

## **PhD-Proposal:**

### **The Effect of Local Political Deliberation on the Publicity of Reason**

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The research wants to explore if – and if so, under which conditions – local political deliberation effects public reason.

This paper outlines a PhD project that aims at developing a deeper understanding on the effect of local political deliberation from a public-spirited perspective. Whereas the academic developments on the subject are in an already advanced stage in the area of democratic theory, deliberative democracy has not yet considerably caught the attention of political empiricists. Hence, we still lack accurate empirical data on the phenomenon of deliberative democracy.

One of the most central theoretical claims on the deliberative effect, which makes the practice of deliberative democracy extremely appealing from a public-spirited perspective of citizenship, is that deliberation would stimulate public-spiritedness among its participants. However, little is empirically known on this assumption. However, meanwhile local governments and ordinary citizens are in this respect extensively investing in the practical implementation and support of deliberative practices.

In the first part of this paper we will introduce the concept of deliberative democracy from a political theoretical point of view. In this section of the paper we will particularly give thought to the assumption that deliberation stimulates public-spiritedness and the normative relevance of the latter. In the second part of the paper we will explore this assumed deliberative effect more deeply from a political practical perspective. In this section we will also highlight the importance of the local political level in this matter, on which this research will exclusively focus. In the third and last part of this paper, the research and methodological design of the forthcoming work will be presented.

Notice that this PhD project is still in the early days of its development. In a next phase and aided by feedback on this paper, the undermentioned insights have to lead to a full-fledged theoretical framework and research design, which on its turn has to lead to the advancement of a concrete methodological design. For this, we will firstly focus on 'empirical theory' in the next stage of the

development of this project, in order to come to a more thorough exploration of the possibilities to empirically approach the normative theoretical research assumption as presented in this paper.

In presenting you this paper, we assume that precisely in an early stage in which the concretization of the approach of a distinct research idea is not yet full-fledged – and thus before irreversible decisions are made –, feedback from experts in deliberative democracy, participatory local politics, and other domains of political science is particularly fruit- and grateful in light of the choices that will have to be made.

## **1. POLITICAL THEORY**

### **1.1 Deliberative Democracy**

It is commonly assumed that voting is fundamental to political decision-making (Elster, 1999). However, there are plenty of other ways through which citizens theoretically could shape policy in a democracy. For a long time past, political theorists have been developing normative approaches to democracy. Some of those ideas can be defined as participatory approaches to democracy, in which the ordinary citizen – in one way or another – is being brought in the limelight of policy-making. Nowadays, we notice that the more the idea is shared that the way in which Western representative democracies are being put into place alienates the citizen from the policy it produces, the more we see the actual implementation of some of those ideas. Foremost in American and European subnational democracies, plenty of participatory initiatives have already been practically developed to re-establish the connection between citizens and policy makers (Hendriks, Loughlin, & Lindstrom, 2011). Initiatives that go beyond the mere possibility citizens have to choose, every once in a while, between alternatives offered by policy makers. Initiatives that complement and sometimes even challenge the representative system.

One of those participatory approaches to democracy is called *deliberative democracy*. In the following two sections, we will advance the notion from a political theoretical perspective. However, it is not the ambition of this work to aim at a comprehensive, nor even a thorough political theoretical introduction. Indeed, the essence of this research concerns an empirical investigation of the deliberative practice. Hence, a full elaboration of the political theoretical approach to the concept seems inappropriate. Yet, deliberative experimental practices are incontrovertibly based on democratic theoretical assumptions. Therefore, without wanting to contribute to the normative debate, a short descriptive introduction to the political theory on deliberative democracy is indispensable in this empirical orientated research.

The idea of deliberative democracy is, according to Elster, as old as democracy itself (1999). Elster refers to the Athenian government in which an assembly of a several thousand citizens directly made decisions through deliberation. Speakers in the assembly tried to persuade the entire audience, instead of merely those they were debating. By arguing the weaknesses of each other's arguments, they tried to reach the assembly as a whole. Because of its elitist character, it is self-evident that contemporary advocates of deliberative democracy have a different model in mind than the Athenian, in which only privileged citizens were part of the assembly and only a small number of them were given the opportunity to make themselves heard. Nonetheless, this ancient experience harbours the roots of an extensive development of the idea of deliberative democracy.

Many social and political theorists have embarked the Athenian idea of politics as a discussion before an audience. John Stuart Mill, Joshua Cohen, John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas are only some of the thinkers who were arguably of considerable importance for our social and political development and who also reflected on the notion of deliberation (Cohen, 1989; Habermas, 1996; Mill, 1948; Rawls, 1971). Theorists do not agree on whether the debate needs to take place between groups of citizens, in the wider public sphere or in the legislature, or whether the normative emphasis lies on the input or the output of deliberation, but they all do centralize reasoned discussion in collective decision-making (Chappell, 2012; Cohen, 1989; Dryzek, 2000; Elster, 1999; Valadez, 2001). For proponents of deliberate democracy, democratic legitimacy does not come from a mere vote, but is to be attributed to the opportunity of (direct or indirect) participation in reasoned discussion for those subject to the collective decisions to be taken. The latter represents the democratic part; the participation of all who is affected by the collective decision-making or their representatives (Elster, 1999). The former embodies the deliberative part; decision-making through the means of arguments offered by and to the participants.

As noted above, in specifying this rather broad conception of deliberative democracy, political theorists have different interpretations of what particularly counts as deliberation. Some authors define deliberation by the outcomes it produces. The most cited normative interpretation that define deliberation by its outcome concern the endogenous change of preferences that results from the deliberation (Stokes, 1999). Other authors on the contrary, dwell on the deliberative process – irrespectively of the outcomes it produces. According to the latter, the process has to meet certain conditions to be counted as 'deliberative democratic'. Elster for instance includes the commitment of the participants to the values of rationality and impartiality in the deliberative decision-making (1999). However, according to some democratic theories, deliberation has to be characterized by many more and further-reaching normative aspects. Steiner, Bächtiger, Spörndli and Steenbergen illustrate in that respect that the Discourse Quality Index (DQI) – a method to empirically analyse

the quality of deliberation (cf. *infra*) – is constructed on the ideal type of deliberative politics and entails six characteristics (2004). The ideal type of deliberative politics is characterized by an open, free, and equal participation by all citizens (1), who treat each other with respect (2) and express their views – which are open to change (3) – truthfully (4) through arguments that refer to the common good (5) and which indicate a logical justification of assertions and validity claims (6). The DQI is to be seen as a way to measure how close a deliberative practice approaches the deliberative ideal that can never be fully reached.

The essence of this research concerns a definite empirical investigation of the effect of deliberative practices. Practices which cannot be detached from the normative arguments on which they are based, but which can never fully reach the requirements political theorists aim for. One should note that there is no consensus in the literature on the normative – procedural nor outcome – requirements to which deliberative democracy has to answer. However, that is beside the point in this work. A research that aims at gathering empirical knowledge on the effect of local deliberative practices, does not require normative consensus, nor an ideal type of deliberation. It does need a core normative basis, but it has to leave open the different empirical, institutional conditions through which this normative basis of deliberative democracy can be fulfilled<sup>1</sup>. For now, we go along with the widely shared essence of deliberative democracy as reasoned discussion in collective decision-making – from a perspective of participatory democracy – between citizens. The reasoned character of the discussion distinguishes the deliberation with other forms of communication in which the exercise of power, manipulation, indoctrination, propaganda or threats dominate<sup>2</sup>.

## **1.2 The Deliberative Effect and the Relevance of Public Reason**

### *The Deliberative Effect*

This research wants to contribute to the empirical knowledge on the casual consequences of deliberation, assumed by democratic theorists<sup>3</sup>. As noted above, theorists argue that deliberation is good for democracy, as a process and/or an outcome. Concerning the latter, democratic theorists generally make the claim of the transformative power of deliberation (Steiner, 2004). The reflective aspect of deliberation is claimed to be crucial: deliberative reflection would have the potential to transform preferences/interests/beliefs in a normative welcome way (Chappell, 2012; Dryzek, 2000; Stokes, 1999; Valadez, 2001). More specifically, the deliberative process, contrarily to the way citizen participation in representative democracies is organized, would have the potential to go

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chappell (2012)

<sup>2</sup> Dryzek (2000)

<sup>3</sup> Fearon (1999)

beyond the mere aggregation of individual interest (Leyenaar, 2007). Some make the claim that there would be a reinforcement of the willingness to take the arguments of the others into account (Fishkin, 1997), while others even assume that deliberation would strengthen the commitment to the common good, to a sense of public-spiritedness (Chappell, 2012; Habermas, 1996; Mill, 1948; Pateman, 1975; Valadez, 2001; Verba, 1995).

Some assume the public-spirited effect of deliberation to be expressed in the actual support for this or that policy preference (Ackerman & Fishkin, 2002; Fishkin, 1997; Gastil, Bacci, & Dollinger, 2010). Others put the emphasis of public-spiritedness more generally on the use of public reason in justifying policy preferences (Chappell, 2012; Valadez, 2001). Notice that the latter assumption is more far-reaching than the former. One cannot straightforwardly evaluate a policy outcome as embodying ‘the common good’. Even on a pure normative level – leaving aside the complexity of political realities in actual policy-making which can actually not be disregarded –, there are different interpretations of what this actually ought to be (e.g. difference principle<sup>4</sup> vs. utilitarianism<sup>5</sup>), never mind how this then can be most effectively obtained.

Furthermore, even if there would be a normative consensus on what is the best for the common good and on how this ought to be obtained, support for this does not necessarily imply a true commitment to the common good. Self-interest motives do not as such exclude the support for policies that are satisfying for the common good. On the contrary, the theoretical assumption that deliberation stimulates the use of public reason in justifying policy preferences is as such unambiguously and thus more far-reaching. It does not depend on an exceptional chain of events in which self-interest and common interest accidentally overlap. It is about the expectation that deliberators learn more about the perspectives, beliefs and interests of others in a much greater extent than they otherwise would, which would make them truly more other-regarding (Chappell, 2012; Valadez, 2001). They would consequently be more likely to actually take the interests of others into account in the formation and argumentation of their policy preferences. The assumption of the reciprocal quality of deliberation is grounded in the idea that in a public, political forum citizens are compelled to justify their preferences in way that others can understand, if not necessarily can accept (Chappell, 2012). Contrarily to a ‘public-spirited preference’, being able to justify your preferences in an extra-personal manner, in a manner that is relevant for other as well, is as such truly other-regarding.

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<sup>4</sup> The common good is to be expressed according to what improves the lives of the least advantaged.

<sup>5</sup> The common good is to be expressed in what is the best for the greatest number of people.

Theorists stress that this assumption of other-regardingness does not imply that all arguments presented during the debate have to refer to the common good (Chappell, 2012). Regardless of its idealistic character, it would be furthermore impossible to take the interests of others into account if we do not get to know their perspectives, beliefs and interests. Deliberators should be perfectly free to express their personal preferences. The deliberative, interactive setting would, however, stimulate the need for extra-personal justification of those personal preferences.

Giving its more far-reaching and unequivocal character, we will focus in what follows on the empirical validity of this latter theoretical assumption of the effect of deliberation on public-spiritedness. Let us for the moment go along the assumption that the process of deliberation indeed does have the transformative potential to contribute to the public character of the reasons one has to prefer a certain policy above another. Yet, it is not self-evident that we as a matter of fact have of welcome this; one still has to make a normative argument on the significance of this.

### *The Relevance of Public Reason*

As outlined above, the question on the relevance of the other-regarding perspective in one's justification to prefer particular policies, is a specific interpretation of the importance of sensitivity to public-spiritedness. These assumptions embody the question of what we expect of citizens and thus brings us to the idea of citizenship.

Arguably, citizenship starts off individualistic. Politics affect everyone. It creates the general framework in which we live. It is about the historical decision whether to go to war, as well as about detailed regulation that influences our everyday life. Hence, it is in everyone's proper interest to be able to express preferences in the policy-making process. In expressing our preferences, it is commonly assumed as being self-evident to vote for those of whom one believes will create the greatest benefits for oneself. That the idea of the vote as a private expression of 'what I think is good for myself' is widely shared, however, does not tell us anything about its reasonableness. Hence, a lot of authors precisely stress the importance of public-spiritedness and consequently consider the upper interpretation of citizenship as detrimental from a normative point of view.

Rawls, for instance, stresses the importance of the sensitivity for the public interest in politics, for which other great thinkers as Mills among others also extensively advocated (1948). He argues that fair principles are principles that would be accepted in a contract including all persons who are behind a veil of ignorance and consequently are ignorant about their personal life plan (Rawls, 1971). Arguing in an extra-personal manner does not necessarily make the argued policy one that would be accepted by every other person, but it is, just like the Rawlsian idea of justice, a way of

the transcendence of one's personal situation in the formation of policy preferences<sup>6</sup>. In this respect, one should note that Rawls, from his interpretation of justice, tapped into the notion of public reason himself. According to his criterion of reciprocity, the exercise of political power is only proper if we – as citizens – reasonably think that other citizens might reasonably accept the reasons we offer for our political actions (Gosseries, 2010). According to Rawls' notion of public reason, we as citizens have a duty of civility towards other citizens as if we were legislators: reasons need to be reasonable to be accepted by others, whom do not necessarily share the same views on culture, religion or metaphysics. It is precisely such a public-spirited approach to citizenship that is commonly assumed in the underpinning of deliberative democracy (Ackerman & Fishkin, 2002). This research wants to test if this reasoning is empirically valid.

One should note that this normative, broad idea of the relevance of public reason is also reflected in concrete classifications of citizenship which are being used in empirical research. In these classifications, citizenship is commonly defined as involving a set of norms of what people should do as good citizens (Bolzendahl & Coffé, 2013; Dalton, 2008; Dinesen, Nørgaard, & Klemmensen, 2014; Hooghe, Oser, & Marien, 2014; Horne, 2003; Jackman & Miller, 1998; John, 2011; Kotzian, 2014; Oser & Hooghe, 2013; Raney & Berdahl, 2009; Schwartz & Bardi, 1997; Van Deth, 2007; Zmerli, 2010). In the most widely cited classification in this sort, Dalton presents *social citizenship* as a normative category in which the emphasize lies on our moral obligation towards others (Dalton, 2008). In combination with autonomy he speaks of *engaged citizenship*, in which the importance of addressing social needs is crucial. Hoskins & Mascherini then, write about *active citizenship* as the civic engagement individuals ought to have to participate to the wider society, not in terms of specific individual benefits, but instead in terms of continuation of democracy, good governance and social cohesion (2006). In the neorepublican conception of citizenship it is accordingly argued that citizens have the duty to engage within the public community. Here this broadly implies participating in the care for anything to do with the common good (Block, Dezeure, & Van Assche, 2010; Block, Verlet, & De Rynck, 2006). There are different interpretations of *neorepublican citizenship*, but Van Gunsteren concludes that they all come down to a communal way of thinking, which he describes as autonomous public ethics (1992). Ethics inherently rooted in the public sphere, whereby the civic input is not to be reduced as a simple aggregation of individual – not civic – preferences. The neorepublican duty then implies learning to express one's own vision in terms that are relevant for others as well.

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<sup>6</sup> Notice in this respect that Hansen states that in Rawls' hypothetical situation of the original position, self-interest simply cannot exist because of the veil of ignorance (2004).

The normative idea of the relevance of public reason is reflected in a very direct and explicit manner in the neorepublican interpretation of citizenship as outlined above. However, the other conceptions of citizenship described above all incorporate the intrinsic relevance of other-regarding civic norms. Consequently, they are in line with the adherence to public reason in preference formation, a theoretical assumed effect of deliberative democracy. The degree to which normative ideas – about how society should be organized – are subject of empirical research – about how society is shaped – must be seen as an enforcement of the theoretical arguments on its relevance. However, the question becomes: how empirical validity is the assumed relationship between this normative argued claim and deliberative democracy?

## **2. POLITICAL PRACTICE**

### **2.1 Empirical Fuzziness about the Deliberative Effect**

Considering the attention that has been devoted to the topic from the end of the former century onwards, it is commonplace to talk about ‘the deliberative turn’ in democratic theory (Carpini, Cook, & Jacobs, 2004). It is only the last decade however, that empiricists followed the same road and empirical research has been significantly conducted on deliberation. Despite this effort, we still lack accurate empirical data on the effect of the phenomenon.

Previous empirical research concluded that deliberation creates more single-peaked preferences<sup>7</sup> (Farrar et al., 2010), that it acts as a buffer against more negative feelings towards the out-group (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2014) and that it makes people more thoughtful (Smets & Isernia, 2014). Other conclusions have been that deliberation stimulates mutual understanding of conflicting viewpoints (Andersen & Hansen, 2007; Hansen, 2004; Luskin, O’Flynn, Fishkin, & Russell, 2014). It has also been derived from earlier research that deliberation leads to a greater cosmopolitan and collective orientation of preferences (Gastil et al., 2010), as well as to preferences that are more environmentally friendly (Fishkin, 1997).

All of these conclusions are in line with the transformative character argued for and assumed by deliberative theorists. However, there has been disproportionally less attention given to the transformative public-spirited character in empirical research than this has been the case in theory. Moreover, research rarely focuses extensively on justification instead of preferences or other deliberative qualities. The empirical claim, for instance, that the deliberative setting creates the openness between and willingness among citizens to argue back-and-forth (Caluwaerts &

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<sup>7</sup> A set of preferences in which there is a most preferred choice and in which options that are further away from this preferred choice are consistently less favored.



Deschouwer, 2014), is as such not sufficient to fulfil the theoretical assumption of public reason: one can perfectly be open and willing to argue with others, without eventually ending up with adopting an extra-personal perspective in one's own argumentation.

Besides the lack of focus on public-spiritedness and on public reason giving particularly, it is also remarkable that in empirical research on the deliberative effect, studies have generally approached deliberation as a broad deliberative experience.

#### *Grand treatment*

As noted above, there are many different empirical, institutional conditions by which a normative basis of deliberative democracy can be shaped. However, if one merely quantitatively explores the changes in preferences, thoughts or beliefs after respondents are invited to take part in a deliberative experiment, after they have been exposed to briefing materials and have informally deliberated the topic in their personal life setting, encountered other citizens, experts and politicians on scene, have been confronted with the presence of an active moderator and the need for particular decision-making (Farrar et al., 2010; Luskin et al., 2014; Smets & Isernia, 2014; Thompson, 2008), it is unclear in what way deliberation is responsible for each of the measured outcomes. Hence, up until today, the most important conclusion drawn from the state of the art of empirical research on deliberative democracy is that we still know little about why and under which circumstances deliberative effects take place (Barabas, 2004; Carpini et al., 2004). Indeed, at present day, researchers are therefore explicitly calling to pay sufficient attention to the characteristics of the deliberative process to learn more about the outcomes it produces (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2011; Setälä & Herne, 2014).

Apart from the approach of deliberation as grand treatment, one should notice that empirical research on the deliberative effect generally overlooks which kind of citizen takes part in deliberative experiments or policy initiatives, which can be an important factor in the analysis of the deliberative effect.

#### *Self-Selection Bias*

Blais, Young & Lapp suggested for instance that the less important one evaluates 'civic duty' as a norm of citizenship, the less likely one will cast their ballot (2000). And Bolzendahl and Coffé concluded that the greater the emphasis citizens place on the norm that it is important to understand the reasoning of people with other opinions, the more likely they participate in non-institutional political participation (e.g. signing a petition, taking part in a demonstration, buying or boycotting goods for political or ethical reasons) (2013). This self-selection thesis, which opposes

the socialization thesis in which participation effects norms, has however not yet been directly explored in this manner (Quintelier & Hooghe, 2012). However, Dalton's empirical findings demonstrate – and others replicated – the actual existence of an engaged citizen who finds it important to address social needs, to help the worst-off and to be involved in political participation away from elections and parties towards more direct forms of action (Dalton, 2008; Hooghe et al., 2014). The link cannot be straightforwardly be made, but deliberative democracy can be seen as a form of direct political participation away from the current institutional frame.

Yet, other insights contradict this self-selection suggestion. Besides the general remark that norms do not (necessarily) lead to corresponding behaviour<sup>8</sup> (Quintelier & Hooghe, 2012; Van Deth, 2007; Zaff, 2010), we acknowledge empirical evidence that challenges the notion of the 'engaged citizen' (Bolzendahl & Coffé, 2013; Oser & Hooghe, 2013). Endorsing the importance of addressing social needs and helping the worst-off would not necessarily make unconventional direct political participation more likely. Furthermore, Agger even explicitly advances the idea that when citizens are invited to participate, foremost those who see this participation as an opportunity to fulfil individual needs (e.g. improve the traffic situation around their children's school) – everyday makers – are likely to respond to this (Agger, 2012). A reasonable insight, but it does challenge the empirical evidence on the notion of the engaged citizen. Agger even goes further in contradicting this by stating that social entrepreneurs – citizens who are by definition oriented towards voluntary work and are intrinsically driven to help others in need, and thus of whom the activities are as such contributing to the creation of social cohesion –, do not see themselves as candidates for public participatory processes offered by their government. Arguably, it will be decisive in this matter to which extent the degree of abstraction of this participation to public policy contrasts with one's social engagement in one's direct environment.

In this way, the literature reasonably suggests that there is a self-selection bias when it comes to political participation, but does not agree on its direction. The question becomes which kind of citizen is attracted by the deliberative form of political participation? Seen the centrality of (the lack of) public-spiritedness in the suggested self-selection biases, the occurrence and direction of it seems consequently of considerable importance in our quest for insights on the effect of deliberative democracy. How does the assumed effect of deliberation on public reason interact with citizens who are already convinced of public-spirited norms? Is this an essential condition for

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<sup>8</sup> Expressing that you think it is important to deliberate does not mean that you actually will participate in deliberative practices.

the socialization effect to come about, or does this precisely minimize the effect – which is greater in interaction with citizens whom do not a priori value public-spirited norms?

It should be noted that the potentiality of the self-selection bias in the analysis of the deliberative effect cannot be detached from the way deliberators are selected. If people voluntarily have to register for a deliberative practice, the potential self-selection effect will be the greatest. If, on the other hand, a representative sample of the population is drawn, the potential self-selection effect can be diminished; it can trigger selected citizens to deliberate who would otherwise not have been involved. Notice however, that self-selection even in the latter in a way occurs (which as such does not say anything about the significance of its impact on the relation between deliberation and public reason); people always still have to decide for themselves if they actually will respond to the invitation to participate<sup>9</sup>. In light of the self-selection effect, it is consequently also important to look beyond mere selection: are potential deliberators given real opportunities for power? Is training provided to provide the necessary confidence and skills? Are potential deliberators mobilized? How and by whom are they approached?

In sum we can conclude that previous research lend us some meaningful indications about the deliberative effect on public reason. However, this matter has not yet been directly and fully explored. Meanwhile, theorists suggest far-reaching claims which increasingly stimulate the use of deliberative practices by policy makers.

#### *Connecting Normative Theory with Empiricism*

Thompson argues that if the academic study of politics has the ambition to come to a more comprehensive understanding of deliberative democracy, it is of crucial importance that theorists and empiricists pay attention to the developments in each other's field of research (2008). From the above it is to be derived that this has not yet been sufficiently the case, certainly not when it comes to the specific matter of deliberative democracy of concern in this work. Without making claims on whether a good democracy should have which amount deliberation, empiricists can throw light on the normative claims suggested by political theorists to further develop our understanding of the phenomenon (Steiner, 2004). One way to do so is to measure how close real-world deliberative practices approach the ideal type of the deliberative process as argued for by theorists. This is however not this research's approach. The question this research wants to answer

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<sup>9</sup> In this respect the selection procedure of the Belgian G1000 of 2011 is particularly interesting: they opted for a random selection of participants but anticipated a stronger dropout among groups who traditionally feel less comfortable with political or social participation by reserving 10% of the places to persons of whom they expect they were least susceptible to accept their invitation (D. Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2014).

is if – and if so, how and under which conditions – deliberative practices fulfil specific normatively assumed consequences. This question has thus to be distinguished from research which aims at measuring if deliberative practices answers the procedural qualities deliberative theorists argue for, which is normatively cut-off from the outcomes it produces (Mutz, 2008).

From the above it is to be derived that it is still unclear if societies – in case they value the relevance of public reason – are better off spending time, effort and resources in further developing deliberative decision-making processes<sup>10</sup>. Hence, based on the normative value of an assumed deliberative effect, this research approach does not as such imply the exclusion of other ways to achieve this outcome more efficiently<sup>11</sup>. However, meanwhile governments and ordinary citizens – foremost on the local level – are increasingly investing in deliberative democratic practices. While this work has a clear academic objective, policy-relevant implications may consequently be indirectly derived from this research's results.

## **2.2 Deliberation and Local Politics**

It is a widely shared argument that the added value of local politics lies in its unique democratic character (Steyvers, Pilet, Reynaert, & Devos, 2007). Local policy has – by its very own distinctive nature – the ability to affect – directly and tangibly – the day-to-day life of its citizens (Beetham, 1996; Hendriks et al., 2011; Stoker, 1996). A reasonable and widely shared argument on citizen participation – of which the notion of the everyday maker is to be seen as a specific and rather excessive elaboration (cf. supra) – is that citizens will participate if they feel it directly affects themselves (Steyvers et al., 2007). In that way the local level has the unique ability to attract citizens to deliberate in the public sphere who not necessarily would identify it as their civic duty to do so. This makes it particularly interesting in this explorative research on public reason.

Hence, it should not surprise that the current deliberative practices in Europe and the US are almost exclusively deployed on the local level (Hendriks et al., 2011). However, following this reasoning, the local level can be seen as a kind of grand political school, exceeding the strict local level (Hendriks et al., 2011; Kersting, Caulfield, Nickson, Olowu, & Wollmann, 2009; Steyvers et al., 2007). It is John Stuart Mill who argues that on the local level citizens get acquainted with the political dynamics in general and the public debate in specie. In that way, local participation can give rise to analogous participation on broader levels (1948). It follows from these arguments that

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Mutz (2008).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

the local level is indispensable in encouraging public-spiritedness in the political sphere among citizens.

Additionally, the particularity of the Belgian local context seems specifically fruitful for deliberative research. Whereas the importance of the role of parties in Western democracies in general is unquestionably, Belgian politics are to an even larger extent dominated by political parties as the principal actors in decision-making (De Winter, 2006; Deschouwer, 2004). Nonetheless, parties are increasingly struggling in Belgium's political climate (Dassonneville, 2014; Regering, 2015; Schamp, 2016; Steyvers, 2014; Van Haute, 2015). The confrontation with declining numbers of members, a suspicious public opinion and increasing volatility, is however not unique to the Belgian case (S. A. R. J. & Weldon Dalton, 2005; Drummond, 2006; Van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012). Yet, given the fact that Belgium's parliamentary democracy is more than any other Western democracy characterized by a true domination of parties, this crisis is of particular relevance for this country.

This party crisis as described above is particularly situated on the level of the party base. Hence, it is primarily the role of the party as bridge between policy and the people that is put under pressure; citizens are increasingly losing connection with party politics and politics by consequence. In this light, we observe practices by which party members are being more and more involved in intra-party decision-making, through which citizens are progressively engaging in non-institutional forms of political participation, and governments that are to a greater extent involving citizens on a more direct way in their decision-making. This research can be seen as testing the adequacy of a particular expression of the latter solutions and is consequently of particular interest in the Belgian context.

### **3. DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM**

#### *Research Objective*

The central question this research wants to explore is if – and if so, when – local political deliberation affects public reason.

This research objective is based on the assumption that deliberation strengthens the commitment to the common good and particularly stimulates the use of public reason in justifying policy preferences. However, we still lack accurate empirical data on the phenomenon of deliberative democracy for this claim to be empirically valid. Empirical research on deliberative democracy rarely explores justification of preferences thoroughly, has generally broached deliberation as a grand treatment – which makes it unclear in what way deliberation is responsible for the measured outcomes –, and has not yet dealt with the question of the impact of the self-selection effect on the deliberative transformative effect. As to be concluded from the above, the literature leads us

some meaningful indications on the deliberative effect on public reason, but this relation has not yet been directly and fully explored.

Yet, empirical validity on this theoretical assumption seems pivotal. The relevance of public reason is argued by some of our greatest political theorists, and contemporary institutional and non-institutional participation is increasingly drawn to stimulate such conceptions of citizenship. Local governments, as well as ordinary citizens are in this respect extensively investing in the practical implementation and support of deliberative practices. Hence, there is a pressing need to contribute to insights on the efficiency of investments in local deliberative democracy, from a public-spirited perspective of citizenship – assumed in this research.

This research wants to dwell on the importance of connecting political theory with empiricism by contributing to the knowledge on a subject on which many thoughts and ink have been flown, on which a lot of contemporary political practices are based, but on which there is – proportionally – insufficiently empirically known.

### *Conceptual Framework*

In the first part of this paper, deliberative democracy has been defined as a participatory model of reasoned discussion in collective decision-making between citizens. With its reasoned discursive character, deliberation differs from other forms of communication in which the exercise of power, manipulation, indoctrination, propaganda or threats dominate. In other words, deliberation as interpreted in this work, does not imply the need to obtain a decision, nor does it involve an explicit orientation to any outcome. As noted above, it is important – in light of the research objective – that the conceptual framework leaves open the different institutional conditions through which this normative basis can be fulfilled. As a result from the definition of the problem and as the research question reads, the focus of deliberation in this research is confined to deliberation on local policy matters.

Notice, furthermore, that this definition exclusively focuses on deliberation among citizens (public deliberation), and thus not between policy makers or in which policy makers as a matter of course deliberate with citizens. Hence, this research is embarked upon the rising questions on the way in which Western representative democracies are being put into place which stimulate the quest for solutions to alternatively involve citizens to decision-making.

With the restriction on deliberation among citizens, the deliberative process is as such approached as a group process. The dialogical is indispensable to the problem posing of this research as introduced above. In this respect one should note that giving their shared essence of the dialogical,

‘deliberative democracy’ and ‘discursive democracy’ are often being used interchangeably<sup>12</sup> (Steiner, 2004).

Concerning the dependent variable, public reason as introduced above is interpreted in this work as proper extra-personal justification for policy preferences. Like Van Gunsteren’s interpretation of the neorepublican civic duty, public reason is to be found in the articulation of one’s own evaluation of policy and its alternatives, in terms that are relevant for others as well (1992). Hence, public reason in this research is an interpretation of the civic duty of public-spiritedness, expressed in the justification of preferences on local policy matters. It is based on the expectation that deliberators would be stimulated to take each other’s interests, perspectives and beliefs into account in their preference formation (cf. supra).

### 3.1 Research Design

The first question on which this research wants to formulate an answer is whether local political deliberation effect public reason. As stated above, this research is aimed at gathering empirical knowledge on the effect of the different institutional practices of local participatory democracy that answer to the bare normative requirement adopted in this work. This research will focus on deliberative practices that are currently being developed on the Belgian local level and wants to find out to what extent these are actually able to fulfil the normative aspects of which theorists assume they characterize deliberative democracy. We are particularly interested in the empirical validity of the assumption of the deliberative transformative effect on the extra-personal character of reasons people hold to justify their respective policy preferences.

*RQ1: Do contemporary initiated Belgian local political deliberative practices effect public reason?*

Empirical literature already suggested the empirical validity of the public-spirited effect of deliberative democracy, from particular interpretations of the dependent and independent variables, from various research objectives and accordingly diverse operationalized designs. However, the effect on justification of preferences has not yet been thoroughly, nor directly studied. Given its reasonable theoretical explanation and some meaningful empirical indications in

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<sup>12</sup> Dryzek does make the distinction between ‘discursive’ and ‘deliberative democracy’. However, in doing this, he does not want to include the possibility of monological deliberation; discursive democracy is interpreted as the more critical version of deliberative democracy (critical in its orientation towards the established power structures) (2000).

previous research of which the designs adjoins the objective of this work (cf. supra), we could expect that deliberation actually stimulates public reason.

*H1: The justification of policy preferences of deliberators will evolve in a more extra-personal manner.*

The objective of this research is, however, not limited to the contribution of empirical knowledge on the mere outcome of deliberative practices. This work is also characterized by the ambition to discover some meaningful insights on the explanation of the measured deliberative outcome. “We consider it to be very much an open question just how well deliberation works, by what mechanism, under what circumstances” (Barabas, 2004). Indeed, at present day, researchers are therefore still explicitly stressing the need to come to a deeper understanding of the deliberative outcomes (Setala & Herne, 2014).

*RQ2: Under which conditions do these local political deliberative practices effect public reason?*

We will particularly involve the type of the deliberating citizen into our analysis. The literature suggests that particular kinds of citizens would be more likely to take part in participatory initiatives. The relevance of public-spiritedness in these – opposing – claims on the civic norms participatory citizens hold, turns these claims into assumptions of remarkable significance for this research. Research indicates on the one hand that citizens who already value a public-spirited approach to citizenship a priori are more likely to actually take part in deliberative practices, while on the other hand it explicitly denies this claim and even suggests that participative citizens are driven by a fulfilment of individual needs – which precisely indicates that deliberators would rather adhere a self-interested approach to citizenship. The local context of this research, which has – more than any other political level – the ability to affect – directly and tangibly – the day-to-day life of its citizens, provides us with the best opportunity to try to find out the difference in impact of civic norms on the deliberative outcome.

In our quest to explore the relationship between deliberation and public reason more deeply, it is of considerable importance to analyse the occurrence and direction of this suggested self-selection bias. The question becomes how the assumed effect of deliberation on public reason interacts with citizens who are already convinced of public-spirited norms? Is this an essential condition for the effect to come about, or does this precisely minimize the effect – which is greater in interaction with citizens who do not a priori value public-spirited norms?



*RQ2a: How are the norms of citizenship deliberating citizens a priori hold related to the deliberative effect on public reason?*

*H2a: There is a correlation between distinct civic normative orientations to public-spiritedness and the deliberative effect on public reason.*

Another way by which this work wants to discover some meaningful insights on the understanding of the relation between deliberation and public reason, is by overtaking deliberation as grand treatment. As to be concluded from the above, there are many different empirical, institutional conditions by which a normative basis of deliberative democracy can be shaped. In this research, we want to pay attention to the characteristics of the concerned deliberative process to learn more about their effects. Since such a ‘middle ranged’<sup>13</sup> or ‘disaggregated’ approach<sup>14</sup> is rare, little is known on the effect of specific components which shape deliberation (Setala & Herne, 2014). Yet, given the wide-ranging possibilities to construct the normative interpretation of deliberative democracy in this work, we expect them to respectively effect ‘the deliberative outcome’ differently.

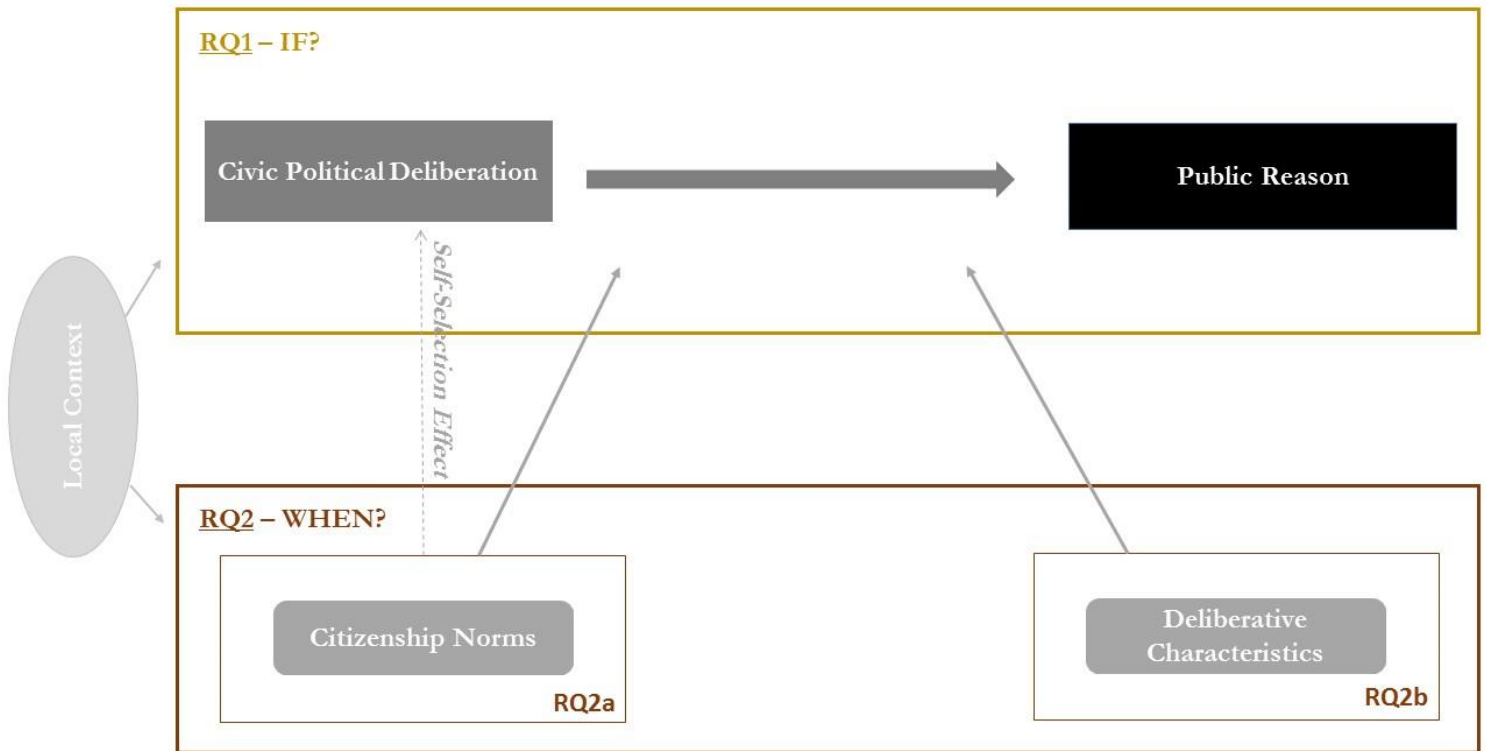
*RQ2b: How are the distinct deliberative characteristics related to the deliberative effect on public reason?*

*H2b: There is a correlation between specific deliberative characteristics and the deliberative effect of public reason*

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Mutz (2008)

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Thompson (2008)



### 3.2 Methodological Design

Above we represented the overall objective of the forthcoming work, derived from the state of the art. In a next phase, these insights have to lead to a full-fledged theoretical framework and research design. We will therefore in the next stage of the development of this project, firstly on ‘empirical theory’ on (the publicity of) justification of preferences, transformative vs. transactional effects and the institutional conditions of deliberative democracy. Once this is thoroughly de- and refined, this has to lead to the development of a concrete methodological design. This will be established in virtue of specific methodological literature and ECPR courses on the methodological techniques in questions.

For now, we will suggest in this last part of this paper, the preliminary ideas on how to methodologically approach the objective of this research.

#### *Deliberative Effect*

So as the conceptual framework reads, we will practically aim at participatory initiatives where citizens are invited to discuss local policy issues. Despite the outlined potential diversity of its institutional conditions (which is as such an important aspect of a sub analysis in this work), the centrality of reasoned discussion between citizens is essential to this work and subsequently has also to be incontestable to the participatory initiatives in question. Hence, we will only take

initiatives in consideration of which the local initiators themselves acknowledge this centrality of reasoned discussion between their citizens (cf. how the initiators feel about the nature of the practice). The extent to which the centrality of this core basis is self-evident, as well as the institutional diversity between the initiatives in question, will eventually decide on the concrete selection of cases.

Regarding the research objective and its specific concretization in the first research question, it is not our purpose to intervene in these deliberative practices. We want to find out if, in the way the concerned deliberation is practiced, the assumed transformative effect on the extra-personal character of justification is empirically valid. Therefore we will first off present the deliberators a survey at the start of the actual on-site deliberation, just before the reasoned discussion between citizens outside the private sphere kicks off. In this survey, we will ask the deliberators to report their personal preference/vision (depending on the issue at hand) on the policy matter. As argued above, we are not as such interested in those concrete preferences, but we will consequently ask them to think about why they hold this preference/vision and to report this in the most concrete way possible.

Firstly, we will do so by using open-ended questions. Hence, (specific) justifications of preferences – particularly on actual policy-making, seen its comprehensive implications –, can take numerous forms. This does not mean that one cannot categorize the most expected and relevant justifications for this research. However, in that way we would solely depend on the self-assessment of the participants on what they think which suggested categories fit their concrete, personal justifications they may hold regarding a policy matter in the best possible way. Furthermore, not only the reasons people may hold for this or that policy preference are potentially very discrepant, the way these reflect and – the extent to which – these incorporate an extra-personal character, can also be equally diverse. For these reasons we judge that this open-ended methodology – with manual encoding – is highly recommendable in view of the research question at hand.

For this analysis, we will use an operationalized coding category of the above-mentioned DQI. Hence, one of the dimensions of the DQI, which was initially developed to measure parliamentary deliberative speeches but has being take on for citizen deliberation, is particularly relevant regarding the specificity of our dependent variable: ‘the content of justification’. This concerns a coding category that captures whether appeals are made in terms of narrow group interest (if one or more groups are mentioned in a speech), in terms of the common good (there is an explicit mention of the common good, conceived in utilitarian terms of terms of the difference principle) or when appeals are neutral (no explicit reference to group interests or the common good) (Bächtiger,

Shikano, Pedrini, & Ryser, 2009; Steenbergen, Bächtiger, Spörndli, & Steiner, 2003; Steiner, 2004). We will explicitly focus on the common good appeals in the justification of preferences. In this research, it is of little importance to dissect if appeals are either utilitarian or according to the difference principle. We therefore congregate the wide range of macro level statement – analogous to the specific subject at hand – about benefits of costs (‘good for the city’, ‘the best for society’, ‘best for the most people’), as well as explicit references to a particular group – analogous to the specific subject at hand – that is among the least advantaged. This coding category will be used to analyse the reasons deliberators express a priori to the on-site deliberation.

Regarding this first research question, we will, however, also confront the participants in the survey with close-ended questions. The use of open-ended questions in a survey always comes with a greater risk of blank answers. In this case, we also have to take into account that people in this pre-deliberative stadium, do not yet feel able to freely express their opinion on the issue at stake, let alone its justification. Furthermore, we must consider the possibility that the way participants freely provide their personal reason may not always indicate the (extra-)personal character it may embody. None of these situations, however, do as such exclude meaningful insights to discover regarding the deliberative effect.

In that way we will also use close-ended questions in the survey. Applied to the specific policy topic at hand, participants will be provided with statements people could potentially hold as reason for their policy preference<sup>15</sup>. Statements indicating a clear self-, group-, or common good interested orientation, or which rather imply a neutral orientation towards public reason. In order to obtain an insight on their justification that is as sound and accurate as possible, we will both ask the participants to evaluate each of the statements separately (0 to 7 scale: not at all important – very important) as well as to select their first, second and third most and respectively less important statements.

This pre-deliberation survey, with open- and closed-ended questions, has the objective to gather data on the justification of – a potentially large group of – deliberative participants’ preferences and the importance they (do not) attach to common good justifications in the most accurate and efficient way possible. Presenting the deliberators the same survey after the conclusion of the deliberation, allows us to analysing the deliberative effect on personal justification through the comparison of the pre- and post-deliberation results.

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<sup>15</sup> Including the possibilities ‘if other, please specify’ and ‘don’t know’

A second way in which we will approach the first research question is through a discourse analysis of the deliberation itself. A pre-post shift in the extra-personal justification of an in an isolated context surveyed deliberator, does not necessarily imply that this shift in justification has also been observable during the deliberation. Just as well does the absence of such a shift in the pre-post survey analysis not necessarily exclude the actual presence of an evolution of one's justification in a more extra-personal manner during the deliberation. Seen the interpretation of deliberation in this work, the evolution of (extra-)personal character of justification during the deliberation is to be seen as a feature of the deliberative effect of public reason.

For this analysis, we will also use the DQI. Notice that, as marked in the upper paragraph, we will not use this index to measure how close a deliberative practice approaches a deliberative procedural ideal, we will rather use the DQI as an instrument to measure the deliberative effect. When it comes to the deliberative speeches, the 'respect' dimension of the DQI is – next to the upper-mentioned dimension regarding the content of justification – another coding category that is of relevance for and will be used in this research: 'respect'.

This dimension relates to a coding category in which respect towards the needs and rights of different social groups – affected by the concerned policies –, towards the demand of others and towards counterarguments are respectively analysed (Bächtiger et al., 2009; Steenbergen et al., 2003; Steiner, 2004). Regarding our focus on public reason, we will take on the indicator of respect towards the demands of others and counterarguments. The former differentiates between explicit respect for the demands of others (which differs from a bargaining situation in which one gets something in return, but in which there is no need to make any positive statement about the demands of others), no respect (code assigned if there are only negative statements on the demands of others) and a neutral category (no explicit negative, nor positive statement on the demands of others) (Bächtiger et al., 2009; Steenbergen et al., 2003; Steiner, 2004). The latter is used in the situation where counterarguments come into play or are anticipated. Counterarguments can be ignored (all counterarguments are ignored), they can be included but degraded (counterarguments are acknowledged, but no positive statement on these are made and at least one of these are explicitly degraded), counterarguments can be included and neutral (acknowledgment of counterarguments but no explicit negative, nor positive statement is made), or they can be included and valued (counterarguments are acknowledged and at least one of them is explicitly valued).

With an exclusive and respective focus on these two dimensions of a well-known deliberative measuring instrument, next to the comparison between actual pre-post justification, we will be able

to gather elucidate empirical data on the assumed evolution of justification in a more extra-personal manner.

### *Self-Selection Effect*

Regarding the exploration of the second research question on the level of the individual conditions, we will add questions in the pre-deliberation survey that measure the norms of citizenship deliberators hold. For this we will take on the widely duplicated operationalization of the citizenship dimension of the International Social Survey Program (ISSP, 2013). Seen the specific local restriction of this research, the questions of the ISSP will be accordingly adapted where there is an explicit extra-local focus\*:

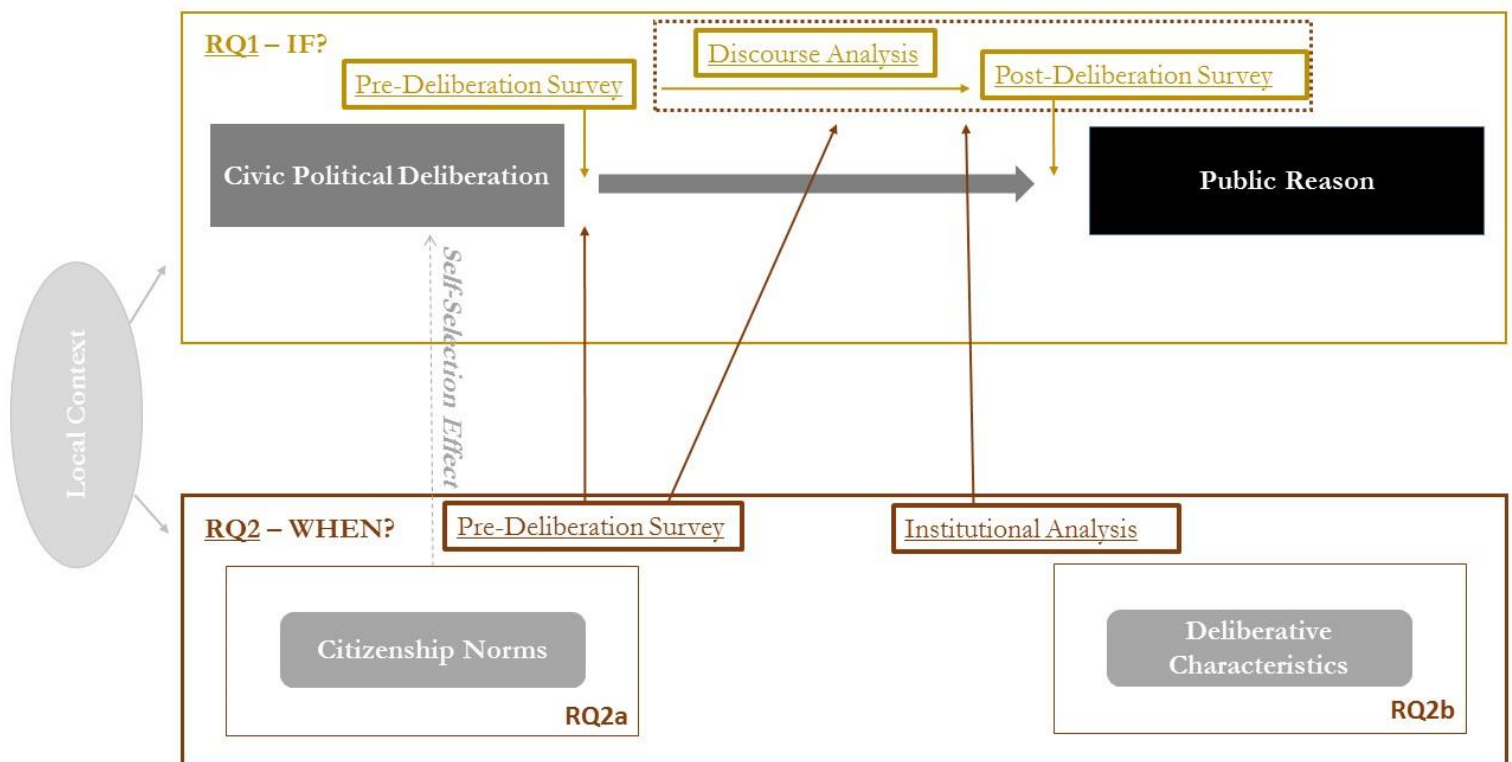
Participants will be asked to evaluate nine items separately from (1) not important at all, to (7) very important according to what they think is important for a person to be a good citizen: (a) never try to evade taxes; (b) obey laws; (c) try to understand the reasoning of people with other opinions; (d) buy or boycott goods for political/ethical/environmental reasons; (e) help people in the local community\* who are worse off than yourself; (f) always vote in elections; (g) be active in social and political associations; (h) keep a watch on the actions of local government\* (ISSP, 2013). In this research, we will additionally ask the participants to select what they think is the first, second and third most and respectively less important norm, which can grant us additional accurate data on which distinctive civic orientations participants actually hold.

Hence, regarding RQ2a, we are interested in participants whom have a distinctive civic orientation towards public-spiritedness – of which the literature suggests deliberators are characterized –; in casu norm (e). Additionally, we will focus on norm (c) in our analysis. This norm is labelled as corresponding to the citizenship category of ‘autonomy’ (not ‘solidarity’) (Dalton, 2006). We notice however, that in other categorizations of citizenship norms, this norm is often being replaced by the norm of ‘engagement in political discussion’ or ‘the formation of one’s own opinion, independently of others’ (cf. Dalton (2006); Hooghe et al. (2014); Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito (2010); Zmerli (2010)). From the perspective of the specific nature of our dependent variable, the latter is not an equivalent of the former, since the former has not just a deliberative democratic character, but already incorporate a clear public-spirited character. We will explore how the deliberative effect of public reasons relates with participants who attach either great or precisely little importance to these (correlated?) norms.

### *Institutional Effect*

Regarding RQ2b, we will analysis the institutional characteristics of the deliberative practices at hand. For this we will bypass the deliberation as grand treatment and unravel the distinctive deliberative conditions of the actual practices and explore if we can detect patterns in relation with the deliberative outcomes on public reason.

In a second stadium, based on the explored insights from the studied ‘real-world’ practices, we could additionally set-up own deliberative experiments (among students), in which we specifically could focus on the manipulation of deliberative conditions and its effect on the deliberative outcome on public reason.



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