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The squared circle of participatory democracy: scaling up deliberation to the national level

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Can participation be scaled up to the national level? And if so, can large-scale participation be attained without forfeiting deliberation? This article addresses these two questions, providing empirical evidence that deliberation can be scaled up, together with participation, and manage to impact on national-level policies. It argues that participation can be feasible at the national level, and that deliberation can be effective on a large scale, once the appropriate institutional design is in place. A theoretical framework composed of two overlapping dimensions (feasibility and effectiveness) is proposed to assess the degree to which participation and deliberation can be scaled up. As for the feasibility of large-scale participation, the article argues that the institutional design of participatory experiments should allow participation to be scaled up according to three criteria: actors, space, and volume. As for the effectiveness of deliberation, it is argued that large participatory experiments should provide for the deliberative process to follow criteria of transformation and impact in order to scale up local preferences to the national level and make sure they affect policy outcomes. The theoretical framework is tested against the empirical background of the world's largest participatory and deliberative experiment known to date, the National Public Policy Conferences in Brazil.

Keywords: democracy; participation; deliberation

In a recent book, Adam Przeworski (2010) makes the strong statement that ‘participatory democracy is an oxymoron’, because participation is ‘not feasible at the national scale’, and therefore ‘only a few can causally affect collective decisions’. In spite of valiant efforts by participatory democrats, he asserts, ‘the circle just cannot be squared’. This same opinion is shared by Robert Dahl (1994), who believes changes in scale involve a trade-off between the ability of citizens to exercise democratic control over political decisions and the capacity of the system to respond satisfactorily to the collective preferences of its citizens. Dahl implies that on the small, local level ‘a citizen may be able to participate extensively in decisions that do not matter much but cannot participate much in decisions that really matter a great deal’. On the national level, therefore, one can agree with Dahl that ‘the opportunities for the citizen to participate in and greatly influence decisions are vastly reduced’ (1994, p. 28).

The participatory democrats contend that scale is in itself no argument against participation. However, they concede that participation matters most in specific decisions

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requiring conflict-solving (Warren 2002) or problem-solving (Fung 2004), where it may only be possible to engage the few, who are supposed to represent the many (Urbinati and Warren 2008). Skepticism toward the feasibility of large-scale participation beyond the local level seems thus to disconcert both detractors and supporters of democratic participation.

Deliberative democrats for their part recognize the long-standing critique that effective deliberation can only take place among a small number of people (Shapiro 1999). James Fishkin has published a book in which he concedes that the success of deliberative polls is proportional to their failure in spreading participation. Deliberation is a value unachievable in combination with mass participation, since the latter has the effect of undermining the former (Fishkin 2009). John Dryzek also acknowledges that the larger the number of participants, ‘the harder it becomes for them to deliberate together’ (Dryzek 2008). While the trade-off between participation and deliberation has been discussed by democratic theorists (Cohen and Fung 2004), it remains a normative question lacking empirical support. Deliberative democrats have so far produced no evidence of whether the scale of participation affects the effectiveness of deliberation.

Empirical studies on deliberation have over the years mostly relied on mini-publics, which are ‘small enough to be genuinely deliberative, and representative enough to be genuinely democratic’ (Goodin and Dryzek 2006). Even the best attempts by deliberative democrats to overcome the problem of scale still rely on mini-publics, as it is the case with Dryzek’s (2008) idea of ‘discursive representation’, and Mansbridge *et al.*’s (2012), and Niemeyer’s (2012) concepts of ‘deliberative system’. Assuming that the process of converting individuals’ beliefs and desires into preferences ‘does appear to work best during the kind of group deliberation that is found in mini-publics’, Niemeyer claims that at least this shows that their impact can be scaled up to the public sphere (Niemeyer 2012). No study has however found that the transformation of preferences that is characteristic of deliberation can be achieved in large-scale participatory settings beyond the circumscribed space of mini-publics.

Can participation be scaled up to the national level? And if so, can large-scale participation be attained without forfeiting deliberation? This article answers these two questions positively, providing empirical evidence that deliberation can be scaled up in combination with participation, and thus manage to impact on national-level policies. I will argue that participation can be feasible at the national level, and that deliberation can be effective on a large scale, once the appropriate institutional design is in place. Such an institutional design involves two overlapping dimensions of scaling-up: feasibility, and effectiveness. As concerns the feasibility dimension, I will argue that large-scale experiments may allow participation to be scaled up according to three criteria: actors, space, and volume. As for the effectiveness dimension, I will argue that large participatory experiments should provide for the deliberation to follow two criteria – transformation and impact – in order to scale up local preferences to the national level and make sure they influence policy outcomes. Such a theoretical framework will be tested against the empirical background of the world’s largest participatory and deliberative experiment known to date, the National Public Policy Conferences in Brazil.

Two dimensions of scaling-up: feasibility and effectiveness

In what follows I will propose a theoretical framework consisting of institutional design criteria that seek simultaneously to ensure the feasibility of the scaling-up of participation and to provide an assessment of how preferences expressed at the local level may,

through a sequential process of deliberation, effectively affect policies at the state/regional and national-level. In order to assess whether deliberation can be effective in large-scale participatory experiments, I must provide a working definition of deliberation. The concept is understood here as meaning a process of reasoning and openness to alternative arguments, and therefore of preference transformation (Goodin 2002, Niemeyer and Dryzek 2007, Niemeyer 2012). This is what a large-scale participatory experiment must ensure, that is, a deliberative outcome that ensures that preferences are transformed through a process of reasoning and openness to alternative arguments.

In order to be feasible on a large scale and at the national level, participation should be scaled up according to three overlapping criteria: actors, space, and volume.

The *actors* criterion implies devising a procedure capable of ensuring that those affected by public policies and those entitled to formulate and enforce them deliberate together. In other words, policy-makers and citizens should be able to exchange arguments and allow themselves to transform each others' preferences through the deliberation process. That implies an equal involvement of state (public administrators and policy-makers) and civil society (individual citizens and representatives of civil society organizations – CSOs) in all stages of the deliberation. This may also imply, if the state is responsible for convening and sponsoring the deliberative process (as usually happens in participatory assemblies, but not so often in mini-publics), that civil society has the means to avoid abusing its power, for example by providing the majority of the deliberators in the scaling-up stages of deliberation.

The *volume* criterion implies devising a process capable of ensuring that the number of people involved in the deliberation and the outcomes generated by them increase in proportion to the scaling-up of space. This entails involving *simultaneous* participatory assemblies at each of the (spatial) levels and ensuring that the deliberative outcomes of all of them converge in a final stage of deliberation. This also entails a process entirely open to participants (and to the preferences expressed by them) in its initial (local) stage, however dependent it is on chains of delegation for the scaling-up stages of deliberation (intended to ensure that local participants will also contribute to the scaling-up (state/national) levels of deliberation).

The *space* criterion implies devising a procedure capable of taking the deliberation from the local to the national level. This entails involving *subsequent* participatory assemblies at the local, state and national levels in the same sequential deliberative process, making sure the risks of agency-loss throughout the process are minimized. The participatory procedure should link local to national deliberations, in such a way as to guarantee that the preferences expressed at the local level will be deliberated at the national one. A national participatory assembly should then be the final stage of a process consisting of a sequence of deliberations starting at the local level.

Table 1 summarizes all three criteria of feasibility, indicating their scope, main features, and requirements.

The three feasibility criteria of scaling-up overlap and all of them involve the scaling-up of both deliberators and deliberative outcomes (the result of the deliberations from the simultaneous and subsequent participatory assemblies). This framework offers a model of staged deliberation that has some resemblances to Robert Goodin's (2005) model of 'sequenced deliberation'. However, the staged deliberative process I envisage here does not involve fragmenting the deliberative task into many parts and agents with their distinct roles. In my institutional framework, the chains of delegates that connect the local to the national level enable the combination of wide participation with face-to-face deliberation to engender a complex scheme of representation and to take place within this; and this is

Table 1. Feasibility dimension.

Criteria	Scope	Features	Requirements
Actors	Link state and civil society	Joint deliberation of policy-makers and citizens/CSOs	Majority of civil society deliberators in order to avoid abuse of power
Volume	Link volume of participation to the spatial scaling-up	Simultaneous participatory assemblies at the same (local/state) level	Chains of delegation (election of delegates) to the scaled-up stages
Space	Link local to national level	Subsequent participatory assemblies at ascending (state/national) levels	Final stage of deliberation of the aggregated outcomes from previous stages

the reason why deliberators must move up through the scaling-up levels of the deliberative process, along with the outcomes of each of the deliberation stages.

The three criteria discussed so far show how scaling-up participation may be feasible. However, they do not ensure that the deliberation is effective. As concerns the effectiveness of deliberation in large-scale participatory settings, the institutional design should be assessed through two other criteria: transformation and impact.

The *transformation* criterion deals with the articulation of the proceedings of all subsequent and simultaneous participatory assemblies and the aggregation of their deliberative outcomes, in such a way as to construct a final consensus that reflects the entire deliberative process, comprising all stages. Such a consensus builds up on the replication, reconstruction or rejection of local preferences at an intermediary (state/regional) stage, and on the replication or reconstruction of local preferences in the final, national stage of deliberation. The aim of this criterion is to make sure that enlarged participation does not undermine deliberation: the preferences expressed at a local level may be transformed (that is, changed as a result of confrontation with other preferences) as the deliberation is scaled up. In other words, the aggregation of the deliberative outcomes of all simultaneous and subsequent participatory assemblies or mini-publics reflects a consensus composed of local preferences that were replicated, reconstructed or rejected – that is, deliberated on – throughout the scaling-up process. Such a criterion allows one to assess the quality of deliberation by assessing its outcomes, and not its procedure. One can say that deliberation has taken place when one observes that preferences have been transformed as a result of it.

The *impact* criterion seeks to ensure the replication or reconstruction of local preferences (according to the transformative criterion, which ensures a process of reasoning and openness to alternative preferences) in state/regional and national policies, making sure that large-scale participation and deliberation affect public policy. The idea is that preferences expressed by citizens and CSOs at the local level may effectively transform the preferences expressed by policy-makers at the state/regional and national policy-making level, by being replicated or reconstructed at the latter. This criterion ensures that the outcomes of large-scale, national-level participatory experiments are causally affected by the preferences expressed at the local level and deliberated on through the scaling-up process.

Table 2 summarizes the two criteria of the effectiveness dimension, indicating their aims and scopes.

The next two sections will each address the main arguments of this article, that is, the feasibility of large-scale participation and the effectiveness of deliberation in the latter. Both arguments will be tested against the background of the Brazilian National Public Policy Conferences (NPPCs). The NPPCs are large-scale participatory and deliberative

Table 2. Effectiveness dimension.

Criteria	Aim	Scope
Transformation	Transformation of preferences through the simultaneous and subsequent stages of deliberation	Aggregate deliberative outcomes of all stages in order to reach a final consensus Replication/Reconstruction/Rejection of local preferences in the intermediary (state/regional) stages of deliberation, and Replication/Reconstruction of local preferences at the final, national stages of deliberation
Impact	Transformation of preferences at the policy-making level	Replication/Reconstruction of local preferences in state and national policies

experiments that have been gathering together millions of people at all three levels of the Brazilian federation over recent years, with the main objective of providing societal inputs into the design and implementation of public policy. In the next section, I will deal with the feasibility dimension of the scaling-up challenge, and describe the NPPCs' work in general, aiming to show how they encompass all the three feasibility criteria of the scaling-up of participation: actors, volume, and space. The section after that will deal with the effectiveness dimension of the scaling-up challenge, and rely on specific NPPC cases in order to show how scaled-up deliberation can also be effective, managing to transform preferences at all stages of a large-scale process and impact on national politics.

Feasibility dimension

Actors

Rather than formulating policies from the top-down in a formal procedure that might at best involve the aid of technical expertise, the Brazilian government has in recent years been providing civil society with the opportunity to join in the process of deliberating on, and designing, public policies. It is Brazil's federal government that convenes an NPPC, following a presidential decree or ministerial act to initiate the process resulting from either governmental perception that a certain area demands new policy-making or from an external demand or pressure from civil society. In general, both actors – government and civil society – act together from the start in the task of organizing the national conferences process.

The first NPCC was convened in 1941, during the first Getúlio Vargas government (1930–45). That was certainly a difficult time in world history, and also in Brazil. Despite the accusations of authoritarianism against Vargas at that period of his government (the so-called 'New State', 1937–45), his strong social concerns were not to be blurred. Through a decree enacted in January 1941, President Vargas convened the First National Conference on Education and the First National Conference on Health.

Although arising from a political decision of the Presidency, one cannot say that the creation of the NPPCs was the result of a top-down process. Several of Vargas's actions were attempts to respond to the demands of the sanitarian movements, which had been very strong in the previous decades. Moreover, although both the education and health conferences were held in 1941, only the latter continued to be held over the following decades, which can be taken as the result of the mobilization of the health organizations, which have

always been highly organized in Brazil (Hochmann 1993). Brazil only held a national conference on education again almost 70 years later, in 2010, and this was preceded in 2008 by a National Conference on Basic Education. The fact that the health NPPCs continued to take place over the years, always within the legal framework and institutional design envisaged by Vargas, regardless of the government or party in power, and continued even during the military dictatorship, must say something about the role of civil society in the development of such democratic experiments.

The interaction between state and civil society may also be located in the initial institutional design of the NPPCs – which, despite having developed into something much more complex nowadays, still preserve some of their earliest and essential features. The law of 1937 that determined the occurrence of health and education NPPCs was the first document to define what they should entail: the national conferences

should facilitate the federal government's health and education actions throughout the country, and should direct government attention to the implementation of local education and health services, as well as to the need for federal grants and subsidies. (Law 378, article 90)

In its initial form, therefore, the NPPC already had the objective of providing policy inputs into the federal government, and of doing this by taking into account the needs and demands of the local level. The need for a national policy that could integrate a health system, providing a centralized, state-disseminated service, had long been voiced by the sanitary movements (Hochmann 1993). This was a feature of their design that the NPPCs would never leave behind: the feeding of inputs from the local level into national policy-making.

One can therefore say that the NPPCs, although put forward by the state, have been a joint endeavour with civil society since their earliest inception. And as the experiment was resumed in the 1990s, and expanded in size and scope in the 2000s (Pogrebinschi 2012a), the role of civil society has increased further in the process of initiating, organizing, and taking part in the NPPCs. In recent years, as the policy areas have been opened up to public deliberation have been broadened by Lula's government (2003–10), several NPPCs have taken place as a result of demands from within society.¹ As the channels for participation have been enlarged, CSOs have apparently become ever more motivated and strengthened. They are not only allowed to deliberate on policies during the policy-making process, and to take part in the organization of this, but they are also able to some extent to set the government's policy agenda by defining some of the areas that should be the subject of democratic deliberation (Pogrebinschi 2012b).

The organization of the conference process is also a shared endeavour between the government and civil society. Once an NPPC has been convened, a committee is set up to define the procedures and oversee the entire process, which can take over a year to reach the national stage. The organizing committee's members are usually half representatives of civil society and half government representatives. In some cases CSOs have about 60% of the seats for the organizing committee members. The committee is responsible for devising the methodology, the rules, and the logistics of the conference, which embraces all three levels of the federation. The parity rule is subsequently followed in the composition of state and municipal organizing committees (some local conferences are co-organized by a policy council on which seats are also shared between state and civil society members). The national committee is usually also responsible for supervising the transfer of federal resources (allocated by the relevant ministry or secretary in charge of the conference) to the states and municipalities.

The allocation of delegates to be elected at the municipal and state stages of the conference process, and to be appointed at all three levels, also follows the parity rule. In general, the NPPC's procedural norms (as deliberated and enacted by the organizing committee) determine that the state's appointed delegates should be distributed in particular proportions between the three levels of the federation. The exact share of each government level at each stage of the conference varies, but most of them try to make sure that representatives from municipal and state government join the national conference, and representatives from federal government join the lower levels of the deliberative process. Civil society delegates are always elected from among participants. Despite the open character of the local, initial stage, some NPCCs require that citizens elected are members of a CSO entitled to elect delegates because of its representativeness in the policy area under deliberation. The purpose of this rule is to make sure that most CSOs concerned with the policy issue to be deliberated will join the process.

The same feature applies to government delegates. Some NPPCs, for example the First National Conference on Public Security (2009), make sure in their internal rules that certain public organs (in this case, all those involved with public security) will participate in the conference stages.² The result is that a vast plurality of civil society entities and state organs take part in the conferences. To give another example, the Rio de Janeiro state stage of the Third National Conference on Policies for Women (2011) had a total of 710 participants (399 civil society and 249 government) and 595 bodies were 'represented', which makes 1.2 participants per body. This is a relevant aspect of the NPCC: it enhances a form of group participation and the representation of collective interests.

Although all conferences are convened by the government, it may happen that the setting up of some depends on civil society. During the preparatory stages of the first National Conference on Social Communication, in 2009, the Governor of São Paulo, the country's most populous state, refused to support his state's conference. The conference took place anyway, thanks to the collective efforts of CSOs, supported by some mayors and local deputies.³ To overcome a lack of governmental collaboration at the municipal and state levels, some NPPCs, such as the first National Conference on Public Security, have had among their organizational rules a provision stipulating that if the corresponding conference is not convened by the local or state government by a certain date, it should then be directly organized by civil society and workers (Brasil 2007, p. 10).

Given their history and design, the NPPCs have proven to be, simultaneously, a bottom-up and top-down process. Although they depend on the political will of the federal government, civil society plays a crucial role in them from their inception. Moreover, as the process starts at the local level and scales up to the national one, it also becomes more socially permeable and autonomous. The design and structure of the NPPC make it much more than a simple procedure of social consultation put forward by the state. Control over the procedural rules is formally shared between the state and civil society throughout all the stages of the process, and both deliberate the policy proposals – which first arise at the local level in the course of the deliberation itself, and are thus not set by any pre-defined governmental agenda. The institutional design of the NPPCs protects such democratic experiments against an eventual charge that they are meant to serve as a mere legitimating device through which the government can try and raise the social acceptability of its policies. That both the state and civil society are the actors who have jointly organized the procedure since its inception, and who together take part into all stages of the deliberation, is a criterion that ensures the feasibility of this large-scale participatory experiment.

Space

What is called a National Public Policy Conference is therefore a deliberative process that comprises several levels in such a way that the national conference (or level) itself is the culmination of a procedure that starts at the local (municipal) level, and works its way through all the country's states before reaching its final (national) stage. This process seeks to ensure that the participatory practice is indeed national, and that its deliberations represent the interests and demands of the entire country's population. This is necessary because the main purpose of an NPPC is to provide guidelines for the formulation of national public policies.

The first stage of deliberation of an NPPC is at the local (municipal) level. Often a group of cities come together to organize the local stage. Such an aggregation of municipalities' deliberations is usually called a 'regional conference', but it still forms the first or local level of the deliberative process. After the local conferences, in which proposals for local policies are deliberated alongside proposals for national policies, comes the second stage, or state conference. Before it takes place, the deliberative outcomes of all the municipal conferences are arranged in a single document, one for each of the country's states. Each state conference will then deliberate which of the municipal proposals will move up to be deliberated at the national level. Several NPPCs have allowed new proposals that were to be deliberated at the national stage to be introduced at this level, and deliberated alongside state policies. After each of the states in the federation has held its own conference, then the last stage takes place: the so-called 'national conference' itself. Figure 1 shows how deliberative outcomes are scaled up from the local to the national stage.

The national conference is usually held in Brasília, the country's capital. It deliberates the policy proposals that have come from each of the 27 states' conferences, and which have been compiled and systematized in a document that serves the purpose of directing the deliberations. At this stage, usually, no new proposals are allowed: only those policy proposals that have come from the municipal and state levels are to be deliberated and voted on. This procedure is meant to ensure that the scope of the final results of the process is effectively national, that is representative of the interests of all the country's federative units.

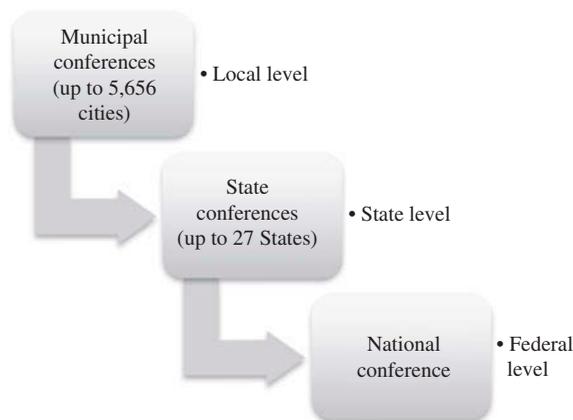


Figure 1. Scaling-up of deliberative outcomes.

Brazil has 5,565 cities (municipalities) and 27 states (federative units). According to recent federal government data, two national conferences that took place in 2011, taken together, reached more than 90% of all the country's municipalities.⁴ Although most NPPCs do not cover such a high proportion of the country's cities, one can note that the scaling-up process seems to be successful, at least as concerns the procedures that are meant to ensure that local demands from all states will potentially be deliberated at the national level, as well as that local levels' delegates will join the national stage and be able to deliberate on the policy proposals to be generated as the final outcome of the process, and thus try to ensure that the deliberations from their municipality will be taken into consideration.

Parallel to the local and state level deliberations, NPPCs may also rely on other deliberative stages, permitting the organization of so-called free or virtual conferences.⁵ Free conferences can be freely organized by civil society as long as certain rules and procedures are followed. Virtual conferences pull together contributions usually submitted over the Internet, following a specific procedure indicated by the NPPC organization. The policy guidelines that come out of the free and virtual conferences are usually included in a booklet of policy guidelines' (the aggregation of the deliberative outcomes of the local and state levels) that will be deliberated at the national conference. Therefore, the policy guidelines from the free and virtual conferences may be deliberated together with the deliberative outcomes from the local (or regional) and state conferences. But not all NPPCs permit the organization of free or virtual conferences, and within those that allow them, not all include their outcomes in deliberation at the national stage.

Not only the policy proposals deliberated move up from the bottom as the process continues. The citizens who participate in local and state level conferences also have the chance to participate at the national level as elected representatives from their municipality or state. A chain of delegation connects the initial stage of the deliberative process (the municipal conferences) with the intermediate stage (state conferences), and the final stage (the national conference). The chains of delegation that connect the local level with the national one comprise a genuine structure of representation within the participatory and deliberative scheme of the NPPCs. The institutional design of the NPPCs, combining the criteria of space and volume, and providing simultaneous and sequential participatory assemblies, encompasses a combination of participation, deliberation, and representation.

At the local level, no selective mechanism is used to choose who will participate in the process. The municipal conferences are entirely open to participation, and in recent years (especially during the second mandate of Lula's government, 2007–10) there has been extensive advertising calling on people to come and engage in the NPPC. At the local stage, besides deliberating policy proposals, one of the main purposes is to elect the delegates who will take part at the next (state) level. Given that anyone can show up at a municipal conference, anyone can potentially be elected as a delegate and go on to the subsequent stage. The participants themselves are responsible for this election, following certain rules laid down to ensure a proportionality of representation between CSOs and state officials.

At the state level, participation is no longer open and free; it is rather semi-open. Only delegates elected at the local level can move up to take part in the state conference of their federative unit. However, at this stage new participants will join the deliberation, since state governments are allowed to appoint some representatives, as is, in most cases, the federal government. Although both local and state governments may appoint representatives to take part in the municipal and state stages, they have no influence on who is elected from among participants to be a delegate and ascend to the next level.

Although the process is open at the beginning, and semi-open in the middle, it closes at the end: only delegates elected at the state level conferences are allowed to participate at the national stage of the NPPC, along with appointed representatives from the government. At the state and national stages, therefore, among the delegates who do not belong to the civil society quota, there may be participants who have not been elected from those participating at the previous level, but have been appointed by the (state or federal) government. In some NPPCs, depending on the policy issue under deliberation, some workers' organizations or CSOs can also appoint delegates.

Elected and appointed delegates eventually get together with a – usually small – number of other participants at the state and national levels. These other participants are usually external observers and invited guests, who must always have been authorized by the organization committee to join the conference. Some NPPCs restrict the number of possible observers/guests to up to 10% of the total number of delegates. It is important to notice that, even if these external participants may, in most conferences, have a voice in the deliberations, being able to make and respond to arguments during the debates, only the elected and appointed delegates can take part in the decision-making (that is, vote on the policy proposals deliberated). The observers/guests may have a right to speak, but only delegates have the right to decide. Elected and appointed delegates, along with simple 'participants', form the representative ecology of the NPPCs.

A difficulty linked to the space criterion is that since no selection mechanism is adopted at the local stage, it could happen that municipal conferences became dominated by partisans, lobbyists or certain other groups. There is as yet no evidence of that, but in principle one can speculate that the freedom of participation at the local level could harm the freedom of deliberation at the subsequent levels. However, the participants themselves have a chance to correct an eventual bias as the process scales up. The institutional design of the NPPC also prevents this happening, because to scale up, participatory assemblies must not only be simultaneous, but also sequential. As, at the state level, delegates from dozens or hundreds of municipal conferences are brought together, it is very unlikely that a participatory bias at the local stage could be reproduced at the state one: the delegates from a municipal conference that turned out to be biased would be scattered, and their influence weakened, at the state level among the delegates from the many other municipalities. A political party or interest group would have to be enormously powerful (and have a huge number of supporters and collaborators in a significant number of municipalities and states) to have a majority of delegates in a majority of municipal conferences. Given that the latter take place within the same time frame, this is even more unlikely. While ensuring the scaling-up of both deliberative outcomes and deliberators, the openness at the initial stage and the chains of delegation in the subsequent ones, the space criterion contributes to the feasibility of this large-scale experiment, as illustrated by [Figure 2](#).

Volume

Official data from the federal government of Brazil estimates that around 7 million people participated in the 82 NPPCs that took place in Brazil between 2003 and 2011.⁶ Of these, 2 million alone would have participated in the eight NPPCs that took place in 2011 (includes all levels). The eight national stages that took place in the capital, Brasília, drew in 16,300 people in 2011 alone. Although each NPPC involves a varying number of participants, accordingly to this data the participation in 2011 would amount to an average of 250,000 people in each conference process. The NPPC is definitely a massive participatory

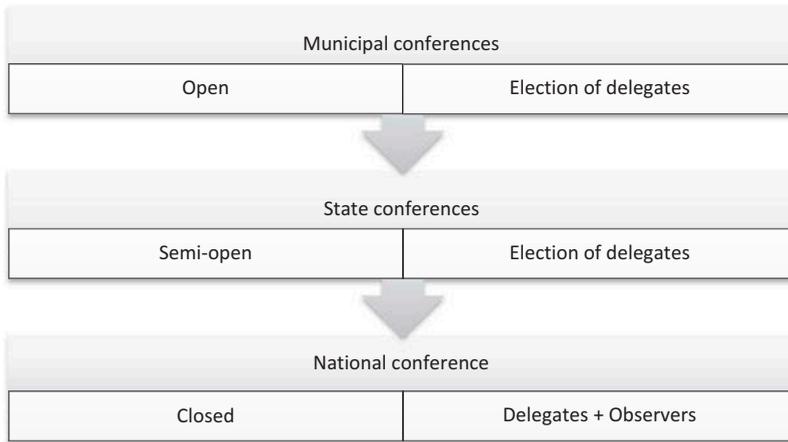


Figure 2. Scaling-up of deliberators.

experiment. It proves that participation is feasible not only across large territorial areas, but also with large numbers of people involved.

The national stages of the NPPC involve varying numbers of participants. In 2011, the conference with the smallest number of participants at the final level was the Second National Conference on Policies for LGBT (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transsexuals and Transvestites), which brought together 964 delegates in Brasilia, after involving 7,000 people in the deliberation process leading up to it. The largest NPPC of 2011 was the Fourteenth National Conference on Health, which had 3,212 delegates, plus another 15% of guest participants (not allowed to vote, only to deliberate), bringing the total to 3,694 people at the national stage. The Fourteenth Health Conference was also responsible, in 2011, for the highest number of participants at the municipal and state levels, drawing in around 600,000 people all over the country. The Eighth National Conference on Social Assistance had the second largest number of participants in 2011, bringing together about 400,000 citizens in a vast array of municipalities.

The number of participants at the national level of the NPPC has ranged between around 1,000 and 3,000 delegates – that is, participants allowed to deliberate and vote. On average, a small national conference will have some 1,000 participants, a middle-range one will reach around 2,000, and a large one will go over 3,000 participants. Although the number of delegates that can be elected at the local and state stages should, according to the rules, be proportional to the population of each municipality, the number of participants at the national stage does not indicate the volume of participation at the local and state stages. While the Second National Conference on Policies for LGBT, in 2011, had 964 delegates at the national level and around 7,000 over the entire process, the Third National Conference on Policies for Women, held in the same year, brought together 2,781 delegates at the national stage, while the official data says that around 200,000 people (mostly women) took part in the entire process.

It is clear that what creates the large human scale of the NPPC is its large geographical scale. Once the process embraces the entire country, from the local to the national level, the massive participation number comes from the local level. The Third National Conference on Policies for Women, held in 2011, reached all 27 of the country’s states. In the state of Rio de Janeiro, local conferences took place in 52 out of the 92 municipalities. The

local conference in the city of Rio de Janeiro gathered 357 participants, while in the state conference of Rio de Janeiro, 710 delegates deliberated on policy proposals, and elected the 154 delegates who would join the national level deliberation. If one divides the total of 7,915 participants from all the local conferences of the State of Rio de Janeiro by the 52 municipalities where they were held, one finds an average of 152 participants for local conferences (the smallest had 60 participants, the largest 400) in that state. When one has in mind that 2,160 municipalities in the entire country held a local conference on policies for women, then one can have an idea of how scaling-up is a matter both of volume and space, and of how the participatory process interpenetrates the national territory while bringing together a massive number of people to deliberate on a specific public policy area.

However, as there are so far no standardized criteria for NPPC organization, one finds cases in which the process was not so thoroughly spread throughout the territory, yet a high level of participation was achieved. This was, for example, the case with the First National Conference on Public Security, which took place in 2009. Only 265 local conferences were held, although these were distributed through all the 27 states. This amounted to a total participation of 44,651 citizens at the local level and 17,439 delegates at the state level stages. Nevertheless, the entire conference process convened 524,461 people. That is because this NPPC adopted the free and the virtual stages of deliberation. A total of 1,140 free conferences were organized by different sectors of civil society in 514 municipalities, bringing together a total of 66,847 citizens who did not participate at other stages. The Internet participation comprised 256,598 people deliberating proposals over the World Wide Web. Other parallel activities, involving 135,866 participants, were also incorporated into the process: mobilization activities, thematic seminars, special projects, development courses, and police consultations. At the end, 3,060 delegates at the national conference decided on policy guidelines that had been deliberated face-to-face by 225,395 people, and virtually by more than 256,598.

Even if one were to reduce the analysis of the NPPC to the small scale and look only at the proportion of the municipal population that has participated in local conferences, one could not easily claim that the results of the deliberative process were more beneficial to those localities where a relatively higher proportion of the population participated in the deliberation. Not only would there be several variables (whether the municipal policy proposals reached the national level, whether any of them were approved at the final stage, whether those would ever be enacted as public policy, and so on), but even if all of the proposals succeeded, nothing would ensure that the higher the number of participants, the higher would be the proportion of the concerned population affecting the results of the deliberations. That is why the representativeness of democratic experiments should be evaluated not only by the level of participation and the quality of deliberation involved, but also by the impact on policy-making and law-making (Pogrebinschi and Santos 2011, 2013). Having that premise in mind, and aiming at analyzing not only whether scaling up participation may be feasible, but also whether scaling up deliberation may be effective, I will next examine the likelihood of a local (municipal) conference having the outcomes of its deliberations further deliberated at the state and national levels, and the likelihood of a local conference influencing (by having an impact on) state and national policy-making.

Effectiveness dimension

If the scaling-up of participation is made feasible by ensuring that both deliberators (deliberative subjects) and their deliberations (deliberative outcomes) are scaled up in terms of

actors, space, and volume, this does not imply that it is effective in the sense of accomplishing the deliberative ideal, that is ensuring the transformation of preferences, and of doing so on a larger scale, thus expanding the transformation of preferences. Can the outcomes of local-level deliberations be replicated at state and national levels, achieving a broader consensus? Can the outcomes of local-level deliberations be transformed at state and national levels, reconstructing preferences, and furthering initial consensus? And, the question that seems to be the most important: can the outcomes of large-scale deliberations impact on policy-making, by ensuring that local deliberations are replicated in state and national public policies (and thus transform the preferences previously expressed in those policies or by their absence)?

When one moves from the question of the feasibility of scaling up participation to the question of the effectiveness of deliberation on a large scale, one moves from the question of scaling up deliberative procedure to the question of scaling up deliberative outcomes – even though, as I argued earlier, the three intertwined criteria that concern the feasibility of scaling-up necessarily involve scaling up deliberators and deliberative outcomes as a part of scaling up the participatory experiment itself. Scaling up deliberative outcomes implies the possibility of replicating them more widely, for instance replicating in the public sphere the outcomes produced by deliberation in mini-publics (Niemeyer 2012). This entails assuming that the transformation of preferences that occurs in mini-publics can be extended to the public sphere not only by means of replicating a given content, but also by means of replicating the way in which positions are formed or re-formed (Niemeyer and Dryzek 2007, Niemeyer 2012). In this regard, crucial to the process of scaling up deliberative outcomes is whether it ensures a process of reasoning and openness to alternative arguments, and therefore the transformation of preferences (Goodin 2002, Niemeyer and Dryzek 2007, Niemeyer 2012).

In order to scale up all three dimensions of feasibility, the deliberative outcomes reached in the initial deliberative stage may be subject to transformation, since they will be subject to further deliberation in simultaneous and subsequent stages, and will therefore involve a growing number of people throughout the process leading to the final outcome (consensus). The achievement of such transformation is the first of the two criteria of the effectiveness of scaling-up, and implies the possibility of replicating, reconstructing, or rejecting local preferences at the later stages of deliberation. The second criterion of effectiveness is that of impact, and it refers to the possibility of replicating local preferences in state and national policies, which requires the transformation of policy-makers' preferences.

Assessing the transformative and impact dimensions of scaled-up deliberation requires us to look at both the supply and the demand sides of deliberation. The supply side of deliberation refers to 'the promulgation of claims, contentions, arguments, and discourses in relation to political issues', while the demand side refers to 'the extent to which arguments are accepted' (Niemeyer 2012), assuming individuals to be not only deliberative 'makers' but also deliberative 'takers' (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2006, Niemeyer 2012).

The demand side of deliberation seems to be especially relevant when one assesses the effectiveness of scaling-up. As deliberation is scaled up in space and volume, arguments demand even more to be accepted, rather than just proclaimed. The space for transformation is expanded with the scaling-up, and even if the chances of introducing new preferences decrease as the process moves up, the chances of engaging with preferences coming from different levels (simultaneous and subsequent mini-publics) increases. Therefore, the behaviour of individuals and collectivities (brought together in the scaling-up of mini-publics, epistemic, or policy communities) as deliberative takers is a good

Table 3. NPPC stages as collective subjectivities.

NPPC level	Side of deliberation activated	Role performed
Municipal State	Supply Supply and demand	Deliberative makers Deliberative makers and deliberative takers
National	Demand	Deliberative takers

indicator of how effective the scaling-up is in both its transformative and its impact dimensions.

In the NPPC process, considering each of its three stages as collective subjectivities and in relation to one another, one can say that municipal conferences mostly consist of deliberative makers, while state conferences consist simultaneously of deliberative makers and deliberative takers, and national conferences consist mainly of deliberative takers. Although in the municipal conferences a transformation of preferences takes place among the participants as they deliberate, in relation to the subsequent stages, the local ones activate only the supply side of deliberation. The municipal conferences are the major forum of the entire process for deliberative makers, and it is the possibility of the preferences constructed at this stage being replicated in the state and national conferences that allows one to assess the effectiveness of the scaling-up in its transformative dimension. Following the same rationale, it is the possibility of local preferences (those constructed in municipal conferences) being replicated in state and national policies that allows one to assess the effectiveness of the scaling-up in its impact dimension. Table 3 illustrates the sides of the deliberation activated and the roles performed by each of the NPPC stages.

An analysis of the effectiveness of the scaling-up of deliberation in single NPPCs will allow me to test the conceptual framework described above. In what follows, I will first examine the likelihood of a local (municipal) conference having the outcomes of its deliberations further deliberated (and therefore transformed) at the state and the national levels (transformative dimension), and then assess the likelihood of a local conference impacting on state and national policy-making (impact dimension), and therefore transforming their *status quo ante*.

Transformation

There seem to be at least three conditions necessary for an effective scaling-up of deliberation in terms of providing an expansion of the transformation of preferences envisaged by deliberative democracy: first, the possibility of *replicating* deliberative outcomes at the subsequent stages; second, the possibility of *reconstructing* deliberative outcomes at the subsequent stages; and third, the possibility of *rejecting* deliberative outcomes at the subsequent stages. These conditions draw on Niemeyer's (2012) typology of deliberative transformation (construction, reconstruction, and confutation), although they have been substantively adapted in order to take account of all three feasibility criteria (actors, space, and volume) in the scaling-up proposed in this article.

In NPPCs, an outcome is *replicated* at a subsequent stage when a state and/or national conference yields a deliberative outcome with exactly the same content (even if adapted to the state or national context) as that produced at the municipal stage. In other words, a local preference is replicated at the state and/or national stage when those taking part – after new rounds of deliberation and thus engagement with new preferences (those contained in the

Table 4. Conditions of transformation.

	Scaling-up of preferences to upper stages	Deliberative outcomes of upper stages	Change of preferences
Replication	Full	Identical to the previous stage	Preferences do not change
Reconstruction	Partial	Modified in relation to the previous stage	Preferences change in part
Rejection	None	Totally different from the previous stage	Preferences change in full

deliberative outcomes generated by other municipal conferences at the state stage, and those contained in the deliberative outcomes generated by state conferences at the national stage) – decide on holding to the same deliberative outcome, preserving in their entirety the policy preferences expressed in it. Alternatively, a municipal conference’s deliberative outcome is *reconstructed* at the state or national stage when its content is somehow modified by new deliberation, although without substantial loss of the preferences contained on it. This modification implies not matching the preferences in full, but matching them partially. What is therefore sanctioned at the state or national level is a modified version of the municipal conference’s deliberative outcome in the sense of not taking on all of the local preferences in exactly the way they were expressed. Finally, a municipal conference’s deliberative outcome is *rejected* at the state or national level when it is discarded at the new stage of deliberation, and is thus not taken account of in the deliberative outcomes generated at those stages of the process (Table 4).

Note that a tension between the criteria used to assess the effectiveness of scaling up deliberative outcomes and the criteria used to assess the quality of deliberation can arise here. The less the preferences expressed at the local level change at the upper levels, the greater the effectiveness of the scaling-up of the outcomes of deliberation, given that the impact of local preferences at the national level is greater. However, when the preferences expressed at the local level are subjected to minimal or no changes at the upper levels, there may be an assumption that less deliberation has taken place. This, however, is a wrong assumption. Deliberation should ensure a process of reasoning and openness to argument through which preferences can change, but not ensure that they will necessarily change.

The NPPCs are certainly a process that ensures reasoning and openness to argument through which preferences can change. The fact that deliberation about the same policy issue takes place in simultaneous and sequential participatory assemblies, and the fact that the latter are spread through different cities and states (and therefore subject to different social, political, and cultural contexts) ensures that the process is open to all sorts of arguments and opportunities for deliberation. Since the deliberation process is composed of simultaneous and sequential stages, the probability that the final deliberative outcome is subject to distortion (discursive, institutional or the result of power relations) is likely to be very low. The procedure of the NPPC, therefore, ensures that deliberation takes place. Whether it takes place to a greater or lesser extent at the different levels is an empirical question. However, if deliberation is to be assessed on the amount of change to preferences, one can assume that the smaller this is, the greater the chances that local-level preferences will reach the national level, and therefore be scaled up.

I will now move to an examination of the Third National Conference on Policies for Women (2011), in order to find out whether the scaling-up of deliberation has proved itself to be effective in relation to the transformation criteria. I will conduct this assessment by

analyzing the transformations (replication, reconstruction, and rejection) of the deliberative outcomes of a municipal conference at the upper stages, that is, in the state and national conferences. The municipal conference to be scrutinized is that of Niterói, the sixth most populated city of the state of Rio de Janeiro, which in turn is the second most populated state of Brazil.

The Niterói Municipal Conference on Policies for Women took place in July 2011 and brought together 188 participants. These participants deliberated for three days, at the end of which they voted on and approved a final report containing 37 policy guidelines. These policy guidelines were the final deliberations of the local conference, therefore this document represented its deliberative outcome. The deliberations or policy guidelines contained in it were of various sorts. They might be specific in the sense of designing a local policy, like the one that called for ‘public kindergartens for all children in the city, full-time and on weekends, even in evening hours for parents who need it’ (Niterói 2011, p. 4). Or they might be specific in the sense of designing a federal policy, like the guideline that asked the federal government to ‘include in the [federal] government program “Minha Casa Minha Vida” [“My House, my Life”] a special credit facility for women victims of domestic violence who do not have any income and free housing for women in situations of economic vulnerability’ (Niterói 2011, p. 4). The policy guidelines might also be broad, and envisage a policy concerning all three stages of the federation, such as the one that requested the government to ‘develop a non-discriminatory education system that does not reproduce stereotypes of gender, race and ethnicity, and sexual orientation’ (Niterói 2011, p. 4).

The deliberative outcome of the Niterói municipal conference (the 37 policy guidelines) was aggregated with the deliberative outcomes from 47 other municipal conferences held in the state of Rio de Janeiro, involving 52 municipalities. Such a compilation of deliberations approved in all the municipal conferences (which is supposed not to discard any guidelines, even conflicting ones) contained the propositions that would then be deliberated in the State conference at Rio de Janeiro. In other words, the aggregate deliberative outcomes of all municipal conferences within a state provide the propositions to be deliberated in the state conference – although new propositions can also be introduced at this stage, as I have already explained. The Rio State Conference took place in October 2011 and brought together 710 participants, who after four days of deliberation (the fourth one entirely devoted to a plenary discussion and voting on the policy guidelines deliberated in the previous days in thematic working groups) came out with a consensus on 20 general policy proposals (each of these comprising more than one policy proposal).

Now that the deliberative process has been explained, we can move on to examine the transformation criterion: how many of the local deliberative outcomes survived the scaling-up process to reach the upper, state stage? More specifically, how many of the deliberative outcomes of the local-level stage of deliberation in Niterói were incorporated into the deliberative outcomes of the Rio de Janeiro state stage of the deliberation process? After juxtaposing and comparing all the deliberations/policy guidelines contained in the final report from the Niterói municipal conference with all the deliberations/policy proposals contained in the final report from the Rio state conference, I arrived at the following result: 51% of the local-level deliberative outcomes can be said to have been scaled up to the state level. To put it another way, about half of the deliberative outcomes of the Niterói municipal conference were replicated or reconstructed in the Rio state conference.

If 51% of the municipal deliberative outcomes were scaled up to the state level, that means that 49% of them were rejected, that is discarded after further deliberation. Discarding policy guidelines (and thus the arguments that support them) is a result of deliberation: the state delegates could not be persuaded by the Niterói ones on those points, and

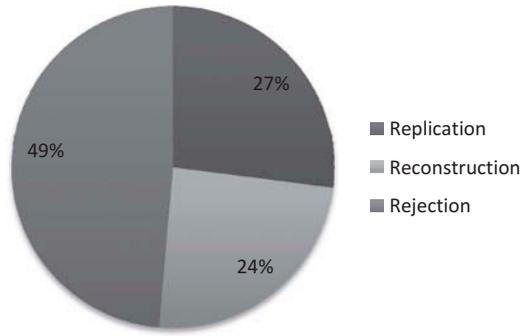


Figure 3. Transformation of local preferences at the state level.

possibly agreed on others proposed by other municipal conferences. Out of the municipal guidelines that did get scaled up, 27% were replicated and 24% reconstructed, as indicated in Figure 3. The reconstructed ones did not entail a substantive modification, but a partial consideration of the initial content. For example: a municipal guideline from Niterói asked for ‘policies for vocational training (professional and technological training), and the first employment program for women, governed by specific legislation, working with nurseries in schools’ (Niterói 2011, p. 4). The first part of this guideline (‘policies for vocational training (professional and technological training), and the first employment program for women’) was included in the state conference’s deliberative outcome, but not the second (‘governed by specific legislation, working with nurseries in schools’). The state conference’s proposal that included the municipal conference one was in fact much broader, possibly also incorporating proposals from other municipal conferences. It asserted: ‘create affirmative action policies aimed at integrating women into the labour market, in an attempt to overcome the gender divide in the workplace and tackling inequalities in labour, the sexual exploitation of women, and sex tourism through quality professional training programs, without reproducing professions restricted to the home or those traditionally occupied by women, encouraging the empowerment of women in new technologies’ (Rio de Janeiro 2011, p. 16). The deliberative outcome of the municipal conference was reconstructed in the state conference; and preferences were changed in the sense of incorporating newly deliberated issues and discarding previous ones. As one can note, the agency-loss of the reconstructed outcomes is minimal, in the sense that the preferences expressed at the local level were preserved.

Let us now look at the national stage of the 2011 Conference on Policies for Women. How many of the local deliberative outcomes from Niterói got scaled up to the national level? Surprisingly enough, more than the number that got scaled up to the state level: 68%. How come municipal deliberations that had not been included in the state deliberative outcomes managed to be included in the national ones? The answer is simple: one or more other municipalities from one or more other states generated similar deliberative outcomes (similar policy guidelines) to those from Niterói (which were rejected in the Rio de Janeiro state conference) and managed to have them included in their state’s deliberative outcomes. In other words, municipal guidelines rejected in the state conference to which they are scaled up can still be either replicated or reconstructed in the national stage, provided that other municipal conferences in other states have managed to have them included in the deliberative outcomes of their state conferences. One example of a Niterói municipal guideline that was rejected in the state deliberations but replicated in the national one

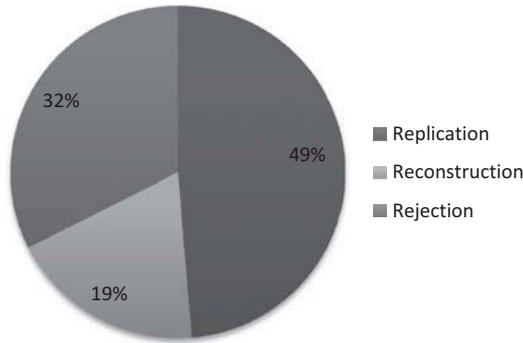


Figure 4. Transformation of local preferences at the national level.

was: ‘promote access to basic and higher education among girls and women by ensuring generational interaction’. There are also municipal guidelines that are reconstructed at the state level, but happen to be replicated at the national one. The explanation for this is precisely the same: such a Niterói guideline was similar to that of one or more other municipal conferences that happened to be replicated in the deliberative outcomes of the relevant state(s), and subsequently in the national one. The fact that a municipal outcome that has been reconstructed at the state level turns out to be replicated at the national one indicates how the scaling-up is effective in the sense of enabling the transformation of preferences through further deliberation.

Out of the 68% of municipal policy guidelines that were included in the national deliberative outcomes, 49% were replicated and 19% reconstructed, as indicated in Figure 4. The high proportion of replicated guidelines (much higher than that found in the scaling-up to state level) indicates how simultaneous participatory assemblies (municipal conferences) deliberating on the same policy issue (policies for women) reach very similar outcomes. One must note that the social, political, and economic contexts of each of these participatory assemblies, as well as the deliberative capacity of those who participate in them, are very diverse. Niterói, for example, is the municipality with the highest human development index (HDI) in the state of Rio de Janeiro and one of the highest in the entire country. Rio de Janeiro has the second largest economy of Brazil. Nevertheless, other municipal conferences held in less developed and poorer states agreed on the same policy guideline and therefore reached the same deliberative outcome. And while Niterói did not manage to scale it up to the state level, one or more other municipalities did. Scaling-up seems to be effective in relation to the transformation of preferences through simultaneous and subsequent mini-publics.

Impact

The second criterion of the effectiveness of scaling-up is impact. Can deliberation in enlarged participatory practices be effective in the sense of influencing policy-making at the national level? Can local preferences expressed at the initial stage of a scaled-up deliberative process be incorporated into state and national public policies? I will answer these questions by examining the case of the Second National Conference on Policies for Women, which took place in 2007. Once again, the method to be used here is to juxtapose

and compare the final deliberations/policy guidelines from a local-level conference with the state and national policies eventually enacted by the government.

One year after the national stage of the Second NPPC on Policies for Women, in 2008, a presidential decree enacted Brazil's Second National Plan for Policies for Women.⁷ This 237-page legal document claims in its introduction to consist of 'the result of the mobilization of almost 200,000 Brazilian women, who participated throughout the country in municipal and state conferences, and elected 2,700 delegates to the Second NPPC on Policies for Women' (Brasil 2008, p. 7). After that, several of the country's states also enacted comprehensive legal acts (policy plans) comprising policies for women. In what follows I will examine whether the deliberative outcomes of the municipal conference of Salvador, the capitol of the state of Bahia in north-eastern Brazil, were scaled up to the state and national policy outcomes, and to what extent local preferences got incorporated at both levels of policy-making.

After three days of intense deliberation, in May 2007, the 420 participants of the municipal conference of Salvador approved 303 proposals comprising several topics and reaching policy areas as diverse as health and public security.⁸ Two years later, in 2009, the government of Bahia enacted the *Second Bahia State Plan for Policies for Women*.⁹ It is asserted in the introduction to the 120-page document that this has been elaborated 'with the words of women from every part of Bahia, based on the demands presented at each municipal and regional conference, as well as the state conference that took place in 2007' (Bahia 2008, p. 5). How many of the 303 deliberative outcomes of the municipal conference that took place in Bahia's capital, Salvador, got included in this state policy? After comparing the Salvador deliberative outcomes with the Bahia state plan, the answer is: almost half. Out of the 303 proposals, 44% (133) were somehow incorporated into the state policy. That is certainly a positive result, and one can say that the outcomes of the deliberations that took place in the local conference in Salvador impacted significantly on state policy.

How exactly were the local preferences expressed in Salvador incorporated into the *Bahia Plan for Policies for Women*? Out of 133 policy guidelines from Salvador's local deliberations that were included in the state policy, 62% (82) were reconstructed, while 38% (51) were replicated. I have counted as replicated deliberation/policy guidelines those that were reproduced in the state plan with exactly the same content (even if adapted to the state context), thus validating the entirety of the preference expressed in the local level deliberations. In the category of reconstructed deliberations/policy guidelines, I have counted those that were not reproduced in state policy with their full content. These were either altered or fragmented, although in both cases they preserved the substance of the preference expressed in the deliberations that took place at local level. Some policy guidelines comprise more than one demand (some are actually drafted in a complex way so as to encompass several demands in one single proposal), and a reconstructed policy guideline is therefore one that may simply have fulfilled one or more demands of the original, but not all of them. In any event, the results show that local preferences can indeed get scaled up and shape state policies, impacting on government decisions.

Salvador was one among the country's 600 municipalities that organized a local conference preceding the state and national stages of the 2007 NPPC on Policies for Women. It elected 102 delegates to the state conference in Bahia and some of these were among the 2,559 delegates that made it to the national conference. How many of the Salvador deliberative outcomes ended up being included in the national policy; that is, how many of the preferences expressed at the local level can be said to have been scaled up to be included in the *Second National Plan for Policies for Women* enacted by the Brazilian government in 2008? Comparison of the Salvador municipal conference's final report with

the Second National Plan shows that about one-third of the former's deliberative outcomes were incorporated into the latter. More specifically 34% of the local deliberations/policy guidelines were considered, which is certainly a very high proportion, especially considering that the number of Salvador's proposals that reached the state conference and then the national conference were not particularly numerous. Nonetheless, about 102 of the proposals approved in the Salvador municipal conference were somehow included in the national policy. That means that other municipalities in the country reached the same deliberative outcomes as Salvador's local conference. Once again, the analysis indicates that simultaneous participatory assemblies deliberating on the same issues throughout the country can achieve very similar outcomes, regardless of the context in which the deliberation is held. This shows that local-level preferences expressed through deliberation can indeed be national in nature, and therefore an institutional design that is able to allow them to be scaled up and be incorporated in national policies is an important democratic tool.

Another piece of evidence that simultaneous participatory assemblies tend to produce similar deliberative outcomes is the fact that about two-thirds (61%) of the local deliberations/policy guidelines from the Salvador conference that were included in the *Second National Plan for Policies for Women* were reconstructed. As reconstructed preferences are those that have been modified and not fulfilled in their entirety, one can assume that such changes have benefited from the process of preference transformation allowed for in the scaling-up process, that is in the simultaneous and subsequent assemblies organized all over the country. The proportion of fully replicated proposals is at any rate quite high: that 39% of the local deliberative outcomes that got to be included in the national policy were fully reproduced is a very significant result, and indicates that preferences expressed in local level participatory assemblies can shape national politics and causally affect public decisions.

Squaring the circle

Can the circle of participatory democracy be squared? That is, can participatory practices be feasible on a large-scale and at a national level, or are they by nature limited to the small scale and the local level? And if they are feasible on a large scale, can participatory practices also be effective: that is, can they enable the deliberations of a large number of citizens to impact on government decisions? This article has provided positive answers to these two questions, using empirical evidence to suggest some institutional design criteria that should promote the feasibility and effectiveness of large-scale participation and deliberation at the national level. Once the appropriate institutional design is in place, large-scale participatory practices can bring thousands of people together to deliberate issues concerning a vast territory and population. And, what seems more important: the outcomes of such deliberations can impact on national politics.

The claim that a large scale is no argument against participatory democracy (Warren 2002) has so far remained a normative one. Scholarship on democratic participation has so far been limited to the examination of local participatory practices, and has mostly relied on studies of mini-public experiments. This has been acceptable, given that to date the world has not been aware of a national level participatory and deliberative process, or at least not one able to engage a massive number of citizens in deliberating on issues beyond their local interests. Moreover, mini-publics or local participatory assemblies seem to date to offer the most satisfactory institutional conditions in which deliberation can take place, making possible the conversion of individual beliefs into preferences, and facilitating the transformation of such preferences through the give and take of argument.

Not surprisingly, the first known large-scale national level participatory and deliberative process, the Brazilian National Public Policy Conferences (NPPC), is based on a set of simultaneous and subsequent participatory assemblies that allow deliberation to be scaled up along with participation.

And so the circle can be squared: large-scale participation is not only feasible, but it can also be attained without forfeiting deliberation. The concrete experience of the NPPCs, as demonstrated in this article, shows how the trade-off between participation and deliberation is a theoretical problem that can be empirically overcome. Deliberation can be scaled up in space and volume through the use of simultaneous and subsequent participatory assemblies and the mandatory equal participation of state and civil society actors in the deliberative process. The finding that participatory assemblies spread throughout a national territory achieve similar deliberative outcomes, and that the latter can get to be replicated or reconstructed at higher levels of policy-making, seems to be strong evidence that the geometry of politics is starting to create new democratic forms.

Notes on contributor

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Notes

1. The 40 policy issues that have been the object of NPPCs so far are: Health, Oral health, Workers health, Health of indigenous peoples, Mental health, Environmental health, Science, technology, and innovation in health, Management of labor and education in health, Medication and pharmaceutical care, Rights of the elderly, Rights of people with disabilities, Gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites and transsexuals, Indigenous people, Public policies for women, Rights of children and adolescents, Youth, Promotion of racial equality, Brazilian communities abroad, Environment, Solidary economy, Aquaculture and fishing, Sustainable and solidary rural development, Food and nutritional safety, Cities, Public security, and Communications.
2. BRASIL. Ministério da Justiça. *Regimento da I Conferência Nacional de Segurança Pública*. Brasília 2007, p. 4, article 15; p. 9, article 44. Available from: http://www.ipea.gov.br/participacao/images/pdfs/conferencias/Seguranca_Publica/regimento_I_conferencia_seguranca_publica.pdf.
3. This information is available from: http://www.cartamaior.com.br/templates/materiaMostrar.cfm?materia_id=16259 [Accessed 10 December 2012].
4. *Jornal em Questão*, published 9 January 2012 by the Secretary of Social Communication of the Presidency of the Republic.
5. Examples are the 2007 I NPPC on Public Security, the 2012 II NPPC on Education, and the II NPPC on Youth Policies. For the last two see, respectively: http://fne.mec.gov.br/images/pdf/regimentointernoconaeversao29_10_12_formatada.pdf and <http://www.juventude.gov.br/conferencia/documentos/manuais-orientadores/manual-das-conferencias-livres> [Accessed 19 March 2013].
6. *Jornal em Questão*, published 9 January 2012 by the Secretary of Social Communication of the Presidency of the Republic.
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