Deliberation

The term **deliberation** describes a communicative process aimed at exchanging positions to find solutions to given problems. The definitions of deliberation can vary, ranging from a broad range of oral exchanges, to more restrictive understandings that demand conditions such as rational discourse and specific ways of expression.

From a scholarly perspective, the concept of deliberation rests on the ideas of consensus from John Rawls, and communicative processes in the public sphere from Jürgen Habermas. The idea of deliberative democracy was first used by Joseph M. Bessette.

Core elements shared by most current definitions of deliberation include:

- Some form of public sphere, as opposed to private talk
- An exchange of views, opinions, and ideas by participants who are open to listen, learn, and change opinion
- Conditions of fairness, freedom from domination, equality and reciprocity among participants
- Exchanges oriented towards finding consensus, as opposed to majority-rules, to solve problems and reach decisions

E-Participation – ICT-based Participation

Electronic participation (e-participation), online participation, or digital participation, are terms that refer to processes that involve citizens in influencing policy making through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The main conditions for e-participation are the use of some form of technology that mediates the communication, and the possibility for citizens to use that technology to express their opinions, ideas, preferences, or demands.

E-participation can take many forms, including:

- **Online Voting**, where citizens can cast a democratic vote using ICTs
- **Online Consultations**, where citizens are asked for their opinion on one or more specific topics, be it through direct input or through some form of expression of voting or support
- **Crowdsourcing**, where open calls allow large numbers of citizens to directly give input, exchange, and collaborate to collect information
- The use of **text messaging**, **social media**, and other digital tools to create communication channels between citizens and their governments

Online Deliberation

**Online deliberation** encompasses different forms of communicative interaction that takes place via digital means, including ICT-based exchanges, social media, real time chats, online forums, comment sections, and others. Unlike online participation, online deliberation demands additional conditions rather than citizen input that takes place via online media - it takes the principles of deliberation or deliberative democracy to the digital public sphere.

Online deliberation thus refers to exchanges and engagement among equal participants in the digital sphere, who interact and are open to learn from each other, change their opinion, and to seek solutions oriented towards the common good through a consensus-oriented process.

Sortition – Random Selection

A **Sortition** process, also known as Random Sampling or **Civic Lottery**, consists of selecting a group of participants who are proportionally representative of demographics and geographic location through a randomized procedure. While truly random selection would demand to choose participants from the total of the population, a
sortition process relies on so-called ‘stratified sampling’ to select participants that represent the distribution of the population by demographic characteristics (for example, by age, gender, socio-economic status, etc) and geographic location (for example, by district). In addition, some sortition processes do not use the total population to draw participants, but instead invite interested individuals to register to a pool, and then select participants randomly from that pool.

**Participatory Budgeting**

*Participatory budgeting* is a form of deliberation and decision-making in which citizens propose and decide how to spend the public budget. It was first introduced in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989 by the Workers’ Party and was considered highly successful in providing citizens with the possibility to directly influence government investments. In its traditional model, the local government organizes open assemblies in each of a locality’s district, where any resident can attend and propose ideas on how to improve the neighborhood. During that same assembly, all ideas are collected and prioritized, for instance, through a points system or through voting. The ideas with the most support are implemented by the government; the implementation process is monitored by citizen representatives elected in those same assemblies.

The Participatory Budgeting model became extremely popular, expanding throughout Brazil and Latin America in the 1990s, and also throughout the world. There are over 7,000 cities implementing participatory budgeting to date.

**Citizens’ Assembly – Citizen Panels**

*Citizens’ Assemblies*, also known as Citizen Panels or Civic Panels, are bodies of randomly selected citizens, who come together to learn about a given issue, deliberate on options on how to tackle the issue, and reach a consensus about recommendations or decisions about it. Typical of this mode of participation is the staged process that comprises a learning phase with expert and stakeholder presentations on the issue submitted to debate; a deliberation phase where the selected participants can discuss about the different options that emerged from the learning process; and a consensus phase, where they can discuss and prioritize those options to reach a decision.

The assemblies are usually mediated by professional facilitators, who organize and lead the deliberation, but do not interfere with the subject matter or with participants’ opinions. The recommendations emitted by the Assembly can be mandatory for the organization or institution that convened it, or they can be of advisory value. Assemblies and Panels are one form of mini-publics.

**Citizens’ Jury**

A *Citizens’ Jury* is a small group of participants, usually randomly selected through some form of sortition, who come together to discuss a problem and reach a collective decision or recommendation. They are usually convened to find an answer to a concrete question, and must provide a report and a decision on the issue at the end of the process.

Citizens’ Juries are usually organized in advisory capacity, to provide a recommendation or a verdict to the government, for instance, on whether to adopt a concrete policy or program, or to select among a pool of proposals for funding, or to evaluate candidates for a position. Juries are another form of mini-publics.

**Mini-Publics**

The concept of mini-publics is commonly used in the scholarship and in practitioner networks to refer to demographically representative collective bodies where randomly selected citizens come together to discuss about a topic and inform public opinion and/or decision-making. The original idea traces back to a concept created by Robert Dahl named “minipopulus”.

**Facilitation – Moderation**

Facilitators are individuals, groups or organizations who host and lead deliberations, discussions, and other forms of exchange between participants. There are many forms and styles of facilitation, but the core principles are:

- The central function of facilitators is mediation, helping participants to interact with one another
Community Committees

Also known as Local Councils, Neighborhood Committees or Ward Committees, Community Committees are groups of citizen representatives, established as intermediary bodies between a particular area, community, district or locality, and the government. They are usually established to enable a direct communication channel between the government and a community. Participants can be self-selected or invited, and they operate as representatives of their communities, groups or organizations, bringing the ideas and demands from their territories to the committee in order to reach the government and other institutional and non-government interlocutors.

Committees usually have a consultative and advisory function and support the agenda-setting and input gathering stages of a policy or program. Sometimes they can also lead the implementation of projects or monitor their execution.

Public Hearings

Public hearings, also known as public inquiries, are open stages where citizens are invited to share their views and opinions on a given issue before an institution or organization that wants to undertake action or reach a decision. Public hearings are open gatherings, but frequently citizens who wish to speak need to register in advance to do so; any interested citizen can attend and listen to other residents’ contributions. They serve the main purpose of gathering input (for instance, on whether or not a government should legislate on a given issue), but can also operate as consultation stages for processes where the opinion of a community must be taken into account (for instance, in resource extraction endeavors).

Survey

A survey is a tool to gather information from a large group or population. It usually comprises a form, list or document with questions or statements that require participants to respond. Responses can be frequently listed as multiple-choice options or scales (for example, in a range of intensity from 1 to 5, or from scaled options between strongly disagree to strongly agree). They can be conducted in-person, per telephone, or using ICTs and digital tools. The data resulting from a survey is usually aggregated to show general trends across a population, and can be segmented according to different variables or criteria (such as gender, age, district, etc).

In the context of participatory processes, surveys can help determine community attitudes, values, or problems in a group or population. They can also support the consensus-building and decision-making stage.

World Café

The World Café is a method devised to allow conversation in small groups, usually of four people. Each group is presented with a question or issue for debate, and participants are invited to discuss that issue at length drawing on their personal experiences, histories, values, and views, to allow for in-depth exchanges and to create connections between the participants. The overall goal
is to enable a conversation in which shared purposes and goals can emerge.

When deployed as part of larger deliberative processes, the World Café method is frequently used by organizing several rounds of small group discussions, changing the participants in each group each round, to allow for more varied and diverse encounters.

Roundtables

Roundtables or Roundtable Discussions are small groups of people who come together to discuss ideas, projects, or demands. They are usually permanent or long-term, they meet regularly, and follow some rules regarding topics they can address, their goals, and forms of reaching agreement - those rules might also be self-given by the members of the roundtable. Decision-making can take place in many forms and not necessarily through consensus, but through a simple majority vote. The groups are usually closed and participants might be self-selected or represent a group or collectivity, such as a neighborhood or organization.

Civic Education – Citizen Culture

Civic education processes seek to give citizens the tools, knowledge and skills to connect to each other and to their communities in forms that respect and embody democratic principles. The idea of Citizen Culture is one iteration of civic education, part of a social approach that seeks to generate a positive change in the behavior of residents by creating a sense of belonging and respect for established norms and customs, for an area or a community, or for a locality and its government. Civic culture activities seek to reconfigure the dynamics of interaction and social participation. This methodology is based on contributions in pedagogy and in the participatory arts, and seeks to foster community communication in easily understandable and applicable ways.

NOTE: All definitions in this document are adopted and adapted from Participedia. Sources are linked to the excerpts.