

REPORT

Beyond a Minimal Democracy

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Table 3

Inclusive Deliberative Pathways: How to Represent the Absent

Chair

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Overview

The objective of this discussion is remarkably ambitious: how to make the absent present. In each participatory process, there is likely to be an underrepresented minority, as targeted communities are always diverse across various cleavages. Additionally, if we aim to expand our political imagination, we should consider even the non-human entities in that void. Acknowledging that the absence of certain elements might challenge the legitimacy of the participatory process, we seek to understand whether and how to transcend those boundaries, exploring the support that culture and creativity might offer for that purpose. What does an inclusive space look like? What are the barriers to participation? Who or what are we missing in this grand scheme of deliberation? What scale of participation can we realistically design? Is there a way for past and present to converge when making collective decisions with a shared legacy?

Current Situation and Challenges

Examining an average participatory process, one may observe a general homogeneity of represented individuals, often based on factors such as ethnicity or age. People are sitting at a table, looking at screens, and ready to jot down notes. Is this the only way to envision participation or interaction? Is this the most comfortable space we can design? Certainly, the picture may vary based on the scale of the participatory process and the geographical

setting. However, as a general guideline, to include those absent, we must consider who the underrepresented are within the political community (e.g., prisoners, undocumented individuals, hospitalized persons, children, etc.). Self-exclusions due to practical constraints should be taken into account, ranging from single parents to the elderly or anyone uneasy with the rational and dialogical modalities of participation.

Finally, those who wield power and fear change might avoid such arenas. Currently, there is no clear definition of the perimeter of political subjecthood, and those boundaries should be drawn according to the specific participatory process. The aim should be to strengthen the exercise of imagination and allow time and space to be circular, representing the actual conditions we live in, including non-human entities and past and future generations in a constantly transmitted story. We should reimagine and reconceptualize the idea of democratic innovation practices. As we don't expect people to become experts on the addressed topics and deliberate accordingly, we must question how to recreate the best conditions for encounter and reciprocity. This might lead us to abandon the overarching rationality paradigm and embrace a sensorial and creative understanding of the political process.

Recommended Steps

To achieve an inclusive participatory process, we need to:

1. Design the expected outcomes and impacts of decisions on the issue, considering the communities and entities that should be taken into account;
2. Understand why certain subjects are concerned or impacted by political outputs but do not participate. Overcoming the sortition practice and targeting specific groups through an intersectional method could be essential;
3. Facilitate access to the process by rewarding civic engagement, potentially dedicating work time or providing support for travel and care;
4. Welcome feelings like fear, disappointment, skepticism, and discontent into the process, acknowledging conflicts and dealing with them without aiming for overarching consensus or scientific deliberation;
5. Guarantee means of expression that consider the psychological dimension of decisions, valuing personal experiences and backgrounds. Horizontal discussion is possible only when encounters include recreational elements, integrating rationality with creativity, spirituality, imagination, and different types of knowledge;

6. Create a comfortable and safe space that functions as an actant, fostering behaviour restoration through which individuals can connect with their inner selves and reconceive themselves as species sharing the planet with other living beings;
7. Be honest about the expected impact of the process, requiring media coverage during and after, along with transparency and dissemination to reach peripheral, self-excluded, and sceptical individuals.