberation is a kind of participation or somehow essential to it' (Hauptmann 2001, 408). Gutmann and Thompson argue that citizens ought to deliberate in a wide variety of settings and that valuing their doing so is a natural extension of valuing 'participation in politics' (Gutmann and Thompson 1996, 13). Participatory and deliberative democracy appear here as interwoven normative projects: one can consider deliberation as a better yet more circumscribed form of participation. In this sense, public decision-making in liberal democracies may truly become both more participatory and deliberative (Fung and Wright 2003; Rosenberg 2007). The participatory ideal establishes that all citizens take part in every collective arena directly affecting their lives: it supports 'the constant participation of the ordinary man in the conduct of those parts of the structure of society with which he is directly concerned, and which he has therefore the best chance of understanding' (Cole 1920, 114). The deliberative ideal, instead, recommends that such decision-making processes are based on public discussion among all those involved. In fact, it is by way of argumentation in the

deliberative process that participants persuade each other and arrive at a decision. To some scholars deliberative theory constitutes the ideal fulfilment of participatory democracy. The former proposes to improve two key elements of the latter (Gbikpi 2005, 110–121): 1. the idea of equal political weight of citizens in decision-making – (*political equality*); and 2. the idea of expanding the domain of the political 'to a wider range of social relations' (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, XV) – ('*the political*').

With respect to the first point (*political equality*), Gbikpi argues that participatory democracy lacks a clear and efficacious criterion for evaluating political equality in decision-making. Echoing some of the vices of direct democracy, participatory theorists do not seem fully able to clarify a workable logical alternative to the vote. Voting tends still to be the best way to choose among political alternatives and select representatives even in collective arenas such as civic organisations and the workplace (Pateman 1970). Participatory theory, thus, falls short on developing a more dynamic and less artificial practice for promoting political equality. To the extent that it rests on voting, the inner logic of participatory democracy still seems 'aggregative', even if here the 'intensity' rather than the quantity of interest appears more important. In contrast, deliberative thought seeks to overcome such a defect by introducing the notions of 'rational argument' and 'preference transformation.' Deliberation is a process of public reasoning by means of which initial (and self-interested) preferences of participants are transformed to include all the different views and finally to lead to the common good. This public discussion, capable of modifying opinions and interests taken for granted, forms the core of deliberative democracy. It seems to offer a way of exercising power without recourse to voting: people take decisions by appealing to the 'force of the better arguments' (Habermas 1984). As decisions are made by convincing others through good and reasonable arguments, they are enacted by all participants: in this sense, deliberative democracy strives for rational consensus. Hence, the superiority of deliberative over participatory democracy arises.

With respect to the second point ('*the political*'), Gbikpi contends that deliberative rather than participatory theory manages to extend the political domain to civil society and, in so doing, politically to empower the people. While participatory democracy aims to enlarge the field of the political by increasing the number of mutually separate collective arenas in which individuals can make decisions, deliberative democracy instead proposes to bridge such 'separateness' by advancing the concept of the public sphere. This autonomous framework of social and institutional structures that facilitate free discussion among equal individuals allows people to enlarge and deepen their scope for political intervention. The public sphere includes the impact of social movements on state and corporate policies. It functions as a space of social opposition and policy influence (Rosanvallon 2008): in it, citizens 'raise issues, publish information, opinions, [...] criticize action and policies, and propose new policies and practices' (Young 2000, 173). In other words, the public sphere represents a favourable arena for the participation, association, and expression of people as long as it succeeds in tying political institutions (and their powers) to free and autonomous discussions in civil society. In short, it is 'a site for the generation of public opinion' (Dryzek 2000, 55) directed at the exercise of 'communicative power' vis-à-vis state institutions. Deliberative democrats regard the involvement of citizens in the public sphere as a form of '"direct" participation in political decision-making' (Gbikpi 2005, 118). According to this, anyone who partakes in deliberation in the public sphere is participating in the political

process. Here 'the political' manifests itself not only in semi-institutionalised and separate arenas (Pateman 1970; Bobbio 1984), but wherever this deliberation takes place and spreads. From this perspective, deliberative theory provides a more extensive interpretation of the political domain.

Radical deliberative means *participatory* democracy?

To state that deliberative theory is partially *complementary* to participatory democracy and improves some of its limits is not to affirm that 'participatory deliberative democracy' is already being realised. In order to envisage this possibility, it is necessary to reconsider the classification of 'competitive models of deliberative democracy' (see Table 1, 7) and decide which is more compatible with participatory ideals. Some 'radical' deliberative democrats (Dryzek 2000; Young 2000) maintain that 'classical' versions of deliberative democracy (Habermas 1984; Cohen 1989; Rawls 1993; Elster 1998) are not sufficiently oriented to the promotion of the values of citizen participation and social inclusion. The classical conception chiefly concentrates on the quality of the public sphere and political discourse, neglecting to explore the extent of potential exclusion and elitism stemming from deliberative arrangements. Not everybody is able to take part in discussions based on 'rational arguments' leading to the 'common good.' According to radical pluralists such as Mouffe (2000) and difference democrats such as Fraser (1997, and Young (2000), the deliberative public sphere is not completely open to the experiences and perspectives of marginalised and oppressed groups. 'Free and equal' citizens have historically consisted of 'bourgeois white men' – that is, politically dominant groups. As Fraser put it: '[…] the view that women and blacks were excluded from "the public sphere" turns out to be ideological; it rests on a class – and gender – biased notion of publicity, one that accepts at face value that the bourgeois public was never *the* public' (Fraser 1997, 75). In this sense, existing deliberations risk equating the common good with the interests of the more powerful, thus side-lining the legitimate concerns of the marginalised. Radical pluralists and difference democrats question the idea of consensus and are critical of deliberation, for 'consensus decision-making' can conceal informal oppression 'under the guise of concern for all by disallowing dissent' (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2006, 637). In this respect, classical deliberative democracy shows an institutional design that is politically, socially, and culturally exclusive. It does not embrace an innovative and strong idea of popular sovereignty and thence is far from participatory theories: deliberation appears here not to be compatible with participation. Classical deliberative democracy is still alternative to participatory democracy.

Table 1. Competing visions of deliberative democracy.

	Classical	Radical
Sites of politics	State institutions	State institutions, civil society
Political acts	Conventional	Conventional and confrontational
Forms of communication	Dispassionate and rationality-oriented	Rational, emotional, and rhetoric-oriented
Ends of democracy	Rational consensus	Plural and different[a]
Public outcomes	Discursive quality	Inclusion
Democratic legitimacy	Top-down deliberation	Bottom-up participation

[a] See, in particular: Dryzek, Niemeyer (2006), pp. 638–646; Niemeyer and Dryzek (2007), pp. 502–508; Bachtiger et al. 2010, p. 36.

In contrast, radical deliberative conceptions dampen the selectivity of rational deliberation by stressing the dimensions of social inclusiveness, political pluralism, and public activism. In other words, they seem to approach participatory ideals that encourage a more powerful notion of democratic citizenship. On the one hand, these deliberative positions point towards overcoming the elitist characteristics of deliberation by deepening the concept of 'political equality;' on the other hand, they propose to redefine the category of 'the political' in more extensive yet efficacious terms. Regarding the first aspect (*political equality*), radical deliberative theorists affirm that rational argument cannot be the exclusive device of democratic decision-making. Besides deliberation, democracy ought to favour rhetoric, humour, emotion, testimony, and storytelling as forms of public communication. In this way, marginalised and non-dominant groups could take part in the public sphere with the same legitimacy as that of the 'polite, orderly, dispassionate, gentlemanly' (Young 2000, 49) groups, and have equal power in influencing collective choices. If the particular view of dominant groups is always hegemonic but disguised in the name of the 'common good,' then allowing for other perspectives means further 'democratising' the political space and enlarging the content of the public interest. No appeals to unity and rational consensus can ever be considered legitimate: goals of democracy are plural and different, and correspond to the variety of interests and perspectives to be found in civil society at large. In this respect, radical deliberative visions appear very similar to participatory democracy.

Concerning the second aspect (*'the political'*), supporters of a more radical democracy hold either that deliberation in the public sphere is by no means a political act or that it is not a completely sufficient political act. According to the former, such communicative actions do not have anything to do with politics, which must be understood either as a public struggle for power between opposing groups (see Mouffe 2005) or as a constituent power directly transforming existing democracy (see Hardt and Negri 2001). Civil society along with rational deliberation are weak concepts that are unable to grasp or concretely affect economic, social, and cultural inequalities. Instead of these categories, new political projects for radicalising democracy should incorporate the concepts of 'multitude' (Hardt and Negri 2005), conflict and 'agonism' (Mouffe 2000, 2005). The second group of radical democracy followers does not reject the idea of deliberation, but regards such a communicative act as an insufficient political means to challenge state institutions and social powers. For them, the public sphere is not only a desirable and peaceful place for expressing good reasons and arguments, but also a conflictual site for promoting dissent, activism and protest. The history of democratisation demonstrates that pressures for greater democracy almost always emanate from 'oppositional' rather than deliberative civil society (Cohen and Arato 1992; Fraser 1997; Tarrow 1998; Dryzek 2000; Young 2000, 2001; Rosanvallon 2008: Cini 2012). The proliferation of collective actions such as sit-ins, strikes, radical demonstrations, and urban riots 'can create fear of political instability and so draw forth a governmental response' (Dryzek 2000, 101): such conflictual acts often affect corporations and state institutions and, in so doing, aim to contest dominant political visions. In these interpretations, both deliberation and contestation are fundamental parts of the 'political power' of civil society. In other words, radical deliberative approaches widen the content of 'the political' to deliberation in the public sphere as well as to struggles for power, conflict, agonism and activism (Mansbridge 1996).

Focusing on the concepts of (1) 'political equality' and (2) 'the political', which represent the two complementary features of participatory and deliberative theory, one

can observe that 'radical' deliberative conceptions are normative projects almost identical to those of participatory democracy. They share the same idea of equality. For all these interpretations, rational deliberation is not the only or the most important means of combatting social and cultural exclusivity; quite the opposite, deliberation, with its emphasis on rational argument and the common good, risks bringing about an increase rather than a decrease in political inequality. Many social groups could never take part in the deliberative public sphere because they speak with alternative linguistic codes. Recognising the political legitimacy of these communicative styles, including humour, 'greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling' (Young 1996), entails opening the public sphere to the entry of 'the other' and raising the level of political inclusiveness.

Second, both theories advance similar concepts of 'the political'. According to them, deliberation in the public sphere is not the main political act of civil society. Beside this communicative action, civil society enables 'contentious politics' (Tarrow 1998) in the public sphere – that is, the use of 'disruptive techniques' such as demonstrations, strikes, riots, and civil disobedience to change corporate and government policy. This means that 'the political' of civil society consists of protest, agonism, and mass activism as well: for these visions of democracy, 'deliberation and conflict' (Flyvbjerg 1998) thus constitute complementary moments of the political struggle.

Participatory and radical deliberative democracies thus seem to tend towards a unique theoretical paradigm encompassing two specific normative features: the notion of *citizen empowerment* – stemming from a wider interpretation of the concept of 'the political' – and that of *political inclusion* – deriving from a stronger comprehension of the idea of 'political equality.' Citizen empowerment is thought of as the radicalisation of the principle of popular sovereignty; that is, the idea that the people possess the authority to influence decision-making processes by employing both conventional and unconventional repertoires of action. More specifically, to empower people means fostering the building of two different yet complementary kinds of political institution. The first type aims to create high quality deliberative participation with direct impact on the exercise of power. These collective spaces are conceived of as formal institutional arrangements in which ordinary citizens, deliberating together on issues of common concern, affect the outcome of such decisions. Citizen juries, electronic town meetings, citizen assemblies and participatory budgeting can be considered some examples of these arenas (Bobbio 2006). In contrast, supporting the proliferation of the second type of organisation means aiming to broaden deliberative participation within the associations of civil society. Habermas, Fraser and Mansbridge call these more informal political venues, which have only indirect and limited effects on state powers, 'culturally mobilized publics' (Habermas 1992, 356), 'subaltern counterpublics' (Fraser 1997, 81), and 'informal deliberative enclaves of resistance' (Mansbridge 1996). In culturally, socially, and politically homogeneous areas, citizens who do not have direct access to representative institutions can rework their ideas, their strategies, and gather their forces to attempt to influence decision-making from the outside. Self-organised committees of citizens, grassroots workplace assemblies, non-institutional social forums, and social movement organisations can be regarded as instances of this second type of political space. One can define these two different kinds of public site, both institutional and informal, as *participatory deliberative arenas*: their centrality within the policy-making process determines the level of power of ordinary citizens. The lesser or

Table 2. The participatory deliberative model of democracy.

	Participatory deliberative norms
Citizen empowerment	The political weight of participatory deliberative arenas
Political inclusion	The ongoing re-signification of the category of the people

greater degree of citizen empowerment thus depends on the political weight of participatory deliberative arenas (della Porta 2007).

The result of this powerful idea of sovereignty is political inclusion. Radical democratic sovereignty expresses the will of a political body founded not only on 'the full and equal membership of all' (Cohen 1989, 73), but also on 'the necessity of contestation' (Little and Lloyd 2009, 205). Political inclusion means regarding conflict and disagreement as fundamental dimensions of democratic order. According to participatory deliberative theorists, it is in fact the degree of openness to such conflict that enables democracy to be truly 'democratic' and ordinary citizens to be politically included. Radical politics is understood here as a struggle between those who are politically included and those who demand to be. To radicalise democracy means ceaselessly to create, demolish, and recreate 'the category of the people' through the strong, widespread mobilization of civil society. In this sense, styles of democratic communication alternative to deliberation are publicly recognised and encouraged: any social group is enabled to take part in decision-making, to affect political decisions to and contribute to determining the general conception of the common good (see Table 2).

A stronger normative standard for democracy?

The conviction that it is necessary to advocate more radical understandings of the common conception of liberal democracy seems to be on the rise within and beyond academic debate (Felicetti 2016). Defining democracy as a political system based on electoral competition governed by the majority principle seems plainly insufficient (della Porta and Rucht 2013). Though not all scholars and social actors propose going beyond the representative form of democracy, they all seem interested in a new idea of democratic legitimacy able to offer a stronger normative standard for assessing the quality of existing democracy (see, for instance, Floridia 2016). This is precisely the theoretical task of participatory deliberative democrats. They acknowledge the political and operative centrality of elections to mass democracy. By means of the vote, ordinary citizens are called upon to choose representatives advancing their own interests in the political sphere, and governors capable of transforming such interests into public policies. For the majority of these radical perspectives, elections are still considered essential in modern democracy. Yet, to recognize this is not to affirm that voting is also the most important instrument for measuring the democratic quality of liberal society (Dryzek 2009). Paradoxically, the acknowledged relevance of elections seems to suggest exactly the opposite conclusion. If any democracy embodies electoral competition as a fundamental part of its political process, then such an element cannot be considered the best standard for assessing its democratic quality. Free and pluralistic elections only distinguish democratic from non-democratic regimes (Sartori 1993), and they do not say anything about the depth of the democratic ideal within the first type of regime.

Thus, the challenge becomes finding a standard against which to assess the extent of democratisation of political systems. We refer to this standard as 'democratic resourcefulness'. In particular, this idea refers to the extent to which a democratic system is rich (or poor) in terms of participatory and deliberative processes to allow for democratic governance.

Recent work adopting the systemic turn to democracy is important in this respect. For instance, Dryzek (2009) has argued for assessing the deliberative capacity of a democratic system. The idea of deliberative capacity refers to the extent to which a democratic system has space for authentic, inclusive and consequential deliberation. As demonstrated by Curato (2015), this approach does represent an advance on existing ways of ascertaining the democratic qualities of regimes, focused as they are on assessing only some minimal liberal qualities of democracies. Whilst the deliberative capacity approach is certainly valuable in furthering our ability to assess democratic systems it does not take into account the contribution that participatory forms of engagement give to democratic life. A similar problem seems to affect Mansbridge et al.'s (2012) approach to assessing deliberative systems. According to this approach the democratic quality of a political system is given not by its level of deliberative capacity; rather, it depends on the extent to which the system is able to attain specific ethical, epistemic and democratic goals (Ibid., 12–16). This approach is more open to the potential contribution of non-deliberative politics to democratic life. Nonetheless, it remains silent as to the role that participation and deliberation respectively should play. As a result, it remains unclear how exactly the democratic credentials of a system could be assessed (Owen and Smith 2015).

We argue that participatory deliberative theory and the idea of 'democratic resourcefulness' might offer a more comprehensive and straightforward way to assess the quality of existing democracies. Its original way of combining participation and deliberation helps overcome three main deficits of competitive representation. According to Cohen and Fung, the participatory deliberative form of democracy makes it possible to pursue the values of responsibility, equality, and autonomy better than the representative. 1) It improves the level of accountability of the political system to the extent that participatory deliberative arenas function as public spaces that create bridges between ordinary citizens and the ruling elite. On the one hand, these arenas – as schools of formal and informal deliberation – promote the formation and influence of new ideas, opinions, and interests on representatives and the legislature (input). On the other hand, they strengthen the bond between the governed and governors by operating as spheres of control and criticism for the implementation of policies and their impact (output). 2) Participatory deliberative democracy increases the weight of the principle of equality. Expanding and enhancing deliberative participation in public institutions may be the most effective strategy for challenging the inequalities that derive from asymmetric concentrations of interest and from traditional social and political hierarchies: '[...] deliberation, because it blunts the power of greater resources with the force of the better arguments; participation, because shifting the basis of political contestation from organized money to organized people is the most promising antidote to the influence conferred by wealth' (Cohen and Fung 2004, 25). 3) Finally, the participatory deliberative conception encourages the realisation of a stronger vision of political autonomy by enabling people to debate laws and policies that representatives and governors enforce for them. Taking part in a variety of collective arenas, citizens

learn to advance and defend their own solutions to common problems and to argue in such situations on the basis of different yet relevant reasons.

This more radical vision of democracy therefore introduces an innovative conception of democratic quality grounded on the idea of participatory deliberative arenas. The larger the number of these public spaces, the greater the 'democratic resourcefulness' of liberal society. Such arenas of deliberation – both institutional and informal – constitute the most appropriate instrument for measuring the democratisation of existing democracies. Promoting the proliferation of these spaces means democratising authority structures throughout society. More specifically, the potential for arranging these collective spheres in terms of *deliberation, political inclusion*, and *citizen empowerment* affects the extent of deliberative participation present in a democracy. 1) Deliberation is based on the discursive quality of a public space: How insightful is a discourse in that space? Does a plurality of public reasons exist? How and what kind of reasoning is advanced? Deliberation is here a process by means of which original preferences of individuals are transformed during discussion in order to take into account the political opinions of all. 2) Political inclusion measures the inclusiveness of these participatory arenas: To what extent are the perspectives of the most disadvantaged people included in such new institutions? And to what extent are their voices publicly listened to? Political inclusion requires institutional assets in which people can formulate, discuss, and make decisions on public issues that directly affect their own lives (Bachrach 1975). 3) Citizen empowerment indicates the degree of political influence of ordinary citizens in decision-making processes: What decisional weight do these new sites have? How often are their solutions taken into account by policy-makers? What is their political impact? To empower citizens means designing decision-making processes through which the mobilisation of civil society can have concretely visible effects. The quality of public discourse, the degree of political inclusiveness, and the magnitude of citizen empowerment thus pinpoint the fundamental qualities of participative deliberative arenas (della Porta, 2007). The extent of their presence determines the amount of deliberative participation to be found in each arena.

Our idea of 'democratic resourcefulness' can be used to reflect upon developments in the Italian political system. Democratisation in a participatory deliberative sense in Italy seems partial at best. Specifically, to begin with, over the last few decades, progress has been limited with respect to the development of formal institutional arrangements allowing for effective public deliberation by ordinary citizens. The remarkable growth of deliberative and participatory forums at both local and regional levels has helped to introduce these forms of participation as an acknowledged component of the political process in a number of administrations, such as for instance numerous Participatory budgeting initiatives or deliberative forums (Bobbio 2017; see for example the pioneering law on participation approved by the regional Council of Tuscany in August 2013 entitled 'Regional Public Debate and promotion of participation in local and regional policies'). To date, these forums have played a largely secondary role, administrations being still deeply tied to logics and processes characteristic of representative political institutions (Freschi and Mete 2009). Moreover, and more problematically, at the national level deliberative and participatory forums of the kind we have discussed play virtually no substantial role (Bobbio, forthcoming). To confirm this, it is worth remembering here that the constitutional reforms proposed in 2016 by the Prime Minster Matteo Renzi concerning the Italian form of

government envisioned an increase in the decision-making power of executive bodies, together with a downplaying of the Senate which, however, would not be replaced by institutional forums for deliberative and participatory democracy, but rather with a chamber of personalities essentially nominated by the parties. The vast majority of Italian citizens voted against the proposal in the referendum held on 4 December 2016. Whilst Italians reject growing concentration of power in the hands of the executive, support for including deliberative or participatory forums in the workings of institutions remains a possibility. In this sense, the introduction of the *Debat Publique* – a forum for stakeholder deliberation as to whether and how to pursue large infrastructural projects – might represent a noteworthy development. However, the democratic quality of this project, which is inspired by the model first introduced in France about twenty years ago (Bobbio 2010), is still open to assessment in the Italian context.

Participatory deliberative action in public spaces seems to suggest a more encouraging trend. Determining the extent to which popular mobilisation has been able to influence decision-making is well beyond the scope of this paper. However, a rich literature has shown that Italy is no exception to the wider global trend whereby mobilisation is increasingly featuring not only participatory but also deliberative engagement (e.g. della Porta and Rucht 2013; Felicetti 2016). What we have referred to as radical democratic views are increasingly embedded in the claims and practices of a plethora of Italian movements, such as the student protests in 2008–2010, the water movement in 2010–2011 and the recent women's mobilisation. This has occurred in a context where increasingly divided parties struggle even to achieve the basic goal of forming government coalitions. Overall, the main challenge to substantive democratisation in the Italian context might lie in the promotion of institutional forms of deliberative participation at the national level and in the mainstreaming of such practices at the lower levels of the state. This development is necessary to counter the growing gap between the democratic ambitions of mobilised citizens, on the one hand, and the democratic quality of state institutions, on the other. Indeed, in the absence of a way of channelling demands for greater democracy among the public into effective practices of participatory and deliberative democracy in institutions, rampant scepticism and disillusion with politics might be encouraged. Against this backdrop, the appeal of radical and deliberative ideals to the public might be reduced and the democratic benefits they can generate curtailed – fuelling resentment towards liberal democratic values and the institutions that embody them.

Conclusion

This article has explored the possibility of establishing a normative standard stronger than voting for assessing the quality of existing democracies. It has done that by drawing on and then employing the political principles of the participatory deliberative tradition. In light of this radical prospective, one can present the normative proposition on democratic resourcefulness as follows: *the greater the role of participatory deliberative arenas with high levels of deliberative participation in a society, the higher its democratic legitimacy*. Moreover, the diffusion of these arenas is also the most promising way of realising the potential for democratic reform today. Insofar as the participatory deliberative model of democracy is adopted to organise society, the enrichment and strengthening of democratic citizenship

can be fulfilled. According to recent discussions in the field of democratic theory, a key asset for a democratic society consists in the way different components of a democratic system interact (Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012). This insight is correct. Nevertheless, from our perspective contemporary democracies might be at a stage where an increase in the number of deliberative participatory bodies is needed before we can start talking about the democratisation of our societies in any substantial sense. A critical mass of deliberative and participatory politics is simply not there yet. This is certainly the case, for instance, in contemporary Italy where, as we have discussed, democratisation represents a distant prospect mainly due to the inability of institutions to pursue radical democratic change.

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