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12. Facilitators: The Micropolitics of Public Participation and Deliberation

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Abstract

Most of the forms of public participation explored throughout this Handbook are supported by a range of practitioners whose work is often rendered invisible in the study of democratic innovations. Facilitators are key agents at the frontline of current democratic practices. This chapter is about agency and the micropolitics of participatory processes, particularly of the deliberative kind. The chapter analyses the role of facilitation practitioners, their different types, their defining practices, as well as their influence on participatory processes. Drawing on a review of interdisciplinary literature, as well as on original empirical work, this chapter offers conceptual and analytical foundations for the study of facilitation practice.

Keywords:
Facilitation, facilitator, democratic innovation, participation, deliberation, micropolitics

1. Introduction: What is facilitation and why does it matter?

In the context of participatory processes, facilitation is the craft of enabling collective work through conversations that are inclusive, meaningful and productive (Escobar, 2011). Experienced practitioners can facilitate group work with unassuming dexterity, jazzing up conversations in ways imperceptible to the unfocussed observer. Facilitation[1] comes from the Latin *facilis*, which means 'easy to do,' and the French *faciliter*, 'make easy, render less difficult'. Facilitators work to make it easy for everyone to participate equally and productively. They ease participants into the process while designing spaces that both enable and constrain various types of interaction.

For example, when facilitating discursive interaction, the role of a facilitator is to help the group meet its aims as fully as possible in the time available; encourage the fullest possible inclusion within the group; maintain an impartial stance on the topic under discussion; manage time-sharing; serve the needs of each individual and the group; and welcome difference and disagreement while avoiding the use of confrontation (Escobar, 2011, pp. 46-54). The facilitator's toolbox includes artefacts such as, 'conversation guidelines' or 'engagement rules', developed with the group through their self-reflection about communication patterns. It also includes discursive resources such as questioning, paraphrasing and summarising, scoping in and out, or framing and reframing (Escobar et al., 2014). As Dillard (2013, p. 218) puts it: 'It is the work of facilitators that turns ''everyday political talk'' into rigorous deliberative exchanges'. This is a dimension highly valued by deliberative scholars of democratic innovation, but also a field of practice that precedes the current deliberative turn in the study participatory democracy (Gastil, 1993; also Chapter 2 in this Handbook).

From a more analytical perspective, the description above illustrates how facilitation encompasses a micropolitics of purposeful intervention that deserves more scholarly attention. Facilitators seek to shape the communication dynamics that unfold in evolving 'interaction orders' (Goffman, 1983) by moulding certain discursive patterns out of the words, speech acts and contact modes enacted by forum participants. This can be a perilous task, since the 'quality of deliberation often hinges on facilitation that can potentially backfire at any juncture, exacerbating 'participants' cynicism and disengagement' (Kadlec & Friedman, 2007, p. 12; see also Chapters 8 and 10 in this Handbook).

Although some of its components can be scripted backstage, facilitation is a paradigmatic frontstage phenomenon. It takes place live, in public, testing the facilitators knowledge-in-action as they converse with the situation at hand (Schon, 1983). Notwithstanding the increasing professionalisation and training of facilitators (see Chapter 13 in this Handbook; Lee, 2015; Bherer et al., 2017), facilitating is a contingent, pragmatic and bodily endeavour that resists standardisation. It is learned by doing, imitating and adapting, in a developmental process in which personality traits and contextual demands are entangled. Facilitators thus form an evolving community of practice that cuts across policy networks and political contexts in the field of democratic innovation (Escobar, 2014a; Escobar et al., 2018).

Despite the important role that facilitators play in most of the forms of public participation explored throughout this Handbook, their work is often rendered invisible in the study of democratic innovations. A strong focus on processes and institutions should not overlook the importance of agency, and in particular the critical interaction between agency and structure that makes social change possible. This chapter is about agency and the micropolitics of participatory processes, particularly of the deliberative kind. The chapter explores the role of facilitation practitioners, their different types, their defining practices, as well as their influence on participatory processes and the challenges of investigating their work.

The chapter draws on a decade of empirical research into the work of facilitators in a range of policy arenas, but mainly in UK contexts (Escobar et al., 2018; Weakley & Escobar, 2018; Escobar, 2017; C. Durose et al., 2016; Escobar, 2015; Roberts & Escobar, 2015; Escobar, 2014a; Escobar et al., 2014; Escobar, 2014b; Pieczka & Escobar, 2013), and puts these ideas in conversation with the broader interdisciplinary literature in order to introduce concepts and approaches for further inquiry.

The chapter thus analyses facilitation practice, illustrating dynamics that reveal its micropolitical thrust. Understanding facilitation helps to demystify the apparently free-flowing alchemy of deliberative engagement, which sometimes conceals the facilitators' agency and other power dynamics. Whereas attention to practitioners is increasingly central in policy studies (Fischer et al., 2015) that has not been the case in recent studies of participatory and deliberative democracy (Escobar, 2017). In the usual narratives, forums are created, participants summoned, encounters facilitated, results taken forward –or not– and so on. But such accounts tell us little about who creates, enables, summons, facilitates and takes those processes forward, as if facilitation simply happens and doesn't have to be performed (Escobar, 2015). This fosters the illusion of facilitation as a somewhat disembodied practice, and ignores that it requires work, and therefore workers.

2. Who are the facilitators? Between community organisers and discursive stewards

This section introduces facilitators as a dispersed community of practice and explores the dilemmas that emerge from ongoing professionalisation and institutionalisation. There are different traditions, beliefs and approaches in the field of facilitation. The provenance of these traditions is blurred as facilitation practices borrow from interdisciplinary experiences and expertise across disciplines as varied as philosophy, management, health, linguistics, politics, psychology and communication (Escobar, 2011; Bherer et al., 2017). The field of democratic innovation also illustrates various approaches to facilitation. For example, studies of participatory democracy tend to focus on practitioners involved in community organising, education and development (Craig et al., 2011). In turn, deliberative scholarship usually focusses on the role of facilitators as discursive stewards (Escobar et al., 2014). Consequently, Dillard (2013, p. 231) argues that facilitation is not 'a single

stylistic category, yet deliberative theory and methodology presents the facilitators to be part of a group possessing the same skills, training, and moderating pedagogy.'

The different types of democratic innovations explored in this Handbook (see Chapter 1) encompass different types of facilitators. For example, in the context of mini-publics (Chapter 3), facilitators will often act as process designers, as well as facilitate group and plenary work according to deliberative standards (Roberts & Escobar, 2015). In participatory budgeting processes (see Chapter 5), facilitators may act more as community organisers seeking to mobilise various communities of place, practice and interest (Escobar, Garven, et al., 2018). Yet in a different context, for example, as part of a referendum or a citizens' initiative, facilitators may have a role to play creating spaces for conversations in the broader public sphere or ensuring electoral integrity. When it comes to digital participation, facilitators can make the difference between online deliberation and digital cacophony (Davies & Chandler, 2012). And in the context of collaborative governance arrangements, all the roles above may be expected to be played by the facilitators at various stages (Escobar, 2017).

Whether in an official capacity working for public institutions, or as practitioners in civil society organisations, facilitators have become key actors in the field of democratic innovation (Gastil, 1993; Gastil & Levine, 2005) and merit more research attention (Smith, 2009, p. 169). Researchers have mapped the varied provenance and roles of 'participation professionals' (Bherer et al., 2017), 'civic engagement practitioners' (Lee, 2011) 'community engagement professionals' (Mayo et al., 2007; Taylor, 1995), 'boundary workers' (J. Newman, 2012), 'civic entrepreneurs' (Catherine Durose, 2011) and 'public engagers' (Pieczka & Escobar, 2013; Escobar, 2014a). Different disciplines use different terminology to express alternative formulations of facilitative roles in participatory processes. The field of democratic innovation can offer space to bring this research together (see Chapters 13 and 14 in this Handbook) in order to scrutinise agency and advance practice.

Rose (1999) has perceptively pointed out the facilitators' 'new political status' as 'experts of community', and their 'increasingly influential and powerful role in policy-making processes', as well as 'wider problems of instrumentalism and industrialization' brought about by the commercialisation of such practices by consultants spearheading the 'emergent deliberative industry' (Amelung, 2012, pp. 13-14). Some studies are thus beginning to document the work of facilitation practitioners operating as consultants in the for-profit and not-for-profit arenas (Lee, 2015; Bherer et al., 2017; Cooper & Smith, 2012; Hendriks & Carson, 2008), but we still know little about official facilitators working permanently for public institutions (e.g. Escobar, 2014a, 2017; Escobar, Gibb, et al., 2018). This is an important gap in research given that democratic innovations are increasingly being institutionalised (see Introduction in this Handbook).

The institutionalisation of facilitation work presents some dilemmas –where should facilitators be based/employed? There are arguments for public authorities to act as enablers of participatory governance and deliberative policymaking (Sirianni, 2009; Smith, 2009). The question is whether public authorities should build in-house capacity or instead outsource facilitation work. Cooper and Smith (2012, p. 22) explored the distress of external consultants hired ad hoc, who complained about tokenistic engagement (lack of impact), a failure by officials to 'understand the demands of participation', and 'impediments caused by the broader structure and culture of public authorities'.

Of course, institutionalising facilitation expertise can also foster tokenism, for example when official facilitators work as part of an institutional culture that lacks genuine will to develop a more participatory and deliberative democracy. In such contexts, facilitation practitioners sometimes have to act as internal activists at the frontline of a culture change project (Escobar, 2017). There are also cases where a civil society organisation may be particularly well placed to provide independent facilitation of an official process. For example, in situations where there may be a lack of trust in the

convening institution, or perhaps a lack of expertise that is yet to be built in-house, or indeed a conflict of stakeholder interests in need of external mediation. The field of not-for-profit facilitation services is expanding across the world, with some leading networks like the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation[2] in the USA, or pioneering organisations such as, PB Partners[3] and Involve[4] in the UK, or newDemocracy[5] in Australia.

However, there is also a growing private 'participation industry' (see Chapter 13 in this Handbook), which delivers facilitation services for profit in contexts where deliberative processes are sometimes co-sponsored by corporations (Lee, 2015). This creates all sorts of ethical quandaries about the motivations and expectations that drive such processes at this peculiar intersection of business and the public sphere. It can also contribute to the depoliticisation of participatory processes (Lee et al., 2015), with emancipatory aspirations being supplanted by technocratic considerations, codified by the professionalisation of the field (Aakhus, 2001).

An additional argument for institutionalising facilitation work is that buying expertise externally establishes participation as an add-on, thus turning participatory practices into market commodities that can be sold as technical rather than political processes (see Hendriks & Carson, 2008; Lee, 2011). External consultants face the challenge of delivering without trumping their commercial bottom-line for future commissioning of projects (Cooper & Smith, 2012, p. 29; Hendriks & Carson, 2008), and there is little they can do after they hand in the results of a participatory process to the institution. In contrast, official facilitators enjoy the security of public sector work, and can invest time building internal and external alliances (Escobar, 2017). Kadlec and Friedman (2007) argue that participatory processes must be followed by an 'activist phase' in which practitioners try to make the process count. Building in-house capacity can thus contribute to having a cadre of official facilitators that are closer to the spaces of power where democratic innovations seek to take hold. This ability to work both the frontstage and backstage of participatory processes is a strong argument for developing a public sector workforce that can develop and sustain democratic innovations.

If institutionalising facilitation work offers dilemmas, the professionalisation of the field adds further avenues for inquiry. Professionalisation usually refers to how a group of people, doing the same work, seek a stronger position in their field by developing instruments and establishing higher levels of autonomy and recognition (MacDonald, 1995). For Abbot (1988, p. 8), professions are 'exclusive occupational groups applying somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases' and claiming to control certain 'knowledge and skill'. The ability to lay such claims depends on expert knowledge embodied and enacted by practitioners, and inscribed knowledge codified by, or for, their community of practice. Abbot's (1988, pp. 9-10) research foregrounds two points: the 'evolution of professions results from their interrelations', and professional work is constituted by tasks which the profession has successfully claimed for itself. The hold a profession establishes over certain tasks is known as 'jurisdiction', which is maintained, extended and refined on the basis of 'a knowledge system' capable of redefining 'problems and tasks, defend them from interlopers, and seize new problems' (Ibid.).

Studying professionalisation invites questions about how a particular body of expertise gets codified, and what that reveals about attempts to fix a profession's identity, tools and training and hiring procedures. Practitioners have sought to provide a range of toolkits, handbooks and training to codify facilitation practice (e.g. Susskind et al., 1999; Escobar et al., 2014), but this is not a field characterised by the 'occupational closure' sought by professions with clearer barriers to entry (Abbott, 1988). For example, expertise on facilitation is not necessarily tied to specific qualifications and is often developed through experience. Facilitation is a craft and thus learned by doing, imitating and adapting, in a developmental process that includes mentoring and peer networks in various arenas throughout a facilitator's career.

Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 98) highlight the importance of shared sense-making in the relational learning that characterises a community of practice. Accordingly, much of the facilitators' knowledge can be viewed as a 'socially distributed resource that is diffused and stored primarily through an oral culture' (Barley's preface in Orr, 1996, p. xiii). Storytelling is crucial in learning how to be a facilitator. This is what Forester (1999, p. 29) calls 'politically engaged and organizationally practical storytelling': 'these stories do particular kinds of work –descriptive work of reportage, moral work of constructing character and reputation (of oneself and others), political work of identifying friends and foes, interests and needs, and the play of power in support and opposition, and … deliberative work of considering means and ends, values and options, what is relevant and significant, what is possible and what matters, all together.'

Practitioners generate and circulate readings of their unfolding worlds through 'war stories' and experiential anecdotes that help 'preserve the knowledge acquired for the benefit of the community', thus making experience 'reproducible and reusable' (Orr, 1996, pp. 104, 143, 126). Accordingly, stories don't simply follow from practice, but are an essential component of informing it. While 'reflective practitioners' learn from experience (Schon, 1983), 'deliberative practitioners' learn from sharing experiences (Forester, 1999, p. 2). Facilitators thus learn their trade through sharing information and sense-making, articulating tacit understandings, testing formats and tools, rehearsing frames and explanations, and socialising each other in this evolving community of practice. That is how they develop vocabularies and narratives that shape the grammar of facilitation practice in a given context.

This crucial, context-specific, shared learning is difficult to codify in formal education. Nonetheless, there have been calls for schools of public policy to recognise the new realities of participatory governance and deliberative policymaking and thus prepare future officials accordingly (e.g. Bingham et al., 2005). Understanding facilitation work as a craft, rather than a discipline, challenges those involved in training facilitators to find new ways of negotiating the somewhat paradoxical nature of teaching practice.

3. Practices: What do facilitators do?

In the myriad accounts of democratic innovation explored throughout this Handbook, facilitation is often a latent dimension. Our field would do well heeding Geertz's (1973, p. 5) advice: to understand the practice of democratic innovation you 'should look in the first instance not at its theories or …what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do'.

The sections that follow offer an overview of key areas for inquiry into facilitation practice. The purpose is to render observable the subtleties of micropolitical work –that is, the work that facilitators carry out to develop processes that meet participatory standards of inclusion, interaction and impact.

This is important because 'the micropolitics of engagement can subvert the best intentions of institutional design' (Gaventa, 2007, p. xv). As Morley notes (2006, p. 543), micropolitics focuses on 'the ways in which power is relayed in everyday practices. It discloses the subterranean conflicts, competitions and minutiae of social relations and describes how power is relayed through seemingly trivial incidents and transactions.'.

Forester (1999, p. 8) argues that we should take more seriously 'the messy, conflicted, dirty-hands experience' of practitioners. To render that work visible, we can draw on Goffman's (1966) heuristic distinguishing the frontstage and backstage of social arenas. In ethnographic terms, the frontstage is accessible when observing participatory forums, and the backstage when working around their temporal and spatial confines (Escobar, 2014a).

In research, the distinction can be useful to understand why facilitators act in certain ways –in the Goffmanian sense that certain behaviours are warranted and expected, while others are not– as well as to explore the different types of work that takes place in each, and the symbiotic relation between both domains through that work. The next two sections illustrate and explore the types of work developed in the frontstages and backstages of the performance of facilitation.

4. Frontstage practices: Facilitators in action

The frontstage is where the most visible aspects of the facilitator's role become accessible to researchers and observers. This may take different forms in the context of different democratic innovations. For example, it may pertain to the deliberative group work as part of the evidence-gathering session of a mini-public, or the open forum for community conversations in a participatory budgeting process. It may take the shape of multiple stakeholder meetings in a collaborative governance arrangement, or the form of an online forum for deliberative crowdsourcing, running in parallel to public meetings hosted in preparation for a referendum, or citizen initiative. All these democratic innovations include spaces where facilitating deliberative interaction is critical.

There is some consensus in the public deliberation literature around the notion that 'good facilitators restrict themselves to matters of group process' (Moore, 2012, p. 154). Dillard (2013, p. 231) talks about an expectation of relative inaction by facilitators who 'do not direct but guide the discussion.' Mansbridge et al. (2006) have offered the analogy of a 'designated driver' who has both influence and responsibility in the process of taking a group through a deliberative process. However, Forester (1999, p. 73) has argued that facilitators can be 'simultaneously an interested party, a facilitator, and a process organizer', therefore refuting 'common stereotypes and academic presumptions that these distinctive roles cannot feasibly be combined'. This illustrates the distinct conceptions of facilitation depending on context. Deliberative scholars tend to focus on discursive standards within forums, whereas participatory democrats often think of facilitation in a broader community organising context.

The facilitator's level of intervention can be placed in a continuum, from passive, to moderate or involved (Dillard, 2013, p. 220). Moore aptly captures the predicament of 'following from the front' that shapes the role: 'The facilitator necessarily occupies a leadership position … yet must follow the group as it unfolds its own discourse … The facilitator is both part of the structure within which deliberation is supposed to emerge, and … a participant in the actual discourse itself' (Moore, 2012, p. 147).

Facilitators have, therefore, a powerful role in deliberative processes, and it is a core tenet of good practice not to use the position to influence the views of participants (Moore, 2012; cf. Forester, 2009). This is a key element in making the process as inclusive as possible: some participants may unwittingly be silenced by a facilitator who expresses views at odds with their own. The facilitator must be perceived as an honest broker by all participants. This means that the facilitator's focus is on shaping the deliberative process, rather than the substantive arguments of deliberation.

There is a useful distinction to be drawn here between impartiality and neutrality: facilitators are charged with maintaining a studiously impartial stance on the topic, but they are not expected to be neutral about the process. That is, their role is to keep the process on track, inclusive and productive; and they actively intervene to shape interaction according to what they deem appropriate to the task at hand. They do so, for example, by responding to situations that might close down dialogue, reframing questions, drawing threads or enforcing ground rules. In this sense, they are not neutral

arbiters sitting on the sidelines while action unfolds. Indeed, they work to foster certain communication patterns and curtail others, and such choices are consequential (Escobar, 2011).

Amongst the discursive resources deployed by facilitators, Dillard (2013, p. 222) finds three types of talk: process talk (e.g. procedures, ground rules), problem talk (e.g. options for deliberation), and framing talk (e.g. perspectives on an issue). Facilitators use various discursive strategies to engage with difference and tensions, to involve minority voices and to encourage scrutiny and deliberation. These strategies include storytelling, modelling behaviour, using accessible language, summarising, paraphrasing, sense-checking, taking time-outs, playing devil's advocate, etc. (Dillard, 2013, p. 222) as well as the use of humour as a key lubricant for the mechanics of facilitation (Hewer et al., 2019).

Facilitators often face a tension between structure and flow. When designing participatory forums, there are always dilemmas around how much should be planned, how strict and regimented the process should be, and the extent to which facilitators run the risk of fostering too much 'artificial' interaction. These dilemmas assume that there is such thing as a 'natural' or 'free' flow of interaction between participants, which may be hindered by too much process design and interventionist facilitators who impose certain patterns. However, the notion that there is such thing as a 'natural' or 'free' flow of interaction deserves scrutiny. Human contact is unavoidably ordered and regulated by the assumptions, habits and practices at play in different social contexts (Goffman, 1983). This means that groups usually interact according to the norms and patterns deemed appropriate in a given context. For instance, if public consultation meetings are understood as places where only the most vocal participate, where it is acceptable to engage in ritualised confrontation, and where shallow exchanges are the norm, then those patterns of interaction will tend to be replicated by people entering that space (Pearce, 2007).

In other words, those kinds of interactions may come to be seen as the 'natural' state of things, but those 'open' and 'free-flowing' forums are arguably as 'constructed' or 'artificial' as a rigorously designed and facilitated forum. The difference is that the former may privilege certain individuals (e.g. articulate, vocal) while silencing others. In that sense, this amounts to replicating within the forum some of the broader inequalities in society. That is what Young (2000) calls 'internal exclusion', and the job of process designers and facilitators is to prevent it.

Equality of participation is difficult to assess. For example, it is not simply a matter of sharing airtime equitably – some people can do more with less time. By the same token, different participants can contribute in different ways and to different stages of the process. Deliberation does not happen in a vacuum but reflects patterns from society at large. Participants bring into participatory processes their diverse experiences and expertise, their different interpersonal skills and communication styles, their varying levels of self-confidence, and so on. These dimensions depend on personal backgrounds, life stories and resources (e.g. education, income) that reflect the landscape of differences and inequalities in society. For example, mini-publics seek to involve people from across the socioeconomic spectrum, from high earners to people on low incomes and/or on welfare. In this context, facilitators must try to minimise negative effects of differences in the way participation and deliberation unfold (e.g. Roberts & Escobar, 2015, pp. 47-86).

Differences and inequalities unavoidably shape the dynamics of a deliberative forum. The challenge for facilitators is to ensure the fairness of the process, by supporting everyone to contribute and influence. A key task is to accommodate alternative communication styles (e.g. storytelling, rhetoric), approaches to learning (e.g. visual, experiential, formal) and ways of participating (e.g. beyond speech) (Ibid.). This is to avoid internal exclusion. Young (2000) argues that narrow definitions of deliberation as reasoned argumentation give advantage to those proficient at a skill that is unequally and unfairly distributed across society. The concern is that this can favour those already privileged in

terms of education and income (Ryfe and Stalsburg, 2012) and give yet another platform to the 'politically skilled and charismatic' (Smith, 2009, p. 169). Therefore, external exclusion may be overcome by including a diversity of citizens, but this can be hindered by internal exclusion if the process only opens space for deliberation based on certain modes of communication. Those included in the process can then be excluded by the process.

This takes us into the micropolitics of face-to-face interaction. Public forums can go awry due to bad facilitation, confrontational dynamics, rehearsed monologues, groupthink, shallow exchanges, or the invisible barriers erected by specialised jargon and expertise (Escobar, 2011, pp. 12-13). Much of the facilitators' work goes into reading, altering or fostering communication patterns so that they can help participants to

- talk across social and political divides,
- involve a variety of knowledges and ways of knowing,
- listen to and engage with voices that offer challenge,
- create a shared language,
- understand different values and perspectives,
- find common ground while being sensitive to difference,
- explore and deal with conflict without confrontation,
- and mobilise collective capacity for joint puzzling and problem solving.

Facilitators thus seek to generate 'internal constraints on discourse' (Moore, 2012, p. 154) and do so by drawing on dialogic and/or deliberative approaches to communication. Perhaps because studies of dialogue and deliberation have evolved in parallel but different disciplines – deliberation within political science and dialogue within communication studies – the potential for cross-fertilisation remains under-explored (but see Forester, 2009; Levine et al., 2005; Escobar, 2011). Facilitators understand that different communication patterns are required at different stages, and the key is to combine them purposefully over the course of a participatory process.

A key difference in these approaches is that dialogue seeks to increase understanding and relationships, while deliberation focusses on reaching some sort of conclusion or decision (Escobar, 2011). Dialogue stimulates a *divergent flow of communication* where the conversation can take many directions and conclude with a polyphonic representation of diverse voices, issues and perspectives, without resolution. In contrast, deliberation stimulates a *convergent flow of communication* where the conversation is oriented towards some kind of resolution on the basis of public reasoning (Escobar et al., 2014). Participatory processes are usually designed to combine elements of both, but these communication patterns are not always prevalent in the public sphere (Pearce, 2007). Facilitators face the challenge of altering existing interaction rituals to make room for dialogic and deliberative patterns. For example, when acrimonious debate through advocacy becomes the dominant communication pattern, the co-inquiry dynamics which characterise dialogue get blocked (Escobar, 2011, pp. 16-32). The aspiration that participants may change preferences through learning and reasoned deliberation, which is central to deliberative practice, can be lost if space is given to advocacy at the expense of inquiry and participants focus chiefly on persuading each other. Advocacy seeks resolution whereas inquiry seeks exploration, but arguably both are necessary in participatory processes. If inquiry and advocacy dynamics are not balanced, learning is prevented, polarisation increases, oversimplification kicks in, shallow exchanges proliferate, and the participatory process can become meaningless or, worse, divisive and counterproductive (Escobar, 2011, pp. 40-45).

Different flows (convergent/divergent) and patterns (advocacy/inquiry) of communication create different engagement dynamics. They can all play a role in fostering meaningful communication in public forums, when combined in ways that are fit for purpose. But the approach of facilitators varies from dialogue to deliberation (see Table 1). In moments of dialogue, they seek to foster understanding

of meanings, sentiments and perspectives. This requires 'skilfully attentive and probing facilitators to help us clarify meaning rather than have hot-button words lead us astray' (Forester, 2009, p. 184). In contrast, to foster deliberation, participants are encouraged 'to sharpen their arguments, and we need skilful work not so much of facilitating but of moderating an adversarial series of claims and refutations, counterclaims and counterrefutations' (Ibid.).

[insert Table 1 here]

Consensus-building facilitation warrants, nevertheless, critical examination. Critics of deliberative democracy, for example, highlight the dangers of suppressing difference and conflict, thus taming the agonistic nature of politics in ways that may favour dominant players. As Laclau and Mouffe (2001, p. 188) argue: 'one of the dangers which threatens democracy is the totalitarian attempt to pass beyond the constitutive character of antagonism and deny plurality in order to restore unity.' In their attempts to pre-empt confrontation, are facilitators suppressing legitimate conflict? It can be useful to distinguish between conflict and confrontation (Escobar, 2011). From a communication perspective, conflict is essential to democracy, but confrontation is not always the best way to take it seriously. The paradox is that confrontation is important to signal conflict, but it can also prevent dealing with it. That is, confrontational communication patterns can hinder mutual learning, foster shallow engagement, exacerbate power inequalities, accentuate polarisation, and leave differences and issues unexplored (Forester, 2009; Escobar, 2011, pp. 14-15).

Another line of critique can be found in governmentality studies, which highlight the role of facilitators, and other 'experts of community', in articulating new and subtle ruling relations (Rose, 1999; Foucault, 1979). From this perspective, facilitation is a 'technology of elicitation' that works by 'shaping, restraining and harnessing particular forms of sociality, often in accordance with theoretical models of what proper communication and citizenship ought to look like' (Lezaun & Soneryd, 2007, p. 292). This Foucauldian critique illuminates the micropolitics of governing, but it also shares more than it seems with the deliberative theory it criticises. Namely, the underlying assumption that constraining and enabling particular forms of discourse is an undesirable manifestation of power. As previously noted, unfacilitated public forums are not void of power dynamics. Instead, they offer a different assemblage of constraints and affordances that tend to privilege dominant players thus replicating power relations, rather than opening them to public scrutiny. Furthermore, Foucauldian critiques provide useful deconstruction, but often fall short from suggesting alternatives for reconstruction – precisely the domain where facilitators operate. By the same token, facilitators struggle with problems ignored in 'the idealized view of deliberation as unconstrained communication', as they face the challenge of 'practically negotiating the tensions involved in actively constituting a site for public deliberation' (Moore, 2012, p. 152).

This overview of frontstage practices would be incomplete without reference to the important role played by facilitation artefacts. Artefacts are ubiquitous in social arrangements, enabling and constraining action by virtue of their physical properties and the 'organization that human activity imposes on them' (Schatzki, 2002, p. 98). Because they enable and constrain, as well as embody worldviews and intentions, artefacts can be said to have political qualities (Winner, 1980). Facilitators use artefacts to structure interaction, from allocating speaking turns to organising tasks and progression, and from playing with different spaces and layouts to trialling crowdsourcing software. Artefacts also provide alternative ways to participate –e.g. writing on cards, prioritising using stickers, making connections by drawing or mapping, classifying by sorting and clustering on a sticky wall, etc. For example, facilitators may rely on the visual and kinaesthetic qualities of some artefacts to aid participants with learning difficulties or inexperienced in public speaking, therefore avoiding privileging discursive prowess. At large scale, digital artefacts sometimes can help facilitators to foster deliberative participation across large populations[6].

Despite the emphasis on how facilitators design meetings and deploy artefacts, this account doesn't mean to understate the improvisational work involved in facilitating. Artefacts and facilitation tactics are just a starting point for adaptation and improvisation. Like in jazz, artefacts come into play depending on the forum's rhythm and dynamics. In this way, facilitating is an ongoing conversation with the situation at hand (Schon, 1983) that demonstrates not only know-how about interaction dynamics, but also a way of learning about them. Know-how begets know-how and facilitation becomes a way of knowing groups by acting upon them.

5. Backstage practices: Political work by facilitators

Facilitation is political work insofar it is a practice imbued with democratic values. Every step in designing and facilitating a participatory process entails making political choices: from who is organised in and out, to what level of power-sharing is at stake; and from the framing of the issues to be considered, to what knowledges are invited or what patterns of communication are fostered. As Forester (1999, p. 168) argues, facilitators are 'public stewards, not just apolitical neutrals. They are organizers of public debate and deliberation, not just convenors who serve water and ask everyone to be polite.'

Besides the micropolitics of the frontstage explored earlier, facilitators develop much of their political work out of sight, in the backstage. Understanding this work can be challenging because it is ongoing and fluid, and thus requires ethnographic research over long periods of time shadowing practitioners (e.g. Escobar, 2014a). It also requires calibrating our research focus to prioritise process over entity. For instance, Law (1994) prefers to speak of 'ordering', rather than order; Czarniawska (2008) foregrounds 'organising' over organisation; and Latour (2005) argues that there is no group, only group-forming. Practice theory qualifies any 'site of the social' as a state of 'becoming' (Schatzki, 2002, p. 6). Instead of assuming discreet entities –orders, organisations, groups–, the focus here is the process of assembling them. This offers some analytical advantages because it recasts participatory sites not as accomplishments –final, bordered– but as ongoing processes of accomplishing –temporary, porous. It thus invites inquiry into agency, and in particular, into the work of assembling democratic innovations. Newman and Clarke (2009, p. 9) have usefully repurposed the concept of 'assemblage' for this discussion: 'the institutionalization of specific projects involves the work of assembling diverse elements into an apparently coherent form… Assemblage draws attention to the work of construction (and the difficulties of making ill-suited elements fit together as though they are coherent). And it makes visible the (variable) fragility of assemblages –that which has been assembled can more or less easily come apart, or be dismantled.'

Not all facilitators are involved in all aspects of assembling a participatory process. As noted earlier, official facilitators working permanently for a public authority tend to have more leeway for backstage work. A study that sought to explore that context (Escobar, 2014a) found that the work of participation practitioners can be understood along four dimensions:

- The work of public-making: turning the amorphous, unknowable public into specific, performable publics.
- The work of scripting: turning myriad agendas, actors, interactions, spaces, materials… into manageable plans and stories.
- The work of facilitating: turning a range of voices, cacophonies, communication patterns… into aligned dialogue and deliberation.
- The work of inscribing: turning multiple knowledges, utterances, documents… into workable translations.

The previous section explored the work of discursive facilitation at the frontage. Here I introduce briefly the work of public-making, scripting and inscribing which is carried out by facilitators in the backstage.

<c> Public-making

Dewey (1927) famously questioned the notion of 'the general public', exploring the varied, mediated and contingent nature of publics. He thought of the 'amorphous and unarticulated' (p. 131), 'shadowy and formless' public (p. 142) as a convenient abstraction invoked for the purposes of established political forces and structures. Much of the effort and political know-how of facilitators goes into public-making –the construction of contingent yet legitimate publics. As Stone shows (1997, p. 27), 'policy making is not only about solving public problems, but about how groups are formed, split, and re-formed to achieve public purposes'. Behind every democratic innovation, there is public-making work, encompassing 'modes, materialities, times and spaces through which publics are assembled as more or less open or selective" (Mahony et al., 2010, p. 164).

Attention to public-making foregrounds the work of assembling. Publics are not only summoned and convened, but also 'made up from the uneasy and impermanent alignments of discourses, spaces, institutions, ideas, technologies and objects' (Mahony et al., 2010, p. 3). This invites analysis of participatory processes as 'political machineries' that 'frame or pre-scribe particular kinds of roles and identities for the participating publics' (Felt & Fochler, 2010, p. 220).

In contemporary governance, publics are 'fluid and mobile' and thus 'assembled at particular moments for particular projects' (Newman & Clarke, 2009, p. 12). Assembling publics, therefore, entail both discursive and material strategies 'to forge the (sometimes disparate or conflicting) connections between the individuals and interests that will constitute the public' (Griffin, 2010, pp. 121-122). Publics unite strangers through participation, but it takes work to 'make those unknown strangers into a public' (Warner, 2002, pp. 106, 175) and that's when facilitators and other public makers become key players (Newman, 2011, p. 316). In the absence of effective public-making in a participatory process, authorities can easily dismiss publics and override deliberative work in the name of the amorphous, general public. Of course, even 'successful assemblages are still contingent, vulnerable to the risk of coming apart' (Newman & Clarke, 2009, p. 182). Public-making is relentlessly contested political work because it prescribes who is organised in and out of a democratic innovation.

<c> Scripting

The work of scripting (Escobar, 2015) clearly overlaps with public-making but has its distinctive focus and importance in facilitation. The scripting of a participatory process, 'like a film script… defines a framework of action together with the actors and the space in which they are supposed to act' (Akrich 1992: 208 in Felt & Fochler, 2010, p. 220). Assembling an interaction order is one of the facilitator's most powerful interventions in setting the stage for participation. The setting is political because it is scripted to encompass a series of 'materials and material arrangements that have hierarchical and distributional effects' which 'perform themselves through agents, through interactions between agents, and through devices, texts and architectures' (Law, 1994, p. 25).

Insofar as power is the capacity 'to structure the possible field of action of others" (Foucault, 1982, p. 221), scripting is political work. The scripting process also throws into relief the facilitators' knowledge in action. Scripting takes know-how and a command of participation technologies. Scripts are thus made of choices. The facilitator's job is to arrange them purposefully. I have called it 'script' because it is created to be enacted, and it evolves when performed. The script is thus a metaphor for the link between backstage and frontstage in the assembling of participatory processes. Commonly, when people say that participation is scripted they mean to criticise tokenism and manipulation. In contrast,

the script as conceptualised here is a micropolitical device that can be put to various uses. Scripting is thus not necessarily something that the 'powerful' impose on the 'powerless', but a practice that can be put to use in various participatory contexts –e.g. the collective scripting of everyday work in assembly-based movements such as, Los Indignados or Occupy (see Castells, 2012, pp. 128-133, 177-188).

Facilitators are meticulous about scripting because it is their opportunity to craft interaction orders and render them consequential. Their experience echoes Law's (1994, p. 166) reflections: 'it takes a lot of effort –over weeks and months– to create a single important strategic performance' and this is 'a process of concentration: of converting a great deal into not very much. Or a process into an event'. Studying how facilitators develop scripts illustrates 'the hard work required to draw heterogeneous elements together, forge connections between them and sustain these connections in the face of tension' (Li, 2007, p. 264). As a heuristic, the script illuminates how facilitators interpret and act upon their policy worlds. When we study participation as a frontstage phenomenon, it is easy to overlook that facilitation practice is sustained by backstage scripting, and the political work of orchestrating people, language and artefacts within purposeful assemblages (Escobar, 2015).

<c> Inscribing

Whatever goes unrecorded during a participatory process will likely be lost for policy-making. Inscription work, for instance recording key conclusions from a deliberative forum, enables 'everyday knowledge to become visible/audible to the state' (Clarke, 2010, p. 644). Myriad documents pervade the various governance contexts where facilitators operate, including emails, evaluations, minutes, action plans, agendas, announcements, booklets, guidance, reports, toolkits, briefs, surveys, consultation papers, assessment forms, spreadsheets, graphics, and other software-mediated formats. The literature on participation typically considers documents as mere instrumental carriers of content, but they are also relational artefacts. Each document entangles a set of writers, readers and users, not only delivering information but also constructing and negotiating social space, maintaining networks and coordinating practices (Brown & Duguid, 1996).

A key aspect of the work of inscribing participatory processes is that it entails translation. Whatever the output of the process, it will unavoidably be a translation of what transpired during the process. Translation entails conscious choices: 'translators must know what is right and for whom', and are thus involved 'in a political, and not merely technical process' (Freeman, 2009, p. 435). Translation decisions can imply that some points from a public forum never make it to a decision-making table. Furthermore, they can fuel disputes over what constitutes 'legitimate knowledge' (Barnes, 2009, p. 37; Fischer et al., 2015) and 'valid forms of evidence in the eyes of the policy-makers' (Smith-Merry, 2012, p. 140). As Li (2007, p. 283) observes, facilitators have to 'work hard to keep participants on task and to corral the outputs into acceptable formats.'

All in all, public-making, scripting and facilitating are inextricable from inscribing (Escobar, 2014a, pp. 210-212). For publics to be summoned and legitimated, they must be known, and that knowledge-work is mediated by documents. For process scripts to transcend their performance, they must be inscribed as stories. For forum facilitation to become consequential, it must encompass the translation of frontstage drafts into formal inscriptions that feed into policy work.

<c> Culture change

An underexplored dimension of the work of facilitators is their role in culture change. Democratic innovations can be disruptive processes that challenge the culture of an institution, public administration or policy network. This sometimes places facilitators at the frontline of a culture change project where new forms of democratic participation are being advanced, contested, and negotiated. More research is required about these attempts at institutionalisation, so that we can

explore not only how democratic innovations affect the people who participate, but also how they affect the institutions and organisations that host them.

Facilitators participate in advancing this culture change project by generating new ways of working at the interface of civil society and the state, thus seeking to reshape the institutional ecology of rules-in-use (Escobar 2014). Most research focuses on 'citizens, users, and publics who are to be engaged, coerced, empowered and made responsible through participatory initiatives' but often overlooks how 'public officials negotiate their roles and identities' within them (Barnes, 2009, p. 34). As Lowndes *et al.* (2006, p. 559) argue, institutions are malleable: there is 'a degree of path dependence but actors can shape and bend institutional forces in new directions.' Of course, that entails painstaking struggle and the potential burnout of facilitators and others is not to be underestimated (Escobar, 2017).

An overall picture emerges from this account of the facilitator's world, featuring a crosscutting tension between tradition and change. Democratic innovations can clash with established ways of working amongst public officials, politicians, and stakeholder groups, who may see their traditional roles challenged. In this account, facilitators are political workers advancing a culture change project ripe with tensions, ambiguities and power struggles: a project embraced and opposed by people across the spectrum of official and public spheres (Escobar, 2017). As Sullivan (2009, p. 65) argues, participatory governance policies 'are themselves subversive acts, designed with the express purpose of unsettling the established relationships of politicians, the public and professionals in the pursuit of new ones.'

In this light, facilitators seeking to advance new participatory and deliberative processes also work to dislocate, engulf or transform preceding practices. Whether the new discipline imposed by these processes is better than that of the regimes it seeks to alter or complement (i.e. technocratic policy-making, electoral politics) is a normative question widely addressed and contested (e.g. Fung, 2004; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Smith, 2009). My point, instead, has been to highlight that participatory and deliberative practices embody new power dynamics (e.g. questioning knowledge hierarchies and technocracy; fostering and altering certain communication patterns; making publics in particular ways), and it is important to study the micropolitics of these forms of power as such.

6. What next? A research agenda on facilitation

Limited attention has been paid to the role of facilitators in the literature on participatory and deliberative democracy, with notable exceptions (e.g. Forester, 1999; Cooper & Smith, 2012; Moore, 2012; Lee, 2015; Bherer et al., 2017). This chapter has outlined a range of analytical concepts and dimensions to support further research into facilitation practice and practitioners. In the field of democratic innovation, as in other social domains, 'work has become invisible' (Barley, 1996, p. xi). Overlooking facilitation practices obscures dimensions that may explain important puzzles about the assembling of democratic innovations.

In the backstage, facilitators design processes, negotiate agendas, align purposes, recruit participants and orchestrate the material choreographies that will structure interaction. In the frontstage, once the performance starts, facilitators seek to materialise the 'script' created backstage (Escobar, 2015), and to shape the micropolitics of the forum by distributing opportunities for intervention while monitoring communication patterns. Once the frontstage phase is over, there is more backstage work, engaging in the 'politics of filtering and distilling' inscriptions from the process (Escobar, 2011) or trying to make the results count – what Kadlec and Friedman (2007, p. 19) call the facilitator's 'activist phase'.

More comparative research is needed to offer more systematic insight into types of facilitation and their impacts in a range of contexts across the world. This research agenda should not ignore the who, the what and the why of facilitation, but must focus in particular on the how. As Flyvbjerg notes (2001, pp. 118-119), the 'how?' question has been neglected in political research. The pragmatist, symbolic interactionist, and Foucauldian 'how?', with its 'emphasis on details and concrete practices', invites us to reformulate political inquiry to 'focus on the micropractices of power, power as seen from the bottom up, instead of political science's conventional focus on sovereign power' (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 81).

This type of research presents methodological challenges, but mixed methods approaches have shown promise (Chapter 33 in this Handbook; e.g. Escobar, Gibb, et al., 2018; Lee, 2011; Roberts & Escobar, 2015). Practices are available for scrutiny only insofar as we make accounts of them. This chapter has illustrated some analytical avenues for the study of facilitation practice, but the subject deserves more systematic attention by scholars of democratic innovation.

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Notes

[1] See https://www.etymonline.com/word/facilitate#etymonline_v_29805

[2] See http://ncdd.org accessed on 19/01/19.

[3] See https://pbpartners.org.uk accessed on 19/01/19.

[4] See https://www.involve.org.uk/ accessed on 19/01/19.

[5] See https://www.newdemocracy.com.au accessed on 19/01/19.

[6] See for example the use of Pol.is in Taiwan: https://www.technologyreview.com/s/611816/the-simple-but-ingenious-system-taiwan-uses-to-crowdsource-its-laws/ accessed on 21/02/19.

Table 1. Different facilitation foci depending on the form of communication

Dialogue	**Deliberation**
Divergent flow of communication	Convergent flow of communication
Inviting exploration and understanding (suspending judgement)	Inviting scrutiny and judgement
Broadening or deepening stories/experiences	Sharpening and testing arguments
Centrality of experience	Centrality of evidence (which may include experience)
Ethics of care	Ethics of justification
Space for private and public reasons	Space for public reasons only
No pressure to reach conclusion or decision	Pressure to reach conclusion or decision