Integrating Multiple Channels of Engagement: from Multichannel Marketing to Democratic Innovations

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Abstract

Increasingly cities around the world are introducing multichannel democratic innovations that integrate multiple engagement processes. This article offers a first overview of this emerging phenomenon by exploring three families of multi-channel innovations: participatory budgetings, citizens' assemblies, and citizen relations management platforms. The authors introduce a series of definitions to identify some of the building blocks of these complex democratic innovations'. The paper uses this framework to explore the opportunities and challenges of integrating multiple channels of engagement, and to describe the most common integration mechanisms employed by these families of innovations: managed competition, regulation and isolation. This paper constitutes a first step in a new research agenda that goes beyond the variety of labels of democratic innovations and investigates how these institutions can be modeled as different combinations of a common set of building blocks.

Introduction

Democratic innovations — institutions designed specifically to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process (Smith, 2009) — have become a common feature of policymaking and governance building. Participedia, a global network of scholars that maps democratic innovations using a variety of new crowdsourcing methods, describes the fast diffusion of democratic innovations as "a transformation of democracy—one possibly as revolutionary as the development of the representative, party-based form of democracy that evolved out of the universal franchise."[1]

Some democratic innovations are very simple and involve a single public in a set of tasks. Town hall meetings (Bryan, 2003), many mini-publics (Smith & Ryan, 2014), issue-reporting digital platforms (Sjoberg, Mellon, & Peixoto, 2015), and participatory monitoring processes (Bjorkman & Svensson, 2007) are just a few examples of single channel democratic innovations. Other democratic innovations are more complex and can be better understood as a system that integrates multiple channels of engagement, i.e., multiple online and/or offline spaces designed to promote the participation of a specific segment of the population. The most complex of these systems engage more than a million people (Aggio, & Sampaio, 2013).

While the existing literature has investigated the interactions between democratic innovations and other existing institutions, both theoretically (Mansbridge et al., 2012) and empirically (Wampler, 2007), very little is known about the interactions of channels of engagement *within* a democratic innovation.

The few existing case studies on multichannel innovations highlight the potential benefits of these institutional designs (Best, Ribeiro, Matheus, & Vaz, 2010; Peruzzotti, Magnelli, & Peixoto, 2011). While up to now the experimental literature has focused on exploring the effects of small organizational features of a democratic innovation[2], what we can view as the smallest 'LEGO®' blocks' of a democratic innovation architecture. No experiment to date has investigated different sequences and integration mechanisms of such LEGO blocks. In sum, the current literature offers many insights into the macro-level interactions, and the effect of micro-design choices, but provides very little insight into the meso-level interactions.

Using a vast collection of recent and not-so-recent examples, this paper presents an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of integrating multiple channels of engagement. This paper begins by offering a definition of channels of engagement and multichannel democratic innovations systematizing concepts developed by practitioners in recent years. In doing so the authors expand ideas developed by the literature on marketing to include concepts developed in the democratic innovations literature.

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[1] See http://www.participedia.net/en/news/2015/10/01/global-research-partnership-awarded-significant-grant-support-participedia

[2] Some examples are: experimental studies on facilitators (Humphreys, Masters, & Sandbu, 2006; Farrar et al., 2010; Spada & Vreeland, 2013), different online platforms for ideation (Spada, Klein, Calabretta, Iandoli & Quinto 2015), the role of group composition (Farrar et al., 2009; Karpowitz, Mendelberg, & Shaker, 2012), the role of different decision-making processes (Morrell 1999), and the role of information vs deliberation (Steenbergen, Bächtiger, Pedrini, & Gautschi, 2015).

The paper draws the majority of examples from three families of democratic innovations that employ multiple channels of engagement: participatory budgeting processes (PBs), citizens' assemblies (CAs) and citizens' relations management platforms (CRMPs). The first allows the participation of non-elected citizens in the conception and/or selection of public projects (Sintomer et al., 2013), the second allows the participation of non-elected citizens in the conception or reform of a complex legislation (Warner and Pearse, 2008), the third, and most recent, allows citizens to interact with multiple democratic innovations and government services. While the first two are well known, CRMPs have attracted little attention from the literature on democratic innovations. The literature on marketing offers a framework for analyzing customer relations management that can be used to analyze these complex innovations (Buttle, & Maklan 2008), but this literature requires significant adaption or it risks to induce a commodification of citizens and an extreme simplification of democratic innovations (Dutil, Howard, Langford 2008).

Most of the examples used in this paper are *invited spaces*, participatory spaces designed by a government/organization to involve citizens. An in-depth analysis of multiple channels of engagement in *invented spaces*, participatory spaces claimed by social movements (Miraftab, 2004), is beyond the page limitations of this paper. Since this paper focuses on innovations designed specifically to deepen democracy, it does not discuss cases in which social movements and organizations leverage Twitter, Facebook, and many other digital technologies to deepen democracy. Lastly, a detailed overview of the interdisciplinary literature that analyzes the diffusion, variety and impact of the three families of innovations under consideration (PBs, CAs, and CRMPs) is beyond the scope of this paper. The objective of this paper is to leverage these three examples to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of multichannel democratic innovations and to present the most common integration mechanisms.

In order to do so we need a language to describe the phenomena we are interested in. Thus, the next section introduces a series of definitions, starting with the concept of channels of engagement and multichannel democratic innovations. While these definitions do not aspire to become a standard, they are a disposable tool useful to jumpstart the discussion and reduce the level of confusion that currently characterizes the debate. The next section also introduces the definition of *action*, the smallest building block of an engagement channel, and then discusses *phases* and *cycles*, clusters of actions frequently used by academics and practitioners to describe the inner workings of complex innovations.

In the sections following, the authors discuss the challenges/opportunities of integrating multiple channels of engagement, and present three different integration models: competition, regulation and separation. These models are not exhaustive of the variety of possible integration mechanisms, but they are common to the family of innovations the paper analyzes. The paper then offers a discussion of the findings and recommendations for further research.

The LEGO blocks of multichannel democratic innovations

Preliminary conceptualization of multichannel customer relations emerged at the end of the 90s (Holmsen, Palter, Simon, & Weberg, 1998; Stone, Hobbs, & Khaleeli, 2002). Around the same time academics begun to employ experiments to optimize messages and select the best medium to promote voting in elections (Green, & Gerber; 2000). The main result of the getting-out-to-vote (GOTV) literature was, and still is, that authenthic dialogue is the most important element that motivates people to vote or participate in a campaign. Building upon such concepts the Obama campaigns of 2008 and 2012 showed the potential of multichannel engagement across a variety of media (Hendrick and Denton, 2010; Creiss, 2012; Stromer-Galley, 2013; Bimber 2014). Since then, these practices have spread to charity campaigns worldwide and have entered popular internet culture generating a large grey literature (Issemberg 2012, Kapin and Ward 2013). This paper adapts this body of ideas to the field of democratic innovations introducing themes and normative goals that are absent in the marketing and GOTV literature.

In marketing, a channel is a set of interdependent organizations and practices that allows and promotes the sales of goods or services (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Multichannel marketing integrates such organizational practices across multiple channels including advertising and customer relations. Multichannel advertising and customer relations have the objective of creating more or less authentic dialogic interactions with the public that, as mentioned before, has been consistently shown to have the most persuasive effect on people. Micro-targeting in advertising is now the norm. Amazon, Google and Facebook track users' available information to maximize the probability of inducing a purchase by customizing the products shown in their platforms. These firms employ a combination of randomized controlled trials, large observational data analysis and qualitative studies of customers' opinions to optimize different messages and platform interfaces.[3] Different versions of the website are shown to users in different locations, and across a variety of platforms. Engagement in customer relations is also becoming more frequent. More and more, firms rely on community forums, Facebook and Twitter, to engage customers in complex discussions about past, current and future products.

Multichannel engagement goes one step further, and micro-targets entire participatory processes in which a segment of the public can collaborate with the organization to achieve a goal. Some of these processes are two-way vertical relations between participants and the organizers; some others are multi-way interactions in which participants collaborate both horizontally among themselves and vertically with the organization to generate an output of interest. The video game industry is a pioneer of these engagement practices. For example, video game companies often allow the most active participants in their community to shape small features of games in development. In some engagement processes, participants can even affect elements of the rules that govern the architecture and agenda of the process itself.

Using these examples we can define a *channel of engagement as a combination of messages and participatory processes designed to encourage a specific behavior in a target public.* The previous very broad definition is purely procedural and applies to a variety of purposes such as: selling goods

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[3] View the following for a description of the Facebook algorithm
http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/cover_story/2016/01/how_facebook_s_news_feed_algorithm_works.html

and services; campaigning; petitioning; gathering volunteers; and crowdsourcing information, ideas and money. In what follows the authors focus on the subset of multichannel engagement processes designed to deepen democracy — multichannel democratic innovations.

Adapting Smith (Smith 2009), *multichannel democratic innovations are institutions that integrate messages and participatory spaces targeted to different segments of the population in a system specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process.*

Multichannel is not (just) hybrid

The most common multichannel democratic innovations are hybrid consultation processes integrating online and offline venues of discussion targeted to different types of participants (Bittle, Haller, & Kadlek, 2009; Andersson, Burall, & Fennel, 2010; Gupta, Gouvier, & Gordon, 2012). However, multichannel democratic innovations should not be reduced to hybrid innovations that combine online and offline media. On one hand, face-to-face innovations can be multichannel. The 2004 British Columbia Citizens' Assembly integrated meetings that were open only to a randomly selected group of participants, with public meetings open to all (Warren & Pearse, 2008). On the other hand, hybrid democratic innovations can be single channel; hybridization does not automatically create a new channel. For example, the District Eight PB process in New York City employs digital technologies to map the implementation of the winning projects, but such hybridization is just a data visualization tool that supports the participants' monitoring activity and does not create a separate channel of engagement.[4]

Additional LEGO blocks: actions, phases and cycles

It is important to distinguish between channels and the *actions that a user can perform within a participatory process*. Some typical actions in face-to-face participatory processes include listening, talking, reading, ranking, and voting. Some typical actions in digital citizens' relations management platforms (CRMPs) include reporting issues[5], accessing and rating services.[6] Recent CRMPs include e-consultation channels, such as Loomio,[7] Ideascale,[8] and Liquidfeedback.[9] Typical actions in such channels are generating, commenting and ranking ideas.

It is common knowledge that users tend to intervene and contribute differently to participatory processes; internet participation has shown that 1% of users will contribute content to a wiki, 9% will edit and refine it, while 90% will lurk.[10] According to the authors' definition, such users/actions clusters are not separate channels of engagement, unless the platform includes a dedicated participatory process targeted to them. For example, multichannel e-collaboration platforms integrate a channel for the general users and a channel with more privileges restricted to the more

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[4] See http://backend.pbnyc.org/maps/?d=8&display_type=winners

[5] See https://www.fixmystreet.com/

[6] See https://assets.digital.cabinet-office.gov.uk/spotlight/documents/Policy-Housing-74ee84f968933609e499c9dc3e3a158d.pdf

[7] See https://www.loomio.org/

[8] See https://ideascale.com/

[9] See http://liquidfeedback.org/

[10] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1%25_rule_%28Internet_culture%29

active users. This is the same strategy that face-to-face participatory processes use when restricting certain actions to representatives selected by the participants or by sortition.

The new definition also allows for distinguishing between phases and channels. *A democratic innovation phase is a set of actions aimed at achieving a goal in a specific amount of time*. Most deliberative mini-publics first involve a learning phase, followed by an experts' consultation phase and then a deliberation phase (Fishkin and Luskin 2005). These three phases are significantly different in design, and allow participants to perform different sets of actions, but do not target different publics; hence, they are not different channels of engagement. All participants in a deliberative mini-public go through each of the phases.

A *cycle is a set of phases or actions that repeats itself*. For example, PB processes employ a yearly cycle that combines phases that last a specific number of months. PBs usually integrate three phases: an initial brainstorming phase, in which participants propose potential public projects, a project selection phase[11] in which participants affect the selection of projects that will enter the budget, and a monitoring phase in which participants gather information on the implementation of projects (Wampler, 2015; Baiocchi, 2005; Avritzer & Navarro, 2003). However, in most PBs these three phases are designed for the same public and thus they do not constitute separate channels of engagement. Large cities' PBs are considered multichannel democratic innovations according to the authors' definition, not because they combine multiple phases, but because they integrate multiple district level participatory processes with specific rules, different amounts of resources and separate engagement campaigns. For example, the PB in Porto Alegre, Brazil, integrates 17 slightly different district PB processes,[12] while the PB in New York City first integrated four districts processes in 2011 and now integrates 28.[13]

Citizens' assemblies offer many examples of cycles of actions. For example, small group discussions and plenaries are often repeated multiple times during each of three phases of the assembly (learning, consulting, deliberating) to transmit the information across groups. In most cases, small groups do not target different segments of the participants (e.g. youth vs adults), and thus, according to the authors' definition are not separate channels of engagement.

However, in consultations that allow the participants to self-select in different small group discussions focusing on different topics chosen by the participants themselves, the groups become channels of engagement. The 2015 Citizens' Assembly on devolution in Southampton (UK) offers a recent example of an open space conference within a democratic innovation. In the second weekend of the assembly, the organizers introduced an open space conference that enabled the participants to discuss topics of their own choosing.[14] The participants divided themselves into five invented

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[11] Some PB processes, particularly digital PB process (e-PB) in Germany employ an ideation software that combines the brainstorming phase with the selection phase. In Bonn e-PB participants employ a software similar to Ideascale and can propose ideas and then immediately rank them. Other PB processes, such as the ones employed in North America and designed by the Participatory Budgeting Project, instead divide the selection phase into a refining phase and a voting phase. During the refining phase volunteers take the projects generated in the brainstorming phase and together with the city staff refine them to generate a ballot. During the voting phase the entire city is invited to vote for the projects on the ballot.

[12] See http://www2.portoalegre.rs.gov.br/op/

[13] See http://labs.council.nyc/pb/participate/

[14] See the report on the assembly http://citizensassembly.co.uk/assembly-south-overview-report/

subgroups. This phase of the CA was designed by the organizers to re-introduce the freedom of *invented spaces* and to allow the participants to step out the choice architecture that had been carefully set up for them. These subgroups constitute multiple channels of engagement. The latter is an example that shows how concepts introduced by this paper can be scaled-up or down; a phase can have multiple channels, and a channel can have multiple phases.

In sum, what distinguishes channels of engagement is not the medium (face-to-face vs text message vs web), nor the phase (learning vs deliberation), or the fact that citizens can participate in different ways (lurking vs creating), but the fact that each channel is designed for a specific segment of the population. A channel can be as simple as an additional face-to-face meeting targeted to a specific minority within a phase, and as complex as an entire democratic innovation.

Opportunities

A growing consensus is emerging among practitioners that the more channels of engagement a democratic innovations has, the better. Many consider the integration of multiple channels of engagement a method to *diversify* the risk that one single channel could be ineffective, and a way to *differentiate* channels of engagement to better accommodate the interests and goals of different types of people (Maia, & Marques, 2010; Bittle, Haller, & Kadlec, 2009).

1) Diversification

Going back to its origins, the concept of product diversification in management describes the strategy of offering different goods and services that experience different cycles and shocks so that the average profit is less volatile. In the realm of democratic innovations, diversification refers to the integration of different channels of engagement with different objectives, procedures and publics. Cities are now developing integrated citizens' relations management platforms (CRMPs) that combine long-term face-to-face consultation,[15] issue-reporting software, open data initiatives, engagement initiatives for youth, social marketing initiatives for sustainability, people panels for recurrent surveying[16] and classic e-government services just to name a few. Some of these channels are stand-alone democratic innovations with different goals and objectives targeting a different segment of the population.

Pioneers of this diversification strategy were the Gabinete Digital in the state of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil, active between 2011 and 2014 (Spada, Mellon, Peixoto, & Sjoberg 2016), and the New Urban Mechanics offices in Boston and Philadelphia.[17] This trend is gaining ground due to the development of reusable digital participatory channels that cities can apply and modify to their needs with little effort. Poplus is a repository of such reusable software,[18] while Empatia is a new European project

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[15] In Brazil many cities every five years implement a participatory process called Plano Pluriennal Participativo (Multi-year Participatory Plan) to design the zoning plan and the guidelines for city public projects. Similar participatory planning processes are adopted by neighborhoods and cities around the world.

[16] People's panels are a common practice of UK cities. The Southampton people panel is a typical example: https://www.southampton.gov.uk/council-democracy/have-your-say/peoples-panel.aspx

[17] See http://newurbanmechanics.org/

[18] See http://poplus.org/

aimed at creating a free modular platform specifically designed for multichannel democratic innovations.[19]

The main practical advantage of diversification is the massive number of participants it can attract. The Gabinete Digital, for example, engaged more than one million people every year. Another advantage that is often discussed by practitioners, particularly those in democratic innovations that support protest movements or campaign to change behavior, is the increased resilience. This concept is directly inspired by the idea of redundancy in engineering. If a campaign uses a variety of channels to try to achieve an objective, even if one channel fails, the others might succeed. To the authors' knowledge, there are no studies documenting the increased resilience of multichannel innovations, and the supposed benefit is currently mostly theoretical. As the next section shows, there are instead very concrete examples of multichannel innovations that experienced a legitimacy crisis due to the failure of one channel or conflicts between two channels. Therefore while the idea of risk diversification is theoretically appealing it probably applies only to a subset of democratic innovations and under a specific set of local conditions.

2) Differentiation

The concept of differentiation originates in marketing and refers to the construction of a brand and specific messages aimed at distinguishing a product or service from its competitors. In the realm of engagement, differentiation is mostly done by micro-targeting messages and spaces of participation. The Obama campaign was the first to show how to operationalize the process to increase the number, diversity and satisfaction of participants in a campaign (Kreiss, 2012).

E-petition platforms such as Avaaz and Change.org that routinely micro-target the possibility of participating in specific campaigns have globalized multichannel engagement campaigns. On its website Change.org claims to engage more than 140 million people in 196 countries and to win campaigns every day.[20] Change.org is a for-profit company and is a typical example of the emerging sector of a business in civic technology that enables democratic innovations. Change.org per se is not a democratic innovation, it is a company that makes money by accepting sponsored petitions by charities and by displaying advertising. However, some of the multichannel campaigns enabled by Change.org are designed to deepen democracy and are democratic innovations according to the definition of Graham Smith (Smith, 2009). The distinction might be subtle, but is an important one to make in order to navigate the field of civic technology.

One of the main advantages of differentiation for democratic innovation is to better engage some difficult-to-reach segments of the population. For example, the New York participatory budgeting organizes multiple district meetings that target linguistic and religious minorities offering a modified set of rules and services tailored to such groups. PB also offers a specific channel for formerly incarcerated people that have no right to vote in the US. This is a differentiation strategy because the overall objective of these different meetings is the same — coming up with projects for the PB process during the brainstorming phase — but each meeting differs from the other for its location,

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[19] See http://empatia-project.eu/

[20] See https://www.change.org/impact

the language used, and sometimes the rules of discussion employed. For example, meetings in Orthodox Jewish communities divide discussion groups by gender.

3) Efficiency

Beyond the benefits in terms of efficacy and broader and more diverse participation, multichannel democratic innovations can gain efficiency due to the sharing of resources and information across channels. Canoas, a city in Southern Brazil, has recently introduced a Municipal Systems of Participation, a CRMP that integrates different channels of social dialogue to improve transparency, accountability and efficiency. The system combines 13 on-line as well as off-line participatory tools targeted to different segments of the population (Martins, 2015). The key innovation introduced by Canoas consists of a complex system of public proceedings of all these different channels that allows the city, interested citizens and civil society organizations to track issues raised by individuals and groups in each of these different channels.

4) Increased choice and other individual level benefits

There are also benefits for the participants, such as increased choice in the way they can interact with the participatory innovation and the ability to switch between channels or participate in multiple channels at the same time. The literature on democratic innovations has yet to analyze these benefits in detail, but the literature in marketing offer many examples of the benefits of increased choice.

5) Democratic benefits

The emerging literature on multi-channel democratic innovations has mostly highlighted the benefit of these institutions on the quantity of participants, little is known about their impact on the democratic goods often discussed by the literature (Smith 2009, Mansbridge *et al.* 2012). Smith for example identifies five democratic goods, inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgement, transparency and the promotion of better institutional capacity.

The multiplication of channels of engagement can be used to promote inclusion and to strenghten popular control over policy making. Randomly selected assemblies in CAs are designed to represent the population and to prevent interest groups from hijacking the participatory decision-making process. Thus the presence of this channel of engagement in CAs contributes both to better inclusion and better popular control.

The case of the Grandview-Woodland Citizens' Assembly implemented in 2015 offers a clear example of these benefits. [21] Between 2012 and 2013 the City of Vancouver (Canada) engaged in a participatory consultation process with the Grandview-Woodland community to define a 30 year neighborhood plan. The process involved many sessions and engaged a few thousands residents – mostly homeowners and representatives of homeowners' associations. The consultation generated a plan skewed toward conservation and had very few provisions for promoting housing densification. Vancouver will increase its population exponentially in the next ten years and the city hoped to use the Grandview-Woodland neighborhood as a main site for development. The ill-

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[21] For a detailed case study and background documentation see the Participedia case study: http://participedia.net/en/cases/grandview-woodland-citizens-assembly

advised reaction of the city government was to overrule the crowd-sourced neighborhood plan releasing a document, called *Emerging Directions* that introduced significant urban densification. However, this document generated a huge outcry from the community. The backlash was such that a new umbrella organization representing citizens disillusioned with the planning process emerged, Our Community Our Plan (OCOP).[22]

To overcome this impasse the city introduced a randomly selected assembly[23] that was designed specifically to reduce the power of homeowners by recruiting half of the assembly among renters. Initially, many perceived this democratic innovation as a way to undermine pre-existing civil society organizations, and a way to reduce conflict during an electoral year. In the first months of implementation, numerous critiques from homeowners and representatives of OCOP emerged in local newspapers and social media.[24] Some of such critiques described the process as a mechanism to manufacture consent.[25] However, after a few months, the legitimacy of the well-executed process eased the citizens' mistrust and criticism decreased significantly. The assembly effectively managed to convey the importance of hearing the voice of the previously excluded renters and countered the effect of vocal interest groups (Beauvais & Warren, 2015). The assembly has recently issued a new set of recommendations, and the residents are waiting to see if the city council will implement the new guidelines. If the procedure works, and the resulting document is an acceptable compromise between the needs of owners and renters, the case of Vancouver will be a groundbreaking example of troubleshooting an engagement process using multichannel integration.

PBs promote inclusion and better judgment by including channels specifically targeted to women, youth and minorities, subgroups of the population that often have difficulties in making their voice heard in general assemblies. The recent experimental literature on male-dominated small group discussions and quality of deliberation (Karpowitz, Mendelberg, & Shaker, 2012) suggests that enclave deliberation promotes the capacity of women to make their voices heard. These spaces contribute to the inclusion of ideas and instances that would not emerge otherwise and arguably promote better decision-making (Landemore, 2013).

The current generation of CRMPs focuses on generating high number of participants, reducing costs and promoting better institutional capacity. The latter results complements similar observations in the broader literature on e-government (Chadwick, May, 2003; Torres, Pina & Acerete, 2006).

Challenges

While reviewing existing case studies and interviewing practitioners the authors also found many interesting examples in which the introduction of additional channels of engagement within a democratic innovation backfired. The following are five families that summarize the most common challenges.

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[22] See https://ourcommunityourplan.wordpress.com/about/
[23] See http://www.grandview-woodland.ca/
[24] http://www.straight.com/news/676076/grandview-woodland-citizens-assembly-process-draws-criticism
[25] https://elizabethmurphyblog.wordpress.com/2015/01/08/citys-grandview-planning/

1) Direct negative interactions among channels

First, channels of engagement might interact negatively; a new channel might divert users' attention and interests in unexpected ways. If one channel is particularly successful in attracting participants, others might suffer due to a loss of participants. Similarly, if a channel is particularly unsuccessful, others might suffer because they are part of a system that has a non-working component. This is particularly important when considering the fact that democratic innovations are often introduced in the midst of fierce opposition, and that opponents, to delegitimize the entire process, will exploits weaknesses.

The Grandview-Woodland CA, presents an example of one channel entering into direct conflict with another. As mentioned, in the first months of the assembly, participants in the meetings open to the public criticized the randomly selected assembly as a mechanism to bypass pre-existing local organizations (Beauvais & Warren 2015).

Channels can also compete over resources, and one channel might *cannibalize* the resources of another, ultimately weakening the entire architecture of a democratic innovation. For example, scholars interpret the introduction of the so-called Governança Solidária Local in Porto Alegre in 2005, a process parallel to PB, which was aimed at generating partnership with private contractors and CSOs, as the beginning of the decline of the Porto Alegre process (Baierle, 2007, Langelier, 2015). In 1989, the closure of similar privileged channels was one of the key mechanisms that empowered the PB process in Porto Alegre (Baiocchi & Ganuza 2014). The re-opening of such channels implied that interest groups did not have to pass through the more transparent and accountable PB process, but could directly engage the city government. This new channel *cannibalized* the amount of resources dedicated to the rest of PB and reduced its bargaining power vis-à-vis the city government.

2) Increased chances for free riding

Second, when multiple channels are available, participants might chose the one that generates the most rewards for the least cost. This form of soft *free-riding* reduces the legitimacy of a democratic innovation. The more channels are active, the more a participant can select the one that generates the most returns for the least effort. The latter was a particular problem in some experiments of face-to-face participatory budgeting that introduced the possibility of voting online in order to attract youth and the middle class. In some cases, participants perceived the new online voting channel as a mechanism that allowed *slacktivists*[26] to affect the PB outcomes. This loss of legitimacy becomes particularly problematic when intersected with issues of digital divide as in the case of Recife (Brazil) and Vignola (Italy). In Recife, middle-class e-participants overturned the results chosen by poor face-to-face participants creating significant protest (Ferreira, 2010). In Vignola, in Italy, youth participating online overturned the result of elderly people participating in person, generating a backlash which led to the suspension of participatory budgeting in 2005 (Cunha, Allegretti and Matias 2011).

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[26] Wikipedia defines slacktivism as a portmanteau of the words slacker and activism. The word is usually considered a pejorative term that describes feel-good measures in support of a social cause that have little practical effects.

3) Increased complexity of the integration mechanism that leads to reduced legitimacy, transparency and accountability

Third, the greater the number of channels that exists, the more complex the integration mechanism becomes. Complexity not only generates costs in terms of management, but also increases the difficulty of explaining and justifying the design of the participatory process to the participants. This reduces the overall transparency and accountability of the democratic innovation and, in some cases, its legitimacy. Complexity often reduces the ability of participants to truly own the process and affect its agenda.

A typical example of this problem concerns the multiplication of brainstorming channels aimed at collecting participants' proposals. What has happened in Lisbon's PB since 2009 is an example of this risk: to deal with the almost 1,000 proposals of investments generated by citizens every year in face-to-face and online meetings, the municipality had to organize an interdisciplinary working group of civil servants to merge and pre-select the proposals. The pared down list – 200 projects – sparked numerous complaints by citizens who saw their ideas disappearing or being distorted (Sintomer & Allegretti, 2016).

The history of citizens' assemblies shows how difficult it is to integrate the deliberative channel open only to a random sample of the population, with the public referendum. Historically the majority of CA referendums have failed to ratify the recommendations proposed by the citizens' assemblies because the public did not pay much attention to the activity of the mini-public (Fournier et al. 2011).

Another example of this problem is the proliferation of unaccountable messages in micro-targeted campaigns (Jamieson, 2013). This example has been studied primarily in U.S. political campaigns, but it has a natural extension to the micro-targeting of participatory processes. First, the proliferation of micro-targeted engagement channels can create expectations that cannot be met, second such proliferation divides the participants reducing their ability to make the platform accountable. While there are no studies yet that explicitly link the presence of multiple channels of engagement with the challenge of managing expectations and the issues of cooptation, contestation and bargaining power, the PB literature offers many examples of multichannel innovations suffering such problems (Wampler 2007, Sintomer & Allegretti, 2015).

4) Increased probability that an oligarchy of super-participants emerges

Fourth, complex democratic innovations that combine different channels of engagement with different privileges might facilitate the emergence of an oligarchy of super participants. The case of Porto Alegre is one of such example (Fedozzi, 2007; Langelier, 2015). Over time the members of the elected citywide assembly of district representatives (Conselho do Orçamento Participativo, or COP) that has the most control over the PB process have become an oligarchy with very little turnover (Figure 1). As we can see from the graph, the percentage of new participants in this key assembly decreases over time. During the 90s new participants composed 70% of this assembly. After 2000, the number of new members declines sharply. By 2011, new members composed only 30% of the assembly.

Figure 1: percentage of new participants in the the COP of Porto Alegre
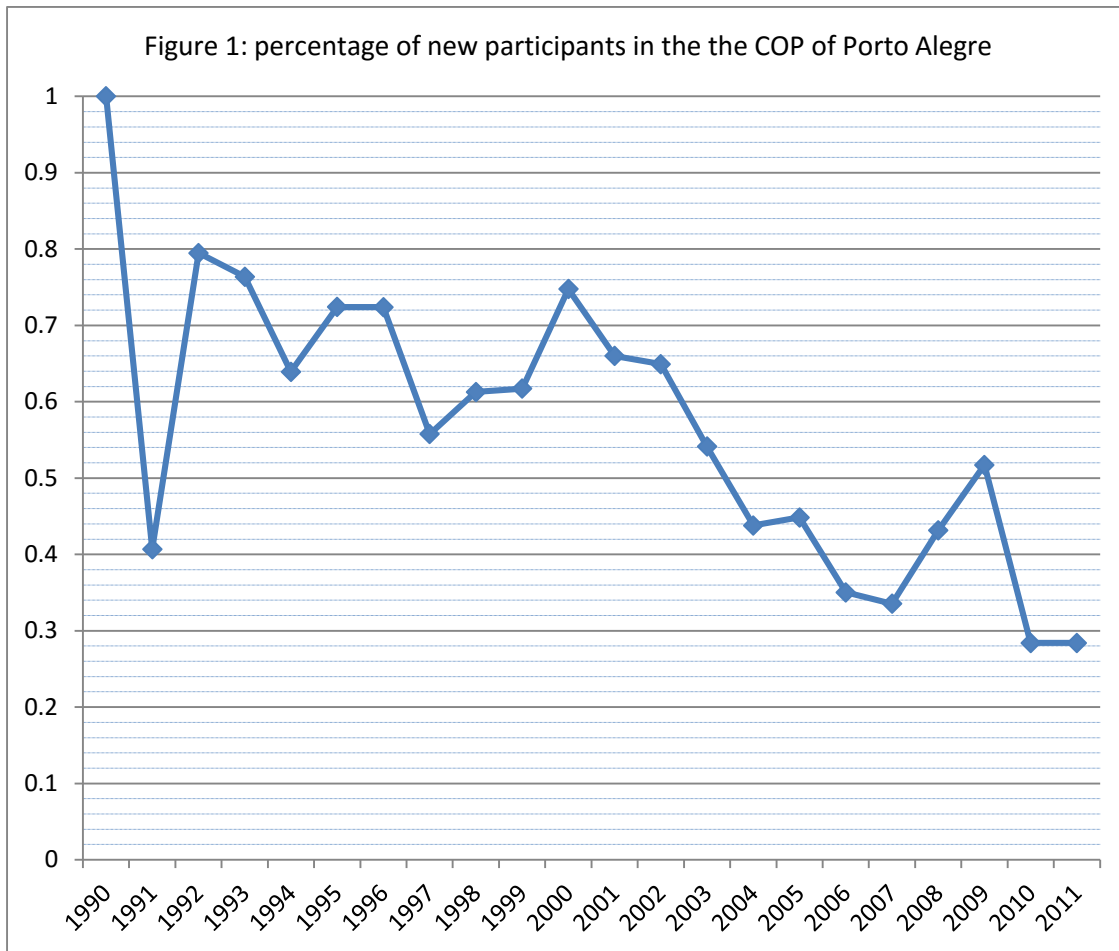
Source: Data collected by the ONG Cidade in Porto Alegre for the years 1990-2008; for the years 2008-2012 authors' calculations based on the list of members of COP published in the yearly issue of the Regimento Interno.

The COP is a channel that requires significantly more effort that any other channel in the PB systems. The meetings are more frequent and the discussions are more complex. At the same time, the COP has the most influence over the final allocation of projects. The combination of channels that require more effort and provide more privileges increases the probability that a selected group of people that has the time and the interest will monopolizes such channels. The example of Porto Alegre provides only anecdotal evidence, but it is helpful as a cautionary tale for complex democratic innovations that employ gamification mechanisms and other complex systems of rewards and incentives.

5) Increased risk of imposing a constrictive structure over a segment of the participants

A fifth and final challenge resides in the risk of overdesigning the democratic innovation. If the organizers impose a new channel of engagement, participants might end up feeling like cattle in a chute, rather than valued partners. The introduction of thematic assemblies in some PBs provides the typical example of poorly designed channel. Returning to the case of Porto Alegre, during the mid-90s, the city government introduced a new set of citywide assemblies in an attempt to overcome the fact that projects proposed in district assemblies were limited in scope and

concentrated on filling basic infrastructural deficits in informal neighborhoods. These thematic assemblies, attempted to tackle citywide problems such as transportation, education, employment and environmental pollution. But people rarely used the thematic assemblies as intended, instead they used them to re-propose projects that had not been selected in the district assemblies.

Common models of integration

After having introduced the concept of channels of engagement and having discussed the benefits and drawbacks of integrating multiple channels of engagement within a democratic innovation, this section describes the most common integration mechanisms the authors have encountered in their review of democratic innovation cases.

Analyzing how participatory budgetings (PBs), citizens' assemblies (CAs) and citizens' relations management platforms (CRMPs) have managed multichannel integration to leverage benefits and minimize disadvantages, three main models of integration emerge: managed competition, regulation and isolation.

1) Managed Competition

One integration strategy is to allow the channels to compete for resources. In Porto Alegre, the district level assemblies compete for the engagement of participants. Citizens are asked to rank the policy priorities for their district and to present projects. The overall ranking of policy priorities, combined with the number of people that participates affects the allocation of resources to each neighborhood (Abers 2000).

The risk of this approach is that it can create disruptive competition, instead of promoting democracy enhancing agonism (Mouffe 1999). While disruptive competition might be a good strategy to optimize firms' marketing channels, the examples of Recife and Vignola show that in democratic innovations, it reduces legitimacy and creates citizens' frustration. This might have something to do with the fact that the relationship between a customer and a firm is different from the relationship between a participant and the organizers of engagement processes. The customer has no large stake in the failure of a marketing channel, but a citizen who has invested a significant amount of time and resources in a channel will be extremely disappointed if such channel fails. In many cases, a channel becomes a living community, and the failure of a channel implies the death of such community and the loss of a unique space to interact with fellow citizens and friends.

However, the disruptive competition model might be optimal in democratic innovations that are *invented spaces*. For example, in agile campaigns and social movement actions in which the cost of experimenting with channels directly initiated by participants is very low, disruptive competition might be an optimal strategy to promote fast innovation and adaptability. Such campaigns by jumpstarting many channels at the same time might quickly experiment which one attracts most participants, and which one has the most influence achieving the overall campaign goal. However, a detailed investigation of the advantages and disadvantages of competition in such *invented spaces* is beyond the scope of this paper and these empirical questions are left to future research.

2) Integration based on rules and procedures

The most common integration mechanism is to adopt a system of rules and procedures that manages the interactions among channels.

Citizens' assemblies require rules that allocate tasks between the closed randomly selected assembly and the meetings open to the public. In the Vancouver Grandview-Woodland CA the organizers established that the closed assembly would gather two rounds of feedback on the proposal for the neighborhood plan they were writing. Participants in the open assemblies wanted a third round of feedback, but the organizers gauged that the amount of work an additional round would have imposed on the members of the closed assembly would have been excessive.

Citizen relations management platforms often employ gamification strategies to govern the access to different channels of engagement. Participants might be required to complete capacity-building actions, social actions or reaching out actions (Gupta, Bouvier, & Gordon, 2012) before having access to a channel of engagement that has higher privileges or higher status. For example, the Repurpose project during the Obama campaign integrated a campaigning channel, with an e-collaboration channel. Volunteers earned points by canvassing and making phone calls in the campaign channel. They could then spend such points to reshape the campaign itself,[27] from buying certain ads in certain locations, to sending more organizers to some electoral districts, to support political actions beyond the election. Repurpose emerged as an evolution of previous incentives schemes based exclusively on badges and dinners. Nudges are also another more subtle approach that is widely used to optimize messages and choice architectures in engagement channels (Sunstein & Thaler 2008). While the growing literature that explores the advantages and disadvantages of nudges offers many insights for the design of democratic innovations (Hausman and Welch, 2010; Holler, 2015), few scholars have started investigating such issues (John *et al.,* 2013).

The system of rules governing a complex democratic innovation is, in some instances, open to discussion. For example, many participatory budgeting processes create a sort of constitution that describes the principles governing the process and establish a procedure to review it. At first glance, opening up the rules to discussion increases transparency and empower participants to adapt the process to their needs (Lerner, & Secondo 2012, Allegretti 2014). But, in Porto Alegre, this channel was exploited in a way that solidified the control of the oligarchy of participants over the process and reduced the possibility of spontaneity during open assemblies (Baierle 2007, Langelier 2015).

Everything the authors have presented thus far describes integration mechanisms to improve the efficiency and internal legitimacy of multichannel democratic innovations. These mechanisms encourage the behavior that the innovation architects have identified as ideal. However, other interesting integration mechanisms of multichannel democratic innovations are designed to strengthen the sense of community across channels (De Cindio, Gentile, Grew, & Redolfi 2003) and promote overall playfulness (Sicart, 2014). These design choices allow the participants to redefine

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[27] http://repurpose.workersvoice.org/how_it_works

the meaning of their actions within the platform in new ways (Lerner 2014, Gordon & Walter 2016) beyond the goals of the project.

Some argues that the creation of a long-lasting community of engaged citizens is the most concrete benefits of democratic innovations and thus design innovations that strengthen the community via social and playful activities that have nothing to do with the primary task of the democratic innovation (Stortone & De Cindio 2015). Successful democratic innovations offer an array of examples of these *meaningful inefficiencies*. These elements bring back the energy of *invented spaces* within *invited spaces* and transform grey institutions in lively spaces. A catalogue of these reinventions of democratic innovations is beyond the page limitations of this paper. PB district meetings in Brazilian Cities are often preceded/followed by parties that include a variety of artistic representation that showcase the energy of the community. The Youth PB process in Boston is currently experimenting with social initiatives to promote friendship among participants after the first year evaluation surveys highlighted "making new friends" as the number one reason for participating in the process. Citizens' Assemblies include social nights, dinners and often games. For example, the Irish CA employed a game during the first social dinner that had the participants explore different voting mechanisms to select the dessert. CRMPs often have a community channel, off-topic forums and playful contests.

3) Isolation

The complete isolation of two channels of engagement is a third form of integration strategy often adopted in PB processes. The case of Belo Horizonte is proto-typical. Belo Horizonte, Brazil, created an online e-PB channel that has its own budget and is effectively an entirely separate space with limited interaction with the face-to-face PB process. This strategy was designed to prevent the emergence of the conflict that had plagued Recife (Sampaio, Maia, & Marques, 2010; Allegretti, 2012). Isolation might also be particularly useful to prevent the tyranny of majority and dedicate specific spaces to youth or other minorities. PB and CRMPs processes sometimes activate a specific channel for women, or youth or LGBT. It is difficult to find examples of isolated channels in citizens' assemblies because a key feature of these processes is the attempt to represent the population via a random sample. However, part of the ratio of having a randomly selected assembly is to isolate such assembly from the effect of interest groups, thus in such respect CAs offer an example of an isolated channel.

Discussion

In this paper, the authors have introduced a classificatory scheme that identifies multichannel democratic innovations separating them from the concept of multichannel engagement and multichannel marketing. The authors have also reviewed a number of advantages and disadvantages of such innovations using three main families of democratic innovations as a source of examples, participatory budgeting, citizens' assemblies and citizen relations management platforms.

Different from previous research that investigates innovations and their interaction with existing institutions (macro-level), or analyzes experimentally the role of different organizational elements

within one innovation (micro-level), the authors have examined clusters of *actions* that are designed specifically to engage a segment of the public – what this paper calls channels of engagement. To the authors' knowledge, this meso-level analysis has never been done before.

These comparisons have uncovered three models of integration: managed competition, regulation, and isolation. These three models are certainly not exhaustive of the variety of possible integration methods, but are first steps in the exploration of the sequence and integration of different combinations of the LEGO blocks that compose democratic innovations.

What has also emerged from this paper's analysis of the most recent cases is that the examples integrating the largest number of channels appear to be more concerned with quantity, efficiency and satisfaction of participants, than effectively empowering citizens. Using the normative conceptualization introduce by Smith, these integration mechanisms focus more on improving institutional capacity than creating democratic goods. Therefore, the authors believe that the next step in the research agenda on multichannel democratic innovations should be to explore the impact of different integration models on the division of power between participants and organizers, in order to promote the development of a new generation of integrating platforms that include in their code stronger democratic principles.

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