

DELIBERATIVE AND DEMOCRATIC QUALITIES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE.
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRANSITION INITIATIVES IN ITALY AND AUSTRALIA

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Declaration

This thesis is the author's original work, material from other persons has been acknowledged in the text. There is no content that has been submitted for any other degree or diploma.

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Citizen deliberation is a fundamental concern for deliberative theories of democracy. Early deliberative theorists tied the prospects for a democratic society to the possibility of realising democratic deliberation within publics at large, not just institutions. Nonetheless, circumscribed citizens' or representatives' assemblies have often been identified as the very loci where democratic deliberation could be pursued, whilst the possibility of deliberation within the public sphere has been neglected. The empirical investigation of the deliberative and democratic qualities in the public sphere remains necessary, as well as an understanding of what aspects may hinder or foster quality discursive engagement. The increasingly advocated systemic approach to deliberative democracy calls for a refined understanding of organisations in the public sphere.

This study provides an investigation of the qualities of citizens' engagement from a deliberative democratic standpoint. The key concept through which such qualities are investigated is 'deliberative capacity', which is seen in terms of the extent to which organisations host authentic, inclusive, and consequential discursive processes. This work, in particular, is based on a comparative study of four grassroots local initiatives, two from Australia (in Tasmania and Queensland) and two from Italy (in Emilia-Romagna and Sicily). The case studies under examination are associated with Transition, a contemporary movement fighting peak oil and resource depletion through the development of community-level activism.

In the initial part, this work discusses the idea of deliberative capacity in light of the wider debates in the field and adapts this concept to suit the empirical investigation of organisations in the public space. Next, the interpretive and qualitative research methodology and relevant literature are presented. Social movement scholarship emerges as the area which has most closely investigated the issues under examination in this work and therefore it receives particular attention throughout the text. The Transition movement is then introduced. After presenting the main features of the movement, Transition is examined through social movement literature and framed within deliberative democratic theory. Four case studies are thus developed. Each of them provides an in-depth understanding and an assessment of the discursive processes characterising the various activities taking place. The ensuing comparative analysis sheds light on the overall deliberative and democratic qualities of these organisations and the way in which deliberative capacity was developed. This research shows that the deliberative and democratic qualities of community-based organisations vary significantly, from particularly problematic to satisfying. In line with earlier studies, the main dynamics accounting for the development of deliberative capacity are found in the interaction of two sets of aspects: the organisations' internal features and the context surrounding them. Deliberative capacity is generated when participants find that adopting and developing

deliberative and democratic qualities is valuable in itself and necessary in influencing the local publics and institutions. The findings may inform future theoretical advancement, particularly with regard to the role and potential that organisations in the public space may have in deliberative systems.

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Introduction

This research investigates the qualities of groups in the public sphere from a deliberative democratic standpoint. The key concept through which such qualities are investigated is 'deliberative capacity' (Dryzek, 2009: 107, 2010a), which is seen in terms of the extent to which organisations host authentic, inclusive, and consequential discursive processes. This work, in particular, is based on a comparative study of four grassroots local initiatives, two from Australia and two from Italy. The case studies under examination are associated with Transition, a contemporary social movement fighting peak oil and resource depletion through the development of community-level activism.

This study asks three questions: what level of deliberative capacity is involved in the four case studies? How (if at all) does deliberative capacity vary across these cases? What aspects may account for the development of deliberative capacity? Answering these questions required a preliminary theoretical exploration of the concept of deliberative capacity and of the possibility of applying it to empirical research. The interpretive analysis of the four cases provided an assessment of the deliberative capacity of these community organisations and their comparison allowed an understanding of which mechanisms underpin the development of deliberative capacity. This research has found that the concept of deliberative capacity can be conveniently adapted to be used in critical investigation of the deliberative and democratic features of public space organisations. This study shows that the deliberative capacity of community-based organisations varies substantially: from highly problematic to satisfying. This work also finds that the development of deliberative capacity can be understood in light of the interaction between two sets of variables: the internal features of organisations; and the context surrounding them. This seems to be in line with observations from other studies on the democratic qualities of social movement organisations and collectives (Rothschild and Whitt, 1986, Polletta, 2002, della Porta, 2009d, della Porta and Rucht, 2013a). Organisations develop deliberative capacity to the extent that participants see deliberative democratic qualities as attractive and that these features are found to be necessary to impact on the local publics and institutions.

This research is rooted in deliberative democracy scholarship and it provides a systematic and in-depth qualitative analysis of the deliberative and democratic features of organisations in the public sphere. Such a contribution is important as the possibility of deliberation in society at large has been a central concern for deliberative democracy since its inception (e.g. Habermas, 1989). Such an interest has continuously characterised the more critical strands of deliberative

democratic scholarship (e.g. Dryzek, 1990, Benhabib, 1996a, Bohman, 1996, Young, 2000) and the role of public space in deliberative democracy at large has been repeatedly emphasised (e.g. Mansbridge, 1999, Chambers, 2009). However, empirical studies have focused on democratic deliberation in forums, whilst the investigation of the deliberative and democratic qualities of societies has often been overlooked (Chambers, 2003, Mansbridge et al., 2012). This type of research is even more necessary in light of the systemic turn in deliberative democracy and the renewed emphasis on the need for interpretive and qualitative research within the field of deliberative democracy (Bevir and Ansari, 2012, Hendriks et al., 2013). The systemic approach shows that focusing on democratic deliberation within designed assemblies is not sufficient to understand and enhance deliberative democracy. It thus encourages scholars to take into serious account discursive processes occurring in a number of loci within societies (e.g. Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012) and it calls for a refined understanding of the potentials and roles that different publics may have in mass democracies (Chambers, 2012).¹ By critically assessing community organisations this study embraces and may enrich the expanded understanding of democratic deliberation that is characteristic of the systemic turn. John Dryzek's (2009, 2010a) idea of a deliberative system will be used in this research to place my case studies within what he calls 'public space'. Understanding the extent to which grassroots groups meet deliberative and democratic norms is thus of primary importance to contemporary deliberative democratic inquiries and, for this reason, this study investigates Transition, which is a fast-spreading contemporary movement. Given the nature of the case studies, this work enhances our understanding of the deliberative and democratic qualities of contemporary forms of citizen engagement and this research contributes also to scholarship on social movements.

Studies on social movement organisations (e.g. Polletta, 2002, della Porta, 2009d, della Porta and Rucht, 2013a) have been a particularly interesting source of engagement. This field, in fact, has increasingly embodied deliberative democratic perspectives and provides the most advanced insights into the qualities of organisations in the public sphere as well as many of the conceptual tools that were used to identify the dynamics hampering and fostering deliberative capacity among my case studies. Transition represents an unusual social movement and its objectives and repertoire cannot be generically linked to those of other campaigns (e.g. those of Global Justice Movements, GJMs). Moreover, Transition provides a critique of existing

¹ In the most important publication on deliberative systems, Parkinson and Mansbridge (2012: 2) argue that 'it is necessary to go beyond the study of individual institutions and processes to examine their interaction in the system as a whole'. Interestingly, although systems theories have been adopted in different fields, it appears that the systemic approach to deliberative democracy does not present significant connections to discussions about systems theory so far. Rather, the essence of the systemic approach is simply connected to the recognition that 'democracies are 'complex entities' and its value lies in its ability to address this complexity (ibid.).

economic and political structures, the exploration of which is also of interest to deliberative democrats, as deliberative democracy itself is a critique of contemporary societies. Indeed, a deliberative understanding of democracy is concerned with similar issues as is Transition (and other social movements) when the latter seeks to promote debate and reflection within different publics on issues of public relevance (e.g. climate change, resource depletion, local economy) and influence empowered spaces.

Chapters Overview

This thesis is divided into three sections. The first section includes chapters one to three, which establish the background and provide the foundations for the study. Section two, chapters four to seven, presents the case studies. The third section, chapters eight and nine, is dedicated to a comparative analysis and concluding remarks.

The first three chapters deal respectively with: the idea of deliberative capacity; a discussion of methodology and relevant scholarship; and the Transition movement as an object of deliberative democratic investigation. As already mentioned, deliberative capacity (Dryzek, 2009, 2010a) is the means through which this research conceptualises deliberative and democratic qualities. Chapter One discusses this concept in detail, focusing upon the different criteria underpinning each of the three dimensions in which deliberative capacity is articulated (authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentiality), and the way in which it may be usefully adopted in this study. Chapter Two focuses on the research methodology and justifies it in the light of wider methodological debates, with particular attention to recent developments within research on deliberative democracy. As illustrated, the interpretive methodology used in this work has a more descriptive orientation in the case studies. On the other hand, the comparative analysis investigates the determinants of deliberative capacity to explain how the observed deliberative and democratic qualities are developed (see: Neblo, 2005, Bevir and Ansari, 2012). As this chapter explains, this research is grounded in deliberative democratic scholarship yet it acknowledges the importance of work from social movement studies. Chapter Three introduces Transition from three different standpoints. First, some core features of the movement are presented. Second, Transition and its particular characteristics are investigated through the lens of social movement theories. The concluding section of the chapter argues that researching the deliberative capacity of organisations associated with a movement like Transition is a worthwhile undertaking from a deliberative democratic perspective.

The second section of the dissertation presents the four case studies. Each chapter deals with a different case study: Chapter Four, Transition Kurilpa (Queensland, Australia); Chapter Five,

Monteveglio Città di Transizione (Emilia-Romagna, Italy); Chapter Six, Transition Meander Valley (Tasmania, Australia); Chapter Seven, *Modica in Transizione* (Sicily, Italy). As it emerges from the case studies Transition Kuripla is rather dynamic but presents substantial shortcomings with regard to authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentiality; *Monteveglio Città di Transizione* is a highly developed Transition Initiative that overall displays good qualities on all three dimensions; Transition Meander Valley is not particularly active and highly problematic from a deliberative democratic standpoint; *Modica in Transizione* is an early stage experiment featuring quality discursive processes but limited inclusivity and consequentiality in particular.

Each case study describes in detail the different social and political environments in which the four organisations take action, assesses the overall deliberative capacity manifested by each Transition, as well as the performance of each in terms of authenticity, inclusivity and consequentiality, and analyses their various activities that are contributing to the life of these organisations. With regard to this latter aspect, it is important to outline some key features of my approach which are essential in understanding the case studies.

In order to better investigate each organisation through a deliberative democratic lens I arranged the various activities of each Transition within six categories. Numerous interactions characterise the course of my case studies and a categorisation was devised as a means to account for this complexity in light of my research interests. Most of the activities taking place in the organisations under examination were thus included in one of the following categories: 'group meetings'; 'discursive activities'; 'on-line communications'; 'practical actions'; 'individual initiatives'; and 'casual interactions'. These labels are arranged in a continuum, from those that can be analysed more immediately having relied upon participant observation and evidence from interviews, to those which are more difficult to assess, since direct observation is hard (if possible at all) and material from interviews is limited.

'Group meetings' are those occasions, occurring on a fairly regular basis or in exceptional circumstances, when participants meet with the main goal of discussing issues concerning the group – and also include specific sub-group meetings. 'Discursive activities' indicate the events whose main aim is to give participants (as well as other people) specific information on a topic (e.g. workshops, conferences, movie nights). 'On-line communications' refer to all activities taking place on one of an organisation's virtual platforms. The main goal of 'practical actions' is to perform activities (e.g. permablitzes, during which participants turned a green area into a space for permacultural cultivation), which may also feature incidences of discursive engagement. 'Individual initiatives' include all those actions carried out by a single individual,

with little or no engagement from other people in the organisation. 'Casual interactions' are those which take place outside group meetings, from chat on the street to informal gatherings.

There is no denying that 'group meetings' are a fundamental forum within which to determine the deliberative capacity of an organisation (della Porta and Rucht, 2013a). However, my classification represents a way to acknowledge that different activities characterise the life of each group, that these activities may feature varying levels and quality of discursive engagement and that they may contribute to the overall deliberative capacity of the organisations in different ways. Indeed, in order to assess the deliberative capacity of these case studies, it is necessary to understand the quality of different incidences of discursive engagement, the prominence that different activities have in different organisations and the way in which the discursive processes that take place during these activities interact. These categories are not mutually exclusive, nor do they aim to provide an exhaustive list of all the activities that may occur within a case study. Yet, they seek to capture the vast majority of the activities that occurred and differentiate between them with sufficient clarity.

The last section links empirical findings and theoretical analysis. Chapter Eight develops a comparative analysis of the four case studies, and it highlights the main insights provided by the research as well as engaging with relevant literature. In particular, the comparative analysis allows for an in-depth reflection upon the observed levels of deliberative capacity and it investigates the dynamics that affect its development. Finally, Chapter Nine recaps the main findings. Besides the aforementioned different levels of deliberative capacity and the dynamics underpinning their development, this chapter discusses the varying authenticity of the case studies, their restricted inclusivity and their usually limited consequentiality. It also explains how the structure of an organisation, as well as its participants' (and particularly leaders') views and interests affect deliberative capacity. The thesis ends with some recommendations for enhancing the deliberative capacity of organisations and possibilities for future research.

Chapter 1 Deliberative Capacity: from Deliberative Theory to Democratic Life

Summary

This chapter introduces the idea of deliberative capacity and discusses its three dimensions. Section one presents deliberative capacity as a contribution to the wider systemic turn in deliberative democracy. A synthetic definition of the concept is also provided, as well as an illustration of how deliberative capacity can be and has been used in empirical research. Section two discusses in detail each of the three dimensions of deliberative capacity (authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentiality) and their respective components. In doing so, this section provides a series of refinements to make the concept of deliberative capacity more suited to investigating community groups.

An Introduction to Deliberative Capacity

Over the last few years many deliberative scholars have come to agree on the need to develop a systemic approach to deliberative democracy. In an attempt to envision more deliberative and democratic societies, the systemic turn focuses on the deliberative and democratic qualities of different activities and the way they interact (Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012, see: Mansbridge et al., 2012). Since its inception deliberative theory has been concerned with the possibilities of democratisation of societies at large, although empirical studies have often focused on isolated sites of public deliberation.² Indeed, early deliberative theorists such as Manin (1987: 363) stressed the importance of systematically investigating discursive processes, assessing their overall quality, and envisioning ways in which real world experiences can be drawn closer to the deliberative ideals, which seems fully consistent with the goals of the concept of deliberative capacity. Generally, deliberation has been understood and investigated at micro or macro levels. That is, research has focused on deliberative assemblies or on the study of deliberation in the public at large in formal and informal settings (Hendriks, 2006). This divide has been paralleled by a tendency to neglect the empirical investigation of the deliberative qualities of social practices outside deliberative assemblies, despite their fundamental importance (Mansbridge, 1999, Young, 2000, Mansbridge et al., 2012). Overall, as pointed out by Chambers (2009, 2012), although it makes sense to distinguish between the

² Systemic concerns are already present in early deliberative work in Habermas (1989), Manin (1987), and Dryzek (1990), and as remarked by Mendonça (2013: 3-4), who also provides an overview of the matter, a systemic approach can also be observed in later work by Habermas (1996), Benhabib (1996c) and Young (2000). Mansbridge's (1999) analysis of 'everyday talk', with its direct reference to the idea of deliberative system, gave new vigour to systemic thinking (Dryzek, 2000, 2010a, Goodin, 2005, Hendriks, 2006, Parkinson, 2006, Gutmann and Thompson, 2009), which has become a central development within deliberative democracy (see Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012).

notions of 'democratic deliberation' and 'deliberative democracy', in times of mass democracy, deliberative democratic hopes depend upon the capacity to bridge, rather than split, these two understandings of deliberation. The systemic turn acknowledges this necessity and provides a theoretical context to extend deliberative analysis to those events that are not straightforwardly deliberative in nature.

The idea of deliberative capacity (Dryzek, 2009, 2010a) can be understood within the context of this wider effort to build a systemic understanding of deliberative democracy. It can be intended also as a contribution to the oft-mentioned recommendation to connect deliberative theory and observation of societal dynamics (e.g. Neblo, 2005, Bächtiger et al., 2010). As argued by Benhabib (1996b: 10) deliberative democrats agree on the idea that in order to envision deliberative reforms of democratic systems it is necessary to 'combine the virtues of deliberative politics with a sociological realism adequate to the complexity of modern societies'. Deliberative capacity provides a means to assess the deliberative democratic qualities of contemporary societal practices without sacrificing the critical nature of the deliberative approach.

It is worth noticing that Dryzek (2009) first defined 'deliberative capacity' while discussing his own elaboration of the deliberative system, the main one referred to in this study. This system is influenced by a critical tradition built upon the Habermasian notion of the public sphere and discursive democracy, and it is composed of just two parts, 'empowered' and 'public' spaces. These are connected through 'transmission' and 'accountability' mechanisms and meta-deliberation, and each space possesses a degree of deliberative capacity (Dryzek, 2010a).

Dryzek has referred directly to the idea of deliberative capacity three times.³ On each occasion, he argued that deliberative capacity can be related to a deliberative system in its entirety or to parts of it, and it is articulated in three fundamental dimensions. In fact, deliberative capacity is the extent to which an overall deliberative system or its parts host authentic, inclusive, and consequential deliberative processes. It is worth noticing that the idea of deliberative systems

³ In particular, deliberative capacity is defined as 'the degree to which a polity's deliberative system is authentic, inclusive and consequential', 'the extent to which a political system possesses structures to host deliberation that is authentic, inclusive and consequential' (Dryzek 2009: 1382; 2010: 137), and, finally, '[a] system can be said to possess deliberative capacity to the degree it has structures to accommodate deliberation that is authentic, inclusive, and consequential' (Dryzek 2010: 10). The term 'deliberative capacity' actually appeared for the first time in Dryzek's work in an article on deliberative forums (Hendriks et al., 2007: 366). There it referred 'to the potential to achieve deliberative ideals, rather than the actual quality of the deliberation'. This study employs Dryzek's more specific formulations. Bohman (e.g., 1996: ch.3) also speaks of deliberative capacity but in a different sense as he refers to the skills citizens need to possess to deliberate (see also Hariman, 1998-4). Similarly, Cohen (1989a: 21), in discussing core aspects of 'the formal conception of a deliberative democracy', refers to the idea of 'deliberative capacities' thus: 'the capacities required for entering into a public exchange of reasons and for acting on the result of such public reasoning'.

suggests an understanding of deliberation as a series of dynamic and overlapping phenomena. The notion of 'deliberative processes' or 'discursive processes' may better express this idea than just 'deliberation', which, instead, may lead us to think of formal deliberative processes only. Discursive processes, in particular, are the main concern of investigations on deliberative capacity; other elements (e.g. organisational aspects) are valuable in so far as they help understand discursive processes.

The three dimensions upon which the concept of deliberative capacity is articulated are based on certain criteria, each of which is connected to concepts and debates which have long characterised deliberative democratic thinking. The threefold structure of deliberative capacity echoes Dryzek's (1996a) earlier analysis of democratisation as a process of advancement of three criteria: authenticity, franchise, and scope. Though some similarities exist between these criteria (see *ibid.*: 5) and those relating to deliberative capacity, the latter concept is more straightforwardly anchored to a deliberative logic.

The idea of 'capacity' can be intended to mean the 'capability' (of a system or parts of it) to act in a deliberative and democratic fashion. Nonetheless, when authentic and inclusive deliberative processes can be found, it does not necessarily follow that these processes are consequential in any substantial way. Thus, ultimately, the idea of capacity seems to acknowledge the possibility of a situation where an object under investigation may have a certain level of a resource (in this case, authentic and inclusive deliberative processes) without necessarily exploiting it (that is, without consequentiality).⁴

One can study the deliberative capacity of one (or more) deliberative system(s) or focus on the deliberative capacity of various elements. In the first case it is necessary to identify a system, analyse its component parts, and express a global assessment. In the latter, instead, the elements under observation could potentially belong to a number of deliberative systems. The systemic dimension is important in understanding how the object under examination interacts with its environment, but the goal is to assess the component's deliberative and democratic qualities. This research, which focuses on community groups, prefers the second approach, which is less extensive but especially valuable in so far as its narrower scope allows for a more in-depth analysis. This is particularly true when the main goal is to explore in detail the idea of deliberative capacity, assessing its levels in specific cases, understanding its significance in different contexts, and considering what may affect its development.

⁴ As noted by von Beyme (2011: 30) the vocabulary of political science is rich in terms, for instance Duverger's (e.g., 1996) 'semi-presidentialism', which, though not perfect, once they have been specified are still acceptable and accessible and help cast an interesting perspective on social phenomena.

The four organisations under examination are the unit of analysis. Indeed these four organisations are also the level of analysis of this study. The context in which the four organisations take action is important insofar as it helps us understand the deliberative capacity of the four Transitions, but it is not the main object of this study. Indeed, this research does not aim at analysing the deliberative system of which the public sphere organisations are parts of. Thus, this work is not tied to the systemic approach to deliberative democracy. Instead, it employs theoretical developments in systemic thinking wherever these may be useful in better understanding the deliberative capacity of public space organisations.

Even when focusing on groups in the public space, as this study does, it is necessary to ‘always keep our eye on whole systems’ (Dryzek, 2009: 1388), and to refrain from ‘assess[ing] component parts in isolation’ (Dryzek, 2010a: 14). Undertaking a study that focuses on ‘groups’ does not imply that analysing groups is believed to be the most important means to understand deliberative dynamics. Nonetheless, group-level interaction does constitute an important stage in understanding (and finding ways to enhance) the deliberative democratic qualities of our societies (Gastil, 2010).⁵

The Three Dimensions of Deliberative Capacity

Authenticity

‘Authenticity’ can be intended as a set of ‘criteria’ (Dryzek, 2009: 1386) informed by deliberative democratic theory (and its normative goals) and its aim is to assess the deliberative qualities of communicative processes. To be sure, plenty of communications including everyday talk or simple information-sharing may fall short of deliberative ideals (Neblo, 2007: 30, Bächtiger and Hangartner, 2010: 48). Yet, assessing the deliberative democratic qualities that different processes may display (or lack), and understanding what factors may determine the observed phenomena are the core challenges for which the idea of authenticity is employed in the first place.

⁵ This approach has been criticised from widely different angles. For instance, on the one hand, Sartori (1973) argued that democratisation should be sought not within organisations but in the interactions between them. On the other hand, Bohman (1996: 8) pointed out that deliberation is ‘a “public” rather than a “collective” or a group-specific activity’, where ‘public’ stands for ‘universal’, where reason is aimed at ‘an unlimited audience’ as opposed to ‘a community of like-minded citizens’. Against the former view, however, one could argue that even if interactions were the main target of democratic studies these may be better understood in light of organisations’ internal workings. One could, instead, agree with Bohman’s remark in so far as his claim highlights that society may well remain the ultimate frontier of deliberative democracy. Yet, although not a ‘group-specific’ activity, democratic deliberation and its effects on wider communities are often determined by the quality of group-level communication. Moreover, to Bohman (ibid. 21) ‘public reason is exercised not only in the state and its representatives but also in the public sphere of free and equal citizens’. Whether and to what extent democratic and deliberative communications may take place within these publics is far from granted and interesting to investigate.

The criteria usually employed to assess the quality of public deliberation (Steenbergen et al., 2003, Fishkin, 2009) inform yet vary from the *desiderata* of authenticity (Mansbridge, 1999: 7, Bächtiger et al., 2010: 37, Stevenson, 2011). In fact, as already seen, the latter is meant to test (also) communications taking place outside formal deliberative assemblies. Thus there are both theoretical issues and methodological reasons why, for instance, the Discourse Quality Index (Steenbergen et al., 2003) cannot simply be employed in lieu of deliberative capacity.⁶ Nonetheless, ‘authenticity’ is but one way to assess the quality of deliberative processes and it is important to acknowledge that alternative frameworks can also be envisioned in literature. For instance, to Dahlberg (2005: 112) Habermas’ formal pragmatics contains a list of ‘normative conditions of argumentation’ in communicative interaction that can be used to evaluate discursive practices. These include, ‘the thematization and reasoned critique of problematic validity claims, reflexivity, ideal role taking (combining impartiality and respectful listening), sincerity, formal inclusion, discursive equality, and autonomy from state and corporate interests’. Another example is given by Gastil (2007: 20-1) to whom deliberative conversations and discussions can be seen as analytic and social processes. From the former perspective, good deliberations create a solid information base, prioritise the key values at stake, identify a broad range of solutions, and weigh the pros, cons, and trade-offs between solutions, in order to make the best decision possible. From the latter standpoint, quality deliberation occurs when participants adequately distribute speaking opportunities, ensure mutual comprehension, consider other ideas and experiences and respect other participants. Gastil (1993: 278) also envisions the conditions under which a small group can be democratic. A group should be powerful and inclusive, with a membership committed to the democratic process, maintaining healthy, democratic relationships and practices of democratic deliberation, including equal and adequate speaking opportunities, comprehension and consideration. Furthermore, Gastil identifies the different stages of democratic deliberation: agenda setting, reformulating, informing, articulating, persuading, voting, and dissenting (ibid.: 26).⁷

The idea of authentic deliberation is illustrated on several occasions through the whole span of Dryzek’s work (1990: 14-9, 2000: 68, 2005: 224, 2010a: 136-7, 2013: 13) and four criteria emerge as fundamental. In sum, authentic deliberative processes are not affected by coercion, induce reflection about the preferences that individuals hold, display claims that are

⁶ This view seems shared also in the most important study on the quality of discursive process in social movements to date (see Haug et al., 2013: 31). Also, it is worth noticing in passing that Dryzek’s authenticity has a different meaning from Habermas’ discourse ethics where the term refers to ‘the absence of deception in expressing intentions’ (Steenbergen et al., 2003: 26).

⁷ Moreover, as will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, Rucht (2013: 49) also provides a consensus-oriented definition of deliberation characterised by inclusion (of people), equality, and argumentative discursive interaction where participants are willing to change their positions.

systematically connected to more general principles, and exhibit ‘reciprocity’ – that is, an effort to communicate in ways ‘that others can accept’, a concept borrowed from Gutmann and Thompson (2009).

The above characterization is central to this work, yet further consideration is in order. To begin with, a general observation is necessary: authenticity can be intended as a dynamic rather than a static property. That is, we cannot understand the authenticity of a process by simply observing whether it meets given criteria without accounting for the way processes unfold and interact in a given situation. This appears particularly important since ‘deliberative capacity...can be manifested in different ways in different systems’ (Dryzek, 2009: 1380; 2010a: 136; see also 2013: 13).

In order to adapt the idea of deliberative capacity to the ends of this work it is necessary to discuss the criteria characterising the original definition of authenticity, according to which good quality discursive processes: are not affected by coercion, induce reflection, display claims that are systematically connected to general principles and exhibit reciprocity. To begin with, unlike some of the original formulations of authenticity (i.e. Dryzek, 2000: 68; 2009: 1382; 2010a: 10, 137), it is important to keep non-coercion and reflection as distinct criteria, since even when closely connected they remain two different phenomena. Moreover, coercion affects not just the quality of the deliberation in terms of its capability to induce reflection (i.e. a coercively induced reflection would not be a deliberative one) but also in its ability to, say, connect claims to more general principles, or exhibit reciprocity. Non-coercion is constructed (cf. Ball, 1978) within the framework of communicative action and communicative rationality (Habermas, 1984) in particular, and it configures a ‘situation [that] should be free from deception, self-deception, strategic behaviour, and domination through the exercise of power’ (Dryzek, 1990: 14). Coercion, like manipulation and deception, is the opposite of persuasion, which is a fundamental dynamic of deliberation as a social process (Dryzek 2000: 1).⁸ Moreover, to Dryzek (ibid.: 68-71) the idea of non-coercion can also be employed as a fundamental test to judge how deliberative a type of communication might be (cf. Chambers, 2009); the latter would include storytelling and testimony, greeting, rhetoric, narrative (Young, 1996: 129-30, 2000).⁹

⁸ Medearis (2005) argues for a less strict rejection of coercion in the case of social movements in light of the power imbalances that the latter need to face to have their voice heard (cf. Mansbridge, 1994). To a degree, such a position is welcomed from a systemic standpoint in so far as less than deliberative actions may still have positive effects on the overall deliberativeness of a system. Nonetheless, communications characterised by coercion remain generally non-deliberative (Dryzek, 2013).

⁹ The role of narratives in deliberation has also been remarked upon by other scholars more recently (Polletta and Lee, 2006, Polletta, 2007, Boswell, 2012). Polletta (1998a, 1998b, 2009a, 2009b) also

It is evident that the characteristics of the environment which hosts a deliberative process, the 'structural relations of dominance and subordination' (see Fraser, 1990: 65), do influence the quality of the process, especially when this is not to occur within a 'framework that secures free expression' (Cohen, 1989b: 38), which is usually in place in deliberative assemblies. Thus, non-coercion is one of those instances where we may need to revise our ways of assessing deliberation in view of the systemic turn. In fact, it is necessary to pay attention to the coercion that may come from outside a discursive process. An authentic deliberative process should not be generated through coercive means, and the coercion that may exist in the broader deliberative system should not affect the deliberative process significantly.

As to the second criterion, the term 'induce' suggests that deliberative processes should at least enable participants to reflect. Deliberation in public forums may value a more instantaneous sort of reflexive process; yet, if one thinks of deliberation as 'the engagement of discourses in the public sphere', then reflection can be intended also as a 'diffuse process, taking effect over time' (Dryzek, 2006: 57-8). As Cohen (1989a) explains, commitment to deliberation 'is likely to require ... a willingness to revise one's understanding of one's own preferences and convictions', which by no means necessarily translates into an actual preference change. As always explained by Cohen (1997: 100): 'though a deliberative view must assume that citizens are prepared to be moved by reasons...it does not suppose that political deliberation takes as its goal the alteration of preferences'.

The objects of reflection are simply the 'preferences that individuals hold' (Dryzek, 2000: 68 in Dryzek, 2009: 1381; 2010a: 136). Thus, one could assume that they refer to the most emerging aspects of people's stance on a given issue. Reflection upon preferences may be easier to observe than, say, beliefs or values, especially in deliberative processes in the public space rather than in assemblies. Focusing on more emergent aspects, however, does not mean that embedded values or beliefs have to be ignored.

Furthermore, epistemic aspects remain also important. As argued by Bohman (1999: 187) 'a functioning public sphere makes epistemic demands on the reflexivity of participants'; deliberation in particular is 'aimed at producing reasonable, [and] well informed opinions' (Chambers, 2003: 309). Indeed, since its origins deliberation has been seen as being 'in itself a procedure for becoming informed' (Manin, 1987: 349, Benhabib, 1996a: 71). Therefore, the levels of competence or information in a given deliberative process should be taken into account. Indeed, especially within groups, reflection may occur, for example, on the basis of thoroughly partial or incorrect information. Moreover, with regard to group interaction

explored in depth the importance of narratives and storytelling in social movements (see also Mansbridge and Flaster, 2007).

specifically, the possibility for a discussion to induce reflection, seems to presuppose that participants give due consideration to each other's words and that attention is granted when someone is speaking. This point is aptly described by John Gastil (1992: 297) to whom 'due consideration is tantamount to careful, quiet reflection', and indeed, 'consideration transforms democratic decision making from the mere summation of preferences into the practice of deliberation'.

Finally, since disagreement over validity claims is fundamental in discursive ethics and (along with difference) in the Habermasian public sphere (Dahlberg, 2005: 125-9), it seems preferable that discursive processes display not just 'collaborative forms of argumentation' but also some 'agonistic and confrontational elements' (Bächtiger, 2010).¹⁰ The latter aspect – including questioning, disputing, and insisting – may allow a process to draw closer to a reflexive inquiry rather than an overly respectful and consensus-oriented discussion. Although the latter type of interaction might make participants happy, it would not be necessarily desirable from a deliberative standpoint (ibid. 5-13). Deliberative processes may come to resemble ceremony (Gross, 2006: 320), which impede the expression of or leads away from engagement with disagreement. Perpetual agreement may stem from a group limiting its 'conversations to topics that can withstand slow-race discussion' (Gastil, 1993: 132). Thus, argumentative challenges should not be banned (Bächtiger, 2010: 4) but embraced. Ultimately, discussion among likeminded people is hardly a model of deliberation, and the actual opposition of views and arguments, rather than mere diversity of views per se, is necessary instead for good deliberation (Manin, 1987: 352, Ruitenberg, 2010, 2005). The presence or absence of these dynamics may be added as an additional element in assessing discursive processes.

The third criterion concerns the ability to relate individuals and groups' particular interests to more universal principles, and it refers to both the content and justifications of the arguments advanced in a deliberative process. Although, as seen, reflection should be assessed mainly on the basis of individuals' preferences, communication should involve more than that. 'Particular interests' would fit squarely into authentic deliberation (see also: Mansbridge, 1993), to the extent that the holders of such interests are capable of advancing their claims on grounds beyond those within which they were conceived. In this sense, reference to 'more general' or 'universal' principles are necessary during deliberation. Since arguments in deliberation may be about values or facts (Manin, 2005: 3) one could refine this criterion by also considering the nature of the justifications put forward. Thus, one could consider whether arguments are justified through value-based and/or pragmatic grounds (Nanz and Steffek, 2005). It is hard to

¹⁰ A related point is also made by Mansbridge (1992: 36) who argues that 'deliberation should illuminate both conflict and commonality', although, she aptly remarks that deliberation is important also when there is no conflict.

prefer one type of argument over the other regardless of the situation in which a deliberative process takes place. However, a deliberation that balances both types of justification may fare better than one in which one dimension is thoroughly ignored (ibid.).

The final criterion is a normative principle borrowed from Gutmann and Thompson, according to whom reciprocity is 'a core principle of democracy in its many moral variations' and is a fundamental feature in deliberative theory (Gutmann and Thompson, 2009: 98).¹¹ Dryzek (2009: 1381) acknowledges the importance of this 'deliberative virtue', and repropose the idea in the context of authentic deliberation. With reciprocity deliberative processes become means to generate 'mutual acceptance' (ibid. 1393). A deliberative process among, say, likeminded people may display connections to general principles; nonetheless, 'otherness' and 'mutual acceptance' referred to by the reciprocity criterion seem to imply that for an authentic deliberation it is necessary (but not sufficient) to include some degree of difference. However, as argued by Bohman (2003a: 768) reciprocity can be exclusionary 'to the extent that it violates the principle of political egalitarianism'.¹² Bohman's remark may provide a useful caveat in observing discursive processes in the public sphere. In fact, some people may feel excluded or unable to engage in reciprocal reason giving not because they are unwilling to do so but because of the way in which the discussion is framed may obstacle the emergency of dissenting point of view. It is thus important to observe whether those who may be charged with violating reciprocity appeal to 'any number of considerations that are just as central to democratic deliberation', or 'deeper democratic commitments' (Bohman, 2003b).

The importance of emotions in authentic deliberation is not directly mentioned in the discussion on authenticity. Nonetheless, Dryzek (2000: 163) believes that authentic deliberation implies the possibility of 'the contestation of discourses in the public sphere'. Such contestation might well include a degree of passion, and it may be worthwhile to observe whether and to what extent this aspect emerges in a discursive process. A vast literature has now highlighted the role of feelings in deliberation, criticising the rationalistic tendencies of the Habermasian approach in particular (e.g. Rorty, 1985, Young, 1987: 68-73, 1999, Mansbridge, 1993: 99-100, Nussbaum, 1995). Della Porta and Giugni (2013: 123-7) remark that

¹¹ Indeed, for instance, Habermas (1996) has already remarked upon the relevance of this concept, which is essential for communicative freedom (ibid: 119) and the possibility of 'a linguistically constituted public space' (ibid: 361). Also to Mansbridge (1999: 213) 'reciprocity applies well to everyday talk'.

¹² To Bohman (2003a: 768) reciprocity can violate political egalitarianism 'when public reasons are considered secular or when religious reasons have no worth in the context of democratic deliberation'. He illustrates this point in discussing the famous case of Mozart parents objecting to the use of some books by the readers in their children's elementary school. More generally, he makes the point that deliberation can be framed in ways that make it especially difficult for certain groups to find have their views taken into serious consideration.

also in the study of social movements feelings have been neglected for a long time despite research having shown their importance in these organisations and in cognitive processes, and how feelings vary depending on the context in which they emerge and the identity to which they are attached. Feelings need not be limited to what Gastil (1993: 23) terms ‘congeniality’, which ‘includes expressions of kindness, empathy, sympathy and praise’ and could help capture ‘the development and preservation of positive emotional relationships’. Actually, these kinds of relationships can be an obstacle to deliberation in particular cases – for instance, when there are conflicting interests – and it is necessary to look beyond ‘congeniality’ to see if there are also different emotions playing a role (Goodwin et al., 2001b, Ruitenberg, 2010). Ultimately, taking note of the role of passion helps us to understand deliberative processes, as does the argued of Hall (2007: 82, 92) that deliberation ‘is a process that inherently involves passion as well as reason’, which requires ‘thinking carefully and caring thoughtfully’. Finally, also Mansbridge (1999: 226), referred to the importance of feelings in deliberation when speaking of ‘considered’ rather than just ‘reasoned’ deliberation.

Inclusivity

‘Inclusivity’ is especially important in assessing the democratic qualities of a deliberative process. ‘Without inclusion there may be deliberation but not deliberative democracy’ (Dryzek 2009: 1382), and as Goodin (2003: 163) puts it, inclusion is important in that: ‘[d]emocratizing inputs contributes mightily to democratizing outputs’. ‘Inclusiveness applies to the range of interests and discourses present in a political setting’ and both empowered and public space can be tested ‘for the degree to which they are inclusive of relevant interests and voices’ (Dryzek 2009: 1385).

Although assessing the overall inclusivity of a deliberative system is different from observing the inclusivity of its parts, the latter undertaking should always be understood in light of the broader system. For example, to Dryzek (2010b) group polarization (or even bonding rhetoric) may actually be desirable for some oppressed groups within the public sphere to generate solidarity and help them to enter public debates with confidence (see also Mansbridge, 1994: 56-9, cf. Sunstein, 2005). Moreover, high inclusivity is not necessarily desirable in the empowered as well as the public spaces at the same time. For example, a highly inclusive empowered space may lead to a moribund public, whilst a lively civil society may exist in spite of (or in response to) a highly exclusive empowered space.¹³

Discourses and interests are the main objects of inclusivity in the original definitions of deliberative capacity. In this research, however, inclusivity assessments are based on the

¹³ See Dryzek’s (1996a) distinction between democratisation within, across, and against the state as well as his critique of ‘inclusive states’.

investigation of the social background of participants and their interests rather than on discourses. This choice is connected to practical considerations concerning the economy of this work and to theoretical reasons.

With regard to discourses, the main problem is arguably that developing a methodology (such as, for instance, the Q methodology) specifically aimed at investigating the plethora of discourses that could characterise my case studies could become of itself the object of an entire thesis. There are also theoretical reasons to highlight the importance of social background rather than discourses as an element of inclusivity. To begin with, discourses and interests, ultimately, bear on individuals and groups. Indeed, although it comes in different formulations (see Näsström, 2011), the deliberative inclusiveness principle would hardly make sense at all if its reference to 'all those' (affected by or subject to...) completely excluded people. Therefore, it seems necessary to take them into examination, at least for their sociological characteristics. This is all the more important since, unlike in deliberative assemblies, participants in discussions in the public space are not selected on the basis of predetermined sociographic characteristics. Indeed, whereas inclusivity in formal assemblies is closely tied to the idea of (discursive) representation, inclusion in local publics seems more directly connected to individuals' participation in the discursive process. One could, therefore, investigate 'gender, race, age, ethnicity, occupation, class, education' (Young, 2001b: 3) and disability (Young, 2000) of participants. This can be done in light of the roles that different people have within organisations, and bearing in mind also that 'where societal inequality persists, deliberative processes in public spheres will tend to operate to the disadvantage of subordinates' (Fraser, 1990: 67, Fung and Wright, 1999). Ultimately, groups have represented a fundamental resource in the study of democracy (e.g. Young, 1989), especially in regard to inclusion, and the exposure of the limits of narrowly conceived deliberation (Young, 2000), the communicative resources of difference, and the non-fungibility of individuals in democratic publics (Young, 2001c: 120).

Although the inclusivity 'principle' (Cohen, 1997: 431, 1998: 203, 224) may be universally desirable from a normative point of view, inclusions of interests are 'context-specific' (Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008: 482). Importantly, the idea of inclusion in fact requires that interests are taken into account in so far as they are relevant to a certain deliberative process (Dryzek 2009: 1385). In this way we can delimitate the possibly endless list of interests (potentially) connected to any given deliberative process. At the same time inclusivity in terms of interests need not be limited to material ones. As is commonly the case among democratic conceptions stressing the importance of the Habermasian (1996) public sphere (Maia, 2007: 78-9), interests

can be intended in a particularly broad sense to include even environmental interests (Dryzek, 2000: 157).

Finally, a deliberative process that is inclusive in the ways just discussed may still be far from democratic. If inclusivity is to be connected to the democratic quality of a deliberative process, an account of equality is needed.¹⁴ The requirement of non-coercion (part of the definition of authenticity) already implies concerns such as freedom from domination (see: *ibid*; Bohman, 2003b). However, taking more directly into account equality – a pillar of deliberative democratic theory (e.g. Cohen, 1989a) – may help to better understand the extent and modes (Sass and Dryzek, 2011) by which inclusion in deliberation occurs (see also della Porta and Rucht, 2013a). That is, in group-level discursive processes, one should observe whether there appear to be equal possibilities of speaking ‘over time and across different topics’, equally distributed decision-making power, and whether participants ‘neither withhold information nor verbally manipulate one another’, and ‘are able and willing to listen’ (Gastil, 1993: 26, 6).¹⁵ Thus, in assessing inclusivity, one should check how far a group falls short of an ideal of equality and eventually investigate how imbalances are understood and justified by participants.

Consequentiality

Consequentiality specifically concerns the extent to which inclusive and authentic deliberative processes generate collective or social outcomes, and it therefore refers to the empowered as well as the public space. The deliberative process ‘must have an impact’ or ‘somehow make a difference’ to collective decisions, or social and collective outcomes. ‘Impact need not be direct’ as in explicit policy decisions; instead, it may also include, for example, ‘informal products of a network’, ‘influence on decision makers’, or ‘even cultural change’ (Dryzek 2010a: 10, 137). Understanding consequentiality differs from an assessment of (the balance of) power in a deliberative system, for it goes beyond tracking down the different ways in which groups have an impact. To assess any group or system overall consequentiality it is necessary, in the first place, to understand if there is any authentic and inclusive democratic deliberation at all in the process under observation. Consequentiality, in this sense, depends upon authenticity or inclusivity. If the latter dimensions, which focus on the deliberative process, are upstream,

¹⁴ Indeed, the importance of equality has been remarked upon by several deliberative democrats. For instance, to Benhabib (1996c: 68) ‘deliberation is governed by the norms of equality and symmetry; all have the same chances to initiate speech acts, to question, to interrogate, and to open debate’.

¹⁵ An interesting practical characterisation of equality emerged from Mansbridge et al.’s study (2006: 27) that looked at the quality of deliberation from the facilitators’ perspective. A core insight from this study is that ‘equality emerges... as a feature of three related goals: extensive and inclusive participation in discussion, self-facilitation and group control, and fair representation of views without bias’. In della Porta and Rucht’s study (2013a) on the discursive qualities of social movement organisations’ meetings an interesting alternative to the deliberative approach to equality is based on the notion of symmetry and asymmetry in discussions during meetings (Haug et al., 2013: 38).

consequentiality, with its focus on outcomes, is downriver. If either leg (authenticity and inclusivity) upon which deliberative capacity stands is weak, then consequentiality is necessarily low.¹⁶ Actually, rather than a sign of high consequentiality, the achievement of remarkable outcomes in spite of exclusive and inauthentic deliberative processes is probably the hallmark of weak deliberative capacity. Far from being a prerogative of institutional deliberation, the capability to have consequential discursive processes is fundamental also for social movements.

To Dryzek there exist a number of ways in which a movement can be effective, and this is particularly interesting since the case studies examined in this thesis belong to a social movement. Certainly, a social movement's efficacy can be connected to a variety of activities (and not just deliberative ones). Therefore, the ways in which a social movement can be effective are wider than those in which its discursive processes can be consequential. However, through empirical scrutiny one could identify the ways in which the case studies under examination affect their respective social and political environments, and the degree to which these activities can be connected to good quality discursive processes (or not). The types of influence can vary greatly according to whether a group takes action from within or outside state institutions. In the former case, a movement is effective when it:

- acts as an interest group or a lobby
- supports an established party or becomes one itself
- participates in negotiations concerning policies
- participates in policy making
- is the object of government policies (Dryzek et al., 2003)

In an excluded movement, on the other hand, deliberative processes can be consequential when it:

- influences the way the issues are framed and the terms of discussion are defined
- legitimates certain types of collective action, with lasting effects on the political culture
- hosts deliberative fora or, more generally, places for discussion of public issues

¹⁶ Elsewhere (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2011: 6) this idea is rendered as 'decisiveness': a system-level property that 'drives home the idea that democratic deliberation should be consequential as well as authentic and inclusive'. According to Lundell (2012: 4) consequentiality 'should be regarded as a consequence of rather than as part of the [deliberative] capacity'. Nonetheless, as already noticed, it is entirely possible that an authentic and inclusive discursive process is ineffectual (for instance, one could think of good quality public deliberation with little or no impact).

- represents a threat of political instability which solicits a response from institutions
- carries out 'para-governmental' activities
- influences cultural change (Dryzek 2000: 101-2)

Consequentiality also appears to be a context-specific dimension of deliberative capacity. In fact, organisations select the issues they are interested in and the forms of engagement they prefer in light of specific features connected to their organisational characteristics and the environment in which they take action. Certainly, these aspects affect the way an organisation impacts a community (in intended and unintended ways) (see Mansbridge, 1999: 230). Consequentiality also is a matter of degree since most deliberative processes may fall somewhere between high consequentiality and ineffectiveness. Moreover, this dimension is also particularly sensitive to timing. In fact, far from being predetermined, the effects of a discursive process (especially when in the public space) may unfold over time in different and not always predictable ways. Awareness of the history of the case under examination may help to tackle this problem. Moreover, even when just short-term investigation is available, one may still seek to understand if the deliberative process under examination (and its outcomes) represents an incidental or a more embedded phenomenon in a certain public (see Fagotto and Fung, 2006). Finally, with regard to consequentiality, an important aspect to observe is whether discursive processes lead or not to a decision.

The traditional decision-oriented nature of deliberation (e.g. Gastil, 2000: 23, Thompson, 2008: 502-3, Fishkin, 2009: 22) is embodied in the original descriptions of the idea of consequentiality, although caution is necessary. From a systemic standpoint, it may be unwise to simply disregard as non-authentically deliberative those communications not directly aimed at decision making. As observed by Polletta (2002: 79), 'meetings of course serve functions other than making decisions'. Mansbridge (1999: 212), notices instead that an important part of deliberative systems such as everyday talk 'is not necessarily aimed at any action other than talk itself'. Similarly, Benhabib (1996c: 76) remarks that 'noncoercive and nonfinal processes of opinion formation in an unrestricted public sphere' contribute to arranging and changing people's preferences and establishing connections between general issues and practical experiences. Nonetheless, power, decision and democratic deliberation remain intimately connected, and in assessing the consequentiality of a deliberative process, it may be necessary to observe whether the latter is at all conducive to decision-making of any efficacy (Chambers, 2009: 332).

The consequentiality of deliberative processes could be also understood in light of a series of theoretical considerations. For example, deliberation may permit 'communication between

citizens', which is a fundamental 'moral dimension' in a democracy (Smith, 2004). More broadly, consequentiality also concerns the capability of a deliberative process to enact democratic ideals (Fung and Wright, 2003: 3). The feeling of political efficacy that a deliberative processes may generate represents another important element, especially since it does influence people's decisions to participate in political life (Li and Marsh, 2008). Moreover, the contact between activists and non-activists as well as the action of enclaves may allow the raising of new ideas (Mansbridge, 1999), and deliberation in the public sphere should also be particularly important to give people in a weaker position a voice (Fung, 2003: 344). Finally, one could investigate the degree to which deliberative process may foster 'withdrawal and regroupment' offering 'training grounds' for 'counterpublics' (Fraser, 1990: 68), and the extent to which deliberative processes tend to favour dominant groups while disadvantaging subordinates (ibid. 66). In sum, in view of these normative considerations, consequentiality could also be thought of as the capability (or incapability) of a deliberative process to oppose structural oppression and inequality.

Conclusions

This chapter explored the concept of deliberative capacity. The theoretical discussion presented the main features of deliberative capacity and sought to connect the idea to relevant debates in the field. Deliberative capacity can contribute to a number of different deliberative democratic investigations and, as shown in this chapter, it can be adapted to investigate community-based organisations (see fig.1 below). Indeed, the above discussion informs the analysis of the case studies. However, before moving to the empirical part it is necessary to further understand the specifics of this study. Chapter Two presents the objectives of this research, its methodology and the body of literature that is related to this study.

DELIBERATIVE CAPACITY	Original Version (Dryzek 2009; 2010a)	Version adapted to investigation in community groups, and caveats
Authenticity <i>Discursive processes</i>	Not affected by coercion	Check if aspects external to the discursive processes coerce communication in the group (cf. Fraser 1990)
	Induce reflection about individuals' preferences	Check quality of information (cf. Bohman 1999; Chambers 2003; Manin 1987; Benhabib 1996) Participants should give due consideration to each other (cf. Gastil 1992); Collaborative and agonistic forms of argumentation should be present (e.g. Bachtiger 2010)
	Display claims that are systematically connected to more general principles	Check if arguments rest on value based considerations and/or pragmatic grounds (Nanz and Steffek 2005)
	Exhibit reciprocity	If reciprocity is missing, check why this is the case (cf. Bohman 2003; 2003b); Observe role of feelings in deliberation (cf. Gastil 1993; Mansbridge 1983; Goodwin et al. 2001; Hall 2007)
Inclusivity <i>Applies to</i>	Interests	Include Participants' social background (cf. Young 1989; 2000; 2001b) but not discourses Check extent and modality of inclusion (Sass and Dryzek 2011) Check if interaction is more or less egalitarian (Gastil 1993; Benhabib 1996)
	Discourses	
Consequentiality <i>Discursive process should</i>	Have an impact or make a difference on collective decisions or social outcomes	Observe whether authentic and inclusive deliberation is of consequence in the life of an organisation, and if it affects the surrounding environment.

Figure 1.1 Deliberative Capacity: Original and Adapted versions

Chapter 2 Research Methodology and Relevant Studies

Summary

This chapter specifies the methodology of this study and reviews particularly relevant literature. The methodological section presents the goals of the research, the methods through which they are pursued, and it explains also the research design and its comparative and interpretive nature. The discussion of the relevant literature shows that this research can be seen as a development within deliberative democratic scholarship. Furthermore, this dissertation can engage with work on social movements, particularly as the work has taken on deliberative concerns.

Research Methodology

As mentioned in the introduction, this study has three main goals. The first objective is to explore the idea of deliberative capacity and refine it, specifically, for its application in the empirical investigation of organisations within the public space. Secondly, it assesses the deliberative and democratic qualities individually and through a comparative perspective of four case studies, four community groups belonging to the Transition movement. Thirdly, it aims at understanding which aspects of the case studies may be particularly relevant in the generation of deliberative capacity in these organisations.

The first goal is pursued through an ‘adaptive theory’ epistemological approach, which stresses the importance of an ongoing connection between theory and empirical observation (Layder, 1998).¹ Whilst the existing theoretical ideas guide the research, the data-analysis generates insights that can refine the original concepts. In this work the theoretical investigation of deliberative capacity informs the research design, whilst the ongoing empirical observations help in refining and grounding the notion of deliberative capacity with special regard to its application within public space organisations. As pointed out by Hendriks (2004), ‘adaptive theory’ is especially suited for interpretive and qualitative research, particularly so given their commonalities in terms of interpretivist epistemology (cf. Yanow, 2006: 408).

Interpretive and qualitative methods are fundamental to investigating the deliberative capacities of the four case studies and to identifying possible determinants of the observed phenomena, respectively the second and third objectives of this study. This research follows an interpretive approach in a way that is particularly suited to deliberative studies. According

¹ An earlier application of the ‘adaptive theory’ in deliberative investigation can be found in Hendriks (2004).

to Yanow (ibid.) interpretive methods permit us to closely explore participants' words and actions. More generally, as Hendriks et al. (2013) argue, an interpretive methodology can effectively contribute to understanding how deliberation works in complex systems because of its focus on comprehending phenomena in light of experience and contextual knowledge. Of course, numerous studies in deliberative democracy have relied upon interpretive methodology (Parkinson, 2006, Hendriks, 2011). Interpretive research focuses on meaning and largely depends on the development of an intimate understanding of a specific context (Yanow, 2007). As argued by Neblo (2005: 8), 'there are different levels of description and explanation', and deliberative scholars can investigate them by employing an interpretive approach and not only through methods shaped after natural science. Indeed, Bevir and Ansari (2012) claim precisely that rather than what they call 'modernist' methods, which rely 'on a formal mode of social explanation that requires bypassing intentionality' (ibid.: 9), the interpretive approach is better suited to understanding contextual aspects in deliberative democratic studies.² Finally, also Lichterman (2003: 128) argues that in studying social movements without necessarily engaging in hypothesis-testing in a conventional sense, researchers can profitably develop 'expectations', which 'when substantiated with observation ... lead to 'theoretical innovations'.

This study employs all of the three typical methods of the so-called 'qualitative' tradition: direct observation and participation, face-to-face interview and consultation of relevant materials (Yanow, 2006: 406), most of which have already been used in investigations on social movements (e.g. della Porta and Rucht, 2013a: esp. ch1-2, della Porta, 2009d) and collectives (e.g. Rothschild and Whitt, 1986). Relevant materials that have been consulted include documents used by the different groups such as books, videos and websites or the documents they wrote (e.g. web content) or contributed to producing (e.g. Monteveglio Council's deliberation).

Participant observation (see Haug et al., 2013) was highly important and was carried out during the time I spent on fieldwork: from January to August 2012, with six to eight weeks in each site. I directly observed many events, participated in most activities organised by the local Transition organisations and spent time with participants as well as other members of the communities. Through this experience I was able to closely observe the life of these groups and the environment within which they took action. Observation involves varying degrees of participation and implies also elements of ethnographic investigation (Yanow, 2006: 410, see

² According to Armony (2004), contextual aspects are fundamental to critically assess the democratic contributions of associations in civil society; the importance of such remarks for deliberative democratic research was first noticed by Mendonça (2008: 127).

also, Gans, 1976), and this study retains an ethnographic 'sensibility' (see Pader, 2006, Bray, 2008).³

In this study, the degree of participation varied but remained generally low even when I had an active role in groups' activities (for instance, occasionally farming with Streccapogn's immigrant workers, helping at 'do-it-yourself' workshops in Modica, participating in the perma-blitz in Kurilpa, or exchanging goods at Meander Valley's produce swap). With regard to meetings, on the other hand, I explained to participants that I preferred not to interfere with their discussions, although I enjoyed an occasional joke or a chat before or after the assembly. Finally, I did not interact in the on-line discussions. I took detailed field notes during and after the events I attended and throughout my stays at the different sites.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were a fundamental means of investigation. A set of common questions was asked of Transition participations (see Appendix), whereas interviews with people who did not participate in the local Transition groups were more open-ended (see Minichiello et al., 2008). In the field I developed an understanding of which people participated in each Transition, which individuals and institutions represented their main interlocutors, and which actors and organisations should be investigated to develop a comprehensive understanding of the life of each Transition and the communities they were based in.

I interviewed a total of ninety-four people (the highest number was twenty-nine in Meander Valley and the lowest twenty in Kurilpa).⁴ Length varied greatly but interviews were usually thirty minutes long. In each case I interviewed as many Transition participants as possible. In these interviews, which were audio-recorded, questions followed a script (in ways flexible enough to suit the style of the interviewee). I interviewed twelve Transition participants in Meander Valley, ten in Kurilpa, twelve in Monteveglio, and eleven in Modica. The level of engagement with their respective local Transition varied between these interviewees. However, in each case study I interviewed all of the most active Transition participants, a majority of the active members, and some of the less involved people. Open-ended interviews with non-participants did not follow a script as with Transition members. During my interviews with non-participants I asked them to provide me with an illustration of the local community, their thoughts on the issues that Transition engaged in, and their views of the local Transition (if they had heard or collaborated with it). Non-participants were selected according to whom I identified as relevant actors in each community following my observations. In particular, these

³ Ethnographic studies have been employed in the investigation of relevance from a deliberative standpoint, for instance, in the studies of Hart (2001), Eliasoph (1998) and Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003). A detailed discussion of ethnographic investigation in organisational context can be found in Ybema et al. (2009) organisational ethnography.

⁴ I translated from Italian into English all the material in this thesis, including the interview excerpts.

interviewees included seventeen people in Meander Valley, ten in central Brisbane, eleven people in Montevoglio, and eleven also in Modica. The role of these people within each community changed greatly, yet in each of these places I always included among my interviewees representatives of local institutions and participants in other organisations in the area (especially environmentalist and community-oriented groups).

The main task of this research is not to carry out a causal analysis or hypothesis testing following a positivist approach. This work does not straightforwardly develop theoretically grounded and falsifiable conjectures or seek to account for the sheer number of variables potentially affecting deliberative capacity. As van Evera (1997: 94-5) remarks, '[d]escription must often precede explanation or evaluation,..., since phenomena that have not been described cannot be explained or evaluated. Hence ... [those] who seek to explain or evaluate phenomena that others have not fully described must first devote heavy attention to description'. This study follows a descriptive orientation to ascertain how deliberative capacity (or lack thereof) may be manifested in the organisations under examination. Then, on the basis of this account, this research can provide an in-depth analysis of the observed phenomena. Indeed, the second objective of this work could be intended as an effort to develop a detailed understanding and make a 'thick description' (Thompson, 2001) of every case study.

In-depth empirical observations, it is believed, could also provide insights on which are the main aspects that may determine the deliberative capacities of the different cases. In fact, the illustration of the mechanisms behind the generation of deliberative capacity is based upon the comparative analysis of the four case studies. Indeed, an underlying effort of this research is to find out how the same idea is developed when it is implemented in different contexts.

The investigation of the deliberative and democratic qualities of public space organisations undertaken in this dissertation is based on a clear research design. The theoretical and methodological discussions in the first part of this thesis will set the boundaries of this dissertation. Next, the in-depth investigation of the four case studies will provide the basis for the comparative analysis, which represents the core part of this work. Finally, the insights from the comparative case study will be used to engage with relevant scholarship. The goal is to observe through interpretive and qualitative research methods the deliberative capacity revealed in each case study, explain how deliberative and democratic discursive processes are developed among public space organisations, and understand how they could be enhanced further.

As discussed in the outset of this dissertation, the idea of deliberative capacity is the means through which the deliberative and democratic qualities of public space organisations will be

investigated. In particular, this study operationalises deliberative capacity along three key dimensions: authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentiality. As seen, this seems consistent both theoretically and in terms of the objectives of this study. The deliberative capacity of the organisations under examination thus will be assessed on the basis of the qualities that they display on each one of the above mentioned dimensions.

In-depth empirical observation of the various activities taking place in each Transition will be fundamental in order to ascertain the authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentiality of the four Transitions. Six collectively exhaustive sites in which communications in the four organisations will be observed are: group meetings, discursive activities, on-line communications, practical actions, individual activities and casual interactions. Moreover, in an effort to understand the context in which these organisations take action, the case studies will take into examination also the four local communities surrounding each Transition. As already mentioned, whereas information on the context could be valuable in allowing us to have a broader systemic view on the matter, the units of analysis of this study are the four Transition groups.

Once the deliberative capacity of the four Transitions has been assessed, it will be possible to compare their deliberative and democratic qualities. Both the overall deliberative capacity of the four organisations as well as their different levels of authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentiality specifically can be compared. Moreover, it will be possible to compare also the six sites of communication characterising each group, in order to understand how interactions in these sites may favour or hinder the development of discursive processes of good quality.

Insights from case study analysis will be fundamental in investigating the drivers of deliberative capacity among public sphere organisations. The research findings will be discussed in light of a number of aspects that literature on social movements has traditionally identified as important in accounting for the democratic qualities of organisations. The goal will be to provide an empirically informed and theoretically consistent explanation for the development of deliberative and democratic discursive processes within organisations.

Engagement between the research findings and relevant scholarship will be instrumental in achieving the final objective of this dissertation: identifying ways in which the authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentiality of public space organisations could be fostered. The analyses that have led to the assessment of the deliberative capacity of the four case studies and to an account of how deliberative and democratic qualities are developed among organisations in the public space can both be used to envision ways to promote more deliberative and democratic interactions within organisations in the public sphere.

This dissertation is designed as a comparative work based on a qualitative and interpretive methodology. On the one hand, the four case studies are the core part of this dissertation as they will provide the empirical evidence for the theoretical considerations advanced in this thesis. On the other hand, qualitative and interpretive methodology is used in this research since as shown together they are a valid approach to study the deliberative and democratic qualities of public space organisations.

As argued by Hendriks (2007) interpretive methodology and the comparative research design may give rise to tensions, which is important to address. In particular with regard to the inductive nature of the former inquiry, and the deductive tendencies of the latter, which assumes that the phenomenon being studied may vary along the dimensions in which the comparison is articulated (see Hendriks, 2007: 290). Yet, in this study there is no hypothesis on whether deliberative capacity is similar or varies in the four cases or on which cases may possess more authentic, inclusive, and consequential discursive processes. As Lichterman (2003: 128) remarks, researchers who rely on participant observation usually have at most an 'expectation' rather than a formal hypothesis to be tested 'with a limited "sample" of one or several field sites' or by establishing statistical relations among variables. Following Howarth (2005), it is believed that 'the basis for comparison must comprise thick descriptive interpretations of particular cases' (in Hendriks, 2007: 290) and that the researcher should be open to the possibility that in understanding the phenomena under observation important aspects could emerge 'that were not envisaged in the original project design' (ibid.). Therefore, due attention to these aspects notwithstanding, it is entirely possible to employ conscientiously and profitably a comparative case study, even for researchers whose main goal is not hypothesis testing but a more interpretive effort.

My research can be thought of as an intrinsic case study, given the importance of developing a thick description of each case I survey (Stake, 1995). Yet, the investigation goes beyond the isolated observation of each case study, and there is a theoretical interest in understanding how these cases speak to the broader issue under investigation. Stake (ibid.) defines this approach to case studies as an instrumental one. My cases are employed to understand the dynamics that underlie the development and manifestation of deliberative capacity. The final goal is to jointly employ my cases to understand the same phenomenon in different contexts (Stake, 2003). This research can also be seen as being based on theory-driven rather than field-driven participant observation in the language of Lichterman (2003: 122). The main concern here is to use case studies 'to address a theory', and it is in light of deliberative democratic theory that I read my case studies.

The present comparison is divided into two levels: national and local. With regard to the national level, my case studies come from Italy and Australia – two cases in each country. It is interesting to observe whether case studies in either national context display higher deliberative capacity, and, importantly, if national-level characteristics seem relevant in affecting the deliberative democratic qualities of local organisations.

The Australian/Italian comparison is valuable given the major political and cultural differences featured by these two developed western democracies. From the political standpoint, variations are patent and range from the architecture of the state to the party system. This study investigated the views of participants in order to understand (whether and to what extent) national-level differences played a role in determining the deliberative capacity of the case studies. From a cultural standpoint, the two countries are usually included in different families within Western nations. Italy is often seen as Latin or Continental whereas Australia as Anglo-Saxon (e.g. Castles, 1993, Ahlquist and Breunig, 2009). Indeed, deliberative literature traditionally has largely focused on cases from English-speaking countries, northern European states, as well as developing countries such as China and Brazil. A comparison between the (heavily studied) Anglo-Saxon context and a country like Italy, which is under-represented in terms of deliberative democratic investigation, is particularly valuable.⁵ The choice of these two countries is also connected to my personal story, as an Italian scholar studying in Australia. In interpretive research in particular, the role of the researcher is never completely ‘neutral’ (Yanow, 2007). This may be especially true when one is researching cases within two national contexts that one is familiar with. Nonetheless, it works as a reminder of the care that this type of research requires, rather than an insurmountable barrier to comparative interpretive research. Actually, insider knowledge can be a resource in researching (see Hendriks, 2007). In fact, besides the undisputable kindness of the people in all four settings, the knowledge of the cultural norms of the groups I visited may have been important as well. Yet, possibly, the positive reception was also connected to the fact that I retained somewhat of a foreigner status, which made people particularly forthcoming (see *ibid.*).⁶

⁵ Furthermore, one of the early discussions on the possible existence of deliberative cultures portrays Italy as among the indexical and deliberation-adverse cultures, in contrast to the more analytical and deliberation-friendly cultures of English-speaking countries (Gambetta, 1998). However, Gambetta’s largely anecdotal discussion does not seem to take into account variations that may occur within purportedly indexical or analytical contexts, and this study may help in understanding whether evidence can be found to support the alleged indexical/analytical divide.

⁶ This was rather clear when in Australia I was referred to as ‘Italian’ or when in Italy I was often nicknamed ‘l’ australiano’ (the Australian). Overall, the development of trust between the researcher and the various groups under examination also plays a role in reducing the severity of reactivity, that is, the possibility that in small settings the presence of a researcher may influence participants (see Haug et al., 2013: 43).

The second level of comparison is local. Within each country, I select two localities. In Australia, Meander Valley and Kurilpa (in Inner Brisbane); in Italy, Modica and Monteveglio. Each place featured differences in aspects ranging from the level of political activism to the nature of the public sphere, the social and political trends, and the relationship between local activists and institutions. Interestingly, the two localities within each country diverged from each other in ways that were similar to those relating to the pair in the other country: on the one hand, Monteveglio and Kurilpa, and, on the other, Modica and Meander Valley. The first pair had a marked tradition of leftist local government which was absent in the second pair, and levels of income and scholastic education were higher in the first, while environmental problems were particularly patent in the second. Through this research it was possible to observe whether (and what aspects of) the different local settings may affect the deliberative capacity of the organisations. Moreover, Monteveglio and Kurilpa were different from Modica and Meander Valley also with regard to the very characteristics of their local Transitions, so adding another layer to the comparison. In fact, the Transitions in Monteveglio and Kurilpa were official Initiatives affiliated to the transnational Transition Network Ltd., pioneering, older, better funded, and more active than the corresponding experiments in Modica and Meander Valley, neither of which had official recognition from the Transition Network.⁷ Such differences may permit observing whether and to what extent the different social and political environments and stages of development of the case studies may be important aspects in affecting their deliberative capacity.

Related Studies

Studies on a variety of topics have employed 'deliberative capacity'. At the time of writing these include: 'the use of mini-public in transnational governance' (Smith, 2013), practices of 'legislative disruption' (Smith and Brassett, 2013), public forums on coastal innovation governance (Glavovic, 2013), law-making processes for serious crimes in Australia (Ayling, 2013), the quality of democracy in the Philippines (Curato, 2013), multi-stakeholder governance (Schouten et al., 2012), climate change governance (Stevenson and Dryzek, 2012), and international organisations (Milewicz and Goodin, 2012). The majority of these studies focus mostly on formal and institutional deliberation, and although some of these studies emphasise the role of public spaces (e.g. Stevenson and Dryzek, 2012, Curato, 2013) they do not closely observe organisations in public spaces. Thus, they provide limited ground for this research to engage with. However, more relevant insights come from other studies that, like this one, focus on the democratic qualities of organisations in the public.

⁷ As shown in chapter three, this is a common characteristic among many groups and an important feature of the Transition movement.

As will be illustrated in Chapter Three, the public space represents a most important component of theories of deliberative democracy, and, of course, social movements are an important part of such space. Although the role of social movements in deliberative democracy has long been neglected (Baber and Bartlett, 2007), the possibility of deliberation within these fundamental manifestations of democratic life is a core idea of early critical deliberative theorists (Dryzek, 1987: 670) and it characterises also more recent arguments endorsing a systemic approach to deliberative democracy (e.g. Habermas, 1996, Mansbridge, 1999, 2010, Chambers, 2003, Parkinson, 2006, Hendriks, 2006, Dodge, 2009, Dryzek, 2010a, Dryzek, 2010b, Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012).⁸ Empirical analysis, however, has mainly investigated organisations which could hardly ever be associated with social movements. Noteworthy examples are provided by Mansbridge's (1983) classic investigation of Helpline crisis-centre and Selby's town, or Gastil's (1993) analysis of the Mifflin Co-op. Moreover, more recent empirical work (informed by widely different conceptions of deliberation) has also focused on the quality of deliberation in the informal public (e.g. Conover et al., 2002, 2005, Mutz, 2006, Jacobs et al., 2009). The theoretical and empirical advancements provided by these and other works have surely benefited this dissertation. Indeed, the attempt to employ deliberative capacity as a unifying framework for the deliberative democratic investigation of grassroots organisations is in the first place an effort to contribute to this tradition of deliberative democratic scholarship.

Nonetheless, to date, the greatest contribution to the study of the subjects of this research has come from social movement scholarship. In particular, the DEMOS research project, which focused on Global Justice Movements (GJMs), has provided a pioneering platform to study the deliberative and democratic qualities of social movements. This research project takes into account the internal workings of social movement organisations and employs a perspective that is largely receptive to deliberative and participatory conceptions of democracy (see for instance, della Porta, 2005a, 2005b, Haug and Teune, 2008, della Porta, 2009a, 2009d, della Porta and Rucht, 2013b). These works – along with ground-breaking work by scholars from a participatory background (e.g. Rothschild and Whitt, 1986, Polletta, 2002) – represent a particularly important source to engage with for this study. It is therefore worthwhile outlining

⁸ Also Young's (e.g., 2000) work in particular has favoured a deeper engagement between deliberative theory and radical politics. Of course, the possibility of deliberation in social movements has been captured in earnest also by political sociologists. For instance, Lichterman (1999: 104) speaks of the likelihood of social movements to feature, among others, a 'forum' quality. This refers to a space in which the group 'values critically reflective discussion about members' interests and collective identities, apart from strategizing identity and interests to gain more influence'. The connection between Lichterman's 'forum quality' and the investigation of the discursive qualities of social movements was first made in della Porta's (2005b: 83) study on values and norms guiding organizational choices within the Italian social forum.

here some of the main findings of the DEMOS project that seem of relevance to the present study.

To begin with, as highlighted by della Porta and Rucht (2013b: 2), the DEMOS project has shown that the idealised view of social movements as sites of deliberation and participation needs to be checked using empirical observation on the ground. Studies confirm that the democratic conceptions of social movement organisations are informed by participatory and increasingly deliberative ideals. However, the attitude of social movements towards democracy varies. Besides the fundamental divide between those which reject democratic and deliberative values and those which embrace them in principle, there is a difference also between movements that try to strike a balance between effectiveness and internal democracy and those for which democratic values and practices are absolutely central. At any rate, even democratically-oriented group practices can be far from ideal (ibid.: 5-7).

The propensity to embrace different conceptions of democracy seems influenced by individual and organisational factors. At individual level, 'general norms' such as a person's identification with the Global Justice Movement (more than socio-demographic characteristics) accounted for 'preference for a participatory and deliberative conception of democracy' (ibid.: 12, see also della Porta, 2009a). From an organisational standpoint, 'smaller, younger and more resource-poor groups' privileged participatory and consensus oriented forms of internal democracy' (della Porta, 2009b, della Porta and Rucht, 2013b: 11-2). Organisational values were also important as deliberation and participation was embraced 'the more a group identified with the GJMs at large addressing a broad range of issues' (della Porta and Rucht, 2013b: 12, see also della Porta, 2009d). Importantly, the 'democratic visions' that organisational and individual level factors contributed to were developed in light of the specific contexts in which organisations took action (della Porta and Rucht, 2013b: 12). Thus, a primary step of the DEMOS project has been to gather insights on the importance of group characteristics (articulated along fundamental dimensions such as culture, organisational structure and type of action) and establish the relevance of contextual aspects in determining the democratic qualities of social movement organisations. Then, the research project has connected these two aspects to understand how they affect the quality of communication within GJMs organisations (ibid.).

The latest findings show that group life and internal communication is a fundamental component of social movement organisations, and that power issues are relevant also within social movements and the groups associated with them. Dominant egalitarian views notwithstanding, hierarchical dynamics persist and, in particular, informal leaders are common. These are accepted as long as they are perceived as beneficial to the group and respectful of

other members. Various strategies are often developed as a way to cope with a lack of means to challenge leaders. The study of micro-dynamics of communication provides a valuable insight about the conditions that favour deliberative engagement during meetings. For instance, communication during meetings is influenced by group characteristics such as size, gender composition and group norms. Interestingly the type of communication (with varying degrees of deliberativeness) varies even during the same meeting. Importantly, deliberation stands out as the preferred type of communication for groups associated with the Global Justice Movement (and possibly for other movements within the 'left-libertarian' area) and can be observed in many discussions. Although communication is generally friendly and respectful it can be observed that the atmosphere improves with the presence of women, and is friendlier in homogenous groups. Informal arrangements seem to facilitate more deliberative interactions. The existence of a facilitator and of criteria for interacting seems to enhance the deliberativeness of communications. Social movements seem able to and interested in experimenting with ways for improving the quality of communication. Moreover, the conception of democracy in social movement organisations is the result of a continuously changing equilibrium between instrumental and normative concerns. Finally, rather than an effort to meet the requirements of a formal conception of democracy, informal norms connected to the movement's culture seem fundamental in determining the democratic attitudes of the Global Justice Movement (GJM) organisations (della Porta and Rucht, 2013c: 228-32).

Anyone researching the deliberative and democratic qualities of organisations associated with transnational social movements would benefit from engaging with the DEMOS studies. Within the context of the DEMOS project the comparative research in the edited volume *Meeting Democracy* (della Porta and Rucht, 2013a) receives here particular attention, as it seems to come closer to the research interests of this study. In fact, both works are early attempts to undertake (using comparative analysis) the long overdue effort to understand the role that deliberative democratic practices have in the life of social movements and more generally in the public space (see Haug et al., 2013: 29). Where it is possible and profitable to do so, this dissertation engages with this and other research on social movements by comparing its findings with those of other studies with regard to specific aspects. The systemic turn in deliberative democracy and the cutting edge research in social movements seem to call for a future increase in the number of studies on the deliberative qualities of organisations in the public space (within and beyond social movements). Rather than rushing into hypothesis testing, current research may render a better service to future scholarship by exploring the complexities that characterise such an investigation. Rather than applying observations generated through research on GJM organisations as a hypothesis to be tested against the

Transition movement, it seems more profitable to study the latter object using an original approach. In doing so, interesting findings can be generated. Insights can directly feed back into deliberative democratic theory, which would benefit from empirically-informed theorising on public space and its organisations, and can also be used to engage with relevant findings from a variety of fields, which, like social movement studies, are interested in deliberative approaches. Although della Porta and Rucht's (2013a) study and this dissertation both strive to understand the deliberative and democratic qualities of discursive engagement within social movement organisations and the causes that may explain their development, the ways in which this effort is carried out varies substantially. Explaining these differences is important as it may also help to better understand how this research within the deliberative tradition relates to contemporary studies in the field of social movements.

To begin with, as will emerge in chapter three, Transition features typical traits of new social movements, yet it has distinct characteristics and, although it has some concerns in common with those of the Global Justice Movements, it cannot be seen as representative of the latter. This is particularly important since, as della Porta and Rucht (2013b: 5) notice, '[s]ocial movements differ widely in their attitudes toward democracy at large and in their internal practices of deliberation and democratic decision-making'.

The local Transitions I studied behave in different ways from those of the GJM as it will emerge throughout the present work. Here I just point out some basic differences that may otherwise be overlooked. For instance, my four Transition groups as well as (nine of) the twelve GJM organisations that were examined were local, relatively young, and adopting the 'values and concerns' of the different movements they were associated with (della Porta and Rucht, 2013b: 17). Nonetheless, as will emerge in the dedicated chapters, my case studies and the local Transitions' concerns were distinctively local, in a way that seemed different and probably more marked than had occurred with the GJM cases. Although the outlook of Transition participants was certainly influenced by global problems, the subjects of group initiatives were overwhelmingly focused on the local community. Participants sought to implement Transition ideas locally: the objectives of the groups were within the community and the interactions they focused upon were those with the local population. My reconstruction gives a central role to these interactions in each case study. Furthermore, for many Transition participants it was important to remark their apolitical status, unlike GJM organisations (della Porta, 2009f). Interestingly, Transition claim to be an apolitical movement is not at all intended as a commitment to avoiding making connections with politics. As will be shown, this claim did not prevent groups, and especially their leaders, from engaging in local politics but it seemed to discourage discussions about current political affairs or party politics and hindered the

emergence of distinctive political affiliations within Transition groups (which, in fact, do not seem to share in a left-libertarian view). Ultimately, the political dimension affected my groups in ways that were different from those that characterised GJM organisations, in which power disputes also seem much more central than in the internal discussions of my case studies. Even more importantly, one of Transition's key tenets is to adopt a non-confrontational, non-blaming attitude towards other actors in the community (beginning with local institutions) and among group participants, and it does not present a protest repertoire. Such a characteristic does not seem to find any parallel within the organisations studied by della Porta and Rucht (2013a). As Chapter Three discusses, this is a major point of divergence between Transition and more conventional (new) social movements (Barry and Quilley, 2009). As will emerge, the ideal of a non-confrontational attitude was never fully realised but still affected the deliberativeness of the four organisations.⁹

It is also important to remark that the DEMOS project study and this dissertation are informed by conceptions of deliberation that can be compared but have substantial differences. The systematic application of the deliberative capacity set of criteria by a single researcher presents quite distinct challenges and insights. These surely differ from those coming from the coordinated efforts of several researchers who work on the basis of a shared characterisation of deliberation, Rucht's definition (2013: 49) of which represents probably the most explicit formulation. In summary, deliberation is considered as 'an interaction of speakers who (1) do not exclude other people willing to speak; (2) consider themselves as equal in their potential to reason; (3) present experiences, facts, and arguments; and, in reaction to the perceptions and reasons of others, (4) are ready to modify their original views, attitudes and opinions. In short, deliberation is an open and discursive interaction in a spirit of mutual recognition, understanding and search for a consensus, rather than a game of power' (ibid.). Importantly, deliberation is often conceptualised as a way to communicate during controversies, and is one of the possible ways in which 'controversies are carried out' (Rucht, 2013: 57, see also Haug et al., 2013). A controversy starts with disagreement (Rucht, 2013: 57) but is more than 'mere disagreement' and includes a rebuttal to someone's objection (Haug et al., 2013: 36). Deliberation thus tends to be conceived on the basis of the attitude and type of power participants employ during a controversy (ibid.: 37). During controversies participants can display a more or less egalitarian attitude, and a specific interaction can be symmetric, 'when

⁹ As shown in Chapter Three, these characteristics are not surprising in light of the Transition movement's ideals. In fact, the movement, for instance, stresses the importance of action at community level, and remarks on the non-political nature of the movement and the development of a non-adversarial attitude. It's also worth remembering that, in the study on the GJM, two case studies have been examined from each of the six European countries selected (see Haug et al., 2013); also this research is based on two cases from each country, but it compares one from Europe and one from Asia-Pacific.

other participants are recognised as equal discussants' and asymmetric when this is not the case (ibid.: 40). Power, instead, is connected to the type of resources speakers use: power is 'soft' when 'it is based on arguments and/or the appeal to experiences and/or emotions by the use of narratives and symbols'. On the other hand, 'hard power' concerns 'the capacity of a speaker to impose sanctions or grant rewards based on one-sided or mutual dependencies' as, for instance, occurs with 'offers, demands and threats'. Deliberation occurs when a controversy shows 'symmetry' and 'soft power'. This characterisation is both theoretically informed and parsimonious. However, it tends to relate deliberation to 'type and patterns of intragroup controversies' (Rucht, 2013) and tie it to the notion of consensus (ibid.: 59, see also: della Porta, 2005a, 2005b: 74, 85, 2009b, della Porta and Rucht, 2013b), in a way that is quite different from the characterisation of deliberation given in this study. Disagreement and controversy are fundamental ingredients for deliberation, and, as shown in the previous chapter, the importance of disagreement has been remarked upon by recent deliberative scholarship. Yet, in this study, the possibility of deliberation is not linked to the emergence of instances of controversy in communication, and the role that agreement and disagreement play in enhancing or hindering groups' deliberativeness is left open to empirical investigation.

Finally, the deliberativeness of a group in this study is assessed on the basis of virtually every activity that case studies undertake. Group meetings are not the single object of observation but just one of the six different activities under examination in each case study. There is no denying the importance of these group sessions. However, this study tries also to understand whether and how discursive engagement occurring in other activities has a role in the development of organisations' deliberative capacity.

Conclusions

The methodological discussion has highlighted the three main goals of this study and its interpretive-qualitative and comparative nature, showing that such an effort is grounded in deliberative democratic scholarship. However, to date, social movement literature represents a most interesting source of engagement. Thus, the second part of this chapter has tried to assess some of the main contributions from studies on the democratic qualities of social movement organizations, and it has envisioned ways in which this work can be related to these works. After the illustration of the main concept of this study (provided in Chapter One) and having discussed the methodology of the research and its relationship with existing literature, Chapter Three will focus on the object of this study, the Transition movement.

Chapter 3 Transition from a Deliberative Democratic Perspective

Summary

This chapter outlines the main features of Transition, frames it within social movement theory, and shows that the subject of this study is relevant to the wider debates in deliberative democracy. Section one introduces key ideas of Transition, considers its history and expansion, and explores some central aspects of Transition, including its relationship with politics. The second section remarks on the ‘oddity’ of Transition as a social movement, showing that while Transition shares many of social movements’ organisational and cultural aspects it lacks a protest background. The section ends with an overview of critical literature from localism and from a variety of other fields to which Transition can be connected. Section three frames Transition and this study within the field of deliberative democracy. A short discussion on deliberative systems opens this section, followed by a detailed examination of the public space. In particular, the importance of the public space in deliberative theory is remarked upon and some fundamental concepts that can be applied to its investigation are taken into consideration. The section closes with a discussion of the ideas of ‘organised activism’ and ‘everyday activism’.

An Overview of Transition

The Transition movement is built around the idea of developing community-led responses to the twin challenges of peak oil and climate change. Since these two problems are seen as intertwined, they need to be tackled together. However since its origins Transition has put particular emphasis on the idea of peak oil. This problem receives less attention from the public and elites despite the fact that its implications can be perceived more immediately and could therefore engage people more effectively than the climate change debate (see Hopkins, 2008b: ch.1 esp. 39). As a simple illustration, the problem of peak oil, as discussed by the movement, refers to the moment in which the highest production of oil is reached and the ensuing end of the age of ‘cheap-oil’. Peak oil, it is argued, is nearing (if it has not already arrived) and along with climate change it is bound to have dramatic effects (see *ibid.*: 18-25). Over the years, besides these two key issues Transition has come to include also other concerns, from the financial crisis to the peak of other natural resources that our societies depend on.

The term 'transition', as employed by the movement since its origins, is not related to academic and policy discussions and it has usually not been given a specific definition or a particularly in-depth analysis in most Transition writings.¹ 'Transition', in fact, is often simply characterised, as it is in its on-line disclaimer, as a shift away from 'unviable way of living' towards a future with 'lower energy' but 'happier, fairer and stronger communities' (see Transition Network). Transitioning towards more localised and resilient communities is the overarching objective of the movement (e.g. Hopkins, 2008b, Hopkins, 2010a).

Resilience and localisation are central in Hopkins' elaboration of Transition, since they provide a framework for the movement to engage with wider discussions on social, political and environmental matters. To Hopkins (2008b: 54), 'resilience in the context of communities and settlements, ... refers to their ability to not collapse at first sight of oil or food shortages, and their ability to respond with adaptability to disturbance'; it involves a 'fundamental rethink of assumptions about infrastructure and systems' towards a more sustainable economy and society. Indeed, resilience provides to the movement a fundamental concept through which to engage with the discourse of sustainability.² Localisation, on the other hand, refers to a 'far-reaching adjustment of economic focus from the global to the local', and unlike localism it focuses 'on the practicalities of building more localised economies' (Hopkins 2010a: 237-8). Localisation offers a platform to reflect upon economical and societal issues.

'Localisation carries within it an inherent social justice and resource-focused critique of globalisation (Bailey et al., 2010, North, 2010), emerging from concepts such as Limits to Growth (2004), Steady State economics (Daly, 1977) and Schumacher's (1974) concept of 'Buddhist economics'. Localisation is a social movement and a principle for social and economic reorganisation...' (Hopkins 2010a: 239).

The theoretical underpinnings and practical aspects of Transition were first explored in 2004 in Kinsale, Ireland. The movement's co-founder – and its main figure (Scott-Cato and Hillier, 2010: 875) – Rob Hopkins, as part of his course on permaculture design, realised a project which brought about an Energy Descent Plan for the local community. In 2006, those experiences were elaborated into a more comprehensive approach to localisation and resilience at community level, giving birth to the UK's first Transition Town in Totnes (TTT), Devon.

¹ The movement, however, has been connected to more academic discussions on 'transition'. An example is provided by Seyfang and Smith (2007) who link Transition to socio-technical regime transition literature.

² Barry (2012: ch.3) offers a particularly rich analysis of the idea of resilience stemming from Transition's interpretation of the concept. For a critique of 'resilience' as employed by movements such as Transition, see Mackinnon and Derickson (2012).

Although since then several Transitions have provided ‘success stories’, Totnes still retains a special importance to the movement as an inspirational and fairly advanced experiment.³ Indeed, TTT contained *in nuce* some fundamentals of the movement subsequently shared and elaborated throughout the world.

Within a few years, a plethora of Transitions formed in the UK as well as abroad. Today, Transitions are found mainly in Western countries particularly in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Groups are especially numerous in the English-speaking world but the movement is not limited to that area. Overall, the movement has succeeded in prompting action and collaboration in a variety of settings. Indeed, since its early stages, Transition has communicated in accessible ways its main ideas, which are related to a number of complex debates (for example, those on climate change and peak oil, and their effects on human communities). This was possible through the use of widely-circulated materials (including videos, movies, handbooks and a legion of on-line materials) as well as a raft of events (Transition Talks, Trainings, Conferences, etc.) that elicited great interest (see: Brangwyn and Hopkins, 2008, Hopkins, 2008b, Hopkins and Lipman, 2009, Hopkins, 2011). However, the successful spread of the movement in an incredible variety of localities does not imply that the level of engagement is the same across the various Initiatives (see Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2010). Interestingly, Quilley (2011: 9-10) remarks how, in practice, although Transition may aim at building ‘communities of fate’, an idea derived from Tönnies (2001 [1887]) (*Gemeinschaft*), the Transition movement resembles more a ‘community of choice’ (*Gesellschaft*). Thus a very specific segment of population, ‘liberal, highly-educated cosmopolitans with left-liberal political inclinations and a strong attachment to the institutions of liberal-social democracies’, is identified as engaged in Transition experiments (Quilley 2011: 9-10).

Transition experiments take action within widely different places and organisations, and the earlier denomination Transition Town has been replaced by the term Transition Initiative. The latter expression more aptly captures the varying types of contexts in which Transition is experimented, from streets to entire cities or regions as well as a wide range of organisations (see Hopkins, 2010a). Transitions are often connected to national and regional hubs, which are important to the life of the movement. Of particular relevance is the transnational Transition Network Ltd. set up in 2006 to ‘inspire, encourage, support, enable networking, and training’ Transition Initiatives around the world (Hopkins and Lipman, 2009: 15).⁴ The Transition

³ A description of Totnes and its particularly favourable conditions for Transition are discussed, among others, by Connors and McDonald (2010: 563) and extensively by Hopkins (2010a).

⁴ In December 2012, the Transition Network (TN) received the European Economic and Social Council (EESC) Civil Society Prize. The 2012 edition of the award, themed ‘Innovate for a Sustainable Europe’,

Network is also the organisation that groups need to contact to demonstrate that they are meeting some fundamental criteria necessary to become official Transition Initiatives. As of September 2013, the TN involved 462 official Transition Initiatives. However, the official groups linked in the Network are just one part of the movement, and, indeed, the necessity of having an 'official' Transition status for the organisations associated with the movement has generated some debate (see: Hopkins and Lipman, 2009, Connors and McDonald, 2010: 567-8, Smith, 2011: 101-2). For instance, there are 645 'Muller Initiatives' (see Transition Network), which have made contact with the Network without having yet obtained an official status.⁵ More broadly, there are 'countless' groups which try to implement the movement's ideas in their communities without formal connection to the Network. This variety shows that the Transition movement is based upon but not limited to action within local communities. Rather, it engages at different levels and with an incredibly vast array of organisations, including social, political and religious ones (see Transition Network, 2013).⁶

As noted by Quilley (2011: 2), the Transition approach draws on elements from a variety of pre-existing environmentalist concerns ranging from deep ecology to ecological economics. However, while the movement continues an environmentalist and alternative living tradition, it also differs from older environmentalism (ibid.: 2-4; Hopkins, 2008b). According to Connors and McDonald (2010: 559-60) Transition is an expression of a 'new environmentalism' discourse, the novelty of which is represented by collaborative and issue-based action on environmental matters. The movement's capability to rearticulate a variety of concerns – not limited to environmental ones – under a markedly localistic view contributes to the spread of the movement (Bailey et al., 2010: 602).

Transition's perspective appeals to a broad audience, including anti-globalisation sympathisers and environmentally conscious people (ibid.: 596-602), and integrates the movement within alternative knowledge networks and what Featherstone (2008) has termed 'counter global networks' (Mason and Whitehead, 2012: 496-7). To Quilley (2011: 11) the public debates in the Transition network are characterised by an egalitarian and feminist nature. Interestingly, the ongoing expansion of the movement's concerns – as an increasing number of people

was conferred for the 'REconomy' project, a TN pilot launched in 2011 to bolster 'green' social enterprise in local communities (see EESC, 2012). 'REconomy' is one of a raft of Transition projects which include local currencies, community energy, local food systems and press, just to mention but a few areas (see Transition Network, n.d.-b).

⁵ As reported on the Transition Network website, these groups are 'mulling over' the idea of becoming official Transitions and have not yet formally met all the requirements for becoming an official transition Initiative (see Transition Network).

⁶ Nothing like the rich investigations of the organisational aspects and democratic visions and practices of global justice movements is available for Transition (e.g. della Porta, 2007 esp. ch.1). Whilst such an undertaking would take an entire thesis of its own, for the purpose of this work I try to provide a sufficient degree of analysis to make sense of Transition from a deliberative standpoint.

around the world reflect upon its messages – parallels (and could be reinforced by) the wider extension and shifts characterising the environmental justice discourse (see Schlosberg, 2013b: 38). References to ‘environmental’ or ‘social justice’ are present in Transition writings and discussions. Transition’s projects, especially those on food and energy issues, seem to embody some features of the ‘sustainable materialism’ discourse, effectively bridging the movement to concerns that characterise the discourse on environmental justice (see *ibid.*: 48-9). Moreover as Dryzek et al. (2013: 140) claim, movements such as Transition do not represent a ‘post-material liberal interest group’; rather they see it as an example of ‘prefigurative politics and economics’, along with Barry and Quilley (2009). Finally, as suggested by Baber and Bartlett (2007: 13), concerns with decentralisation and more locally-focused politics are challenges that deliberative democracy and environmentalism have in common and Transition seems to embody fully.

The greatest influence on Transition is found in the philosophy of permaculture (e.g. Mollison and Holmgren, 1978), whose design principles underpin the Transition method (Hopkins, 2008b: 89). However, Transition has also gathered insights from studies on psychology of change and system thinking (*ibid.*). Given its antecedents, Transition places a particular emphasis on the link between the individual and the surrounding social and natural environment. Essentially, it argues that changing the latter is unlikely unless the former is changed. This dynamic is well captured by the oft-mentioned idea of Inner (and Outer) Transition, according to which taking care of one’s inner dimension is central to promoting positive change. Emphasis upon the inner being, however, is paralleled by a focus upon more relational aspects involving action at community level.

Countless Transition ‘success stories’ can be found online. Bailey et al. (2010: 599) point to a number of examples: Somerset County Council, which became the first Transition local authority in the UK in 2008 and established working relationships with the movement (similar to Montevoglio’s Transition, which is examined in this dissertation); Transition Leicester, which submitted a plan for the development of a local eco-town; and Transition Glastonbury, which supported the inclusion of carbon reduction and resilience building in the local development plan. Similarly, Seyfang and Haxeltine (2010: 15-6) report that Transition Town Totnes was recognised as one of the ten ‘Low Carbon Communities’ by the Department for Energy and Climate Change, and that Transition Trainings for local authorities have been organised by a number of Transition Initiatives. Other interesting cases are peak oil resolutions, like the one championed by Nottingham City Council (with help from the local Transition), and dozens of Energy Descent Action Plans which, following Totnes’ and Kinsale’s examples, have been accepted by local governments in New Zealand, Australia and the USA. Transition has also

introduced complementary local currencies with the Brixton Pound representing the most advanced experiment (see Longhurst and Seyfang, 2011).

Probably none of the above projects would have been possible without collaboration with local institutions, which occasionally are key partners for Transitions. However, Transition embraces a 'do-it-yourself' approach (Scott-Cato and Hillier, 2010: 879-80, Barry and Quilley, 2009: 13, Quilley, 2011: 4), and one of its core ideas is that communities should take action without waiting for governments and corporations. In many cases, ranging from the organisation of an event to awareness-raising campaigns, institutional collaboration is not vital but it would be hard to disregard it. Thus, besides official collaboration and totally independent activities, instances of a more informal interaction with local institutions configure another, fairly frequent, type of relationship for Transition groups.

In regard to politics in particular, government is seen by Transition as a 'reactive' institution, which by itself is not capable of fully addressing the challenges the movement envisions. The movement asserts that governments should be addressed by a 'proactive' citizenry, especially at local level where the relationship is more straightforward (Hopkins, 2010b: 76). However, government, in Hopkins' (2010b: 2) words, 'is part of the solution'. In fact, a key tenet of Transition is to avoid the 'them and us' adversarial competitive logic when dealing with other actors in the community. In order to solve fundamentally common problems it is necessary to avoid divisiveness. Transitions should refrain from confrontational attitudes and maintain a non-adversarial and an inclusive approach (see in particular Hopkins, 2008a). Politics ought not to lead Transition, which remains fundamentally a community response, but groups should 'build a bridge towards local government' (Hopkins, 2008b: 170, for a broader discussion see Rowell, 2010). As shown by a national survey, 82.4% of Transition Initiatives in the UK have actually already started this process (Haxeltine and Seyfang, 2009: 10). In spite of that, Transition is seen as apolitical.⁷ However, there is no doubt that the movement deals with politically-loaded issues (Chatterton and Cutler, 2008: 34, Haxeltine and Seyfang, 2009: 8-14, Connors and McDonald, 2010: 560, North, 2010, Smith, 2011: 102, Mason and Whitehead, 2012: 511) even when Transition strives to act 'below the radar' (Hopkins, 2008b: 146) of mainstream politics.

Ultimately Transition's firm willingness to collaborate with political actors, among others, provides a fundamental connection between the movement and politics, especially at the local level given the community-based nature of the movement. This focus on collaboration has

⁷ In his study on French social movements, Mathieu (2007) shows that, even when they are engaged on highly-politicised issues, many social movements find it important to emphasise their autonomy from the political field.

spurred a number of critiques and warnings about the risks involved. Those aimed at Transition specifically include, for example: 'co-option' (Smith, 2011: 102); 'over reliance on compromise' (Connors and McDonald, 2010: 560); difficulties in freely and fully engaging with issues of concern, and incorporation into State services provision with insufficient funding (ibid.: 566); the possibility of mere 'complimentary government' (Chatterton and Cutler, 2008: 159) and that groups may be able to act only on minor issues and risk being dragged into 'a bland local consensus of inaction' on more relevant matters (Mason and Whitehead, 2012: 512). Without entering into the detail of these debates it is important to emphasise that these critiques recast in different ways a fundamental problem, that is: the notion of community-engagement is vague and widespread enough to include experiences whose quality cannot be taken for granted (Bryson and Mowbray, 1981, Craig, 2007, Head, 2007). Ultimately however, and notwithstanding critiques about whether the movement ought to seek open and non-adversarial collaboration with institutions, the Transition movement is already willingly walking this path. Having an open and non-confrontational approach is a central tenet of the movement and it is hard to remove that element without transforming the whole Transition concept into something else. Collaboration with political actors, as well as businesses, is sought (even if the aim is to change their mentality) and, in many cases, Transition-inspired enterprises are legal entities and registered companies running their activities in the context of existing market and political structures.

Among its various activities Transition also deals with political issues. Even when Transitions interact with institutions only on issues that allow for a non-confrontational approach, there is a need for an open and substantive engagement. Towards this goal the movement stresses the value of open, clear and high quality communication. Transition recommends the use of Open Space Technology or World Café. The movement's publications often illustrate the benefit of these two 'tools' and provide guidance on how to run these events (see respectively: Owen, 1997, Brown, 2005). Briefly, Open Space Technology usually starts with all participants seating in a circle and the facilitator introducing the theme under examination and the various rules; afterwards, participants can propose to host a discussion on a certain question and make sure that notes are taken, they should also report the main issues and make them available to everyone, the agenda is developed on the basis of the discussion groups that are formed; participants can decide what discussions to attend and move freely among the various groups; eventually, a document including the main points that emerged from the group-reports is made available at the end of the proceedings. During a World Café, participants usually explore given issues through rounds of conversation in small groups (whilst the bulk of participants regularly change tables, hosts remain at the same table and brief others on the contents of the discussions) and key ideas are collected at each round and eventually

discussed by all participants in a plenary session. These methods are seen as instrumental in debating issues productively within Transition groups and also involving communities in the exploration of complex themes (Hopkins, 2008b, 2011). Indeed, deliberation and discussion are said to be central to the movement (Kelly and Cumming, 2010: 16, Mason and Whitehead, 2012: 496), and as argued by Barry (2012: 114), deliberation is a 'necessary prelude to action'. This observation suggests a commitment to some deliberative principles in the movement and it seems in line with della Porta's (2009e: 7) remark that paying attention to communication processes is increasingly common among movements with democratic aspirations.

Transition, however, is also characterised by a markedly 'pragmatic turn', which stresses the primary importance of practical activities (e.g. the great reskilling) (Quilley, 2011: 4) and emphasises the importance of visible and tangible initiatives. These are important in themselves and also to raise awareness and motivate people to participate in addressing 'urgent' challenges. In fact, to Hopkins (2008b: 9), one of the first 'lessons' of Transition is to 'create a sense that something is happening' (ibid.: 125) and to promote a positive and inspirational vision of an 'abundant future' (ibid.: 126). This approach is well captured by the idea of 'engaged optimism' (Hopkins, 2010b: 2). Although it envisions fairly dramatic developments in relation to peak oil and climate change, Transition has a proactive attitude and it shuns survivalist views, in which environmental and social disasters loom large and little space is left for social responses. Instead, the movement believes that in order to address the effects of climate change and peak oil it is vital to build resilience, whilst a future of economic (re)localisation is both desirable and unavoidable (Hopkins, 2006, Bailey et al., 2010, Quilley, 2011: 6).

Finally, Transition admits that small-scale and grassroots action does not suffice to address global issues. However, local communities offer a more accessible platform for people to take action. Moreover, it is argued, action at local level will be increasingly important as peak oil and climate change have a greater effect on individuals' lives. Indeed, Transition claims that changes could provide a unique opportunity to empower people and make their lives happier. Although there are guidelines, steps, advices, networking and partnerships to assist communities to start their own Transition, the movement acknowledges that a one size fits all model cannot be applied. Each community is responsible for finding its own path and a necessarily localised solution. Indeed, a naturally open-ended approach is encouraged, in which individual participation as well as processes should unfold in their own way (Hopkins, 2008b: 172).

Framing Transition within Social Movement Theory

Transition is commonly referred to as a social movement. For instance, geographer Peter Taylor describes it as: 'one of the most impressive and important social/community movements of the early twenty-first century' (2012: 496). However, as Barry and Quilley (2009: 18) argue, in one of the earliest and more in-depth analyses of the phenomenon, Transition differs in important aspects from traditional (new) social movements in 'its ontological and strategic orientation'. As the authors point out, what makes Transition 'an odd kind of social movement' is 'a communicative and ideological misalignment' with more explicitly 'political' globalisation and climate change protest.⁸ A similar position is taken by Scott-Cato and Hillier, who study the Transition movement using Deleuzian philosophy, and specifically the notion of micropolitics. For them, the 'viral' quality of the movement (Hopkins, 2010b: 3-4) is a manifestation of its rhizomic nature (unlike the Network that represents an element of 'arborescence') (Scott-Cato and Hillier, 2010: 871-3) through which Transition successfully spread across hundreds of relocalisation initiatives (see also Bailey et al., 2010). It is thus interesting to explore whether and how Transition can be understood as a social movement.

To begin with, Transition does display several organisational features widely shared among social movements. Networks of Transitions exist at different levels, and generally they have low institutionalisation; formal associations (e.g. the Transition Network Ltd.) are paralleled by small and informal groups (e.g. most Transitions); although the figure of Rob Hopkins is widely acknowledged, in practice various Initiatives rarely feature strong leaderships; at local level in particular organisation and coordination appears fairly flexible, additionally there is no formal membership to access groups (see della Porta, 2005b: 79). According to a classical definition, a social movement is characterised by '(1) informal networks, based (2) on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about (3) conflictual issues, through (4) the frequent use of various forms of protest' (della Porta and Diani, 1999: 16). Following Melucci (1994: 102) one could argue that the 'conflictual' component characterising new social movements is to be intended as 'a challenge that recasts the language and cultural codes that organize information'. Transition can be seen as giving voice to 'actors [that] fight for control and the allocation of socially produced potential for action', which suggests that there is a 'conflictual' dimension also in Transition. Therefore, the applicability of the above definition to Transition may be limited by the latter's lack of a protest background. However, it is worth noticing that an earlier version of the aforementioned characterisation can be found in Diani (1992: 7), who substitutes '(4)' with a possibly more congenial criterion according to which social movements

⁸ More generally Polletta, (2006) has theorised the issue of 'awkward movements' highlighting how understanding such organisations requires extra care in order not to force upon them inappropriate frameworks.

take 'action which displays largely outside the institutional sphere and the routine procedures of social life'. Moreover, although the notion of conflict has been historically important to (understand) social movements, with time the possibility to envision social movements as spaces in which to overcome conflict and build consensus has also emerged (della Porta, 2009b). Overall, it appears that Transition manifests a 'family resemblance' with new social movements which, according to Crossley (2002: 2, 7) borrowing from Wittgenstein, is typical of social movements, in so far as they lack 'a fixed essence'.

More basic considerations can also be drawn on the characterisation of Transition as a social movement. Transition shares to a large extent the cultural traits that broadly characterise new social movements. As Habermas (1981: 31) argued long ago, conflict in Western societies has moved towards 'cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialisation'. It is not sparked by '*problems of distribution*' but concerns over the '*grammar of forms of life*' (italic in original), which seems to capture also the themes around which Transition (like 'new social movements' at large) mobilises. Indeed, Transition does seem to embody concerns related to life quality within the context of a post-materialist society (Inglehart, 1989: ch 11, Touraine et al., 1988, Benhabib, 1996a: 5), and it engages on cultural grounds within the context of information societies (Melucci, 1994:109-126).⁹

Furthermore, Transition shows substantive similarities to Claus Offe's (1985) fourfold ideal-typical characterisation of new social movements: *issues*, *actors*, *values* and *modes of action* (ibid.: 828). Transition's and new social movements' 'dominant' *issues* seem to overlap.¹⁰ Moreover, Transition embodies in many ways new social movement's 'most prominent' *values* of autonomy and identity. Likewise, new social movements' *actors*, like Transition participants, do not 'rely for their self-identification on either the established political codes...nor on ...socioeconomic codes'. Rather, categories in which political conflict is coded are taken 'from the movements' issues' (ibid.: 831). Finally, regarding its '*mode of action*', Transition features many of the characteristics that define new social movements when it comes to the 'internal mode of actions'. It features for example a 'strong reliance upon de-differentiation' (ibid.: 829), which in the words of Offe (1985: 829-30) is 'the fusion of public and private roles, instrumental and expressive behaviour, community and organization, and in particular a poor and at best transient demarcation between the roles of "members" and formal "leaders"'.

⁹ Indeed, as reported by virtually all the participants I interviewed, Transition represented to them an *educational experience* and many thought of Transition in terms of a *lifestyle change* to their own and their community's benefit.

¹⁰ 'Dominant issues of new social movements consist in the concern with a (physical) territory, space of action, or "life-world," such as the body, health, and sexual identity; the neighbourhoods, city, and the physical environment; the cultural, ethnic, national, and linguistic heritage and identity; the physical conditions of life, and survival for humankind in general' (Offe, 1985: 828-9, cf. Medearis, 2005: 61).

Once more, with Offe's model, the deepest differences between Transition and new social movements concern the '*external mode of action*'. Offe's new social movements feature demonstration tactics and 'other forms of action making use of physical presence of (large numbers) of people'. Protest tactics, moreover, are 'paralleled by protest demands' framed in negative forms, and '[s]ocial movements relate to other political actors and opponents... in terms of sharp antinomies' (ibid.: 830). Even if these modes of action may have a role within Transition (although protest tactics are fairly distant from Transition's repertoire) the movement, at least in its ideology, firmly opposes this approach. Transition's mode of action is purposely shaped to distinguish the movement from more confrontational 'conventional environmentalism' (Hopkins, 2008b: 135). It is worth remembering, however, that as argued by Keck and Sikkink (1998: 226-30), protest politics is just one of the two strategic alternatives for social movements to gain attention (see also Baber and Bartlett, 2007: 6). An alternative strategy of information politics, which strives to provide valid information to selected sites, would permit a social movement to pursue the same end through different means. Furthermore, as Polletta (2002: 4) points out, often social movements 'have defined themselves in imitation of, or opposition to, their higher profile counterparts' and these choices have affected their strategies (see also Polletta, 2005b).

To Offe, new social movements are '*incapable*' of negotiating because they would have nothing to offer in return for possible concessions. This occurs because they do not have 'the properties of formal organisations' (e.g. 'the internal bindingness of representative decisions'). Indeed, they 'typically lack a coherent set of ideological principles and interpretations of the world from which an image of a desirable arrangement of society could be derived and the steps toward transformation could be deduced' (Offe, 1985: 830-1). Without speculating here on the actual capability of Transition to negotiate, and overlooking the fact that the movement is variegated, it seems clear that at least a (more or less) coherent worldview does exist for Transition. The movement, more than fighting back over given issues, puts a deliberate effort into envisioning a Transition future. Thus, whilst to Offe 'a practice of exchanging long-term gains for short-term losses, a practice of tactical rationality and alliance formation' cannot be expected from social movements, this can occur with Transition (ibid. 211).

Ultimately, all of the above aspects may account for Transition's different 'ontological and strategic orientation' pointed out by Barry and Quilley (2009: 18). Moreover, they may also shed some light on Transition's willingness to collaborate also with political institutions. In the parlance of collective action frames (Hunt et al., 1994: 190-2, Benford and Snow, 2000) we may say that Transition partakes in framing or 'meaning construction' processes. Nonetheless, its diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing (that is the identification of the source of

an issue, the quest for potential solutions and the motivation to engage in collective action) differs from that of more traditional social movements.

Importantly, Transition's stress upon an ideally non-confrontational and non-blaming approach surely deserves attention, yet it should not be overemphasised. In fact, as shown in this study, Transition's participants in practice tend to be extremely critical of existing politics, and although they have not developed any major protest background, their critical views on politics do influence the development of local activities. If one considers that the image of anti-political social movements significantly diverges from a reality made of movements which critically and selectively engage with institutions (della Porta, 2009f: 122), it appears that Transition, although peculiar, does not diverge fundamentally from other social movements.

Often ordinary participants share a discourse without being well versed in the detail of the numerous Transition-related debates (Quilley, 2011: 9). Likewise, Transitioners' level and type of interest, as well as their involvement in the movement, varies. Such differences in level of awareness and involvement characterise local initiatives no less than the movement more broadly. In the Transitions I researched, usually a few participants were highly engaged whereas most people were less active. Overall, Transition appears to be (to use a term often employed by participants themselves) a 'catalyst' movement, involving the formation and networking of local companies clustering around more or less shared narratives (which are critical of contemporary ways of living) that individuals seek to enact privately and publicly.

Social movement theories, as well as Transition's ideology, seem to converge also on the relevance of a movement's bottom-up nature. Transition is ultimately grounded in local communities (Seyfang and Smith, 2007, Hopkins, 2010a, Taylor, 2012) and, following Barry (2012: 79), it can be defined as a 'grassroots movement'. Indeed, Transition has also been presented as a case of 'grassroots innovation' in studies on the movement from a Strategic Niche Management perspective (see: Haxeltine and Seyfang, 2009, Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2010).¹¹ Such 'grassroots' nature of course does not grant that effective and democratic engagement occurs. For example, Connors and McDonald (2010) and Smith (2011) have concerns about Transition's capacity to successfully meet the expectations of its participants.

In passing, it is worth noticing that besides social movement theories there is also a burgeoning critical literature on localism that helps understand Transition in light of its own localistic and resilience building objectives. Actually, in considering the potential

¹¹ Citing studies by Doherty (1999), Drury et al. (2003), and Wall (1999), della Porta and Diani (2006: 149) notice how already during the 1990s 'grassroots' protests connected to the idea of locality and environmental concerns (though mainly against road constructions) were common in many UK communities.

limitations of localism, Hopkins (2010a: 154) himself refers to the distinction between 'unreflexive' and 'reflexive localism'. The latter challenges inequality and hegemonic domination, while 'unreflexive' or 'defensive localism', to use Winter's (2003) term, involves a narrow response to cope with economic difficulties and ineffective national politics. Transition's localistic perspective actually seems largely built in opposition to this latter and more conventional understanding of localism. In fact, Transition stresses the role and prerogatives of agents of localisation from below, and it resonates with forms of localism that seek to enhance local democracy and the 'reflection of local identity' (Pratchett, 2004). Indeed, Hess (2008: 625), drawing from a US-centred analysis, argues that localism in itself is also a social movement 'that aims to increase the role of locally owned, independent businesses and other organizations that primarily serve the geographical communities in which they are located'.

Related approaches which seem to resonate with these distinctions can also be found in a variety of other disciplines. In geography, Featherston et al. (2012) contrast the notion of 'progressive localism' with what they label 'austerity localism' – the 'latest mutation of neoliberalism' (ibid.: 178). In economics, Transition's localistic view is close to an eco-localistic approach (Curtis, 2003) which, unlike (new) localism, challenges 'conventional economic wisdom' and 'reject[s] globalization' (ibid.: 84). In this sense, Transition strives towards 'intentional' localisation, as opposed to an 'immanent' localism, intended as a mere adaptation to the varying circumstances of market economy (North, 2010: 589). Finally, in development studies (Mohan and Stokke, 2000), a distinction is drawn between 'revisionist neo-liberalism' – which is 'top-down' – and a 'post-Marxist' conception of localism. In this latter case, '[t]he institutionalised political system constitutes a set of negative or positive political opportunity structures that can facilitate or hamper collective action rather than simply being a monolithic 'other' for collective actors' (ibid. 260). Such a conception in particular acknowledges, as Transition does, that the relationships between community actors and political institutions need not necessarily be conflicting. Moreover, it also highlights that community organisations do not need to wait for or engage with 'the structures, policies and decisions of the formal state' either for 'democratic enfranchisement' (Purcell, 2006: 1930) or for achieving their own goals.

Deliberative Democratic Theory and Organisations in the Public Space

As mentioned in Chapter One, in Dryzek's (2009; 2010a) deliberative system there is an essential distinction between public and empowered space. Briefly, the latter consists of 'a deliberative space for actors, recognizably part of institutions producing collective decisions', that is, formally and informally empowered institutions (Dryzek, 2009: 1385). However, some

connections to empowered spaces notwithstanding, Transitions are firmly rooted in the public space. In fact, the movement draws its nourishment from community engagement, which it seeks to elicit and champion. Dryzek defines the public space as:

‘a deliberative space (or spaces) with few restrictions on who can participate and with few legal restrictions on what participants can say, thereby featuring a diversity of viewpoints. Such spaces may be found in connection with the media, social movements, activist associations, physical locations where people can gather and talk (cafés, classrooms, bars, public squares), the Internet, public hearings, and designed citizen-based forums of various sorts ...’ (ibid.).

Public and empowered spaces, and the elements composing each of them, may feature different levels of deliberative capacity. Importantly, the overall capacity of a deliberative system is not given by the sum of various deliberative capacities of a system’s components. Rather, what matters is whether and how these components interact. Therefore, besides the abovementioned spaces, characteristic concepts of Dryzek’s (2009, 2010a) deliberative system are ‘transmission’ and ‘accountability’, which are meant to link public and empowered spaces, as well as the overall level of ‘decisiveness’. Indeed, the connectivity between different components is a key function that a deliberative system needs to deliver (Mendonça, 2013).¹² Democracy can be conceptualized as a process instead of a ‘settled order of any sort’ (Dryzek, 2000: 86, see also Dryzek et al., 2003: 104, Cunningham, 1987, Hyland, 1995), and although deliberative capacity as a concept is meant to capture some structural characteristics, rather than pure contingencies, it is not to be intended as a fixed model for mechanical application. In a sense, the notion of deliberative capacity seems to acknowledge how essentially mobile arrangements rather than structured ones may help us think about the world we live in and its politics (see Deleuze and Guattari, 1977).

Assessing the deliberative capacity of a Transition Initiative is different from making observations on a whole public space and it is even more distant from configuring and analysing a deliberative system in its entirety (see Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012). It is at best a preliminary step towards these directions, an analytical effort towards developing an understanding on how deliberative capacity is synthesised. Whereas the systemic approach provides a wide theoretical framework within which the case studies can be understood, this research does not and could not develop an analysis at the level of deliberative systems. Rather, it focuses on the deliberative and democratic qualities of organisations within the public space.

¹² In a later work ‘meta-deliberation’ was added as another fundamental feature (Dryzek and Stevenson, 2011).

Since the public space is central to this study, it is necessary to discuss this idea further and see how it relates to the wider debates in deliberative theory and to these case studies. The concept of 'public space' stems from the notion of public sphere, which, following the work of Habermas (1989, 1996) and Benhabib (1996a), is the place 'where perspectives and ideas are generated, policy decisions are questioned, and citizen competences are developed' (Dryzek, 2009: 1383; cf. Young 2000).

The idea of the public sphere can be articulated only in connection to other concepts and normative concerns of primary relevance from a critical theory standpoint, within which Dryzek's analysis is largely grounded. Briefly, taking *communicative action* as referring to the 'intersubjective understanding, the coordination of actions through discussion, and the socialization of members of a community', *communicative rationality* is interpreted as 'the extent to which this action is characterized by the reflexive understanding of competent actors' (Dryzek, 1990: 14). In this sense, the *ideal speech situation* represents the 'full realization of the precepts of communicative rationality', a counterfactual idea (ibid.: 36), since interactions in the public sphere instead largely feature *systematically distorted communications* (see Gross, 2006). The *lifeworld*, portrayed after White's (1988) characterisation as a symbolic network for interaction among subjects, is prey to the *system's instrumental rationality* yet it remains the 'natural home' of communicative rationality and a venue for resistance and counter-attack to its *colonisation* (Dryzek, 1990: 51, 81). Borrowing from McCarthy (1984), to Dryzek (1990: 37) the idea of *public sphere* 'is central to any attempt to pursue a communicatively rationalized lifeworld' given its distinctively politicised nature which distinguishes it from *civil society* (Dryzek et al., 2003: 15).¹³

As argued by Fraser (1990) the notion of public sphere should be plural and open to counterpublics; it should not be limited to an opinion-making function (weak publics) but should aim at decision-making (strong publics). Also, Young (2000) builds upon the seminal work of Cohen and Arato (1992) on civil society, and in particular upon their distinction between 'defensive' and 'offensive' aspects of civil society, to show the variety of functions that different publics perform.¹⁴ The former aspect refers to 'the way associations and social movements develop forms of communicative interaction that support identities, expand participatory possibilities, and create networks of solidarity'; the latter, in contrast, 'aims to

¹³ Indeed, this is also central to deliberative theorists like Benhabib (1996c: 68), who claims that: '[a] public sphere of deliberation about matters of mutual concern is essential to the legitimacy of democratic institutions'.

¹⁴ Young talks of 'self-organization' and 'public sphere' functions and merges this dual distinction with the aforementioned threefold typology of associations in the public to show the complex contribution of public space organisations to democratic life, both in terms of potential and flaws (Young, 2000: 164, see also Benhabib, 1996a).

influence or reform state or corporate policies and practices' (Young, 2000: 163-4). Moreover, it is along this line that runs the distinction between 'private', 'civic' and 'political' associations, which feature a higher or lesser engagement in either or both self-organising and public sphere functions (ibid.: 161-3). These distinctions are particularly valuable as they can be applied to empirical research. Indeed, they can be used to understand whether organisations belonging to the same movement but taking action in different situations may, in practice, engage in different activities and if this may result in the development of different qualities from a deliberative democratic standpoint.

To Habermas (1996: 307-8), 'on account of its anarchic structure, the general public sphere' is 'more vulnerable' than 'the institutionalised public sphere'. 'The structures of such a pluralistic public sphere develop more or less spontaneously' and 'the currents of public communication...flow through different publics'. These features '*taken together... form a "wild" complex that resists organization as a whole*' (ibid.: 306, italics added). Arguably Habermas does not seem to imply that when taken apart these processes necessarily display poor deliberative and democratic qualities. More modestly, Habermas claims that '[o]n account of its anarchic structure, the general public sphere is ... more vulnerable to the repressive and exclusionary effects of unequally distributed social power, structural violence, and systematically distorted communication than are the institutionalized public sphere of parliamentary bodies'. However, the public sphere 'has the advantage of a medium of *unrestricted* communication', which allows it to perceive new problems more sensitively, and to achieve wider and more expressive self-understanding and 'fewer compulsions' in the articulation of 'collective identities and need interpretations' (ibid.: 307-8, italics in original).

This point is given even more vigour in Dryzek's analysis (1996b, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2010a) where he has repeatedly argued that, when compared with major limitations to the democratization of the state, civil society appears to have fewer constraints, and offers potentially more room for reflexive action, whilst remaining a powerful area for political life. Deliberation can actually be located also in 'the engagement of discourses in the public sphere' – and not just in face-to-face public deliberation (Dryzek, 2006: 57). Obviously, the public sphere(s) is home, among others, to social movements that are sources of innovation in political life (Bohman, 1996: ch. 5, Dryzek et al., 2003) and, by virtue of 'their radical and modern character', they 'can contribute to the establishment or revival of free discourse in a public space' (Dryzek 1990: 49). In fact, organizations in the public sphere(s) represent, for example, dynamic sites of institutional innovation 'reflected most productively in their own internal organizations' (Dryzek, 1992: 532). In the words of della Porta (2009a: 227): 'democracy is important for movements, and movements are important for democracy'. As

Baber and Bartlett (2007: 7) put it, social movements may be problematic yet desirable components of deliberative politics. Indeed, the role of social movements in democratic publics can vary greatly, from manifestations of (more or less deliberative) self-referential enclaves to agents of discursive democratisation. Overall a social movement may come closer to one or the other end of this spectrum. However, the tension between niche and everyday aspects is a funding dimension of any social movement and the way it is handled might affect its deliberative capacity.

Jane Mansbridge's categories of 'organized' and 'everyday' activism (Mansbridge, 2005, Mansbridge and Flaster, 2007, Mansbridge, 2012) as well as the concept of 'everyday talk' may help reflect upon the discussion on the public sphere, social movements and deliberative democracy (Mansbridge, 1999, 2010).¹⁵ Transition in fact seems to offer many of its participants a powerful platform to elicit, besides the more traditional 'organized' and 'enclave' forms of activism, what Mansbridge (2012, 2010) terms 'everyday activism'. These concepts are derived from a wide analysis of social movement theory and in particular the idea of 'free spaces' (e.g. Polletta, 1999a, see also Boyte and Evans, 1992).

Briefly, although they are far from having an unproblematic role in deliberative democracy, enclaves (e.g. Sunstein, 2002, 2005) 'have the function, among other things, of production new and counter-hegemonic ideas' (Mansbridge 2010: 15). In contrast, everyday talk aims, among other things, at 'processing, mulling over, trying out, implementing, selecting from and adapting these ideas' (ibid.). Everyday activism, which is a manifestation of everyday talk, refers to 'talk and action in everyday life that is not consciously coordinated with the actions of others but is (1) to some degree caused (inspired, encouraged) by a social movement and (2) consciously intended to change others' ideas or behaviour in directions advocated by the movement' (Mansbridge, 2012; see also Mansbridge 2010: 47). Such a definition of 'everyday activism' seems to capture to a great extent the characteristics of Transition participants, and it may be worthwhile exploring this idea more closely.

¹⁵It is worth noticing how the Transition movement seems to recruit widely among 'Everyday Makers' (EMs) and occasionally also 'Expert Citizens' (ECs) (Bang, 2004). In summary, ECs are characterised by an attitude of 'do-it-yourself', act locally, take action with confidence for fun as well as out of necessity, and they are involved on an ad-hoc or part-time basis, acting in response to concrete issues rather than being ideologically driven, and they use the system if necessary. EMs, on the other hand, conceptualise politics as a discursive construct, are engaged on a full-time basis with a project identity reflecting their own lifestyle, and have enough expertise to influence elite networks; they prefer negotiation and dialogue over an antagonistic and oppositional approach since they consider themselves within, rather than outside or in opposition to, the system (Li and Marsh, 2008: 250-1). However, Bang (2010) advances his formulation of EMs and ECs largely as an alternative to Habermasian and Dryzekian notions of participation in political life. Given these features, critically appropriating these ideas for application in the field of deliberative democracy presents major conceptual difficulties.

Mansbridge's analysis of everyday activism is grounded in the context of the feminist movement, and specifically around the observation of the genesis and spread of the idea of 'male chauvinist'. Interestingly, the notion of 'everyday activism' is related to that of 'everyday' and 'organised activists'. According to an early definition, an "everyday activist" in a social movement [is] anyone who both acts in her own life to redress a perceived injustice and takes this action in the context of, and in the same broad direction as, that social movement' (Mansbridge and Flaster, 2007: 629). Indeed, occasionally 'a measurable link' between a movement and everyday activism occurs when an Everyday Activist 'frames her action in the language' of the movement (Mansbridge and Flaster 2007: 629). 'Organised activists', though, have further characteristics: 'They work, in varying degrees, to coordinate activities that further the movement. They give up time in their lives for that work. They often act and talk with one another in "enclaves"...' (ibid.: 630). Everyday activists act in a less protected environment than organised activists and they usually do not enact deep challenges to the system. Rather, they 'act to get benefits *and* because they are motivated by a sense of injustice' (ibid.: 632). They share an 'oppositional consciousness' with organised activists, though it is more limited (ibid.).

To make sense of this characterisation one has to recall that this formulation of 'everyday' and 'organised activism', as expressed in the 'enclave theory of change', is related to the birth and spread of counter-hegemonic ideas in opposition to a system of domination and injustice (Mansbridge, 2005). The above theory was developed using a metaphor of genetic evolution. 'Organized activists' are the agents of 'random variation', acting in the protected enclaves in which they bond and 'craft new ideas' to oppose the 'pattern of subordination' they are exposed to. 'Everyday activists', on the other hand, are the agents of 'selective retention', that is ordinary people who in their everyday life draw selectively from some of the ideas created by 'organised activists'. Usually 'everyday activists' selectively use these ideas 'to pursue their counter-hegemonic aims' in their daily lives 'to change the world around them' through 'acts of persuasion more than of power' (ibid.: 341, 345).¹⁶ Not only do everyday activists take action against injustices highlighted by a certain movement without necessarily interacting with formal politics, but they also include those 'individuals who have never taken a public stand supporting that movement' (Mansbridge and Flaster, 2007: 628). Through their 'thought and action' everyday activists represent a fundamental manifestation of a social movement (Mansbridge 2005: 340).

A reformulation of 'organized' and 'everyday activism' that is less closely tied to the original type of social movements from which the ideas seem to originate may favour the applicability

¹⁶ On how the 'logic of formal justice' favours this process, see Mansbridge (2005).

of these concepts to Transition. The latest definition of 'everyday activism' (Mansbridge, 2012) seems to allow such a move in that the categories of injustice, oppositional consciousness, domination and the lack of an overt support for a movement are not explicitly mentioned. Still, while the actions of the Transition participants often consist of 'small and largely and unplanned acts' (Mansbridge, 2010: 47), they often display a level of 'conscious coordination' (for example in attending meetings) that is excluded by the formulation under examination. One could propose that it is in the extremely different levels of work aimed to actively promote the coordination and the organisation of the movement's activities and in the intensity of the actors' interaction where a fundamental difference between 'everyday' and 'organised' activists lie.¹⁷ Finally, it is worth noticing that to Mansbridge and Flaster (2012: 628) the effects of everyday activism can be seen in 'everyday outcomes', that is 'changes in the realm of daily life'. In the idea of deliberative capacity such a possibility is rendered in the interpretation of 'consequentiality' as change in 'social outcomes' (Dryzek 2009; 2010a). This resonates with what to Gusfield (1994: 70) is a feature of reflexive new social movements, that is their capability to 'have consequences and influence behaviour' without requiring ideological agreement or integral commitment.

Finally, the broader concept of 'everyday talk' employed by Mansbridge (1999) is interesting when thinking of Transition from a deliberative perspective and, as seen, it is surely related to activism and 'everyday activism' more specifically (ibid.: 217). To Mansbridge, 'everyday talk is not always self-conscious, reflective, or considered' and not necessarily eminently political. Nonetheless, it can be 'a crucial part of the full deliberative system' (ibid.: 211). Moreover, its deliberative and democratic qualities can be tested. As she argues (ibid.: 228), '[w]ith the possible exception of accountability...criteria [for judging the quality of deliberation] do not change; they simply become looser in application'. Obviously, among the case studies important interactions took place within daily interactions exposed to widely varying circumstances as well as in discursive venues deliberately conceived by participants. Likewise, 'organised' and 'everyday' activists both contribute to the life of community groups, and these distinctions may support the analysis of the deliberative and democratic qualities of the four case studies.

Theoretical issues such as those being considered throughout this chapter have helped to identify the relevant aspects that each case study addresses. To begin with, as seen, Transition hosts a wide array of views on environmental and community subjects. Groups in different situations may interpret these views in various manners and seek different ways to implement

¹⁷ For an in-depth discussion of coordination as a derivation from complex adaptive system theory see Mansbridge (2010: 21-2).

them. The extent and ways in which these choices affect the deliberative and democratic qualities of each group can now be investigated. Moreover, as seen, Transition embodies concerns related to deliberative democratic ideas, similarly to other contemporary movements, and the case studies show whether and to what extent such ideas find application in practice. On the other hand, the Transition movement, as it has emerged, retains specific aspects which make it somewhat different from other contemporary movements, and it is interesting to observe whether and how these differences (e.g. the lack of an oppositional repertoire) affect deliberativeness. By focusing on the empirical analysis of community organisations this study allows a close observation not just of the specific features of this movement but also of the extent to which internal differences characterise social movements. As seen through this chapter, theoretical speculation suggests that the public space hosts an array of discursive processes, which may feature different deliberative and democratic qualities and perform different functions. However, these dynamics are in need of further empirical observation. This work specifically investigates the main activities characterising the organisations under examination, their qualities from a genuinely deliberative democratic standpoint, and what aspects seem important in affecting deliberative capacity. Deliberative democratic theory has projected significant expectations and reservations on the potential of organisations in the public sphere. The empirical investigation in this work seeks to understand the extent to which these views find support in the day-to-day life of some of these groups, and in doing so this study attempts to narrow the gap between theoretical speculation and empirical research on this subject.

Conclusions

This chapter has introduced the subject of this study, the Transition movement, to which the four case studies in this research belong. The first section provided to the reader an understanding of some cardinal features of the movement. Those aspects of the movement that are most relevant to this study naturally received greater attention, and there was an underlying effort to mix sources from Transition with more critical academic literature. Section two made the connection with academic research explicit, arguing that social movement theory provides a useful means to understand Transition even though it presents some peculiarities. The last section explored the natural connection between social movements and the public space to discuss the importance of the present research from a deliberative perspective. In particular, this section engaged with the very idea of public space, evidencing the relevance of its organisations for deliberative democracy. Organisations in the public space, such as those associated with the Transition movement, emerged as fundamental agents of the discursive democratisation of societies and the empirical observation of their qualities cannot be left unaddressed. The theoretical discussion has also introduced concepts that

appear particularly helpful in understanding the cases under examination, including the notion of self-organising and public sphere functions (Young: 2000) as well as Mansbridge's (2012) distinction between 'organised' and 'everyday' activists. Having undergone these introductory discussions, it is now possible to move to a core part of this research: its four case studies.

Chapter 4 Case Study: Transition Kurilpa

In the following pages I analyse and assess the deliberative capacity of Transition Kurilpa (TK), a Transition Initiative based in an inner area of Brisbane (Queensland). First, I describe the local context in which the group operates and give an overview of TK's main features as well as brief illustrations of some its activities. TK seems embedded in a progressive and supportive yet (from a discursive standpoint) problematic environment. Then I focus on the group itself, attempting to assess its overall deliberative capacity. Finally, always from a discursive standpoint, I also analyse the different moments in which the group life is articulated. Although variations in the discursive quality of activities occur, ultimately Transition Kurilpa seems to possess only limited authenticity, restricted inclusivity, and poor consequentiality.

Kurilpa and its Transition Initiative

Transition Kurilpa is one of several Transition Initiatives in Brisbane.¹ The group is active in the Brisbane River peninsula and Kurilpa is actually the aboriginal word designating this land, borrowed by the local Transition with the elders' permission. TK covers an area extending for about 5.1 square kilometres with a population of about 20,000 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011) in three suburbs in the inner circle of Brisbane: Highgate Hill, South Brisbane and West End.

These neighbouring areas share a fairly prosperous economic background although pockets of poverty exist, especially in West End and South Brisbane. The Labour party seems to dominate local politics with elected candidates at the three tiers of government (with West End still representing a stronghold of progressive forces) in an environment which is otherwise surrounded by an ascendant Liberal party. Although all suburbs have a markedly diverse population it is probably in West End, which also hosts an important community of Indigenous people, that immigration fluxes have had a profound impact on the local life.

Most of my interviewees remark that West End 'is different from all other parts of Brisbane', it 'is seen as alternative, maybe the breaking ground for a lot of initiatives', it 'has always been a Bohemian society like [a] little enclave... a real culture hub'.² Nonetheless, West End's social

¹ At the time of fieldwork, I counted eight active Transition groups.

² See also Gall's (2009) study on how daily practices and ethical networks in West led to a local alternative economic landscape, or Connors and Hutton's (2005) account of Brisbane's radical past.

climate, as Linda claims, 'is starting to die out a little bit', 'it's becoming more gentrified'.³ Essentially, as Thomas puts it, 'the council is trying to promote much higher development [than the community wishes]'. As remarked by Bernard (a lifelong political activist operating in the community), the local councils repeatedly 'tried to knock the life out of West End but they are struggling, they still do it but there is still something different here, like we have local markets...community gardens... people who are progressive in their thinking that want to look after the environment, that want to preserve the community...'. Urban movements (e.g. Fainstein, 2011) seemed to be on the rise in West End. As highlighted by a young community activist, major development that is 'coming into West End' has 'really galvanized the more grass roots communities, they've started to stand up, raise their hands and say: "we don't want this!"'; moreover, he added: 'there has been a bit of backlash against that development from the community, lot of activism from residents' (see: Walters and McCrea, 2011, McCrea and Walters, 2012).

It is in this environment that the local Transition started, and the peculiarity of West End surely is reflected also within the Kurilpa Initiative. In fact, it is from that suburb that most of TK's participants come from, it is there that meetings and activities are most often held, and it is this area that is targeted most frequently by the local group's initiatives. Kurilpa has had an important role in Brisbane Transition since when the movement first approached the Queensland capital in 2008. As Linda, one of the founders, pointed out, during the first Transition workshop 'the majority of the people were from West End' and although Kurilpa cannot 'take all the credit for starting [the movement]', it was 'pretty much instrumental in co-founding it'. Soon after these meetings, TK started to take shape and in May 2009 it also became an official member of the Transition Network. Currently the Kurilpa Transition also adheres to the Brisbane Transition Hub, a loose network of local Transition Initiatives.

Transition Kurilpa was based on voluntary work by local participants, it did not have a legal status, membership or official roles, and there was little money involved, with slightly more than a AUD 1,000 account at the time of my visit. Self-financing and some money raised during events were the main economic resources. Public funds were also obtained to run a project supported by Brisbane Council. Many people with different levels of involvement had participated in the Transition in Kurilpa since its beginnings. Generally, the participants I interviewed made a straightforward distinction between 'active' or 'core' participants and the others. Although numbers fluctuated, interviewees estimated that there were about ten active participants and up to sixty people who were interested in TK overall.

³ All names employed in the case studies are fictional.

At the time of my observations, around fifty people were subscribed to TK's main web platforms, and many more could access less restricted websites. During events like Permablitzes (an informal gathering of people collaborating to perform a permaculture design), networking drinks, and casual gatherings, there were usually among the attendees about a dozen people related to TK. Numbers shrank at the monthly meetings, where sometimes as few as four people showed up. Thus, although it seems appropriate to estimate that there were about sixty people aware of and interested in TK, clearly, their involvement varied greatly.

On the basis of my field observations I identified just six active participants. These people regularly contributed to the life of the group by attending meetings and activities (also on-line ones), or they were fundamental participants for sub-groups (e.g. energy plans, community gardening) or specific tasks (e.g. building relationship with other groups or local partners). These individuals devoted time and energy to TK and they also interacted rather regularly. Among them, Henry was the key actor of TK and his role as 'informal coordinator' was widely acknowledged. In particular, he performed two fundamental roles: he was by far the most active member and the one with the most contacts.

Besides Henry and a small group of committed individuals, there remained about another fifty people interested in TK. From this latter group there were about 30 participants who occasionally took part in the life of the Transition (on-line more than face-to-face, and during activities other than official meetings), or were referred to by interviewees in regard to particular projects or events. Finally, there was a group of about twenty people who seemed to 'spectate' (to use a TK member's expression) rather than actually participate. Despite these evident internal differences, however, TK had never had (or attempted to have) a formal hierarchy.

In about three years of activity TK was able to achieve some important results. According to my Brisbane interviewees, TK represented probably the most active Initiative in a town where the Transition movement seemed clearly on the rise. As reported by Henry, during an initial stage of about one year the main activity consisted of meeting every two weeks 'to just talk' and 'develop relationships'. Then, the group participated in some permablitzes, worked on interesting projects, such as Energetic Kurilpa (EK) – realised in collaboration with about twenty local charities and NGOs, supported the One Hundred Trees Action (OHTA), collaborated with two local community gardens, set up workshops and conferences (including one with a co-founder of permaculture), and, at the time of my arrival, was starting to work on an Energy Descent Action Plan (EDAP). Besides having collaborated with other local organizations and some local businesses and institutions, TK was part of the Brisbane Transition Hub, the local network of the Transition. In order to briefly illustrate the way TK had

operated and engaged with the rest of the community, I briefly discuss the Energetic Kurilpa and the One Hundred Trees Action, as these projects, according to several interviewees, have been among TK's most important activities.

The Energetic Kurilpa plan shows how small a role discursive engagement may have, both inside a group and in its relationship with other organizations, for a successful project to be accomplished. TK's aim was to promote both the community's awareness on climate change and peak oil as well as practical ways to reduce energy consumption. According to Henry: 'this project really came about because of the opportunity of the funding'. Interestingly, the more discursive dimension of the project was underplayed by the council's decision. In fact, as pointed out by Henry: '[TK] applied for [AUD] 50,000 to do the energy orders but also to do workshops and community outreach, networking, events and that kind of thing but they decided they would only fund the energy orders and the quantification [of emissions reduction] component of that', for a total of AUD 37,000.

Furthermore, in illustrating how the project was realized Henry reported: 'people have helped me out, [but] I am definitely the driver...when we got the grants lots of people in the group said: "this is fantastic, I am gonna get involved", and then, when they realised it actually takes work, they backed off, there is a few people...who helped me with the orders'. Thus, although there was previous group discussion on energy issues, and there were updates on the developments, it was the consistent and skilled initiative of a single person which permitted, and shaped, the realization of the project.

Also the way in which TK engaged with the partnering organisations is telling: 'two of them contacted us via email, [though] a lot of the groups that are involved we actually got them involved through personal contacts'. Whilst on some occasions he met 'proactive groups', Henry also had to deal with organizations that 'said: ... "well it's free so it's not gonna cost us anything so let's just do it". If they actually had to put any effort into it [then] they don't have that same level of engagement'.⁴ Eventually, funds were 'put on hold' the same way they came. Allegedly, the Brisbane Council decided, with little or no consultation with the recipients, to use part of that money to cover the floods emergency that hit Brisbane in 2011.

The One Hundred Trees Action (OHTA), however, represents a more complex operation from a discursive perspective. The project's basic idea was to plant fruit trees alongside a public road as part of a broader project called 'Hampstead Common' aiming at transforming urban space into a productive, eco-and community-friendly area. OHTA appeared to resonate with the

⁴ A dynamic aptly captured by Lichterman's (1999: 19) remark that often 'intergroup politics means action, not talk'.

broader struggle against development in West End and nearby areas. As the action's informal leader (Thomas, a landscape architect) explains '[OHTA] it's been an idea that's been around for about ten years in the community'. The OHTA was led by a sub-group of the TK. It could happen in fact that, when there were particularly interesting initiatives, some group members as well as general followers devoted (more) time and energy to a certain sub-group. In this way the bulk of the action and discursive engagement shifted from TK in its totality to smaller group cells. Actually, OHTA was a particularly successful manifestation of this *modus operandi*: the plan generated some levels of participation in the community, and 'six or seven' main actors were helped out by many people throughout the process. The OHTA, however, met some resistance when residents – apparently just a couple – eventually protested against the action, after which reportedly '23 trees were planted'.

About two years before the OHTA, there had been some consultation on the initiative with the community, which appeared to support the idea. 'Then', as reported by an OHTA participant (John), '[the project] went on hold for a while and then recently, together with a smaller group within Transition Kurilpa, [we] decided to take a smaller action towards that bigger idea ... planting a hundred fruit trees down the length of the road...'. John continued, 'The local councillor was very supportive of the idea in principle but she had to [abide by] the broader council regulations and she was stuck. She couldn't authorize what we wanted to do so we ended up planting the trees without council consent'. The residents' complaints thus presented a perfect situation for two contrasting views to emerge. On the one hand, there was the view behind the OHTA, according to which in the words of its leader: 'the community can design its way to the future...it has to because government and other leaders in business are not doing that'.⁵ On the other hand, there was the view of the supportive councillor who acknowledged that it 'is very important to have groups like Transition Town'. Yet, she remarked that 'they are single issue groups...often they don't have to worry about other parameters which an elected representative has...', and 'often [this type of groups] gets more internal looking rather than external looking'. The leaders of the OHTA and the local councillor thus started a 'negotiation' to solve the issue and prevent the council from uprooting the trees. Two TK participants also spent two weekends in a row knocking at residents' doors trying to talk to them, confirming their support, and possibly furthering collaboration.

Interestingly, TK participants outside the OHTA sub-groups had diverging views on the matter. For example, one TK member pointed out that the OHTA 'had huge community support three

⁵ When I asked what they thought about politics at national level, if they 'were happy' with it, no one among the TK participants gave a positive answer, the vast majority of them being extremely critical. An overwhelming majority found no particular difference between 'left' and 'right' parties, and only a small minority expressed a positive judgment on politics in their community.

years ago but they didn't talk to the community since', and another remarked that committing to community interaction only at that stage 'seems a bit forced and a bit kind of now we have a problem so we talk to the community and get them on our side again'. As Henry claimed, 'we actually had a lot of support, which we were able to demonstrate. But if we didn't react [to] that [complaint], this one guy who works for Council would have had the power to pull off the work that the community wanted'. The OHTA shed some light on TK and on some of the challenges it encountered in its action, showing also how discursive engagement dynamics affected the quality of the life of a community.

With regard to discursive politics at local level, I found particularly interesting the words of the leader of West End Community Association (WECA), one of the most important community organizations in the area. He seemed to have a rather clear view on the role of deliberation in the community's politics: 'I would like it to be otherwise but, from what I've seen, good argument doesn't pay back'. Indeed, it seemed that in the local political situation the force of the better argument was not dominant and a 'tension between persuasive methods and more forceful strategies' afflicted activists (Fung, 2005: 389-9). As the interviewee claimed:

'Historically the community association runs these big political campaigns targeting the decision makers, stickers, promotional materials, information, advertising, slogans, and banners and rallies, and very public events and workshops and seminars and direct lobbying with people and so on, and run a lot of those activities without outcome, with no positive outcome, so you used up a lot of energy and time of people for no positive outcome, and so part of what's going on now is we are saying: "hang on!"...what basically is needed [is to] be honest about decision making process...it becomes frustrating, and really it's moved to, and this has happened with a lot of the planning now, it's moved to a democratic ticking the box as a check list...'

Ultimately, a rather progressive social and political environment characterized the Kurilpa area and especially West End, and many people seemed sensitive to community and environmental issues. However, this very context appeared also rather problematic from a discursive perspective.

Transition Kurilpa Deliberative Capacity

As the following pages show, the overall deliberative capacity expressed by Transition Kurilpa appears limited on all sides: authenticity, inclusivity and consequentiality. The main problem in terms of authenticity was that TK did not have a platform for quality discursive engagement. More specifically, as will be shown later, the group meeting that in TK was meant to be the

main venue for discursive engagement is: a) only partially deliberative; b) very poorly inclusive and; c) appeared to have mainly a ceremonial or ratification function. More pragmatic concerns dominated among TK participants, while attention to discursive engagement was certainly not a priority. Indeed, the absence of a discursive arena for some of my interviewees did not represent a major issue, especially to the extent that there were other channels for group action and members' interaction. Nonetheless, deliberative potential could hardly be found in those practical activities (e.g. permablitzes) that seemed to have little to offer in the way of quality discursive engagement. Moreover, there were also more discursive activities (e.g. conferences) but they were not frequent enough to contribute substantially to discursive engagement in the group. Overall, the main discursive moments, aside from group assemblies, occurred when small groups of people or single individuals interacted face-to-face and on-line, publicly and privately. All of these interactions, however, presented major flaws from a deliberative democratic standpoint and overall they could not remedy, and at times even exacerbated, the deliberative deficit of TK.

With regard to the various dimensions of the concept of authenticity, TK seemed fairly successful in preventing 'coercion'. Specifically, during group discussions no attempts to manipulate or deceive fellow members were manifested. However, a degree of coercion characterised those activities where, as in Energetic Kurilpa, an individual would take virtually all the responsibility for realising a project. In these cases, the position of the main actor was hardly ever questioned. This aspect provided no barrier against the outcomes of a discussion being determined by status or power imbalances, rather than by reflection among equals. TK's discursive activities certainly induced some people to reflect about their preferences and values in a context where some participants also displayed high levels of competence. High-quality arguments were occasionally advanced, and it was also possible to observe specific considerations being justified with reference to higher principles of a different nature. Nonetheless, the extent of such phenomena was severely reduced by lack of confrontation. Indeed, discussion on uncontroversial subjects prevailed in most discursive activities in TK. Furthermore, the number of people affected by authentic deliberation remained always very low and tended to shrink as discursive engagement became more substantial. The lack of engagement with different views greatly constrained the need for reciprocity and mutual acceptance. In particular, to the extent that group discussions displayed little or no engagement between contrasting views, reciprocity and mutual acceptance lost much of their meaning. In fact, these behaviours could appear as either 'unnecessary' when discussants all shared basic ideas and world views, or 'unachievable' when divergences in, say, views did not manage to emerge at all in the first place.

The absence of substantial engagement between different views also exacerbated a wider problem concerning TK's limited inclusivity. As already mentioned, at the time of my observations the group had a key figure, another five regularly active people, and about fifty followers whose level of involvement varied from mere spectating to rare participation. The main activist was a 40-year-old white Australian male, an environmental scientist with a Masters degree and further qualifications and with substantial experience in activism. The other active members were two females and three males, white Australians, three in their late twenties and two in their forties. All of the younger members had a Masters degree and the older ones held at least a Bachelors degree. Both older members had long been involved in activism (and one of them also ran for the Greens party at federal elections). Environmental concerns appeared of primary importance in participants' professional lives. There were, notably, three architects, one general manager of a local social and environmentally-conscious business, and a person employed in the field of disaster resilience. Besides active members I also interacted with many locals participating in TK life and I had in-depth interviews with four of them. From what I observed, this larger group of casual local participants was made almost entirely of white Australians, evenly split in gender, mostly in their twenties or thirties, and although it was not possible to assess clearly their educational background and type of employment, many of them were university students or specialized professionals. People from different ethnic backgrounds and seniors represented a clear minority (with no more than five people in each case). The local councillor seemed well aware of the local Transition's restricted inclusivity:

'...the final thing that I am aware of when I speak to them is that they don't represent the Greek community,⁶ that they don't represent the ethnic community at all, they do represent the student community but more importantly the questioning part of the community. So that is their strength but it is also their weakness because they don't speak for the whole area'.

Looking at inclusion of relevant interests and voices it is interesting to notice that when occasionally the views and interests of West End indigenous people, immigrant communities, the working class, the unemployed, the seniors were mentioned that was never done by a person from those backgrounds but by members from outside these groups. On a particularly relevant issue, the urban development of West End, the interests of those opposing development were certainly considered in the arguments of TK participants but discussion with those on the developers' side did not occur. Moreover, it is worth noticing that personal commitment in TK's endeavours could also be seen as overlapping with some actors'

⁶ Historically a particularly important community in the life of West End.

professional lives (for instance, a landscape architect leading a project like the OHTA). Most interviewees acknowledged that the group was made up of like-minded people, and all TK participants appeared extremely sensitive to environmental and community issues.

Consequentiality seemed modest, in the first place because of the very limited space offered to discursive engagement and decision-making. Moreover, discursive engagement appeared more effective when only a limited number of people participated in discussions, for instance during discussion among active members. This aspect was paralleled by the absence of ways to coordinate the various communications that in different ways contributed to the group life. In combination these dynamics jeopardized the space for substantial discursive engagement. As will be shown, often decisions ended up being taken and implemented in ways that, although effective, were wanting in deliberation. Besides group meetings, these poorly deliberative processes included individual initiatives, casual discussions, and on-line interaction. More practical activities and other more discursive events, finally, did not seem to provide ground for consequential deliberation because of their nature and because of their rarity respectively.

Transition Kurilpa Activities and their Discursive Quality

Group Meetings

Group meetings were important in the life of TK, as without them there probably would have been no group altogether. Nonetheless, they did not seem to interest many people outside the circle of active participants, and a certain preference for 'action' rather than 'talking' was evident among most of my interviewees. Although more sporadic, action-oriented sub-group meetings seemed to gain more attention because of their more practical nature. In the words of an interviewee: 'a long slow talking talking [sic.] process without getting anything done, that's mine, our experience in Transition so far...[TK] is not effective at doing things, it's doing what it says it's gonna do which is talking about stuff, whether or not that's worthwhile'. As remarked by another participant, '[all the talking] could be worthwhile as long as there are working groups on the side'. However, in the six weeks I spent in Brisbane no sub-group meeting was called, whilst there were two monthly assemblies which I attended.

The two monthly meetings were attended by nine and four TK participants respectively, that is one out of six and one out of fifteen people interested in TK. At the first one, there were five males and four females; five people were from the active members group. At the second assembly, there were three males and one female, all of them active members. The first meeting was not particularly engaging. Essentially, active members, and the group leaders in particular, introduced to the newcomers some basic features of Transition and illustrated the main activities that TK had carried out. Current and future initiatives of the group were not

debated, nor did reflection upon specific aspects of Transition occur as the conversation was always on general themes. None of the newcomers taking part in the first meeting participated in the following one. The second meeting, attended only by active participants, featured more engaged and critical discussions. On both occasions there was no attempt to dominate the assembly, and generally everyone was encouraged to actively participate in the meetings. However, different familiarity with group assemblies may explain why active participants, more assiduous and more aware of group issues, seemed better able to make the most out of the meetings as a discursive and decisional arena.⁷ Both meetings were characterized by courtesy and friendliness, and only rare instances of someone talking over someone else (generally when people were tired) disrupted otherwise highly respectful interactions. Where the import of the discussion required it, well supported arguments could be observed (for instance, in explaining the idea behind the OTHA action, or the logics of an Energy Descent Plan). A level of reflection upon the issues under examination was also promoted. These phenomena could be generally observed only when, as in the second meeting, all participants were confident enough to speak to others, and, at any rate, they interested only a very few people given the group's size. Moreover, the need and possibility for reciprocity appeared limited since speakers held seemingly similar views.

As highlighted by most interviewees, TK meetings were far from being 'formal' or 'structured', which I can only confirm following my observations. In particular, there were only a few routines. At the beginning, the agenda was announced to participants and brief feedback on the ongoing projects was given. The agenda, which was generally set up by one person a few days in advance on the basis of the indications gathered at the last meeting or during the past month, was not strictly followed. Usually, participants seated in a circle introduced themselves to each others in turn. If there were new participants they were given an explanation of the Transition movement and of the group. Minutes of meetings were usually posted on-line within a few hours. There were no other procedures other than social norms naturally followed by attendees (e.g. speaking in turns).

Participants had different views on whether meeting structure (or lack thereof) was a problem at all. The critique regarding the 'lack of attention to the processes' held by a minority was paralleled by dominant accounts on the virtues of an 'organic approach'. Such discussion generated an interesting incident in TK, as reported in Henry's own words:

'we have had one member who comes from a very corporate background...she was very big on the hierarchies, note-taking, formal protocols, instructions and so

⁷ A similar imbalance is found by della Porta (2005b: 83-4) in her investigation of the Italian social forums between more active and less organized activists.

on and we were just like “yeah whatever”. So she found it very very difficult and she wrote an email at one point saying how frustrated and angry she was...the way we approached her was again pretty informal: some of us just responded, some didn't, most of us responded just directly to her rather than to the group. For me it's partly to acknowledge what she had said, right or wrong. Obviously, I sort of disagree with what she said, but I just sort of took the tack. That's just not how we as individuals operate, and with the rest of the group we are not used to those sorts of structures and ... we don't consider anyone to have a role officially'.

Further examination is in order to understand discursive shortcomings of the meetings. Firstly, the emergence of disagreement, not to mention engagement with different opinions within the group, was reported by most interviewees to be very limited. In the words of Fanny:

'I think the problem is [that] there is no process for decision making or conflict resolution so it would just go on whoever is louder. It depends on what type of conflict it was, if it was a personality conflict I am sure someone would probably just drop out...if it is conflict over a decision then it would probably come down to who cares more or who is louder maybe, but I have a bit of a different perspective 'cause I have been more trained in this area'.

Another noticed: 'the actual process of meetings is not a focus unfortunately because what I've seen happening is: because we are not focused on process some people get disillusioned and leave, or they think it's just all talk and nothing gets done and they leave, or they feel like they are not having a say so they leave, or things aren't structured the way they would like [them] to be structured'.

Especially when people outside the limited group of 'active members' participated in a discussion, a conflict avoidance attitude seemed to dominate meetings in which substantial disagreement never arose. In the words of Linda: 'people judge on their own limits if they feel they aren't up for a meeting then they won't attend, they prefer to avoid any conflict than go on and face it'. There was more 'confrontation' during the meeting attended by just 'active members' than when there were also less active participants present. Accordingly, in the first meeting I could not observe a single instance of disagreement, while the second one had at least a few confrontations.

Active members had developed strong ties that appeared to impose severe restrictions on the group's capability to attract people other than themselves to meetings (see Freeman, 1972). As one interviewee evidenced: 'if I was someone who felt the same but didn't have those

social ties, [I] wouldn't come back, and I think that's one of our losses'.⁸ Thus, it was hard for TK not just to foster inclusion in the more deliberative moments but also to socialise with the rest of the community.

As reported by one interviewee, meetings ended up resembling 'social events' rather than moments of thorough deliberation upon issues. The difficulties in going through substantial discussions and decision-making processes during assemblies may explain why many interviewees lamented that monthly meetings were not effective in steering the group. Especially in a group oriented to action such as TK, the lack of productivity of meetings, their failure to deliver useful ideas (see Mansbridge et al., 2006), was perceived as particularly negative by participants. Further, meetings' shortcomings also contributed to the fact that many projects were conceived and developed at individual or small group level rather than in the monthly assemblies, which eventually led to a highly compromised consequentiality of group meetings.

Discursive Activities

TK participants saw these events as a valuable means for broadening the group's knowledge, raising awareness in the community, seeking support, and promoting TK's image. Nonetheless, such events were rather infrequent, and, in practice, they contributed only marginally to the discursive dynamics in TK.

During the six weeks of my fieldwork, no major events were held. More precisely, two TK members set up a two-day workshop on how to foster governance and decision-making techniques. However, none of my interviewees reported attending it. TK also gave a fundamental contribution to organise a talk by a public intellectual, which was due to take place right after the end of my fieldwork. Thus, I was not able to assess the quality of these events or their impact on the community. Interviewees seemed to appreciate the idea of these events being organised, although they also reported that attendance varied widely. Overall, it appeared that the successful organization of these events required major resources and it was hard for TK to organise them on a regular basis.

When these events are successful they could be the single most important contribution to raising awareness in the community and a clear manifestation of TK's activism. In light of their potential role and their infrequent nature I hold that 'discursive initiatives' could well give an important cultural contribution to the group. Yet, in practice, these were only marginal platforms in which to develop (and observe) the quality of TK's deliberative dynamics.

⁸ This and other TK participants report similar feelings to those della Porta finds among some activists within Italian social forums (della Porta, 2005b: 83), mentioning that the creation of internal solidarity reduced external openness.

On-line Communications

Besides being mentioned on a myriad of websites, TK had several virtual platforms on Wiggio, GoogleGroups, Ning, Transition Brisbane Hub website, Facebook – in order from the more restricted to the more easily accessible. Around fifty people were subscribed in the Wiggio space, the main channel for in-group communications, and GoogleGroups and Facebook were instead used to communicate with the general public.

On-line activities were central to TK. They were a fundamental channel for TK participants to share information, for TK to communicate with the outside, and for coordinating the various activities. During the six-week period during which I observed TK's on-line activities, I found about ten discussions were started on TK's Wiggio platform, while twenty-four posts were made on Facebook and fourteen communications were delivered from GoogleGroups. On-line venues hosted a majority of the topics that participants ended up discussing off-line. Every activity that was happening in TK (and most of those organized by other groups that may have been of interest to TK participants) was announced on-line. Finally, it was on virtual platforms that most TK participants joined.

Similarly to other activities, I could observe no overt coercion on-line. Interestingly, however, only a minority of contributions seemed to attract other people's reactions. Very few posts received a public reply on-line: one out of ten posts on Wiggio, four messages out of fourteen on GoogleGroups, and only two posts on Facebook. 'On-line communication' was probably the means through which TK induced more people to reflect upon a variety of issues, since it represented the main instrument by which to reach out to the broader community and share information. Nonetheless, the extent to which reflection may have been promoted was narrow. In fact, I could observe only limited on-line discussions on most topics and only some comments displayed a level of engagement, often among a minority of individuals. Virtual communications seemed largely similar to face-to-face meetings. It was in fact a small group of people who participated in on-line activity, and an even smaller number that gave substantial contributions. In particular, those who were most active on-line tended to coincide with those who were most present off-line. Nine out of ten discussions on Wiggio and GoogleGroups were started by active members (mainly Henry) who were by far also those more active on-line. Finally, even when a message proposed fine contents it was hard to observe in-depth discussion at all.

The focus on virtual interaction may have affected negatively at least two aspects of the group life. In the first place, whilst the Internet permitted efficient organization of activities and provided a channel for (often captivating) communications, it may have actually undermined the need for (albeit not particularly engaging) face-to-face meetings. While the Internet helped

to establish connections, it seemed to hinder the construction of a sense of community. The fact that most of the events were reported and at times directly carried out on-line could have facilitated a spectator approach and a more intermittent type of participation. Moreover, focus on virtual space, along with the pragmatic leanings of the group, could have favoured a lack of investment in face-to-face discussion and decision-making. Virtual forums did offer a means to carry out discussions and make decisions, yet they displayed a quality that tended to be even lower than in off-line events. In particular, individual contributions or arguments were not necessarily of poor quality. Rather, it was engagement in TK's on-line space that was rare and often limited. The Internet was more of a place to share information and make immediate decisions than a venue to actually engage in deliberation, and its consequentiality seemed only modest.

Practical Actions

These activities were central in the life of TK since participants believed that 'action' was fundamental. Every month there were events which TK members were involved in, either as organizers or simply as participants. During my fieldwork two activities took place (at the same time), a permablitz and a collective gardening weekend. I attended the former and it was a particularly good occasion to meet less active participants. In fact, a dozen of the about forty people who turned up that day had some connections with TK (and I had not seen most of them at other activities).

Assessing the quality of 'practical actions' was especially difficult. In fact, discussions not only generally lacked structure, they also occurred at random in time and space (while other activities were being carried out) in an environment that was impossible for an observer to control. The quality of these interactions appeared to be determined by utterly circumstantial elements rather than constant features. Overall, trying to assess patterns where there was mostly randomness and where there could be astounding variability from case to case would probably be useless, if not overtly misleading. 'Practical actions' remained probably the most inclusive and one of the most concrete manifestations of TK's existence. However, given their very shortcomings in promoting any systematic discursive engagement, practical actions hardly represented an instance of inclusion in a discursive sense. They also displayed little or nothing in the way of consequential deliberation. Ultimately, these actions could be intended as the outcome of previous discursive activities, rather than a source or the means through which the deliberative capacity was developed.

Individual Initiatives

As illustrated by Energetic Kurilpa, 'individual initiatives' played a major role within TK. Besides EK, the initiative of single individuals was often the main mode of action, for example in the

organization of events or in the establishment and development of relationships with other organizations. The role of the group was limited to an initial manifestation of interest in a given activity, receiving updates from (and giving occasional support to) the main actor responsible for a project. Such person was the one channelling information, steering the project, and addressing communications with the outside. It was difficult to observe these often private interactions. However, in the case of TK, the Energetic Kurilpa project offered a valuable illustration of the 'individual initiative' type of action.

With regard to coercion there seemed to be no complaints about the way that the EK project was carried out. Although manipulation and deception cannot be excluded without direct observation, it seemed unlikely that partners would adhere to a project promoted through such means. Yet, with regard to internal group dynamics 'individual initiative' promoted processes in which it was the (unofficial) status of participants that determined what was (and what was not) to be done, whilst diminishing the ability of fellow members to discuss or question decisions on their own merits. Importantly, these dynamics occurred despite the fact that TK key participants actually wished others would be more involved. 'Individual initiatives' surely enabled reflection, yet the magnitude of this process seemed severely constrained since discussion with the group tended to be limited. Ultimately, it could be an extremely small set of people who were induced to reflect. Moreover, engagement was very limited and narrow (e.g. preferences more than underlying values or beliefs) when the goal of a process rotated around a very specific end (e.g. obtaining funding). Levels of competence varied greatly, depending on the actors in charge and the issue at hand. The EK case, however, showed that 'individual initiative' tended to occur whenever there was a person who was particularly knowledgeable on or highly devoted to a certain issue. In TK, it was people with professional backgrounds and specialized education who often carried out specific projects. Thus, the quality of information exchanged in such processes may have been reasonably high. Nonetheless, to the extent that discursive engagement with the rest of the group was lacking, the emergence of opposing views or competing arguments was discouraged. In the case of 'individual initiatives', it was also difficult to observe whether the contents of the arguments and their justifications related individual or group interests to higher principles, or whether arguments were advanced on pragmatic or value-based grounds. Still, it was possible to notice that, although environmental and community-related values were central to TK, in the Energy Kurilpa operation Henry made the effort also to speak the language of profitability with those groups that were interested in energy savings for rather practical and economical reasons. Cooperation was thus promoted even when it was inspired by different values. It was also difficult to ascertain the role played by reciprocity in 'individual initiatives' – and it was even harder to understand participants' feelings. However, the fact that cooperation did occur

seemed to imply that at least a degree of mutual acceptance between groups was generated through the Energy Kurilpa project.

With regard to inclusion, as one might expect, occasional interactions with others notwithstanding, 'individual initiatives' fell at the least inclusive end of the already short inclusivity scale of TK. Moreover, actors carrying out 'individual initiatives' usually embodied the features and visions and reinforced the role of the social groups dominating the organisation.

Finally, individual initiatives were important to conceiving and implementing projects, especially once a more or less satisfying small group interaction had occurred. As illustrated earlier, these actions were effective but they were neither the source nor the result of any consequential deliberation.

Casual Interactions

Although it was almost impossible to keep track of them, 'casual interactions' were an important part of TK's life. Participants interacted in a myriad of ways (on-line as well as off-line). In light of the limits to discussion and decision-making characterizing monthly assemblies, casual meetings appeared increasingly important to shaping and implementing decisions, showing that 'everyday talk' did have a role in the life of the group (see: Mansbridge, 1999). In TK's case, 'casual interactions' contributed to maintaining connections between members and also between the group and other interested people – possibly even more so than did official meetings. As Thomas explained, 'we see people walking around you know so you run into someone you say, "hi how are you doing?" and I usually see the President [of a local organization] who just lives and works up the road, so he tells us what's going on, whether there's some activities to do with...issues to do with a project at development or an event, festival...'. Moreover, private discussion, as highlighted by Linda, was an important mechanism to address problems: 'In the past if there's been someone expressing concerns or objections to particular issues we would take it offline and have private discussions offline to address the issues'. To the extent that group issues were not publicly addressed, a transparency problem may arise. Such a problem (besides limiting the researcher's investigative capability) represented a burden to the development of the group's deliberative capacity. Nonetheless, it could be mitigated. For example, in TK the main actors had the custom of reporting relevant news to the others. Even more importantly, it was generally necessary for any group member to share, at least in part, his or her casual communications with fellow participants in order to give issues a group-level status, as opposed to a purely personal initiative. Lack of transparency could thus partly be addressed, although the limited quality of other discursive instances reduced the efficacy of such a process.

Here, I briefly analyse one of TK's casual gatherings called 'electricity free night'. In these occasions people on TK's mailing lists as well as friends were invited to spend an evening together. 'Electricity free nights' (of which I attended two) were particularly interesting because they hosted a rather broad discussion during which issues related to local community and environment were often mentioned. The event was hosted at the house of two TK active members. In this welcoming context, usually a dozen people or more socialised and exchanged ideas without having to follow an agenda or explicit norms (except for bringing some food to share). Given its extremely unstructured nature, it was possibly to only partially read the events that unfolded at the 'electricity free night' in light of authenticity criteria.

These friendly nights did not seem to show signs of coercion. People interacted freely and unlike at the monthly meeting, usually in separate small groups. There was no speaker addressing the rest of the audience, no structured interaction of any kind, and people came and went throughout the night. The continuous variability characterizing discussions made it extremely hard to assess their quality and the type of arguments developed in these gatherings, or even just to envision its overall discussion threads. However, these events tended to gather mainly passionate and informed people, and their discussions on community and environmental issues appeared decidedly more sensitive than what one could hear in other informal contexts of a different nature.

It may be useful to compare the 'electricity free nights' and the group meetings. In the first place, the former tended to have more participants than the latter. People brought in a wider variety of views and eventually more individuals could be affected by the content of the discussions. Similarly to what occurred with the monthly assemblies, however, there was no structure in place to favour the emergence and the handling of diverging views. Thus, while different views arose, thorough engagement was not actively pursued. Furthermore, there appeared to be no direct ways to translate discussions into group decisions, even less so than at the monthly assemblies. Attempting to seek reciprocity or mutual acceptance during these nights ultimately seemed to rely upon a person's own inclination, especially given the lack of a common goal towards which to orient discussion. However, it would be misleading to use the above observations to critique casual happenings like 'electricity free nights'. Rather, the above discussion may offer some grounds to show how little may change between casual gatherings and poorly structured meetings, at least from a deliberative perspective.

In terms of inclusivity, as discussed, casual events could even have greater variety and higher attendance than official meetings. However, they also seemed to present more obstacles to systematic discursive engagement. Thus, 'casual interactions' probably did guarantee a level of inclusion, but in a social more than a discursive sense. That is, while they favoured the

establishment and development of relationships, they did not seem to suffice to include individuals at the stage where more in-depth discussion took place and decisions were made.

Finally, casual discussions were an effective means of promoting internal and community debate. However, the lack of clear decisional power and, more fundamentally, the absence of processes to facilitate thorough and systematic discussion imposed severe constraints on the 'consequentiality' of these interactions.

Conclusions

In the about three years since its beginnings, Transition Kurilpa certainly had contributed to the local life, addressing with passion and dedication important environmental and community issues. However, it seemed to have done so using an approach that was far from deliberative democratic ideals. Group meetings did not provide platforms for deliberative discussions or decision-making. Indeed, their quality and contribution to engagement from a discursive standpoint seemed no better than that of other casual activities. Whilst group meetings and casual activities were insufficient in generating authentic, inclusive and consequential discursive engagement, other instances of group life (discursive events, practical activities, on-line communication) also offered little in terms of quality discursive engagement. TK, ultimately, heavily relied on the individual initiatives of a few actors. The committed efforts of a limited number of group members allowed TK to obtain some results, but the potential contribution of other participants was not elicited. The attention that discursive processes received on different platforms proved insufficient to counter the impediments to quality discursive engagement and the development of deliberative capacity.

Figure 4.1 Overview Kurilpa

Kurilpa
1. Location: West End, Highgate Hill and South Brisbane; Brisbane, Queensland (20,000)
2. Type of community: Urban. Highly concentrated and diverse neighbourhoods.
3. Local political arrangements: Labour stronghold.
4. Situation on environmental issues: Environmental Consciousness enclaves.
5. Type of local debates: No single issue and open public discussion
6. Public Space features: Progressive tradition, associationism, anti-development grassroots
7. Statistics:
Education: well above State and Federal levels
Income: well above State and Federal levels
Age: younger than State and Federal averages

Figure 4.2 Overview Transition Kurilpa

Transition Kurilpa (TK).

1. **Year of start and Status:** 2009, Official.
2. **Repertoire:** Group and sub-groups form, meetings, fairly active.
3. **People involved:** About 60 people know about it. About 30 participants: 1 key actor, 6 active, 20 participate occasionally, 20 spectators.
4. **Form of the initiative:** No structure, more active and less active participants, spectators.
5. **Relationship with the rest of the community:** Within alternative niche (anti-development activism), fairly distant from rest of community. People with environment-related jobs dominate. Partnerships (problematic) with Council. Collaboration with other groups and businesses. Some collaboration with Transition Brisbane and Transitions in Queensland.
6. **Finances:** Little money, self-funding, and Council project fund.
7. **Relationship with local political activism:** Part of anti-development movement, mastering bureaucratic interactions. No need to challenge niche, clash with political norms.
8. **Priorities:** Focus on 'getting things done'.
9. **Existing Taboos:** No taboos.
10. **Stance on Politics:** Non-political (institutional politics) and individually critical of politics.
11. **Social background of participants:** Community-and environment related-jobs, higher level of education than local average, younger or working age, white Australians, gender balance (except cores), only progressive. Private interests influence.

Chapter 5 Case Study: *Monteveglio Città di Transizione*

This chapter analyses the deliberative capacity of Monteveglio Città di Transizione (Transition Town Monteveglio, CT), Italy's first Transition Initiative. The first part illustrates the context in which this Transition Initiative took place as well as CT's main features. A number of activities embodying Transition ideas were realised thanks to a small number of local actors who mainly interacted in not very systematic ways. Indeed, in Monteveglio there was not even a Transition group. To be sure, sub-groups could form around certain activities, and the social enterprise Streccapogn, in charge of the agricultural Transition, was the most important of such sub-groups and deserves particular attention. The second section looks at the overall deliberative capacity of CT, showing that the various activities organised by the local Transition displayed a fair level of authenticity, a modest inclusivity, and a considerable consequentiality. The last part ascertains CT's deliberative capacity by investigating in further detail (from a discursive standpoint) the various activities taking place in the context of CT.

Monteveglio and its Transition Town

Monteveglio is a town of about 5,200 inhabitants (ISTAT, 2011b) in the Emilia-Romagna region. The municipality extends over 30 square kilometres from the foothills of the Apennines descending towards the Po valley. It borders other small towns surrounding the province capital city of Bologna, the most important centre in the region, less than 30 kilometres away. Historically, ties with Bologna and nearby Modena have been important for Monteveglio, and many people nowadays commute to these major centres.

Monteveglio is in a rather prosperous region. The local economy is dominated by the service sector. Dynamic local businesses as well as outside firms have developed a small-sized industrial area where local as well as foreign workers are employed. Indeed, the regular immigration from outside the EU has contributed to the doubling of the population in the last thirty years (ISTAT, 2011a). Agriculture, on the other hand, despite its historical importance, has experienced increasing problems. The pleasing natural environment (more than 90% of the territory is comprised of green areas) and the relaxed lifestyle (especially when compared to the urban centres) have favoured the development of some tourist activities. Monteveglio is in the midst of an area which has been often described as a fairly successful economic model (e.g. Cooke and Morgan, 2011) as well as an example of society with a high social-capital, and well-performing local institutions (e.g. Putnam, 1993). A leftist tradition has characterized local

politics since the end of World War II (Diamanti, 2007).¹ Finally, Montevoglio has developed a reputation for its environmental practices, which include having one of the highest levels of recycling in the region – almost 70% against an average of 50% – and efforts to reduce waste production (see Regione Emilia-Romagna, 2012).

It is in this context that the first Transition Initiative outside its birthplaces of the United Kingdom and Ireland started its activity in 2008. The Transition idea was brought to Montevoglio by a local resident, Guglielmo, who later became president of the local association as well as co-founder and vice-president of Transition Italia, the nationwide network of Transition Initiatives. A small group of people thus started to have meetings seeking ways to spread Transition values and ideals locally. Four people composed the CT's steering group: Guglielmo, Salvatore, Nicola, and Ugo. They were four local men, respectively a publicist, an engineer (to become local councillor for the environment), a former physician and organic farmer, and a university professor. According to my interviewees, following the movement's guidelines, from its beginning the steering group was destined deliberately to disappear. Group meetings thus became rarer and eventually stopped as soon as participants had become familiar with the movement's ideas and had envisioned some general directions towards a more sustainable and resilient community. As they explained to me, their goal was not to have a Transition *group* but a Transition *town*, to rebuild a community rather than having a few people merely running technical projects. The hope was that initiatives would be developed by individuals and sub-groups. Over the years initial hopes translated into a number of activities. The local Transition became active on a wide array of themes, and energy and sustainable local agriculture became particularly relevant.

A fundamental aspect in the life of CT was its cooperation with local institutions.² In 2008 in Montevoglio, a new local secretary of the recently started *Partito Democratico* (Democratic Party, PD) was elected. His main charge was to form a team and an electoral program to run at the forthcoming municipal elections. As he reported, his team decided also to 'build [its] electoral program upon Transition's own concepts of participation and environmental safeguard'. Indeed, the PD team had showed an interest in the ideas and values of Transition and, for instance, the electoral campaign of the party was run using World Café rather than normal meetings, as suggested by the Transition Initiative. The electoral program was thus

¹ Though also reformist Catholic views were historically important to the area (see Pombeni, 1992).

² The relationship between Montevoglio Council and CT is substantial enough to fully qualify as 'cooperation', according to Brown and Keast's (2003: 7) characterisation. This relationship is voluntary, it has duration over time and involves low risks as well as modest rewards; the entities remain autonomous, but they are connected by flexible links and generally informal contacts.

developed through open meetings with the population created following the traditional World Café format where people move through various discussions at different tables.

In November 2009 (six months after PD won the elections) the collaboration led to a Council deliberation that made Montevoglio the first Transition Town in Italy. That decision generated a high level of enthusiasm within the Transition movement and, for the occasion, the Transition Network (2009) released an exciting post entitled: 'What It Looks Like When a Local Authority REALLY Gets Transition... the Montevoglio story...'. As stated in the Council's document:

'...administrative actions on their own are not sufficient to operate transformations we need. It is necessary that the entire community be involved and take responsibility. It is in that direction the movement of Transition Town operates, and we feel to share their reference scenario (the depletion of natural resources and the sense of limits to development), the methods (getting the community involved from below), the objectives (making our own community more resilient, that is, ready to match the future we described), and most of all the optimistic approach (in spite of the difficulties of current times, in future events there are great opportunities to be seized in order to improve the quality of life of all our citizenry)'. (Comune di Montevoglio, 2009)

The document listed a series of national and regional laws and a number of reports from sources widely familiar within the Transition movement (e.g. studies by the Association for the Study of Peak Oil, the Post Carbon Institute, the 2005 Hirsch Report to the US Government (see Hirsch, 2005)). The Council unanimously supported such objectives as:

'Departure from oil and fossil fuels as a primary political concern of the administration, through an Energy Descent Plan to make of Montevoglio a "Post-Carbon" town.'

'Strategic patronage of the association, *Montevoglio Città di Transizione ...*'

'Promoting energy efficiency of existing public buildings' and the nomination of an Energy Manager.

Promoting the diffusion of renewable energies among the citizenry through specific actions and raising awareness of sustainable living, the alternative economy, and 'the limits of the concept of development based on limited resources'. (ibid.)

The Monteveglio Council and CT were reciprocally affected by their close connections. From its side, CT acquired a juridical status under the Italian Civil Code in order to collaborate with the Council. Moreover, CT received economic as well as logistic support during joint projects. Cooperation with the local Council permitted new local actors to get involved in CT and these people started to play an important part in the making of the Transition's various initiatives.

The network of community actors 'contaminated' (an expression which was often employed by my interviewees) by Transition ideas included the mayor, the councillor for the environment, the manager of the local regional park and the representative for environmental education at local elementary schools. These actors sought to promote Transition ideas in their political activities. They interacted with each other when necessary, but Guglielmo was the central figure. As Guglielmo saw it: 'what we know for certain is that to determine the agenda of a community takes very few people'. Thus, from a (steering) group-centred model, CT started to rely upon, in Guglielmo's words, a 'flux' of people and ideas.

Importantly, the termination of the steering group probably also allowed CT to avoid a stalemate. Without a group structure the existing divide between supporters of cooperation with the council and people less enthusiastic about the partnership did not seem to represent an insurmountable problem.³ Actually, although the Council's deliberation was generally welcomed by Transitioners worldwide the reception of the news was lukewarm in Monteveglio. As explained by one of the steering group members, Nicola:

'I personally do not share the deliberation of the council in which they acknowledge the Transition and end up putting a lid on us, because to me Transition has to be a process that comes from below and doesn't have to have connections with politics, because when politics gets in it ruins everything'.

In practice, the partnership with local institutions was just one platform for the activities carried out by the local Transition, and participants developed also numerous initiatives independent of this cooperation. Overall, there seemed to be a great ability to maintain focus on the movement's ideals regardless of the different views of the Council, yet the existence of different attitudes towards the local administration influenced the allocation of tasks within the Transition. Whilst Guglielmo, the promoter and fundamental supporter of the partnership, tried to make the most out of this relationship, other participants started to take action largely independently of the Council.

³ Della Porta (2009f: 120) remarks that, in her studies on social movement organisations, there emerges 'a strict relationship between choices made concerning internal organizational structures ... and [organisations] attitudes and behaviours'.

Giorgio emerged as a key figure in independent activities. Although he was not a member of the steering group he had become a cultural reference together with Guglielmo. The choice of Giorgio is best understood in light of his fairly critical views on the local administrators:

‘I was told that in a certain area I was not marketable because I was not from the PD, but that was a very particular issue and it was a possible role for an international project appointed by Monteveglio Council.... What I can personally say about the administration is not that they are not collaborative, it’s that they do a job which is not our own: for them it is advertisement, it is good for them to have the Transition, they splash it around...’.

Giorgio co-founded and was vice-president of a social and agricultural association called Streccapogn (the local word for ‘wild radicchio’). As will be seen, CT was manifested in a variety of ways in the community and it had very different publics depending on the type of event held, yet Streccapogn probably represented the main manifestation of Transition ideals in Monteveglio. Streccapogn was certainly largely inspired by Transition, as was widely acknowledged. Giorgio himself referred to Streccapogn as:

‘... the proof, the realization, or one possible realization, of Transition movement’s theories, the movement’s views put into practice, it [Streccapogn] is putting into practice Transition ideas to manage to recreate a community around a theme, and the theme is that of nutrition and a rebirth of agriculture, and the capability of agriculture to create jobs, wealth, and social relations...’.

Other Streccapogn members also showed clear ties to the Transition and most of them identified themselves as Transition participants. An example was Michele, one active member of Streccapogn:

‘I think we are fully inside it [the Transition], we are one of the most visible aspects of it...it is important I think for the Transition as well that there is this working side to it, this practical part. Let’s say that when I am working I think little about Transition, I don’t think of it immediately but I know that the whole idea was born also within that context and so I know that what I am doing gives its contribution towards that direction’.

Streccapogn was born in 2009 and it was in charge of agricultural Transition. It had about 20 active volunteers, five of whom (four men, including Giorgio himself, and one woman) dedicated possibly most of their time to the association (and most of them were distant from the Council’s political positions, and in particular, often to its left). There were hundreds of

customers, and Streccapogn also had a number of farms fully or partially available to grow and process produce, as well as a rich networking activity including local producers, local group buyers and associations. The network included suppliers such as '*Amici Contadini*', ('Farmers Friends', local farmers who had started to sell their produce to Streccapogn), and sales networks like '*Campi Aperti*', ('Open Fields', Bologna's branch of '*Genuino Clandestino*', 'Genuine Clandestine', a nationwide network campaigning to protect farmers and land from market and bureaucracy). Streccapogn's aim was to gradually rebuild the biodynamic and organic agricultural supply chain on a local basis, respecting the principles of fair cooperation and social inclusion. Among its paid staff there was a disabled person, and three non-EU immigrants. The association had tried to introduce to the latter individuals to the local community and also had given them accommodation, jobs, and provided support in regularising their legal status.

The twelve main figures in Montevoglio Città di Transizione included: the five most active participants of Streccapogn, the four abovementioned 'contaminated' community actors, Nicola (from the original steering group), another citizen in charge of Inner-Transition's activities, and, of course, Guglielmo and Giorgio. Each of these people had a primary role in the development of one or more initiatives and they directly related to the participants who were interested in attending them. These actors were in contact with each other when needed, but they all appeared to be closely connected at some point with CT's two main figures.

Guglielmo or Giorgio occupied a central position in the local network and their influence benefitted from this position (see Gastil, 1993: 131). Relationships between the two key actors, or 'facilitators' (to use their own definition), appeared very respectful and positive.⁴ Guglielmo and Giorgio, both white males of 40 and 44 years of age respectively, one a publicist with an arts degree and the other a university researcher with a PhD in Human Nutrition, they rarely met and mainly communicated on-line or via phone. Their interviews offered a comprehensive description of the vision behind the Transition project in Montevoglio. To Guglielmo, CT was:

'an Initiative of facilitation which has tried to get started in this small municipality a process of systemic redesign of the way of living, thinking about the future, organizing things, organizing values of things that are done and paths which are undertaken... Being the first Initiative in Italy is also a bit of a reference point for all the others, so it has also this second value of example, laboratory...'

Moreover, Transition was:

⁴ Interestingly, della Porta (2005b: 89) notices that also in the Italian social forums 'leaders' were referred to as 'facilitators' (or 'speakers').

‘spreading rather widely within the group of people who govern the community. We talk about both administrators, that is, institutional administrators, and all those figures that have got no institutional roles but who are in fact an active part of the community who determine its agenda and its tendencies. Among all of these figures we managed to spread a perception of the scenario, which is one of the key ideas of Transition, an idea on how this scenario can be addressed and the awareness that there is someone constantly present within the community who is able to address these subjects from a technical point-of-view and also in terms of information, and most importantly from an emotional point-of-view’.

Giorgio and Guglielmo shared some basic beliefs (and this fact, among other things, reduced the existing divisiveness concerning cooperation with the Council). First, both of them firmly believed that regardless of the type of partner it was fundamental for Transition to focus on the process, ‘the way things were done’. Secondly, it was important always to use a systemic approach, ‘looking at the whole picture’. Another point in common was that, in Giorgio’s words, they were the ‘two “elders”’ of local Transition, and, as Guglielmo put it, probably the only ones who ‘[had] a fairly deep level of understanding of the process’. Such a remark was made also by most of my interviewees, who systematically recognized the key role of the two actors. Certainly both participants were highly receptive to any idea which may have bettered the local Transition experiment and particularly to ways to improve communicative processes. For example, both actors became especially interested in the themes of deliberative democracy to the point that one of them (Guglielmo) ended up proposing to the Council (and achieving) a deliberative event. The Council and the Emilia Romagna Regional Assembly supported the idea of the *Iniziativa di Revisione Civica*, which took place in Montevoglio in October 2012. This event was inspired by the seminal model of the Civic Initiative Review in Oregon (see Gastil and Knobloch, 2010) and hosted a three-day deliberation by twenty randomly-selected citizens. Participants from five different municipalities in the Valsamoggia area were given the task to explore in detail important issues concerning the forthcoming local referendum on the possible amalgamation of the local councils. They also drew up a document in which they presented their views on the referendum (Iniziativa di Revisione Civica, 2012).

CT’s activities had interested hundreds of individuals over the years. Even just during my fieldwork, I observed at least a hundred different people taking part in CT’s initiatives. Events ranged in size from five people for meditations organized in the context of the Inner-Transition, to forty people at a Streccapogn open meeting. However, not all participants seemed to know that the local Transition was organising the events they were attending or that there was a Transition Initiative at all. I estimate that, as reported by several interviewees, there might

have been overall around two hundred people in Montevoglio who knew of the Transition. Only a quarter of those individuals tended to participate in a more substantial way. Numbers would be higher if we were to consider the Transition Italia activities that often were held in Montevoglio or neighbouring areas. CT participants were often instrumental in the creation of these events, although they were not conceived in the framework of the local Initiative and they were only collaterally aimed at the local community.⁵

Although Transition Italia's activities will not be central to my study, CT's relevance in the Transition movement in Italy remains important to understand the life of the local Initiative. CT's influence on the nearby communities was in fact apparent from interviews, and even nationally Montevoglio had become a sort of community model and was even presented on national media. Guglielmo and Giorgio were often travelling across the country and to share their Montevoglio experiences. For example, I followed the former (along with the Mayor of Montevoglio) when he gave a speech on the Montevoglio model at a student festival at the University of Trieste. Transition did take up a major part of the two actors' working lives and it appeared that both tried to combine their jobs with the Transition as much as possible, or even turn the former into the latter.

The interest in the Transition experiment in Montevoglio seemed justified, as CT had affected many processes that had been taking place in the community since 2008. Yet, in order to find traces of these effects the various reporters, volunteers, researchers and sympathizers coming to Montevoglio had to investigate the recent history of the community. The experience of Montevoglio's local government was surely among the most interesting of these. Since its election, the Council had worked on some major projects, such as the establishment of a 'negative' Urban Structural Plan (that is one in which 'building land was reduced' as the Mayor claimed), the construction of new public buildings, and the renovation of some historical ones so that they would have a 'zero impact' on the environment. The Mayor's view was that regardless of the partnership with the Transition: 'Most of the policies with an environmental point-of-view would have been made anyway'. Yet the Transition had supplied 'a great added value', since it permitted the Council to embrace 'a more comprehensive systemic view'. He added: 'in each theme we [worked at, we] tried to respect Transition Town concepts and there have also been practical implications'. Moreover, he continued, Transition's partnership

⁵ Several Transition Talks took place during my fieldwork. I attended one in Bologna, which had an audience of almost fifty people (mainly students). I attended also a Transition Training (in Tuscany) organised by Guglielmo and attended by about 20 people. Also an informal 'Transition editors' meeting was organized by Giorgio: eight Transition participants from central and northern Italy met on that occasion to envision ways to translate or create and publish Transition-related material for the Italian public.

‘permitted the involvement of a group of citizens I believe we would have hardly been able to get involved had we been doing things a traditional way’.

Besides the above influence, CT had already been more directly active in a myriad of initiatives. Projects with local elementary and junior schools, as well as with the local regional park administration ranged from the promotion of the use of public water, to nutrition, biodiversity safeguarding, and environmental education. CT had also won a European project grant (ENESCOM). Funding permitted partnership with local administrations and allowed them to undertake numerous activities. For example, one such activity that took place during my fieldwork was an educational trip to Vaxjo (Sweden) for a group of mayors from the Emilia-Romagna region, led by Guglielmo. Guglielmo was also committed to raise awareness of Transition’s themes with local organizations (including one meeting with Bologna’s Democratic Party branch, one of the most important in Italy). CT had also organized numerous events: movie nights; small local environmental campaigns (such as cleaning up the river banks, waste reduction, and recycling); forums with experts on a variety of themes, ranging from local currency, to citizens’ participation, to global warming; the creation of synergistic gardening; meetings (mainly free) on energy and energy savings and group purchase of photovoltaic panels; and courses (usually with a contribution) on a variety of topics, from Permaculture to training for local administrators. Moreover, Streccapogn, which had started to be a constant presence at local markets, had also organized events of its own. Giorgio had been very active with presentations on nutrition and sustainable local agriculture. Guglielmo, for his part, held numerous Transition Talks, as well as Transition Training sessions (the first one in Italy was held in Monteveglio in October 2008). Monteveglio also hosted a meeting of the Transition Editors project, and there were regular meditation sessions and recreational activities organised in the context of the Inner-Transition. CT was also present on-line through websites and blogs.

Transition Town Monteveglio Deliberative Capacity

CT had a multi-faceted nature and, in order to assess its overall deliberative capacity, it is necessary to analyse its different activities. In particular, it is worth beginning this investigation by looking at some of the history of the local Transition.

When I arrived in Monteveglio many processes, for example the relationship with the Council, were already well developed. CT’s influence upon the Council was most clear in documents such as the deliberation in which the partnership between the two organisations was made official. That particular document seemed to stem from a deep and effective, though scarcely inclusive, discursive engagement. In fact, discussions included the main figures of the local

administration and a few of CT's early actors. This small circle succeeded in both understanding what Transition had to offer to the local community and conceiving ways for local politics to favour this process as holding a mutually beneficial relationship.

Overall, collaboration with the Council was a matter of degree. In certain activities the Council's role was central, in others it was simply supportive of CT's initiative, and at times it was minimal or unnecessary. The distinction between activities organised in partnership with the Council and independent ones did not appear to involve major differences in terms of deliberative capacity, as variations seemed to occur instead at a more subtle level. On the one hand, autonomous activities and what the Mayor referred to as 'small things' displayed elements of authentic, inclusive, and consequential discursive processes. On the other side, there were those processes that the Mayor referred to as 'big things'. These included the construction and restructuring of 'zero impact' public buildings and town planning. In talking about these 'big things' the Mayor repeatedly acknowledged that collaboration with CT had been beneficial. In fact, at the very least the contact with the local Transition had expanded the vision and administrative culture of the Council.⁶ Nonetheless, the way in which 'big projects' were brought about had little in the way of authentic, inclusive, and consequential discursive engagement, with either CT or the community. In fact, although there had been meetings with locals, as the Mayor himself made clear:

'On big things such as town planning and public works the citizenry clearly participated ... by delegating to us as an administration [the responsibility] to make choices: thus it is administrators [making decisions]...'.⁶

It was outside those 'big things' that the Council's partnership conceded more space to develop deliberative capacity. This category included a rather wide array of activities such as simplification of the bureaucratic procedures of Streccapogn, assistance to the citizenry to install photovoltaic panels (also through organization of public meetings), funding to environmental campaigns and local initiatives, as well as support to the collaboration between CT and local schools and regional parks. All these initiatives led to processes which favoured more deliberative interactions. They also raised awareness among the public and, whilst generally small in scale, they seemed widely appreciated and contributed to reinforcing Montevoglio's reputation as a small but dynamic centre.

As for the events taking place during my fieldwork, CT's activities included two meetings on the group purchase of photovoltaic panels, weekly appointments associated with the Inner-

⁶ Admittedly, with regard to the construction of 'zero impact' public buildings there was a clear requirement from the latest regional norms.

Transition; fairly regular on-line activities, contacts with administration, a talk on sustainable living and nutrition, and meetings with local businesses and the Bologna branch of the Democratic Party. Of course, there was also Streccapogn, the only manifestation of CT which was based on a regular group activity. Besides the daily work on the farms and produce handling and processing, Streccapogn organized 'do-it-yourself' workshops, weekly markets, one public meeting, one group assembly, and several meetings with partners as well as other local groups.

In general, most CT initiatives had a discursive nature and it was possible to observe their quality according to authenticity criteria. Indeed, as will be shown, they seemed to perform positively from this perspective and attention to Transition's ideal, and in particular to the implementation process, characterised most activities. Nonetheless, it is worth remembering that authenticity assessments were impracticable in the case of equally important activities, such as Streccapogn's daily work (farming, etc.) and the Inner-Transition meditation sessions. Working activities for production and distribution of produce were obviously central as without them there would have been no Streccapogn at all. The Inner-Transition, likewise, had a prominent role within the local Transition, especially given the main actors' firm belief that taking care of an individual's inner-self was almost a prerequisite to change the community. The Inner-Transition thus promoted the Transition with few words and plenty of meditation and celebrations (as, for example, on the occasion of the equinox).

Streccapogn's case was particularly interesting because it was the only CT manifestation to rely upon a group structure and it hosted a wide array of activities. The group's main concern was to keep the business running (seeking to keep to its values), and meetings as well as discursive activities were secondary in that respect. Meetings were called only when needed, that is when at least a few of the main participants felt it necessary. Over time this had been happening roughly on a monthly basis, whereas there tended to be a public assembly every other month.

Despite their minor role within the group life, meetings and discursive activities received great attention. In fact, these occasions represented an opportunity to reaffirm the commitments and the values of the group. Moreover, there seemed to be a shared practical expectation that if meetings were to be held then they should be productive as there was plenty to do.⁷ Overall,

⁷ This view resembles the 'instrumental' and practical understanding of deliberation that facilitators seemed to have in Mansbridge et al.'s study (2006). This outcome-oriented assessment of deliberation was focused on the number of good ideas that would stem from deliberation, and it parallels the Streccapogn participants' expectation that discussion would be productive.

Streccapogn's meetings and discursive activities appeared to be of fairly good quality, as will be discussed later.

The main shortcoming was that these discursive occasions worked best for a small number of people, the Streccapogn main actors. These people had developed enough interests and skills to make the most out of discussions, which resulted in their greater influence on the group's life. Though not necessarily problematic *per se*, as will be seen, this phenomenon disadvantaged those who had a stake in Streccapogn but were not among its main actors (e.g. immigrants). This happened despite group members having no intention of excluding people, as their aim was quite the opposite. Also, Streccapogn's networking was particularly concentrated in the hands of a few actors. Similarly, whilst Streccapogn's on-line communications guaranteed a broad audience, they did not open up any space for substantial discursive engagement.

Some of Streccapogn's inclusivity issues were typical of CT at large (especially with regard to networking and lack of engagement on-line), although CT's lack of a group had provided a barrier against the development of a self-referential community organisation. Instead, it had given shape to an initiative that did aim at the local community at large.⁸ CT's activities hosted people in their early twenties to late seventies, locals and non-EU immigrants, and workers with highly varied jobs as well as unemployed people; indeed, I had occasion to interview and observe participants with widely different social backgrounds. However, CT's publics varied greatly and they tended to change depending on the occasion, also showing significant volatility.

Although the inclusivity of CT appeared rather remarkable, most of the people in Montevoglio still did not know about its existence. Guglielmo was well aware of this aspect. For him, there were many people who could have been engaged, yet 'there is part of the community [that is] totally detached...', he reported. As he stressed:

'They are absolutely impossible to reach out to. In reality only the mass media reach out to the masses and there is a total block of communication at local level, and you have no instrument to reach out to people who do not want to be in touch with the community, to the point that some people in Montevoglio discovered the existence of the Transition Town on national television'.

⁸Indeed, using Young's (2000: 73) terminology CT may have succeeded in forming a 'local public', that is 'a collective of persons allied within the wider polity with respect to particular interests, opinions, and/or social positions'.

More problematic, however, was the fairly clear homogeneity among the twelve people I identified as CT's central figures (of whom I interviewed nine). These individuals were from Montevoglio or nearby areas – though only a small minority was actually born there; there were eight men and four women; all were white Caucasian from Italy; nine people were between 38 and 48 year-old – the youngest member was 32 year-old, and the oldest was 62; nine of them had at least a Bachelor degree and only three a high-school diploma – the regional data, the best in Italy, is 14.8% of the population between 25 and 65 years of age have a university degree (see Regione Emilia-Romagna 2010); only one of them had a blue-collar job.

Towards the wider end of CT events' inclusivity, there were Streapogn's public meetings and the photovoltaic panels. The least inclusive activities, on the other hand, were those involved in the collaboration between CT and the local Council as they hardly ever appeared to involve more than two people. Ultimately, inclusivity was fairly wide in terms of overall participation but restricted in some key activities.

The relationship with the Council offered a means to understand CT's inclusivity in terms of interests. In particular, CT seemed to include both people who were closer to the position of the local political majority and those more distant from it; interestingly, almost all of my interviewees were extremely critical of national politics, and, with a few exceptions, also very sceptical of local politics. Beyond politics, however, the Transition struggled to engage the views and interests of those outside the fairly homogenous group of main actors (and who had a different background from them).

The local Transition had successfully promoted its views on sustainability and resilience among local institutions contributing to deepen their outlook on this matter. In fact, it is no coincidence that the Council's deliberation referred to the same elements that Giorgio and Guglielmo employed (especially the latter had contributed to raising awareness of the Transition themes among some local politicians): depletion of natural resources and limits to development; participation from below; resilience; optimistic approach.⁹ These concepts were fairly common also among other participants I interviewed.

With regard to consequentiality a first consideration is that CT was quite successful in influencing its local context especially on environmental and community-related themes. In this sense, the Council's deliberation probably represented the most significant result of this action. Indeed, this appeared to be a clear (local-level) instance of public sphere engagement affecting the understanding of actors in the institutions (Dryzek, 2005: 234). Furthermore, a

⁹ Guglielmo would also systematically refer to *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 2004) and *Thinking in Systems* (Meadows, 2008) as fundamental books to those becoming interested in Transition. TTM had also taken care of inserting into the local library's collection a number of Transition related books.

myriad of activities (such as meetings with school pupils, their families and teachers, workshops, and free conferences) had contributed to raise awareness. Plenty of practical implications had also stemmed from the existence of CT, of which the birth and success of Streccapogn was probably the main one. Hence, the local Transition appeared to be fairly effective at local level. However, only to the extent that achievements were realized through inclusive and good quality discursive processes did efficacy mean 'consequentiality'. As it emerged, it was when it working at a distance from strongholds of administrative functions that CT had the best opportunities to develop discursive processes of consequence.

Transition Town Monteveglio Activities and their Discursive Quality

Group Meetings

CT did not have a single group meeting throughout the whole period I spent in Monteveglio. Indeed, it was months since the last meeting took place and actually there appeared to be no group at all. Many important actors in the community had become familiarised with the movement's ideas at an earlier stage. In more recent times, they occasionally discussed Transition among themselves, mainly with Guglielmo and Giorgio, depending on the type of activities. Overall, it was sub-groups and individuals who were entirely responsible for the various initiatives. Streccapogn was at once the most active sub-group and the one with more participants, and the association's activities gave the best illustration of the workings of a Transition group in Monteveglio. In terms of meetings, while I was in the field, Streccapogn held a public assembly and one for meeting participants only.

Public assemblies were organized by Streccapogn with some regularity mainly to present itself to the community, recruit new energies, attract new customers, and (ideally) start new projects. The assembly took place in an inn on the main square of Bazzano (next to Monteveglio). There were banners and flyers illustrating the main features of the group (including its values) as well as the evening's schedule and goals. Most participants arrived fifteen minutes before the scheduled start. Nonetheless, the meeting officially started about fifty minutes late as it took some time before clusters of people finished their lively chat. Michele (the association president) opened the meeting in front of about twenty people. By showing some figures in a PowerPoint presentation he highlighted how new energies were needed, given the great success they were having. The president also proposed some working hypotheses to meet the challenges of the association's expanding activity. Soon after, Giorgio (the vice-president) explained that it was of central importance that every action of Streccapogn should be connected to its values. Thus, he presented some activities of the 'social-popular-farm' and introduced Streccapogn's network of volunteers, paid workers and buyers. The audience had increased to more than thirty people. Inclusion and Transition life-

style were presented among the leading ideas behind this community-based project. Streccapogn's experience, it was said, started with the realization that, the way it was, agriculture represented a failure not just from an environmental or social standpoint but also from an economic perspective. Hence, the association's goal was to experiment with a way to create a local district of fair economy that was instrumental to cultural change among as many (different) people as possible. Afterwards, there was a thirty-minute question time; in the inn's main room there were by then about forty people. Before a closing dinner, forty-five minutes were given for everyone to join one or more of the five round-table discussions to see whether and on what terms people were willing to become involved in the group's activities.

The open assembly of Streccapogn was not significantly affected by coercion. The president and vice-president had a central role during the presentation, yet they did not dominate the discussion. The meeting also induced some participants to reflect upon the many subjects being addressed, and, actually, a dozen people decided to become involved after the meeting. Particular claims were indeed anchored to higher principles most of the time. Moreover, both practical issues as well as ideals were to some extent scrutinized during the question time and round-table discussions. Finally, reciprocity emerged, mainly during discussions in small groups. For instance, this could be observed when people with more practical concerns (e.g. what material benefits one could gain by collaborating with the association) and more idealistic participants engaged in giving reasons and seeking some common ground for discussion.¹⁰

With regard to inclusivity, the meeting was mainly attended by interested locals, and only about ten attendees were from among Streccapogn active members. The gender balance of participants in the assembly was roughly equal (although there was a slight majority of males), there was a wide difference in their ages and in the variety of concerns raised throughout the night. Streccapogn public meetings probably represented the most inclusive regular event taking place in the context of CT in terms of number of participants and the variety of views that they expressed. However, active members seemed to find it easier to interact during the assembly. Moreover, although the activities with disabled individuals as well as with non-EU immigrants were mentioned several times during the meeting, none of these people ever intervened, despite two of them being present.

As to consequentiality, overall, the role of public meetings was more to keep an open dialogue with the community rather than make decisions, and the meeting was successful in generating

¹⁰ One may claim that the above-discussed situation is one which seems to support Polletta's (2012: 45-6) remark that cultural and strategic considerations are not always opposed in the life of movements and need not to be always conceived as such by researchers. In this instance in fact cultural commitments favoured instrumental benefits and strategic choices are shaped by cultural considerations.

support. Nonetheless, any idea that emerged from the open assembly had to be discussed during the participants meetings in order to start its implementation process. The meetings, moreover, were also a fundamental venue to decide the agenda to be addressed during public assemblies.

Only one Streccapogn group meeting took place while I was in Monteveglio. Eight people attended (four males and four females), and it was called mainly to address organisational problems and discuss the earlier public assembly. The themes on the agenda emerged from informal contacts and included the identification of one coordinator for farming tasks, and the synchronization of administration and labour activities. The two-hour discussion displayed attempts at thorough engagement to solve the above problems. The first issue was actually addressed, whilst no practical decision was reached on the latter point and it was postponed to the next meeting. During the discussion, instead, some related issues emerged that generated a heated debate. For example, one such episode occurred when a participant (Patrizio) lamented that immigrant labours were not working hard enough. After a long discussion, the group came to a firm conclusion that tolerance and solidarity were fundamental values and that, as it appeared, performance problems were to do with organisation rather than other issues.

The group meeting did not display coercion. There were passages in which debate was heated but respectful, and the participants seemed comfortable throughout the discussion. However, the association's president appeared to have a main role as speaker throughout the discussion and particularly as receiver of participants' ideas. As it emerged from my interviews, participants were fairly satisfied with the meeting as a venue for discussion. Some of them, however, remarked how the president, otherwise widely appreciated, found it 'hard to pick up hints from the group', showing how some people tended to understand their role as simple advisors. Reflection was certainly induced, especially on hotly debated issues, and general principles were often employed to articulate the various views. In this sense, besides the above-mentioned episode, another interesting discussion ensued from a participant's observation that the group might consider evading taxes. In fact, it was argued, within a short time the group would have to change its legal status in consequence of its growing business (about 25,000 Euros per year). Consequently, all the taxation that 'killed' local agriculture would hit Streccapogn too. Eventually, the whole group seemed to agree that since Streccapogn was also about challenging 'existing paradigms', it should promote a culture of legality: fiscal fraud, although economically convenient was not an option. Reciprocity, finally, was also displayed, especially on divisive subjects and on those matters where thorough engagement did occur.

Inclusivity was fairly limited, however. In fact, among Streccapogn's about 20 volunteers, only eight people (five of whom were from the most assiduous participants group) attended: all adults in their early thirties to early fifties, equally balanced in gender, and half of whom had a university degree. Finally, half of them (including the president) were already co-workers in a local social cooperative. More than by small numbers and homogeneity, the issue was represented by the narrow diversity of interests present in the assembly. In fact, despite the many volunteers who were involved in Streccapogn, the group's discursive forum was mainly populated by the most active participants. Although that may not represent a problem to new volunteers, absence from meetings could be more insidious for Streccapogn immigrant workers given that commitment to the project was their main means to make a living. Perhaps because discursive exclusion of the immigrants (also allowing for some linguistic barriers) was largely taken as a given, no one during the discussion even remarked that they were not present at the assembly. They were directly referred to in rather critical terms by some during the night and, were it not for their strenuous defence by most group participants, the outcomes of the meetings may have had potentially serious consequences on their jobs.

In terms of consequentiality, the group displayed a capability to decide on the basis of a thorough discussion (e.g. reaffirming solidarity and tolerance as basic values). However, it also made decisions with little scrutiny. For instance, the nomination of the group activities coordinator was achieved through a hasty discussion that omitted to articulate the divergent views which did exist. In fact, the need to create such a role was particularly felt by one group member. Eventually the very same person was nominated coordinator, despite the fact there seemed to be alternative candidates who were preferred. As reported by my interviewees, participants' friendships represented a boundary that the group was unwilling to overcome for the sake of good deliberation. However, meetings were just one part of the group's discursive dynamics. Jokes and criticisms of the managerial attitude of the coordinator, which were not made in front of him, found expression in the following days during casual interactions among some participants.¹¹ More than an exercise in intentional detraction that situation could also be understood as a means to keep open the discussion on the subject. In the words of della Porta and Giugni (2013: 142), among groups '[j]oking is also a way out of potential tensions'. To be sure, there were also other issues on which the group was unable not just to engage in thorough discussion (e.g. what legal status to assume, or how to deal with larger numbers of participants) but also upon which they made no decision altogether. Overall, the group meeting seemed to provide a reasonably effective platform to reaffirm principles and

¹¹ For his managerial attitude, after his nomination some participants would nickname the coordinator // *Marchionne della Valsamoggia* (Valsamoggia's Marchionne) after the CEO of Italian car-maker industry, FIAT.

developing guidelines for main activities, and it was also useful in addressing urgent problems. Yet it struggled to be effective in more complex matters. This latter aspect, however, can also be interpreted as a sign of the interaction between casual moments of discussion and group meetings. In fact, it seemed necessary for the group to address certain major issues through casual interaction before any definite group decision could be made, delaying final decisions to the last minute in a way that Haug and Rucht (2013: 210) observed happening also in the European Social Forum.

Discursive Activities

Discursive activities were believed to be a fundamental tool to raise awareness and an instrument to test Transition's capabilities to 'change paradigm'. In the context of Transition Italia, during these events there were constant efforts to seek quality interaction. For example, a variety of ways to engage with participants were experimented with at Transition Talks and especially at Transition Training. That same 'focus on process' seemed present in the development of CT's own initiatives, and it should be remembered that Guglielmo, the president of the association, was also a professional in the field of communication.

Most active participants were often asked to present Montevoglio's Transition on various local or national media, through videos, interviews, or writing, and, to be sure, an element of strategic communication could be envisioned on some occasions. Nonetheless, over the years CT had tried to engage people effectively in a variety of ways. For example, CT organized a series of meetings as soon as the opportunity for the photovoltaic panels purchase appeared. At these meetings people could talk to local business people and experts and reflect together on how individuals and the community could make the most of this technology. CT had even organized a course to train locals in facilitation through Open Space Technology, as well as a two-day training session for local administrators. Moreover, dozens of conferences on peak oil, climate change, financial crises, sustainable living, local currencies, energy and pollution had been organized throughout the years. Similar themes had also been addressed in a more educational manner through collaboration with local schools. As a part of its activity, Streccapogn allotted time to meet with groups of people interested in the association to present to them their project, give them advice and address their questions. Guglielmo, moreover, was in contact with local organizations to promote awareness of Transition-related issues and propose new operating methods. While I was in Montevoglio the main discursive activities that took place included a talk by Giorgio on sustainable living, meetings between Streccapogn and groups of interested people in the surrounding area, a second round of the group purchase of photovoltaic panels, and a meeting between Guglielmo and the local branch of the Democratic Party.

A widely-shared feature of this type of events was that they tended to reproduce an 'oratory model' (see Remer, 2002, Manin, 2005), which Giorgio's talk on sustainable living exemplified. Given in front of about twenty people, the talk unfolded following a structure similar to an academic seminar, with a presentation, time for questions, and open discussion. It displayed no coercion and there was some scrutiny, although differing views seldom emerged and they were rarely engaged with in depth. Of course, there was no decision to be made and it was overall a pleasing and educative night but with no effect other than having supplied participants with food for thought. On another occasion, Giorgio was also invited to present Streccapogn's initiatives to other groups in the region. Numbers were small at the two meetings I attended (respectively, six and eight people) and they consisted of an initial presentation and a time for open discussion and questions. Because of the small numbers it was never possible to set up an Open Office Technology workshop, to develop ideas, as Giorgio wished. Discussions were similar to the previous talk on sustainable living, though questioning was far more intensive. Moreover, differing views did emerge when participants started to reflect upon the opportunity to create a local association, and meetings did have a constructive planning dimension to them.

The second round of the photovoltaic panels group purchase included two meetings. Participants could ask local retailers for explanations about this technology and they also discussed the opportunities for individual and community projects. Guglielmo, who had led a similar initiative in the past, facilitated these events which were mainly attended by people who met for the first time. At least at the one event I attended I could observe a fairly positive discussion in terms of its authenticity. However, there was little display of reciprocity, probably also because numbers were too small to envision community projects (eight people attended the meeting I observed and reportedly twenty people attended the other one).

Attempts to raise awareness of Transition themes with local organizations were mainly carried out on a personal basis and I was not able observe these mainly casual interactions. However, I was able to attend the meeting with local representatives from the Democratic Party at which Guglielmo tried to propose Transition methods to improve the performance of the party's local branch. The meeting was attended by two young party representatives (one being Montevoglio's Mayor), Guglielmo and a local IT expert, who gave advice on the feasibility of the proposal. In particular, Guglielmo tried to make a case for using the forthcoming annual Democratic Party event (*Festa Democratica*) as a platform to develop new forms of dialogue between people and politicians right on Transition themes. The meeting displayed no coercion, and also connections between particular interests and broader principles were present. For example, it was argued that embracing the proposal would at the same time improve the

quality of local political debate and help reconnect the party with its voters. It was evident that actors at the table had different interests and worldviews, yet they sought to find common ground and reason through the various ideas. The meeting, however, did not bear any immediate fruit. The party representative who apparently appreciated the project explained that what they had discussed had to be presented for assessment at higher levels. Eventually, Guglielmo was informed that his idea could not be implemented.

On-line Communications

Transition Monteveglio had remarkable exposure on the Internet. The bulk of the CT presence on-line however was not related mainly to its own sites but to the fact that Monteveglio itself was talked about on-line on a variety of websites, its materials were circulated on-line, and its participants also wrote on other sites. Moreover, there were also a number of visionary accounts of Transition Town Monteveglio. CT's responsibility on this matter seemed limited since although the Initiative was scrupulous in crafting a dynamic and appealing image, it had little or no control of the reports about Monteveglio. Of its own creation, though, CT had only a weblog and Streccapogn (besides Facebook and a Twitter pages) had its own web-site. CT's blog had a mailing list of about two hundred people, links to various projects, related blogs and general information as well as fairly regular posts. Emails were used mainly for minor communication and organization of activities. The blog was not extremely active, with an average of about eight posts a month, mainly written by CT's most active members.

The Internet was indeed a venue where CT's ideas circulated widely, yet there was almost no trace of engagement. Although space for comments did exist they were only rarely used, if at all, and overall there was no significant discussion taking place on-line.

Practical Actions

Practical actions allowed a tangible manifestation of the existence of the local Transition and they had a symbolic value attached to them. That was particularly clear when, for example, people collaborated to upgrade a community area or a participant's yard into a garden, or to clean up the local river. Numerous significant initiatives were also taken on with local schools such as the 'walking bus' or synergistic gardening lessons. CT also organized permaculture courses, and obviously most 'practical activities' did have a cultural significance. Nonetheless, these activities featured mainly casual discursive interaction and they did not seem to allow for a meaningful assessment of their deliberative qualities. Finally, also Streccapogn ran 'do-it-yourself' workshops and farming for volunteers, besides producing, refining and distributing its own goods. All these activities generated tensions, issues, ideas that would eventually converge at meetings, where they would receive group attention.

Individual Initiatives

Though the main actors tended to get a number of people involved in each process, there remained in CT a large space open to individual initiatives. For example, Guglielmo was generally the only person engaging with the Council. More generally, CT's contacts also with other local organizations were mainly run on a personal basis by Guglielmo and Giorgio. The Streccapogn president and vice-president, instead, personally took care of most of Streccapogn's contacts. However, when I interviewed those on the other end of these interactions (including local Slow Food movement representatives, activists and purchasing support groups), they were largely satisfied about the relationships that they had developed with these actors.

'Personal responsibility' was a strenuously defended tenet upon which CT's action was built. As Giorgio and Guglielmo put it, participants had to have 'total freedom' to decide whether, to what extent, and in which activity to become involved. Thus, there did not appear to be a problem with the fact that often only a very few people were managing the CT's contacts. Nonetheless, that aspect could still generate some critical issues, in CT's case even more so than in Streccapogn's. In fact, the president and the vice-president of the latter association had the role, among others, to perform these 'representative' activities, and there was a group to report to during the rare but reasonably well-run meetings. However, in CT's case the president had in practice no ('formal') channels through which to regularly consult with (or be accountable to) others except for casual talk, and more importantly, no checks on his activity other than by himself. Ultimately, CT's structureless networks did not protect against the risk of elitist dynamics referred to by Freeman (1970).

The existence of a minimal structure within Streccapogn seemed better able to prevent elitist tendencies without crushing the individual initiatives of actors that benefitted the association as well as the community. Indeed, to the extent that platforms for satisfying discursive engagement existed, it seemed that the discursive resources that stem from individual initiatives were able to contribute to generating deliberative capacity.

Casual Interactions

An assessment of the deliberative qualities of casual discussions is arduous in light of their widely varying nature. However, some considerations can still be made. 'Individual actions' often lead to 'casual interactions'. When these two modes were coupled together as a way to make major decisions, obvious limitations in terms of inclusivity emerged, especially when there was no engagement between leaders and the association they headed. Yet, Transition successfully allowed individuals with no institutional role to contribute to community life, when more structured platforms of discursive engagement existed. 'Casual interactions',

moreover, characterized much of the activity taking place before and after meetings and discursive activities, as well as during practical actions. For example, during local markets participants and the president in particular sought to interact with people to make them aware of their project. In Streccapogn's case, moreover, casual discussions seemed to have an important role in keeping communication open until the next meeting (and making coordination of events possible and flexible). In deliberative jargon, it appeared that, thanks to the arrangements that the local Transition had created in Montevoglio, 'everyday talk' (Mansbridge, 1999) was actually contributing to the deliberativeness of the local community.

Conclusions

Transition Town Montevoglio presented some positive features from a deliberative democratic perspective. In the first place, in its various manifestations, CT often displayed elements of good quality discursive interaction. Though not optimal, substantial engagement seemed to occur on the occasion of meetings and discursive activities in particular. CT also reached out to a fairly wide public in its community and although it did not raise the interest of a majority of the population, it involved people from different backgrounds and positions. The main problem in terms of inclusivity consisted in the homogeneity of its main members. The existence of a Transition Initiative in Montevoglio had an impact upon the life of the town and beyond it. Although when dealing with those subjects and activities that were closer to the administrative core of the local politics it was difficult to promote inclusive, authentic, and consequential discursive engagement, CT successfully generated deliberative capacity in both discursive as well as more tangible ways.

Figure 5.1 Overview Montevoglio

Montevoglio
1. Location: Bologna province, Emilia-Romagna (5,200)
2. Type of community: Small town. Local community life and commuters to Bologna and Modena
3. Local political arrangements: Leftist political tradition. High institutional performance
4. Situation on environmental issues: Environmental reputation.
5. Type of local debates: No single issue and open public discussion
6. Public space features: Associationism (often political mainly leftist or catholic)
7. Statistics:
Education: conforms to regional higher than national levels
Income: above regional and well above national levels
Age: younger than regional and younger than national averages

Figure 5.2 Overview *Monteveglia Città di Transizione*

Monteveglia città di Transizione (CT).

1. **Year of start and Status:** 2008, Official
2. **Repertoire:** 'Flux' and sub-groups form, meetings (if needed), very active.
3. **People involved:** About 200 people know of it. About 60 participants: 2 leaders, 12 active, 50 more assiduous participants.
4. **Form of the initiative:** Formalised structures and legal recognition. Avant-garde leadership, active and passive participants, public.
5. **Relationship with the rest of the community:** Somewhat within the community and especially some segments. Collaboration with a number of groups, charities, businesses in the Region through institutional channels and beyond. Official partnership with local institutions. Active within Transition Italia and with other Transitions.
6. **Finances:** Some money, self-financing, Council money for collaboration and from businesses and activities.
7. **Relationship with local political activism:** Promoting Transition by doing things differently.
8. **Priorities:** Focus on Transition model and on the 'way things are done'. Innovation in community, addressing a new topic in a receptive area.
9. **Existing Taboos:** No Taboos.
10. **Stance on Politics:** Politics and non-politics segmentation. Critical of politics. Internal split on politics.
11. **Social background of participants:** Dominance of community-oriented, communication, organic farming backgrounds, higher level of education, varying age, gender balance (except key actors), wide reach except 'company town' dwellers, generally progressive. Influence of private interests.

Chapter 6 Case Study: Transition Meander Valley

This chapter analyses the deliberative capacity of Transition Meander Valley (TMV): a community group associated with the Transition movement, active in an inner area of northern Tasmania. First, I describe the environment in which the group operated and I present an overview of TMV's main features. Some of the group's problems from a discursive democracy standpoint can be understood in light of the way TMV interprets its role within its community as well as some features internal to the local Transition and its discursive processes. This chapter assesses the group's overall 'authenticity', 'inclusivity', and 'consequentiality' and analyses the quality of the different occasions in which the group's life is articulated. While there are variations among its various activities, ultimately Transition Meander Valley seems to possess only limited deliberative capacity.

Meander Valley and its Transition

Meander Valley is one of the northern municipalities of Tasmania, extending more than 3,800 square kilometres with a population of about 18,900 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). The territory covers the region around the Meander River, which descends from the Great Western Tiers through the hills and farmland to the outskirts of Launceston in the East where the municipality ends. The area hosts a range of different settings: urban and suburban zones, rural and rural-residential townships, mountain ranges, national parks, and forests some of which are included in the World Heritage list. Today, in the urban settlements reside almost 10,000 people who live in three suburbs of the neighbouring city of Launceston, the major centre of northern Tasmania. Heading west, the urban environment gives way to a markedly rural landscape and a more calm daily life which dominates the several townships at the heart of Meander Valley. Among them there is Westbury, the administrative centre, and Deloraine, an important tourist town and the lively and creative hub of the valley.

Deloraine, a town of about 2,800 people, hosts a variety of small art galleries and music venues and is home to the Tasmanian Craft Fair, the largest of its kind in Australia. Since the 1970s, the town has attracted a continuous influx of young people, mainly from mainland Australia, who come in search of a place to live an alternative lifestyle in strong connection with the land (cf. Breen, 2001: 11). As a result, alongside the more traditional farming and business-oriented groups, a very active and creative community developed not only in Deloraine but also in the surrounding mountainside areas, notably Jackeys Marsh and Reedy Marsh.

The other settlements, which are rather far from each other, host small and diverse communities (from about 350 to less than 3,000 people). Farmers, flourishing pockets of alternative lifestyle communities and business owners all live and work in this land. Meander Valley is characterized by an outstanding level of associations and activism, ranging from veteran organizations to a multifaceted and dynamic network of environmentalist groups. The cohabitation has not always been peaceful but these days it is uncommon to observe open conflict. Stories of barricades in the forest or harassment in the streets seem to belong to the past. While there was a period of open confrontation, manifested in a succession of lawsuits (primarily between groups of conservationist and business organisations) now conflict appears on the decline. However, this tension predates the arrival of alternative settlers in the 1970s. The land, and in particular its environmental and economic significance, has been the main source of division in this territory with the tension between developmentalists and conservationists dating back to the colonial period (Breen, 2001: 161-2).

The existence of just one dominant cleavage is an important aspect in understanding the context, yet to explain the tension only in terms of pro- and anti-forestry would be simplistic. In fact, the broader debate on the use of the land and on the future of the area is articulated in a variety of alternatives including: urban growth, industrial development, enhancement of tourism potential, large-scale agro-business, and community resilience. Although it would be inappropriate to overstate the confrontations of the past, fractured interests and polarized views on the environment are more than just memories. They are tangible in the landscape, they influence the discussion on the area's economic development, and they emerge in politics. As reported by almost every interviewee, including Council members and managers, at the time of my fieldwork the local government was composed of people representing the different local interests. These included: forestry, agro-business, farmers, environmentalists, exponents of religious groups, and alternative life style communities.

The majority of the interviewees referred to the council in rather positive terms.¹ However, those who talked most positively about local politics also claimed they did not 'go political', that is, they did not 'talk about forestry or the environment'. Dissatisfaction, instead, was tangible among those more active on those issues. Transition Meander Valley seemed to fall squarely in the more appreciative category.

The Transition in Meander Valley started its activities in 2010. At the time of my fieldwork, TMV was not an official member of the Transition Network though the group was inspired by the Transition movement and was networked to similar initiatives in the State as an

¹ Quite the opposite was the opinion on politics at national level, with judgements ranging from '[I am] uninterested in them', to '[they are] detached from the people', and '[it's] a business committee'.

acknowledged member of Transition Tasmania. There were approximately fifty addresses in TMV's email list though I observed close to twenty people actually participating in TMV events.

Four people (whom I refer to as 'core' participants) were the main actors of TMV: local community artists, Emmanuel and Julia, school teacher, Winston, and a local councillor, Smith. They were the backbone of TMV and were responsible for organising most of the group's activities. They were informed about the main concepts of Transition and related debates, talked to each other more frequently than others about Transition, and often took the initiative to organise the group's activities. Besides the 'core' individuals, there was a group of about seven people ('assiduous' participants) who attended TMV initiatives but were less active. There was an additional group of about ten people who occasionally took part in the initiatives of the local Transition ('casual' participants). Furthermore, approximately thirty people were on the mailing list but I never met them, and they were usually not referred to by other participants. According to my interviewees, hundreds more could have been interested in the Transition Town project. At any rate, TMV had not been able to reach out to this broader audience, apparently widely differentiated and including 'greenies and artists', farmers, businessmen, conservatives, and people without strong affiliations. The 'core' group seemed very conscious of this issue of involving more locals: the subject popped up often during the meetings and in interviews. It appeared that the group was engaged in a continuous effort to seek the best path to reach out to this potential audience, and this quest for support did have a role in shaping TMV's self-restrained attitudes.

TMV had little activity overall: they held monthly meetings, film nights, and a weekly Produce Swap. They also organised two small festivals, were starting a Gift Circle, and had an operating website. Most activities took place in Deloraine except for the monthly meetings usually held in Westbury, the geographical centre of the valley. There was very little money involved in TMV, and costs were covered by and mainly raised through self-financing or fundraising during special events.

Some participants were in contact with other local groups and collaborated on a number of activities. TMV had also developed some connections with the local council. In some respects TMV was sympathetic to the various interests characterizing the life of the Valley, especially those of the farmers and environmentalist communities. Nonetheless, except for the personal experience of a minority of its members, the group had no substantial collaboration with any organisations or interest groups. Importantly, TMV could not be said to have inherited the dynamic (and sometimes combative) spirit of the local environmentalist activist scene, which was still prominent and influential in the region.

The local Transition preferred to focus on community themes rather than engaging in discussions on environmental debates, especially local ones. This preference could be traced back to participants' personal inclinations. After all, there were already many environmentalist groups in the area (although the area was also rich in community support groups), and what the TMV really cared about could be simply the improvement of community life.

It is important to notice that the local context had a fundamental influence on the TMV's choice to bypass environmental disputes. Besides a possible predilection for community-building activities, participants clearly cared about the place they lived in. Indeed, during interviews, they showed most of the time a deep concern for the (local) environment (an aspect which of course, also characterises the broader Transition movement). It is necessary to report on some features of the local context to understand how it was possible that in TMV, local community and environmental discussions were in practice uncoupled. This is particularly interesting since such a characteristic did affect the group's nature and its deliberative capacity.

In the first place, as previously mentioned, the environment represented a political theme of a most adversarial nature. This was all the more important since interviewees widely deprecated politics (with the exception of the local government) and the 'traditional opposing views' logic politics seemed to embody.² Moreover, unlike many of those who arrived in the seventies (and gave a fundamental contribution to environmentalist campaigns), the participants of the Transition did not share such strong ideological beliefs as the people involved with the 'back to the land' movement did. Thus, the group steered away from environmental issues (especially forestry) precisely because of its 'adversarial', 'political' nature.

Furthermore, after at least two decades, the rather high polarization and overt conflict on environmental issues previously experienced in Meander Valley was progressively declining. The community seemed to strive to enhance reciprocal respect and peaceful coexistence among various groups, rather than exacerbating the differences that still existed. 'A significant part of the effort that I put in is about reducing community conflict' said a State MP of the Green Party in an interview, before mentioning the occasion in which someone in Meander Valley in 1992 blew up a bridge to impede the local 'hippies' from reaching the polling station and voting for the Greens. The recently-formed Transition in Meander Valley seemed unwilling to challenge the new peaceful *modus vivendi*. Such a belief emerged from many interviews I recorded.

For instance, Katherine remarked:

² However, 'if they had to vote' most interviewees would vote for the Green party or green-minded candidates.

'The politics in Tassie is that the Greens are considered the enemy of the state, if you want the Greens movement, and so anything that even hints that you may be Green, you are considered a bit of a radical or trouble-maker. Particularly if you haven't been born here, if you are from inter-state and you are Green you know, well you are one of those urban yuppie types that don't really know what they are doing, you know that sort. So I think there is a bit of that in terms of the environment, if you wanna support the environment. I think that is changing cause we do have people on the Council, like Smith Young [a TMV member], who are environmental types, and that's his platform. Although, I have to admit, when I read into his little speech, when I went to vote for him, [it] didn't really highlight that too much (giggle), you have to know him to know that that is his background'.

Group members stressed that TMV was a non-political group, and that it should not be identified as a 'green', 'activist', 'greenie', or 'environmentalist' organization. TMV's withdrawal into community issues was, moreover, supported by a firm conviction that by talking about the environment, it would be virtually impossible for TMV to communicate to the more conservative sectors of the population. As Winston (from the core group) said:

'...[Meander Valley] is potentially a kind of an ideal place for a Transition Town. I think the only the problem may be that if it is perceived as an environmental type of movement, there's a lot of them, there would be some anger in certain parts of the community where they blame the environmentalists for, you know, losing jobs and stuff if they are in the forestry industry, and then things like that. If it was perceived as an organization that was trying to benefit everyone then it would be successful, but if it was perceived as an environmental thing they would be, they would just ignore it, some people would ignore it'.

As Smith (core member and local councillor) said:

'There would be a third [of the local citizens] who don't know it [the TMV] exists, don't really care, a third that would be supportive to varying degrees, and there would be a third that because of its green tinges and environmental aspects would be, would feel obliged to oppose it'.

In Meander Valley's case, the working background and private interests of participants seemed to influence the subjects that were discussed, and the extent to which they would be addressed by the group. TMV was mainly made up of people whose jobs focused on the community, so pushing the group more towards community-oriented issues rather than the environmentalist ones.

Furthermore, the repeated attempts to avoid highly controversial or 'politicized' issues may also be understood as an attempt to safeguard their role in the community. Among my interviewees, in fact, there seemed to be a perception that in a small town one may have a better chance to make a living if one were seen as a 'good person' rather than a 'greenie' or a 'red neck'. Thus, taking a stance on agri-business or forestry in the local area seemed to embody a threat to their livelihood. In this sense it was interesting to talk to the three artists who participated in the TMV. A 'casual' participant, who was fairly critical of the moderation of TMV, in talking about the conservative and progressive sides of the community reported:

'...there is a part of me that's actually defeated, that when we first got here ... and I was part of the campaign trying to stop the logging of timber reserve in Reedy Marsh ... we fought that for years, and then I was called to the tribunal to testify, and wrote lots of letters about what happened to us, and we lost, and then the next day they moved in and logged it, so there was a part of me that was like: "I don't think I wanna live here anymore". I was so angry that I felt injustice, I didn't feel that I had democratic power, that that tribunal was there to hear my voice and the voice of many other people, and I don't think we were being listened to but I had to reconcile that because I did wanna stay here. So, you have to make some way of being with that along the side of all these things that you really feel strongly agai...that they are wrong, but you still need to make a life here so there is a bit of me that just had to...'

Julia reported:

'There are huge environmental issues in this area. There's lots of problems with chemicals, and agriculture chemicals, and the Gunns, forestry ... but people are already addressing that, there are environmental groups that are already doing that. So I think part of what the Transition group is to do is support them but without, I think it's important that we don't support them overtly to be honest because then we alienate the conservative farming owners who you'd think that they'd be on board with not having their farms over sprayed in chemical stuff that goes on their water, but it's considered hippie talk so...'

Rather than any business consideration, the latent divisiveness in the community, and in some cases the limited information on local environmental issues, seemed to influence my interviewees' position. Strategic calculation by participants, if present at all, was only to avoid eliminating the possibility to work and live peacefully in the small community.

However, in no instance did a person's interests affect the life of the group as much in the case of Smith, who served as a local councillor and a 'core' actor in the local Transition. In particular, concentrating on community themes, rather than engaging in a discussion on the extent to which, for example, export-oriented intensive logging and farming benefitted community resilience, could actually line up to be a shrewd political strategy. It is left open to question whether TMV distancing itself from the local environmentalist scene to persuade the more conservative sectors of the community constituted either a more effective way to work towards a more sustainable and resilient community, or a recipe for cultural change, or a more strategic shift towards the median voter in order to bolster the electoral perspectives of some participants associated with TMV.

Before my visit, largely due to the action of Smith, TMV had been attempting to promote a discussion of 'energy descent' within Meander Valley Council. However, this issue was never even discussed during any of the meetings I attended and there surely had not been an attempt to promote a community-level debate on local resilience. Unlike the former option that could be achieved through personal influence within the local Council, the latter strategy required an effort to engage with people, and potentially an overt challenge to the existing conception of what is good for local resilience. For example, an open debate including the conservationists fighting against intensive logging could challenge the view expressed by the Councillor when I asked him if he thought there were in the Meander Valley relevant interests or groups that covertly or overtly opposed to the goals of the Transition Town:

Smith: '... [there may be] a few organizations that would be sceptical of it but that would be through not understanding what it is really about: because, it is, it does talk about people and the environment immediately it gets a green tinge'.

When I asked if he could name these groups, he replied:

Smith: 'Well Timber Communities Australia any of the pro-forestry organizations, which is really silly because there is no threat. In fact, a Transition Town's future, or a resilient and sustainable future, would employ far more people in the timber industry because it would acknowledge the fact that timber is a very valuable resource, one that Tasmania does well: everybody needs a house to live in and if we are serious about locking up carbon then what better resource than to grow timber for building, I don't [sic.], and then lock it away in a house, and it is there for four hundred years, it is a long term storage for carbon so you know they are a very important part of the picture and I wait eagerly for the day when they realize we are on their side'

As illustrated by Smith, an important aspect of the local Transition was that it was open to a wide array of views precisely 'because it doesn't have a political stance, it doesn't have an isolating ideal, if you like, is very broad, encompassing'. Indeed, in Smith's words, the main achievement of Transition Town was allegedly that: 'it's provided a rational platform upon which people can have these sorts of discussions; it is a kind of a political safe ground where you can actually talk about these things without getting hooked into those traditional opposing views'. Such a perspective may have represented a noble aim but it appeared to be quite distant from what could be observed in the field. In fact, a plausible interpretation was also that in the Transition Town in Meander Valley nobody 'got hooked' into 'those traditional opposing views' because of a clear effort to avoid those 'sorts of discussions' for the sake of maintaining 'a political safe ground'.

The attempt to channel the group into local politics, and especially the manner in which it was carried out, appeared to be probably the single most detrimental aspect to the deliberative capacity of the local Transition. In fact, the connection with local politics and the alleged efficacy of this strategy in bringing about change seemed to come at the price of a reduction in the space for authentic and critical discursive engagement in the group.

Claims to non-political status notwithstanding, political considerations were not infrequent throughout the interviews.

Smith: 'I kind of wish that the Transition Town as a movement, and like-minded community members, put a little more time into putting up candidates for local government and...there is a lot of yeah...there are a couple of missed opportunities at the last election'.

Most of the group members, however, were by no means engaged in interactions with local politics. This was apparent in the answer to the question about what, in practice, the relationship between TMV and the local Council consisted of.

Smith: '[It] Consists of myself being between [the team?] the more active members of the Transition Town, Winston and Emmanuel particularly, and Julia, and, on the Council side, we have our general manager who is broadly supportive of sustainability, and John... who is working in the economic development and sustainability department, so yeah the people are good on both sides as it should be...'.

The belief that in order to achieve anything at all it was necessary to avoid divisive subjects was reinforced by the perception existing among my interviewees that the local Council

seemed now more open than ever to the progressive side of the community. Indeed, some participants reported that Council was keen on paying some attention to topics such as 'energy descent' that are of central importance for a Transition group. It was also 'highly likely' that TMV could access a community grant of up to AUD 3,000, as reported by Smith. Thus, among the wide array of subjects that a Transition Town may address, the preference went systematically to 'safer' subjects related to energy and community.

Overall, TMV ended up ignoring almost entirely the local environmental issues and it had attracted virtually no environmental activists, no businessmen, no farmers, no old-timers (people born and bred in Meander Valley).³ None of these groups could in practice give any contribution to TMV discussions and actions. Furthermore, TMV was not in a situation to access, select, or eventually capitalise on the resources that a territory historically rich in activism may have generated. More importantly, however, the consequences of TMV's neglect of environmental themes posed major constraints on the group's capability to discuss and reflect about important themes. As Polletta (1999a: 4) argued, 'counter-hegemonic frames', as Transition's ideas of localisation and resilience seem to be, 'come not from a... pipeline to an extra-systemic emancipator truth, but from long-standing community institutions'. As this case shows, the rejection of a local tradition of activism reduced dramatically the Transition capability to offer alternative sites of cultural innovation.⁴

Transition Meander Valley Deliberative Capacity

Overall, TMV displayed little in the way of authentic deliberation, only limited inclusivity and, as a result, almost no consequentiality. Most of TMV's discursive activities occurred during its monthly assemblies. Casual discussions during other events, as well as informal meetings among TMV participants and their individual initiatives, also played a role in shaping the action of the local group. Their quality, however, was not remarkable from a discursive standpoint. Finally, despite on-line communication being another venue for potential deliberation, no substantial interaction occurred on that front.

³ As it should be clear, the problem was not in TMV's idea to include 'unusual' groups, indeed such a strategy is identified as an interesting solution for environmental organisations (e.g. Baber and Bartlett, 2007: 17). Rather, the issue lay in the fact that not only were these groups never included, but also discursive engagement was never even sought.

⁴ A passage by Mutz (2006: 138) aptly applies to TMV. In particular, she notes that, 'citizens are encouraged to value "community" and get along with their neighbours. "Putting our differences aside" translates to either avoiding politics or having like-minded neighbours'. Mutz's analysis focuses on political differences and so its concerns are different from those of this study. To Mutz, what she calls 'voluntary associations' are groups that 'embrace largely apolitical goals', that is non-adversarial ones (ibid.: 139). This case study, however, suggests that there may be groups where participants may have 'apolitical', or 'non-adversarial' goals but in these very organisations there can still be a political dimension at work, and more political-oriented actors may be more readily aware of it.

In regard to authenticity, TMV's case showed that conflict-avoidance, the lack of overt manifestation of disagreement, and little engagement with contrasting views jeopardise the possibilities for authentic deliberation. Although during interviews participants displayed different views and opinions, these were rarely voiced at TMV meetings, and they hardly emerged at all during other activities either. This dynamic seemed not to depend upon an attitude specific to TMV participants. Instead, it was more likely that paying attention to the quality of discussions and engagement between different views was simply too onerous an effort. Some participants intended the group to be a means to meet fellow locals on a rather regular basis to talk about interesting issues and occasionally do something together. At the same time, those with more substantial expectations from the Transition found it either unnecessary or too difficult to further the group's efficacy, not to mention its democratic and discursive qualities.

No coercion was overtly manifested in TMV, and people took part in the group also because of the friendly and respectful environment characterizing the group's activities. However, as seen, TMV avoidance of even discussion on any potentially conflictual topic constrained the group's capability to reflect and take action. The underlying argument that omitting to talk about, for instance, local environmental issues would enhance the TMV's capability to lead the local community towards a more resilient and sustainable future seemed to call for justification. Such a discussion, however, was never even started.⁵ Indeed, as already illustrated, the choice to focus on community building (whilst ignoring environmental issues) could also overlap with any strategic behaviour of a powerful actor within the Transition. Overall, whilst meetings were open and respectful, they were not fully screened against a degree of coercion from the outside. TMV's activities could induce reflection among at least some participants on some topics. Such a phenomenon, however, as shown later, seemed reduced in intensity and scope by the features characterizing discursive occasions in TMV's life. Finally, the manifestation of reciprocity and connection of particular claims to more general principles, far from being systematic, was only rarely apparent. It was difficult to observe an attempt to establish common bases for arguments because discussions were only sporadically argumentative at all and participants mostly agreed throughout entire discussions.⁶

⁵ As remarked, this point had not been settled once and for all in the past. Of course, this is not an instance of 'meta-consensus' (Niemeyer and Dryzek, 2007) – or, for that matter, similar concepts such as 'incompletely theorised agreement' (Sunstein, 1995) – because in TMV there did not seem to be substantial discursive engagement to begin with.

⁶ Overall, to say it as Dahlberg (2001) might, it appeared that TMV had no particular deliberative qualities since it was markedly more of a place for 'expression of already formed opinions' (ibid.: 129), rather than 'disagreement over problematic validity claims' (ibid.: 112).

Concerning inclusivity, one of the most important elements was the group's composition. TMV was made up of people of working age and occasionally one or two retired people. Of the twelve individuals I interviewed (the youngest being 32 and the eldest 69 year-old) four people were in their thirties, four in their forties, two in their fifties, and two in their sixties. Thus, TMV appeared to include neither the youngest nor the oldest sector of the community.⁷

TMV was rather evenly balanced in terms of gender. However, females were more numerous among the people in the 'assiduous' group, whilst there were three males and just one woman in the 'core' roles. None of my interviewees ever mentioned the existence of gender issues within TMV or reported on how gender differences may affect the quality of a group's action and discussion. This point, instead, was spontaneously and profusely addressed by, alone among my twenty-nine interviewees, two female environmentalists from the 'back to the land' movement.

In regard to ethnicity, TMV presented virtually no variation. In fact, white Caucasians were the only people I met during my observations. Meander Valley, however, is not one of the most multi-racial places in Tasmania. If on the one hand I never heard a single racist comment of any sort, I never even noticed either a remark on the ethnic homogeneity of the group, or ideas to foster the relationship with diverse groups in the community. Instead, comments on the role of inclusion of different groups (specifically indigenous ones) emerged with some frequency during my interviews with local environmentalists.

Participants' occupations varied significantly. Especially among 'core' and 'assiduous' members, people engaged in community-oriented jobs tended to be more numerous than those with other occupational backgrounds. Furthermore, it is worthwhile noticing the absence of any professional figure associated with the forestry industry, agri-business, and environment-related issues, with the important exception of the only politician in the group, the Chair of the local Council's Sustainable Environment Committee.

In terms of scholastic background, TMV was made up of people from the middle to upper end of the educational spectrum. In fact, every interviewee except for two people had some level of university education, although no one held a PhD. The possession of a university degree by almost every participant is especially remarkable considering that in Meander Valley 7.6% of residents had degrees from university or tertiary institutions – against 11.8% of the population in Tasmania and a national average of 14.3% (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).

⁷ However, it must be said that 9% of the population in Meander Valley was from 20 to 29 year-old, the same data for the State of Tasmania was 11.7% and at national level it was at 13.8% (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011).

Provenance and the locality where a participant lived in the valley both were interesting aspects to look at. I have not found a single TMV participant who was born in Meander Valley. This was of particular significance since the divide between old-timers and newcomers did play a role in the life of the community (cf. Mansbridge, 1983: 100-2), and it was also important to TMV participants' understanding of their community. It is not by chance that my interviewees systematically talked of the Transition Town as a means to build a sense of community.

Katherine: '[in Meander Valley there is] a bit of a polarity in the sense that the people who have lived in Meander Valley and were born here and [their families] lived here for generations are in some ways the lovely rural farming types but also very set in their ways... and then you've got people like myself who've come from the mainland... and so we're considered, we are not locals, and we came in with perhaps more politically educated or [with] a broader outlook on life and want to change things and so we are considered, perhaps not accepted as much'.

Of the participants I interviewed all but two came from mainly rural areas. Both the city dwellers were neither 'core' nor 'assiduous' participants, and they remarked on the different social environments they lived in as compared to the rest of the group. TMV ultimately did not manage to attract people from the remote corners of Meander Valley. Moreover, neither city dwellers nor 'back to the land' environmentalists in Jackeys Marsh had been attracted by Transition ideas.⁸ This fact undermined the level of inclusivity of the Transition. It also shrank the already limited range of interests present in the group, in which, as already seen, the political interests of the local Councillor seemed to have the lion's share.

To assess TMV's consequentiality it is worthwhile to report some of the interviewees' ideas on the main achievements of the group, beginning with the three 'core' members:

Winston: '...I think at least [TMV] it's got together quite a few like-minded people, it's got together some influential people in the community, at least in the Council, and I mean we have got the website that's up and running...'

Smith: 'we have done lots of little things such as the Saturday Produce Swap meeting, which is a good entry point for some people to the whole idea of a Transition Town and also other ways of running an economy...we have attracted broader...we are still very early days so basically we have talked a lot...'

⁸ Interestingly, I was provided with accounts about the early (Tasmanian) developments of permaculture exclusively by local environmentalists and not Transition participants.

Julia: 'First thing [TMV] it's done it's provided hope to the members themselves, that reassurance that you are not alone, that's a very big comfort...'

Similar views were held by participants outside the 'core' group, for example:

Paris: 'I think we've just been trying to raise awareness in little baby steps...'

Katherine: 'I think that the main achievement would be the weekly Produce Swap, that's to me really huge, and, it's also, I guess, it's the sustainable housing day which they participate in, so that's good, some people can go and learn from each other...and it's probably just supporting people with the views that we have, it's a place that we actually feel that there other people thinking the way that you are, particularly in Tasmania because there is a bit of a redneck element'.

Although the Produce Swap was mentioned by many, the discursive role of TMV was an important aspect that people referred to in envisioning the achievements of the group. Nonetheless, whilst it was apparent that TMV represented a means for like-minded people to talk to each other it hardly appeared to involve anything more than that.

The flaws in terms of authenticity and inclusivity shed a rather stark light on TMV's consequentiality. A glance at the way in which the main activities were carried out seemed to confirm these concerns. Monthly meetings were organized initially by a small group of people and TMV core members decided when the meeting was to be held. On most occasions one or very few people conceived and worked at the achievement of projects: movie screening, Produce Swap and Festivals, Gift Circle, website and correspondence with the Tasmanian Transition network. Most importantly, the difficulty of having thoughtful and effective decisions stem from its activities was a core manifestation of the lack of consequentiality of the group. As it will be shown, outcomes, when they were achieved at all, were arrived at mainly through processes lacking quality discursive engagement.

Transition Meander Valley Activities and their Discursive Quality

Group Meetings

The monthly assembly was the main venue for observing whether and to what extent authentic deliberation actually occurred at TMV. This monthly discussion was important for the group and its participants, and a majority of the active members usually attended. Thirteen (nine females and four males) and fourteen people (eight females and six males) respectively participated in the two meetings that took place while I was in Meander Valley. At the first one there were four 'core' members, six 'assiduous', and three 'casual' participants. The second one had three people from the 'core' group, six 'assiduous', and five 'casual' members.

Both meetings presented some common features. Both evenings unfolded in a respectful and friendly way. Smith was responsible for taking notes and Winston for sending a brief report afterwards, whilst Emmanuel often led the discussion. Nobody had the role of facilitating the interaction: discussions were not structured in any way except for the respect of basic social norms; no technique or speaking rule was put in place and no decision-making procedure was ever employed. The agenda, usually circulated via email and repeated at the beginning of the meetings, received no particular attention, either in the way it was set or in its implementation. About twenty minutes before the actual meeting began, participants gathered together and chatted in couples or small groups while sharing some food. The assembly usually started with Emmanuel reading out the agenda. Subsequently the meeting unfolded, touching upon a variety of subjects which emerged as the discussion proceeded, mainly on the basis of what participants felt comfortable with and were interested in discussing.

To give an illustration, the agenda of the first (two-and-a-half-hour long) meeting included: introducing the researcher from Canberra; talking about the achievements and the main ideas of the previous year; setting the goals for the new year; finding ways to enhance communication with the broader community; discussing sustainable housing and the Sustainable Environment Community meeting; organizing a visit to a talk by a climate change expert; reporting on the possible discussion of peak oil in the local Council to suggest practices that may suit the Meander Valley situation, developing a proposal for the group involvement in the local Craft Fair; and the introduction of the community Gifts Circle idea. The TMV meeting succeeded in introducing me to the group, making some arrangements for the trip to the talk, discussing a proposal for the group's involvement in the local Craft Fair, introducing the idea of community Gifts Circles, and talking about sustainable housing. Other issues such as discussing last year's achievements, setting the goals for the new year, and introducing the Sustainable Environment Community meeting were only partially addressed. The group did not develop new ways to enhance communication with the broader community, despite some thought being given to the idea. The discussion about putting peak oil on the Meander Valley Council's agenda never started. Instead, themes not on the agenda such as a forthcoming festival, traditional farming methods, and the possibility of building a public oven and a solar-powered hot water system group purchase were devoted considerable (previously non-allotted) time.

Clearly, meetings did not succeed in matching the plans and expectations of participants. As reported by most of my interviewees, participants expected in the first meeting to discuss the vision of the group and elaborate a plan of action for the new season: an objective which was achieved only partially – the seemingly important issue of whether or not in Meander Valley

there were economic activities and environmental problems likely to obliterate the opportunity to build a sustainable and resilient community did not receive any mention at all.

Throughout the meetings people could voice their views and personal experiences if they desired to share them but there was neither incentive to do so nor method to discuss. Thus, usually, someone would signal his or her wish to talk about an issue, and if the group acknowledged the hint, a discussion would ensue and the proponent was given prominent space. Some people of course preferred to listen and were rather quiet. Only on rare occasions did the group stop to invite someone particularly silent to talk. Often the merriment stemming from a conversation upon a certain subject appeared to be the main factor guiding the discussion. However, it also appeared that whenever disagreement was about to take shape the conversation (frequently and) rather naturally shifted to a different topic. Discursive processes appeared so loose that whenever any divergence in opinion did arise the discussion almost collapsed and headed automatically towards another topic. Monthly meetings were severely affected by this dynamic that also had the side-effect of imprinting great volatility into the interactions. Volatility was less apparent when the conversation had a goal, that is when a discursive or practical outcome was actually expected out of the talk; indeed, these were some of the few instances where participants with different views actually engaged with each other. Overall, discussions seemed to flow from one agreement to the next, whilst occasions for attentive and thorough analysis were dismissed one after the other. Probably as a consequence of the group's orientation towards an 'organic' or 'informal' approach (two terms often referred to by participants), TMV did not seek to put into place measures that may have improved the quality of its meetings. With a few exceptions, divisive subjects were not addressed, and there was also residual limited space for issues upon which a decision had to be made. When a group decision was needed, usually, those at the table were asked if they had any problems with the solution that seemed to emerge after some discussion, generally dominated by those most interested in a specific issue.⁹

A first step to understand TMV meetings' authenticity involves an assessment of the role of coercion. Meetings were not characterised by overt coercion. Interactions were respectful and generally, deception, strategic behaviour or domination were not observed during meetings. However, as seen, the situation characterising the local context and the group structure seemed to have a role in constraining the range of issues that could be addressed during

⁹ This dynamic seems to feature an extreme and negative version of what (Mansbridge et al., 2006) term the 'free flow' of ideas in discussions. Free flow, the authors notice, would be the result of skilled facilitation. In particular, to be normatively and instrumentally valuable 'free flow required lowering the barriers to frank speech through a level of comfort with the situation that encouraged openness, a sense of safety, and the capacity for mutual challenge' (ibid. 24). These conditions (and any form of facilitation or even self-facilitation) were missing in TMV meetings.

meetings. Thus, central topics of Transition, for instance, the local community's perspective in terms of resilience and relocalisation, were in practice systematically kept out of the group purview. Even more problematically, persuasion, as the very dynamic at the opposite of coercion (Dryzek, 2000: 1), was not particularly central to the enjoyable discussions held during meetings.

In regard to the meeting's capacity to enable reflection on individual preferences it was possible to observe that on some topics some levels of reflection and exchange of ideas did take place. For example, discussion on sustainable housing, on group vision, on reasons and ways to communicate with more conservative sectors of the community, on the idea of construction of a community pizza oven, on the debate around the Gift Circle, all had instances in which reflection was shown although some subjects tended to be dealt with in rather generic terms. However, it is worth remembering that TMV limited its discussion to community-related issues, and a number of arguments that could be of interest to a Transition Town were left unexplored. For example, the possible impact of agri-business and intensive logging on the prospective resilience of the community went completely unmentioned. Likewise, TMV's strategy had made it impossible to include many sectors of the local population and their views and preferences: no farmer gave a contribution to the discussion on farming, no environmentalist ever joined the debate to give an activist point-of-view, and no businessman ever gave a first-hand account of what was important for local business. Thus, discussion, not to mention reflection, on individual preferences on many relevant issues was just not possible. Ultimately, if there was a level of reflection the phenomenon may have been modest because of the above issues and process shortcomings.

Assessing the levels to which reciprocity was exhibited is complex because the participants agreed with each other in most of the discussions. Although people did share common grounds in discussion, this did not appear to be a consequence of a quest for reciprocity but rather that divergences rarely emerged at all. When asked whether during the TMV meetings it was mainly agreement or disagreement that prevailed, all of my interviewees reported that agreement was dominant, and most of them highlighted that the group had never really had disagreement.

Similarly, specific claims were at times connected to more general ideas. This, however, was not systematic, and was usually aimed at reinforcing shared ideas rather than engaging with different ones. For example, everybody agreed when some participants explained that it was necessary to avoid being perceived as an environmentalist group in order to reach out to the more conservative people in society. Doing otherwise would turn the TMV into a partisan organisation, which was against the spirit of openness of the group. This observation was not

countered by any objection (and as some participants pointed out during interviews, this came at the important cost of sacrificing the group's ability to engage with important local issues). Overall, meetings seemed far from being processes which would 'enable citizens to see conflict more clearly when that conflict has previously been masked' and help them 'understand their interests better' (Mansbridge, 1999: 226).

As already observed, the group displayed shortcomings in terms of its inclusivity and these were naturally reflected in the context of the monthly assembly. This was apparent with regard to the homogeneity of the participants and the restricted range of views and interests they brought to the table. Meetings also seemed to replicate another feature of the group. While generally every speaker received attention, some discussants – not necessarily the 'core' activists – were more vocal than others during meetings. This behaviour can have different causes and meanings and is not necessarily problematic in itself (cf. Mansbridge et al., 2006, Karpowitz et al., 2012). Nonetheless, if some actors were willing to talk but, for instance, were uncomfortable to talk in public, TMV seemed to offer very few ways to have them become more involved in the discussion.

Consequentiality was limited in two ways. To begin with, there was no authentic and inclusive discussion during meetings. Moreover, group meetings rarely ended up taking binding decisions at all. Often, meetings had little capability to influence group choices as decisions on important issues (e.g. relationship with council) were taken elsewhere or based (almost) entirely on the efforts of a single individual (e.g. networking with other organisations).

On-line Communications

On-line discussion did not have a central role in TMV. Winston and Emmanuel mainly took care of the website and the mailing list whilst Jones (an 'assiduous' participant) updated the Facebook profile for the Produce Swap. TMV's captivating web-site offered a rather comprehensive source of links to information on Transition-related subjects but lacked information about TMV and its current debates and operations. The website main themes (agriculture, food and peak oil) were not mentioned in reference to any local debate in particular, except for a list of shops where to buy local goods and food. The website was seldom updated and it did not host a space for virtual discussion. According to my interviewees, the main function of the site was to allow TMV 'to be out there', and whilst it was a source of information it could not represent a venue for deliberation. The mailing list was used to organize, update and remind people about the TMV activities, and to circulate rather detailed minutes of the meetings as well as interesting documents from time to time. However, emails as well as Facebook were not employed as means for substantial interaction, and ultimately there was no communication exchange to be observed in the virtual space.

Individual Initiatives

As already observed, individual members' professions were a powerful factor in shaping TMV's action. In practice, individuals' own initiative was incredibly important to the destiny of the group, particularly to connect TMV to the outside world. Three individuals – Winston, Emmanuel and Smith – would easily reach out to three important entities, respectively, the broader Transition network (particularly the Tasmanian one), community groups in Meander Valley, and the local Council. Private conversations with members outside the community were important because they brought the power of 'personal connections' into the group and it was not by chance that the abovementioned individuals were three (out of four) 'core' participants of TMV.

Personal connections were the result of a person's position in the community and most importantly of efforts to spread the message of the TMV. No participant ever opposed the fact that just a few people controlled TMV's linkages with the outside. It was clear that the 'core' members were investing more time and energies into TMV and they were, accordingly, respected by the rest of the group. As an 'assiduous' member remarked:

'We only have a few people but say Emmanuel and Winston and Smith, they put in a lot of time, they bring a lot of energy to the group, they bring a lot of knowledge to the group...they kind of know what they're doing, so I think the three of them together are pretty strong...they know what they are there for, they know what they want to achieve, they are feeling motivated about it'.

Nonetheless, the fact that contacts were held on a personal basis and there was absolutely no provision for how to report networking activities (not to mention any sort of accountability), at the same time limited the opportunities for others to scrutinise and concentrated power on certain participants. This seemed problematic in TMV's relationships with local politics in particular. To be sure, anyone could give a call or walk in the offices of Meander Valley Council, whose openness to its citizens seemed to be acknowledged by most people I talked to. However, hardly anybody could do so with the same effectiveness as Smith, the local Councillor and the Chair of the Sustainable Environment Committee. Essentially, whatever could be said to the Council was likely to be channelled through the Councillor, and whatever the Council had to offer to TMV was mainly transmitted through the same person. As explained by an 'assiduous' participant:

'I don't have much involvement or knowledge about politics at local level other than conversations, I may have heard about it by friends that are farmers or information that Smith releases, and that's probably the most information about

local politics I get, is the information Smith leaks, releases at the meetings, about what local Council is up to'.

The Councillor was clearly in a privileged position in defining the (non-)political vision of the group. This was especially true considering that the group had weak connections with the rest of the community and with other groups, only partial interaction with the Transition Tasmania network, and virtually no exchange with the Transition movement outside the state. The 'on a personal basis' manner in which external relations were maintained, especially given the presence of an 'outstanding' figure, was a significant constraint on the authenticity of the group's deliberation. The inclusivity of this mode of action was poor and its efficacy cannot be taken as a manifestation of consequentiality.

Casual Interactions

Group members met outside the context of the TMV with some frequency, especially the 'core' and 'assiduous' participants. In fact, it was not unusual to see TMV members talking to each other around town and conversation occasionally could be about the local Transition. However, there was nothing that could have been meaningfully examined using the standards of authentic deliberation. It was more about companionship, the development of bonding dynamics, a 'going-out-together' experience that actually gave substance to the spirit of the local Transition, so very focused on the need for community-building.

These casual occasions influenced the more deliberative occasions. In fact, they contributed to making some people more aware of the person that was sitting next to them at monthly meetings. This could have enhanced openness but may have also made some participants uncomfortable in opposing or debating with each other. Moreover, special connections between just certain participants did leave some others less integrated in TMV, such as participants from the urban area.

Furthermore, since casual meetings outside the TMV represented important instances of discussion on TMV-related issues, the more they occurred the more the group meetings (the only time when everyone interested could join in) were exposed to interactions extraneous to group-level discursive engagement. This problem would not be particularly concerning if a thorough deliberative process took place on the 'appropriate' occasion. Actually, casual gatherings could represent a supplement to the deliberation. However, as the discursive process was weak, these external meetings could be much more pernicious, and, in the worst case, could render the deliberative session into a ratification ceremony for decisions made elsewhere.

The environment at the Produce Swap was similar to that of other casual meetings. This event, however, was the most regular manifestation of the spirit of Transition in the life of the community, possibly the one aspect of the local life that had actually been modified by the TMV. The first time I attended, a dozen people (half of whom were not TMV participants) turned out, brought some vegetables or some home-made food, took something they needed for the week, had a chat, and left more or less one hour later. The Produce Swap was essentially an occasion for people to gather on a Saturday morning.¹⁰ No coercion was apparent and people attended because they took pleasure in spending some time in company. Moreover, discussions allowed some individuals to reflect on a variety of subjects. However, generally no one advanced any claims that needed to be justified in light of higher principles, nor was there ever any attempt at reciprocity in making a substantial argument. Most of the topics were touched upon and abandoned after a few minutes; just casual conversation without purpose beyond having a good chat seemed to occur. In this sense, the Produce Swap was (just) a moment of neighbourly spirit.

Practical Actions and Discursive Activities

Besides the above activities, TMV organized film nights and two small festivals. It also was planning on building a community oven, implementing a Gift Circle, and organizing a transfer to attend a talk by a public intellectual on Transition-related issues. Unfortunately, at the time of my fieldwork, none of these activities were in place. It seemed that these initiatives captured the attention of participants and were probably destined to increase in number in the future. At the time of my observations, however, they seemed rather sporadic and did not significantly impact on the way TMV acted and discussed.

Conclusions

This analysis has attempted to assess the deliberative capacity of TMV in relation to its own dynamics and to the context in which it operated. Important flaws appeared in all three dimensions of deliberative capacity. Discursive processes were problematic from a deliberative democratic standpoint. The manner in which TMV adapted to its local context as well as its mode of action seemed to hinder the development of deliberative and democratic qualities. Likewise, inclusivity was restricted by the fact that TMV had not been able to include important sectors of the community. Finally, the limited achievements of the group were arrived at usually by means other than consequential discursive processes.

¹⁰ Interestingly, having noticed that at the Produce Swap locals donated more goods than they took, the organizers took up the challenge of familiarizing people with the idea of being open towards receiving without having necessarily to give something back.

Figure 6.1 Overview Meander Valley

Meander Valley
1. Location: North Tasmania (pop. 18,500)
2. Type of community: Largely rural area. Fairly isolated farming communities (250-3000) and 'green' settlements, outskirts of Launceston.
3. Local political arrangements: 'Consociational' local government
4. Situation on environmental issues: Environmental cleavage and polarisation.
5. Type of local debates: Environmental Taboo (except environmentalist groups).
6. Public Space features: Associationism and environmental activism (blocks on confronting issues)
7. Statistics:
Education: well below State and Federal levels
Income: below State and Federal levels
Age: older than State and Federal averages

Figure 6.2 Overview Transition Meander Valley

Transition Meander Valley (TMV).

1. **Year of start and Status:** 2010, Unofficial.
2. **Repertoire:** Group form, meetings, little activity
3. **People involved:** Around 50 people know about it. About 20 participants: 4 core members, 7 assiduous participants, about 10 casual participants.
4. **Form of the initiative:** No structure, more active and less active participants, other potentially interested people.
5. **Relationship with the rest of the community:** Secluded from community. Fairly isolated group, with individuals' personal connections. Informal contacts with local government (Councillor). Little collaboration with Transition Tasmania.
6. **Finances:** Little money, self-funding, seeking Council grant.
7. **Relationship with local political activism:** No environmentalist inheritance embraced, or other local experience. No challenge at all to *modus vivendi*.
8. **Priorities:** Generic focus on community.
9. **Existing Taboos:** No talk on taboos or confronting issues.
10. **Stance on Politics:** Markedly anti-politics as a group and individually critical of politics
11. **Social background of participants:** Community-oriented jobs, higher level of education, only newcomers and no old-timers, youth and seniors under-represented, white Australians, gender balance (except 'cores'), no environmentalists, no farmers. Clear influence of private interests.

Chapter 7 Case Study: *Modica in Transizione*

This chapter investigates and assesses the deliberative capacity of a Transition group in Modica (Ragusa), Italy. The first part discusses some features of the context in which this Transition experiment is operating and the principal characteristics of the group. The local context presented some substantial issues as well as remarkably positive features. The Transition group, after a slow start, has developed strong ties with the most active sectors of the local population. The second part examines the deliberative capacity of the group. Transition Modica (MT) featured good quality discursive processes, yet it appears to be little more than a study group on Transition. An investigation of the main activities of the group shows that Transition Modica features a discrete level of authenticity, restricted inclusivity, and low consequentiality.

Modica and its Transition

Modica is a city of about 55,000 inhabitants (ISTAT, 2010) in the Province of Ragusa, in the deep south of Sicily. Its municipal area runs from the Hyblaean Mountains to the Mediterranean Sea (with an area of about 290 square kilometres). Although since the fascist period Ragusa (about 15 kilometres away) has emerged as the main centre in the province, Modica is still a lively and relatively affluent town. Besides services and agriculture, which are the main sectors of the local economy, a rising tourism industry is developing as well. An important centre to the life of the island, the city is characterized by an incredibly rich and complex history and since 2002 it has been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List (see Cugno, 2012).

At the time of my visit, the town of Modica (similarly to other centres in the region) presented some criticalities. Among the most urgent problems was the major unemployment rates with 41.46% of the people from 15 to 24 year-old unemployed in the province (ISTAT, 2011c). Also, environmental degradation appeared to be a serious concern. Problems included a broad set of issues ranging from arsons, to intensive farming, to oil drills (see la Rocca, 2010, Raffaele, 2010). A chronically inefficient waste management system, a recycling rate well below 10%,¹ and an urban sprawl (which has devastated many rural areas) were also widely acknowledged emergencies. As reported by a local councillor, for instance, over the years there has been an 'exponential growth of urban areas, through variations to the urban development plan, only to the advantage of certain groups... So you had land that was worth 100 Euros and after one

¹ Though official data on recycling could not be found, the Council reports a percentage of landfill waste of about 90% and its target for the forthcoming year was to reach 35% recycling (Modica Council Deliberation 2012)

night it was worth 100,000 Euros through that variation, and [that way] there was a destruction of the territory'.² Moreover, a major debt has been plaguing the Council's finances especially over the last decade. As an illustration, it is worth mentioning that Modica's more than 21,000,000 Euros budget deficit was the country's highest (in absolute terms) in 2008, as certified by the Italian Audit Office. Finally, Modica is in a province that is not unaffected by organized crime (see Ruta, 1997).

Nonetheless, the area also displayed rather outstanding features. First, with the exception of the areas of Comiso and Vittoria where the criminal presence was manifested even through open wars within and among clans, organized crime was much weaker here than in many other parts of the island (see Bascietto, 2005). As the provincial coordinator of Libera, A leading Italian civil society anti-mafia organization, remarked: 'here historically we have not had a mafia presence in Palermitan style...there has not been a mafia that excessively conditioned the whole economic and social life of the province'. The local economy, moreover, is among the most developed in southern Italy (Terranova, 2009). Furthermore, this area, which enshrines a variety of magnificent environments, is renowned for its industrious, welcoming, and simple lifestyle, as my interviewees did not fail to remark.

Many comments tended to highlight Modica's distinction within the Sicilian context. As most people would stress, for example, this territory that has belonged to the county of Modica (from the late 13th century until 1812) has historically enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, developing largely specific features. For instance, unlike the rest of the region, large landed estates here had already been abandoned in the Sixteenth century. That fact, among other phenomena, favoured the development of a dynamic local bourgeoisie and the mitigation of massive exploitative and power imbalances in the which mafia flourished (see Chiaula, 2011). The area's distinctiveness was well captured by the oft-used popular expression deriving from local history, according to which this part of Sicily is 'an island within the island' (Barone et al., 2006).³ Although my interviewees were concerned about local problems, Modica was usually depicted in comparatively positive terms. 'Modica's community, I think, is a bit of a happy island of Sicily even though partially' a local journalist told me. 'Modica is even ahead of Ragusa...There are many more opportunities, informal associations and so on...', a local environmental activist explained. A young local Catholic leader, moreover, noticed that Modica was '...one of the most culturally and socially dynamic towns of Sicily'. Everyone would also

² The city's 1977 urban development plan has expired in 1993 and a comprehensive revision was still not available as of 2012.

³ Another telling and widely employed nickname for the area goes back to the Sicilian writer Leonardo Sciascia (1983) who referred sarcastically to this province as '*provincia babba*' (mild province) as opposed to the '*Sicilia sperta*' (canny Sicily).

highlight the difference from major cities in the region, Palermo and Catania, and with troubled surrounding provinces. In particular, almost unanimously (starting with the Mayor) the neighbouring town of Gela was presented as an extremely problematic environment, 'a social desert' compared to which Modica appeared like an oasis. As a permaculture farmer from the Gela area remarked (in commenting on how locals perceived his work): '...in Ragusa and Modica area it's incredible... although there are just 50 or 100 kilometres of distance [mindset] is widely different'. He also added: 'it is not by chance that [Mariano] is succeeding in creating things there, and I believe that here...they always look at me a bit like ET'.

As celebrated in a short post on the Italian Transition network's website (see Transition Italia 2011), it was in Modica that, in early 2011, the first and only Transition steering group in southern Italy started. Yet, in practice then there was not much more to the Sicilian Transition than the dedicated commitment of two people, one of whom Mariano tried to talk to about Transition ideas in Modica (the other person was in Palermo). As Mariano reported: 'Transition in Modica started when I came back here. The first time I spoke publicly presenting the Transition Town project was in January 2011 when I projected a video at some friends' house; the video was Transition 1.0'. However, the idea did not receive enough attention and little happened in the following months.

Mariano: 'Before the second activity of Transition Town a whole year went by... we no longer even talked about it anymore with those I had already talked to. In January 2012 though I was called to participate in a meeting of Modica's people. The goal was to better understand the current crisis, the one which is unfolding, so we wanted to organise a conference with someone knowledgeable on that'.

That was a unique occasion, a turning point in the history of Transition Modica (MT). For the first time, the Transition idea entered in contact with a substantial group of locally active people who had in place some social infrastructures upon which Transition ideas could circulate.

Mariano: 'I took advantage of that [event] to get everyone involved in the study of the crisis beyond the recitations they show on television... Naturally not all of that was in function of Transition Town... but since to me this is a lifestyle, it is an ideal, I moved following a bit Transition principles so I tried to let pass climate change and peak oil themes'.

The idea to organise meetings around the theme of the financial crisis came from *critica la crisi* (critique the crisis), a local initiative created to reflect upon the meanings and consequences of the crisis and other related issues. As explained by Assunta, one of the leaders of *critica la crisi*,

the group organised meetings and talks as part of a broader discussion involving about fifty people. Most of those who participated in *critica la crisi* were associated with a number of local groups, such as the dynamic social cooperative *Bottega Quetzal*, or the city section of the environmentalist association *Legambiente*. When a conference with a famous journalist was organized, it took off ‘as if everyone was waiting for someone to call for that thing’ Assunta said.

Assunta: ‘...we are not in a context like Milan where you have 500,000 things and you add one more thing that even if it’s not there, there is all the rest. Here we’re in a context where either you do it or not much else [is there] to find other spaces, other information, or other channels on these themes, so surely ours is an important voice’.

Critica la crisi offered a particularly valuable discursive space for interested people to interact and connect, and even the local Transition was founded as a sub-group of this broader initiative. As Assunta reported: ‘Here there was nobody talking about [crisis]’. Indeed, from what I could observe, were it not for the Transition group there would have been no one talking about climate change, peak oil, or regaining community resilience either.

Overall, Modica did not appear to be a place where discussion upon certain themes could be taken for granted. Nor did it seem that more traditional forms of participation held sway. For example, youth participation in traditional Catholic volunteering was in overt decline. As noticed by various community leaders, that channel used to be a fundamental connector between civil society and the existing political class (the Mayor himself came from that path). Moreover, not even party politics appeared to elicit enthusiasm. At least among the vast majority of my interviewees there was deep-rooted disdain, bitter disappointment, or detachment towards politics both national and locally. Modica’s Mayor, described often as an ‘honest person’ and a ‘hard worker’, was possibly the only politician who was clearly appreciated by most interviewees. ‘Friendships, political patronage, and favouritism’ were the widely acknowledged curses of local politics. In the words of Mariano: ‘Modica’s society is very clientelistic, very many Modican people are connected to a few but powerful names ...’. As Assunta put it instead: ‘...everyone knows that when there is an election there is distribution of petrol and food vouchers’. Particularly telling was the answer of the founder of a widely-circulated alternative monthly newspaper when I asked him about local politics:

‘Politics, I believe, is based on clientelism. It is hard to have it [done] free from compromise, that’s just a minimum part [of politics]. Possibly only those who are more educated, who have more options, are capable to express a vote that is free

from that mentality. The rest of the people unfortunately, I believe, base their vote on political patronage. “You give me that, a job, electric light by my house, and I vote for you”, and [that] deviates a bit from the normal democratic process in Modica’.

At any rate, in Modica one could observe greater engagement in other areas, such as campaigns in protection of the local environment, public spaces, and anti-militarism. Moreover, the city was included in a bursting network of political movements across the island. Main themes included immigrant support, workers’ rights, democratic participation, and the fight against organized crime, illegality and corruption. Also, in Modica these subjects were usually widely debated and elicited participation among my interviewees as well as among people within circles like *critica la crisi*. However, these themes occasionally reached out to a broader audience as well. For example, these issues were discussed during events such as the Modica Journalism Festival, an event organized by young local volunteers that was gathering momentum even at national level. Moreover, they also accessed public debate through other channels. For example, as one of my interviewees put it: ‘When [the local section of] *Legambiente* takes a position [on an issue] the matter becomes public’. Finally, if involvement in more traditional politics appeared weak, more recent political phenomena captured the attention of many people. For example, a majority of Transition participants had attended at least a meeting of the *Movimento dei forconi* (pitchfork movement) and some of them had done the same with a recently-launched political formation, *Movimento 5 Stelle* (5 Stars Movement).

Thus, if initiatives like *critica la crisi* did play a valuable role for the local community they were not isolated experiences. Rather, they were manifestations of a broader underlying ferment which certain some sectors of the community. Participants’ experiences moved within these channels. However, if on the one hand it was within *critica alla crisi* that MT could be founded, on the other, there were at least two reasons why eventually the latter took the form of an autonomous sub-group.

Critica la crisi was essentially a discursive open space for interaction among local active people and it could not be constrained into a specific type of interaction with a given agenda. *Critica la crisi* could manifest itself through the organization of conferences and workshops, and it warmly welcomed debate on Transition themes, but it could not be limited to Transition. To be sure, relationships among MT’s members and individuals in other circles appeared to earn reciprocal respect and deep appreciation. Nonetheless, and this was the other main issue, there were people who did not join the group as they had major reservations about the project and its methods.

Some people doubted that a foreign method such as the Transition's could be adapted to the local context. Moreover, they tended to stress the importance of action and favoured more open and less structured discussions, although they had not actually attended MT meetings. For instance, to Assunta Transition was 'applied with excessive rigidity' and the way it was presented was 'very simplistic, shallow' starting from its 'catechism' style videos. According to Silvia: 'Transition is a bit too rigid, if I am correct it was founded on Anglo-Saxon standards and I think it may need to be adapted... Mariano seems a bit rigid in referring to those movements'. Ingrid was also cautious: 'When you have no experience and find something like this [the Transition handbook] you use it as if it were the Bible and that's not something good to me'. Indeed, Ingrid was frightened by the Transition Handbook: 'It is advertising! Americans [sic.] have it in their blood (giggle). Unconsciously we look at it and when you look, if you have no experience, you are like: "we do it too!" [but] you don't go looking for your what's yours, your own modality. I am telling you what frightens me'.

On the other hand, Mariano and a few others preferred to develop the Transition by keeping to a more structured path. Action was important but not without a degree of group reflection on more theoretical issues. The idea of a study group was not seen as a dead end. Rather, it was a necessary step, valuable in itself and with a high innovative potential. For instance, Salvatore, an activist who arrived in town three years earlier, described the MT study group as 'the first and only proactive proposal' that was presented to him. According to MT members, discussions without method had proven unfruitful and problematic. Moreover, it seemed clear that earlier attempts to promote Transition through more traditional means had had little efficacy.

Beatrice: 'Today we're doing a study group on the Transition Handbook because we realised we were starting from the practical end without having substantial study bases. So we said, "let's see how others did it" because by starting from practical things we got a bit lost on the way so we said, "let's try to study and see what happens."'

According to some MT members, it was exactly the way ordinary assemblies unfolded that was seriously deficient. As reported always by Beatrice, in other groups' meetings she had attended 'there is the tendency to leave things as they are, to live in peace, gather together, eat, drink, and that's it'. Further, Angelica, in referring to a past initiative highlighted how 'the previous experience almost abolished diversity...in that group they tended to be like either you are like us or you are out'. Hence, although almost everyone would remark how 'Sicily was not the UK', participants seemed genuinely committed to give Transition a chance. They also acknowledged that, on the one side, they were not yet ready to come out with original

solutions to adapt the Transition to their context, and on the other they were unwilling to compromise the model. In the end, Transition was an innovation that they were introducing and it was worth trying to better understand the movement's fundamentals by following more advanced examples.

Mariano: 'Guys in Montevoglio started with the handbook in their hands, self-taught, and I wanted to repeat their experience here. So let's study! Once we've studied we start to coordinate better because otherwise regrettable dynamics appeared that could be harmful to the work of an entire group'.

Thus, at one of *critica la crisi* meetings during a World Café, Mariano proposed a study group on the Transition Handbook 'just to promote in depth-knowledge of the movement'. The idea was welcomed and an enrolment list for the six lesson course was circulated via email. In a few days, eleven people ordered the Transition Handbook (Hopkins, 2008b) and joined the project. The first appointment was then set up. Meetings would follow the instruction of a translated edition of a study guide companion to the Transition Handbook developed by a Transition Initiative in Seattle (Kerr et al., 2010). Participants were expected to read in advance the parts that would be discussed each time. Small parallel activities like 'do-it-yourself' workshops started to take shape as well. Some participants began to see each other outside meetings and become involved in local activities. In particular, three of them took leading roles in a campaign to rescue a public park from vandalism ('Reclaim the Park!'). Another three were among the main actors of the NO MUOS committee, an anti-militarisation campaign against the construction of an American base in the nearby town of Niscemi. Transition meetings, however, remained focused on the handbook, and participants also decided that MT as a group should not be officially involved in any of the above struggles.

MT relied upon a minimal self-financed budget and, unlike other organizations, had developed no contact with local institutions. To a degree that decision was related to the fact that the group was at an early stage. It was unlikely that in that moment any reciprocal benefit could be generated through collaborations with institutions. MT, however, seemed also cautious of such a move largely in light of a shared belief that, high respect for the mayor notwithstanding, politics was hazardously tightened to local interests. In particular, local 'oil', 'concrete', and 'waste collection' groups were seen quite systematically by Transition participants as potential unscrupulous actors. In the words of a participant 'local lobbies would do whatever it takes to defend their interests...not yet [hampered by us] because we haven't expressed ourselves'. Or as another MT member told me: 'Sincerely before having an open confrontation with these people I would let some time pass also because', she added with a giggle: 'otherwise they will place bombs in every house and we would disappear'. Suspiciousness was not exclusive to MT

participants. Most active citizens I talked to did not appear to be in any way afraid of local politics or interest groups, not to mention organized crime that they overtly challenged. Nonetheless, most seemed aware of the implications of taking action locally, starting from the consideration that, as an interviewee put it: 'talking about environment means going against mafia'.

As reported by an environmentalist from an eco-village on the outskirts of Ragusa, who was talking about the challenges to bring about change:

'...probably it is not the Mayor stopping you because he is a good person like you, believing in what he is doing, but perhaps it is the President of Province or of the Regional Council. Changes are monitored, it's not like there is someone watching but when you really change things then, at some point you will necessarily get in the way of existing interests. Probably as long as here we are ten, twenty, fifty people nobody is coming to stop us. But if, say, people from the province stop eating greenhouse products, and in Ragusa most of the economy is based upon greenhouses, then at that point something would happen. They would move at a higher level against this movement that is crushing the greenhouse-based economy. As long as it is fifty people doing permaculture in a valley we are not getting in the way of the Province's or Region's interests'.

Overall, spaces for effective actions seemed constrained by rather adverse circumstances. Conditions for collaboration with institutions appeared questionable. Attention from the broader population was far from assured. Nonetheless, MT had managed to create a venue to start reflecting upon Transition themes. The local Transition had also supplied another hub for discursive engagement which was harmonized with broader initiatives (e.g. *critica la crisi*, NO MUOS, and 'Reclaim the park!'), and it had furthered connectivity between a number of sites (e.g. the *Bottega Solidale Quetzal* and the tea room *Singola*). MT seemed to have managed at least to make use of those community resources to which it did have access.⁴

Moreover, participants were committed to keep to the Transition movement's values. Even if there was no guarantee that the movement's ideas could be successfully adapted locally, Transition in Modica had already assumed a particular significance. In fact, in providing reasons for their participation in the Transition, many actors referred to their appreciation of

⁴ Embracing the local public sphere implied that MT participants in their discussions could draw from a variety of different experiences, and as it will be shown, this did not seem to negatively affect either group's commitment to the Transition ideals, or the quality of the group discursive engagement. As an illustration, it is possible to notice that 'Reclaim the Park' largely featured the ideas and practices of urban social movement campaigns (see Smith 2004).

the Transition lifestyle. Individual life choices seemed to have a social relevance, and, in particular, the choice to embrace such lifestyle was valued since also it represented an attempt to challenge the *status quo*. In Mariano's words: 'When I talk about my lifestyle or when I show my lifestyle and my interlocutor is a person that is, so to say, on the other side, I feel criticized or derided because what I am doing is worthless or pointless because nothing is going to change anyway'. Furthermore, as Bianca, noticed: 'The obstacle [to the action of MT] is people. Take my mum, my grandmother, they are, as they say "disenchanted". They tell me in dialect: "*chi' nna fari?*" "What do you do it for?" "It's useless". It's been too long, at this point it must change'.

Overall, in the several months of its existence MT had been able to organise just some film nights, a few meetings and laboratories and a course on Transition, which was beginning right at the time of my arrival. Nonetheless, the Transition group had started to find its way through to the local community. The next section analyses how MT fared in terms of deliberative capacity in undertaking its endeavour.

Transition Modica Deliberative Capacity

While I was in Modica only two meetings of the study group were held. Though assemblies should take place every two weeks, participants decided that in August they would suspend their studying activities. Actually, only two people were unavailable, yet the others preferred to pause the meetings for one month and focus meanwhile on alternative activities. The NO MUOS campaign was in fact at a crucial stage and 'Reclaim the Park' was in its main phase. Hence, it was decided that Transition would be discussed during casual meetings (especially frequent given the above campaigns, in which many group members participated) and workshops (one of which was held while I was in Modica).

During its activities, Modica's Transition displayed a discrete level of good quality discursive engagement, particularly apparent in its meetings. Its inclusivity was restricted. In fact, although individuals from remarkably different backgrounds joined and were interested in the group, MT had attracted only a very small part of the people in Modica. Finally, its consequentiality was fairly limited. The group, in fact, had succeeded in raising awareness on Transition themes within Modica but just among a limited group of people. Moreover, it had not yet been able to give more tangible contributions to the community.

The quality of discussion received a very high attention in MT. There was also a parallel concern in keeping the group as 'horizontal' as possible, to use an image very often employed by participants. MT members were resolved to abide by the movement's guidelines and the chosen Transition meetings guidebook was scrupulously adopted as a tool to seek quality

interaction. Indeed, according to group members, one of the interesting aspects of Transition was precisely that it offered a new way to relate and to talk to each other, refraining from running meetings in more typical ways.

In MT experienced activists and absolute first-timers sat next to each other. The former were committed to avoid traditionally tedious and inconclusive meetings and the Transition method caught their interest. The latter, instead, 'feared' unruly interactions in which they could not express themselves. Beatrice, for example, who seemed highly appreciative of the quality of discussions at MT, reported on her usual experience of interactions in other groups: 'I think I have a personal problem I believe I am never fully recognized. One reason is that I never expose my ideas a lot on what I really do because it embarrasses me...I feel a bit neglected'. Overall, the guidebook's indications seemed to be efficacious for the group. At the very least, the adoption of a method seemed to offer a way to pursue a process of group investigation. The fact that studying was the core activity of MT surely also played a role in the group's emphasis upon the quality of its discursive interaction.

Another important aspect was that to some participants MT represented the first time they had ever spoken in public or reflected in a group about public issues, an aspect that more experienced members had clearly in mind.

Mariano: '...to many of us it is a new thing to be able to engage with each other and say our own opinion within a given time so it's also that which is part of the experiment, isn't it? [It is also about] us learning how to engage with others because we have not been used to sit around a table, or better in a circle, and having each and every one of us to speak out and say what we think and being understood or at least not being attacked. Down here usually when people group together it ends up that there are two individuals talking and all the others have to listen. We have been used to do it that way, or even interrupting the interlocutor. The study group is also about getting familiar with respecting others'.

A vast majority of participants indeed seemed to appreciate the way meetings unfolded. For instance, when I asked Anna if she thought everyone had occasion to listen and be listened to during meetings, she reported:

'Yes surely [that is] one of the prerogatives that since the beginning fascinated me and gave me confidence. During meetings I personally learn to stay with others and dialogue, to express a judgement that would be able to influence the group. My ideas, even those I thought less important, that I had inside of me, once I've

expressed them, they influence the matter, the way it is elaborated, and this thing soon attracted me, anchored me’.

Beatrice, also, reported: ‘I am happy because when [we are] in groups we have a bit the problem of talking over each other and not respecting timing so discussions are very tiring. Instead, by following a method, some guidance, we are able to get to the point of the matter concisely, [to do it] better and taking care of timing, and not talking over each other. There is more quality. It surely has more quality than when you just talk without a rule’.

Positive features were acknowledged also by other participants new to this type of activities. For instance, Bianca reported that at MT she was ‘learning to stay with people, relate to them, open [herself] up a bit’. Also, Livia acknowledged that ‘[at meetings I] manage to say what I want in little time, listening without developing prejudices. [I] learnt to stay with others, and the fact of not talking over each other, that thing is magnificent’. Also, a lifelong activist like Carolina highlighted how ‘the method was surely good’ as it allowed including different types of individuals in the discussion, a point she cared particularly about. Finally, in a similar vein, Salvatore noticed how the meetings allowed a voice to people with ‘different levels of intellectual preparation’.

Besides being appreciated by their participants, discursive interactions also manifested some positive features to an external observer. In the first place, coercion did not appear to represent a problem during meetings. Also, during my interviews there was not a single instance of participants complaining about the excessive influence of some members of the group. What some of them noticed was that due to time limits it was not always possible to have as much space as they would like to have to reflect and talk. All of them, however, acknowledged that respect of timing was one of the key elements of the success of their assemblies. Since during meetings participants were asked to comply with guidelines, the role of casual gatherings was important to offer an alternative site for more casual interaction. In the words of Angelica: ‘...because of time constraints I feel like I need some space outside meetings to engage’, and she added in reference to a ‘do-it-yourself’ workshop: ‘...spaces aside, like the one we had today where you do other things and chat...’. Meetings also induced reflection, as theoretical issues were discussed together and connections with the local situation, its problems and its resources were systematically sought and debated. Diverging views did arise on the merits of the arguments found in the Transition Handbook. Discussions on the local situation tended to be critical and wide-ranging as well, although variety of views was less apparent. Occasionally, mainly through storytelling participants did expose their personal concerns. They also tried to discuss them with the rest of the group to see how

problems could be understood and possibly addressed in light of Transition. In doing so, a fairly systematic connection between their particular interests and more general principles emerged. However, the study group nature of the meetings did not leave significant space for presenting a person's material interests. Every member brought into the group his or her own views and interests, but there was more space to discuss the former rather than advocating the latter. Finally, Transition represented the main common ground upon which participants tried to articulate their views. On some occasions, it was also possible to observe how individuals in different conditions (e.g. a business owner and an occasional worker, or a less engaged citizen and an activist) tried to talk to each other, making an effort to take the other's position into account.

Attention to the quality of interactions could also be intended as a means to address the marked diversity characterising the MT group, despite there being just eleven participants. There were eight females and three males, and participants' ages ranged from 23 to 57 year-old. In particular, there were three people under thirty, three in their thirties, three in their forties, and two in their fifties. MT seemed not to have a group leader. Mariano, who had brought in the Transition idea and was very committed to it, constantly sought to promote a 'flat' and 'equal' structure in the group. He himself had no special role, though anyone would acknowledge he was an important figure. Different individuals seemed to take responsibility for various activities according to their preferences. Angelica, Mariano and Beatrice organized most of the workshops. Beatrice took care also of arranging and hosting meetings. Diego would be the point of contact to get involved in 'Reclaim the Park'. Carolina, Salvatore and Angelica would be the ones to talk to in regard to the NO MUOS campaign. Carolina in, particular, was a popular and widely-respected long-term activist. Salvatore also had a noteworthy background in activism, and Isabella was one of the main figures of the *Bottega Quetzal*. Mariano, Angelica, Beatrice and Marina also had some previous experience within civil society. Finally, there were four group members to whom MT represented a totally new type of experience. Although most people seemed well aware of the differences existing in background within the group, on no occasion could I observe any prevarication or complaints about the relationships between group members. Also, in terms of working background the group varied widely, as there were three small entrepreneurs of local activities, two workers in community associations, four people with occasional or no jobs, and two artists. There were no immigrants in MT (those legally registered, however, amounted to just 3.5 percent of Modica's population), and participants were white Italians mainly from the town or neighbouring areas. The level of scholastic education was relatively high as seven people had at least a university degree and four a high school diploma. From a comparative standpoint, in terms of education at least, MT was indeed a niche group. In fact, according to the regional

data, the Sicilian average sees one person in ten having a university degree, 12.8 per cent of those in the age group 25 to 65 years (ISTAT, 2012).

Although participants' backgrounds and views varied, it appeared that MT, like *critica la crisi* and other initiatives, included the more active sector of the population. Outside the circles of local activists, it was hard to find anyone aware of the Transition themes or the local group. From the Mayor to other community leaders of more traditional enterprises, often people had not heard of the Transition before I mentioned it to them. In the words of Carolina: '[Transition] is in part self-referential because many of the people are already part of a group of people that are already sensitive to these subjects...'.

Consequentiality, on the one hand, was positively influenced by the good discursive qualities the group featured, and from a discursive perspective MT had surely been beneficial to some people in the community and furthered connectivity among local organisations. On the other hand, consequentiality was negatively affected by the limited inclusivity of the project. In fact, the young group had not yet been able to recruit widely from among the local population. Furthermore, little in practical terms had been obtained in several months. In fact, beyond the discursive realm, a few 'do-it-yourself' workshops and the establishment of a synergistic garden were the only manifestations of the Transition group's existence. Generating consequentiality was the main challenge that MT was called to address. In fact, there was no doubt that at that time the group had displayed a remarkable capability to make available a space for good quality discursive engagement. Yet the value of such characteristics was reduced if it came at the price of abandoning the efforts to exert more influence and to opening up to the local context.

Transition Modica Activities and their Discursive Quality

Group Meetings

At the time of my fieldwork, group meetings represented the most important activity in MT. Having acknowledged how the formation of a study group was a prerequisite for an effective local Transition, the group concentrated most of its energies on the development of good quality discussions. I attended the first two of a series of six meetings, which, it was planned, should run over a three months timeline.

Nine MT participants (three men and six women) attended the first study group meeting. Only one of two people who were absent had communicated she could not come. There were also two other people (whom most of MT participants knew) who came too but without having enrolled or read the material. As they were curious about Transition they asked if they could

stay to just listen, which the group agreed to. The venue was a restaurant room put at the group disposal by one of the members during one closing day.

Since that one was the first study meeting, Mariano remarked to everyone that the group's goal was to develop an in-depth understanding of the movement's ideas before taking further action within the community. The past months had shown it was futile to try spreading Transition without a group of people who were committed to and aware of the movement's values and concepts. The Transition, it was remarked, was also a good opportunity to try new methods for group meetings. Hence, besides acquiring a new understanding and creating new connections, participants should take advantage of meetings to experiment with efficient ways to interact following the movement's instructions. Mariano stressed that he was not the leader of the group. Ideally it would have no leader at all but be a group of people taking responsibility for their own actions, individually and collectively. As members already knew, meetings would follow the guidelines of the companion to the Transition Handbook. Participants were to read the material beforehand, which everyone seemed to have done for that occasion, though some said they had had just 'a quick read'.

According to the guidelines a facilitator had to be designated each time. This figure had to do some extra reading on how to support group discussion. Mariano, everyone agreed, would be the facilitator since there had not been the opportunity to designate someone else that being their first meeting. Isabella and Angelica, respectively, offered to be note taker and time keeper. The two-and-a-half hour discussion (with one break) would address ten issues proposed by the Transition handbook. Most of the people had books, notebooks and pens. They sat in a circle around a low table with some snacks and drinks brought by participants and a dictionary, which was actually used during the night.

After an initial round of introductions the meeting unfolded in a very orderly manner. Interventions by the facilitator and time-keeper were rare but highly respected. A friendly environment characterized the evening, though not all participants knew each other previously. The first task was to share, if any, some positive experiences or some thoughts that had made participants think it worthwhile to join MT. The core topic of the meeting was the idea of peak oil. The subject was extremely vast and the facilitator's invitations to keep to the questions seemed important in helping maintain the group's focus. The effort was to draw the discussion from fairly general (and at times generic) points on peak oil and its implications to an investigation of what was and what was not clear about the concept under examination. The group then tried to discuss Transition's analysis of the concept and the connections between peak oil and climate change. There was an opportunity to discuss whether participants had any particular fears in relation to peak oil and climate change, yet the meeting mainly tried to

make sense of the two issues. Later in the evening participants were invited to share their ideas on how what had been discussed might relate to their everyday lives and to their community. That topic, it was said, was to be elaborated on in more detail in the forthcoming weeks. By the end of the night the group had addressed in some detail all of the questions. The session was closed with a decision on when and where the next meeting should be held and who would facilitate it. A brief update on local campaigns was also delivered to the audience. People were also invited to send feedback via MT's mailing list. Friendly chats among participants ensued as they slowly started to leave the venue.

The second meeting was attended by ten people (three men and seven women). The absentee had notified she could not come. Marina was facilitator for the day, Salvatore the time keeper and Beatrice the note-taker. It was remarked how the facilitator had the responsibility to shape the structure of the interaction. She would intervene only when the group did not follow her indications, which happened only rarely. Participants seemed to acknowledge how the facilitator's position was not that of a person attempting to impose her views but rather of someone making an extra effort for the sake of the group. In fact, instead of just focusing on the discussion, the facilitator (as well as the time-keeper and the note-taker) had also the responsibility to apply the guidelines and to make sure that everyone had a fair opportunity to discuss ideas and be questioned. This fact seemed to guarantee a remarkably orderly interaction with apparently little or no frustration.

The venue was the same and the people sat in a circle (always with the dictionary, some snacks, and also a plastic blackboard on which to share notes). The meeting started with a short round of remarks in which everyone reported to the rest of the group how they were feeling about being there with the others. Following that, nine questions posed in the handbook were to be discussed. The group thus embarked on a very engaging discussion of almost three hours. There was an official break and a few moments of relaxation, with laughs and jokes as the end of the meeting approached. Participants reflected upon different definitions of the concept of energy descent, its significance, and how the idea could find applications in everyone's lives and in the local community. The group then focused on the concept of resilience, with particular emphasis on the connection with the idea of relocation. Everyday experiences and more theoretical points were intermixed during the discussion. After a little break the group considered also the main difficulties in grasping and talking about the idea of peak oil. Participants also tried to envision whether there were major manifestations of increasing oil dependency in the community. The final questions invited participants to start reflecting upon ways to promote resilience individually and in the community. Many ideas were thus collected and stored with the next meeting in mind. All of

the nine questions were eventually addressed in some detail, though some aspects seemed to be occasionally rushed. Participants were invited to circulate emails if they had further thoughts to share. Whilst some participants left soon after the meeting, others remained for a short chat.

From a deliberative democratic perspective, the above meetings displayed some positive features. As widely reported by interviewees, coercion did not seem to represent a problem. Participants were attentive throughout the discussion. Only in rare instances did speakers jump ahead of others or talk over each other. There seemed to be a mostly successful effort to allow equal time distribution (and it was tolerated if occasionally someone took longer than allotted). Nonetheless, lack of time put a limitation on the group's capability to address particularly complex issues. Personal ideas and everyday situations were often connected to discussions on higher principles. For example, many found it useful to think of how lifestyle change could promote relocalisation, whilst others highlighted how the latter could promote social justice. However, participants' interests were generally mentioned as examples rather than as subjects for group discussion. More broadly, although engagement did occur and different views did emerge, group meetings at this stage were not at all oriented to decision-making. Certainly, reflection on practical as well as more theoretical issues was induced, but for the sake of discussion rather than with an expectation of inducing practical consequences. In engaging with each other, participants also tried to find common bases for discussions and reciprocal understanding. The benefit of the broader community was usually identified as an overarching concern, one towards which the group's effort needed to be oriented. Transition values also represented another common ground upon which participants discussed their views. By no means, however, did all participants accept unquestioningly the arguments (both in their contents and form) presented in the handbook (the allegedly simplistic discussion on resilience, for a start). At any rate, if on the one hand participants found it easy to engage on certain subjects, it appeared that they were more dismissive on other topics. As Isabella critically observed on certain issues, 'it's as if some people stick to what is the common opinion without getting into the game'. As Isabella always acknowledged, 'at times we remain on the surface of things'. Indeed, although on most occasions the group tried to reflect critically upon the themes proposed by the handbook, it was hard to see the same level of engagement occurring with issues or views which were extraneous to the movement's perspective.

In regard to inclusivity, MT meetings did seem to allow all of the participants to take part in the discussions. In this sense, MT appeared successful at including individuals. On the other hand, the major limitation to MT's inclusivity seemed to lie in its small numbers. Surely the very form of a study group did not seem apt for welcoming people who may have been interested in

Transition themes, or if not as listeners in special cases. Overall, MT meetings offered a satisfying forum to discuss Transition and seek its applications in real life. Nonetheless, the group had yet to show that it could accommodate widely different views and interests on environment and community issues.

In regard to consequentiality, meetings definitely did have an effect upon participants. However, despite the fact that these people could also spread the word by interacting with others in the population, there were ultimately only a very few individuals who could be affected by what occurred at MT. Moreover, another fundamental shortcoming of the meetings was that they were absolutely detached from any decision-making process. MT meetings, in fact, did not generate any tangible effects on the community.

Discursive Activities

Apart from its meetings and a few movie nights, MT did not organise any discursive activity. Individual group members took part instead in the events organised by other groups like *critica la crisi*, *Legambiente*, and others. Moreover, news on local events was circulated also through MT. Nonetheless, the group itself had not been able to set up activities. That fact surely represented a problem for a group which was mainly concerned with raising awareness in the community, and engaging in the discursive domain more than in practical activities.

On-line Communications

Transition Modica relied only very marginally on the Internet. MT did not have any space on the web and emails were employed only rarely for basic communications, such as circulating meeting reports. In any case, no substantial interactions took place concerning meeting feedback or any other issue.

Practical Actions

Cosmetics production workshops and the establishment of a synergistic garden were the only activities MT had organized apart from its meetings. They were usually attended by a dozen people, mainly from MT though there were also outsiders. I participated in one of these events.

Friendly chats unfolded as the various tasks were carried out in a very enjoyable social context. A variety of themes were discussed among participants together or in scattered small groups. Lifestyle, traditions, Transition, and local campaigns were among the most common topics. A variety of ideas on Transition as well as about the local group, its potential and its flaws, emerged regularly. Some of these considerations were eventually channelled into the meetings. An instance of this process was the decision to give the Transition Handbook to the Mayor. Another example was the idea to use the Transition also as a platform to reflect upon

and promote local struggles, such as the NO MUOS campaign without any official involvement by the group itself.

Indeed, interactions were significantly less structured than meetings, and engagement between different ideas was less systematic. These features, however, were appreciated by many as these events represented important appendices to the study group. Moreover, they allowed time to think more closely about what in practice could be done and how to have MT interact with the rest of the community.

Individual Initiatives

Individual MT members were involved in a number of campaigns. The fact that among MT participants there were three central figures of the NO MUOS movement represented probably the best example of this phenomenon. People were involved also in the 'Reclaim the Park' campaign, local permaculture, the regional sections of *decrescita felice* ('happy degrowth') movement, *Legambiente*, *Libera*, and fair trade and community support organisations, of which the *Bottega Solidale* was an example. Yet there were no members carrying out MT activities on an individual basis. However, it should be noted that many participants understood their actions also in light of Transition's values and ideas. To give two examples, Anna, a hairdresser, was considering how to turn her working activity into a more sustainable enterprise, and Beatrice's work with her tea room was inspired by Transition and in MT she found a fundamental support. In her words: '[with MT] we have reawakened a few...it's as if we are a passing boat and there are people feeling lonely in the sea and [they] hop on...we are a bit like a lifeboat'.

Casual Interactions

The network of casual interactions in the environment in which MT operated was extraordinarily rich. Most participants would meet each other several times a week. MT members, moreover, were well embedded in social networks. These networks included those individuals who were more active in the community, other civil society groups within Sicily, and also people outside these circles. MT had no relationships with local institutions though. However, it was apparent also, from the words of the Mayor, that if any collaboration between civil society and institutions was to be set up it was to rely on casual interactions. In fact, as he reported on that point, 'what has worked is more the freer relationship between associations and institutions at an ordinary level but the instruments foreseen in the statute never took off', 'laws on participation', 'statutes', 'regulations and by-laws', that is 'formal instruments' historically never played a significant role according to him. More than institutions, however, it was families, friends, and colleagues who were an important target of MT, exerting in this way an influence that is expected of grassroots initiatives in deliberative

systems (Dryzek, 2010a: 10, Mansbridge, 1999) . These groups also were mixes of people with widely different attitudes, with whom MT participants were in contact. It was these people to whom they occasionally talked in everyday life about Transition. The fact that participants needed to be ready to explain to these people what they were doing was indeed one of the main reasons why they set up a study group. Varying publics presented different challenges. Consequently, one of the main efforts of MT was to understand how to promote its messages in a clear and accessible manner also in the situations of these 'casual interactions'.

As has been shown, a concern with the ability to influence the 'casual interactions' of the community informed MT's decision to focus on the quality of discursive engagement. This effort had positive consequences for the quality of meetings. However, in order to reach out to the local public it was still necessary to expand inclusivity and consequentiality of the group. Although MT had not yet achieved this objective, it appeared to be building the appropriate conditions to meet it.

Conclusion

Since its beginnings, the Transition in Modica had been moving slowly and the group has had little impact on the community. In particular, although the group had generated discursive engagement among a few people in the community, practical outcomes were almost non-existent. MT was made up of a diverse group of people who were able to interact with the most receptive sectors of local civil society. In doing so, MT sought to avoid co-option and to create a good quality forum to discuss and spread the word about Transition locally. At the time of my observation, MT displayed fairly positive features in terms of its 'authenticity', though shortcomings characterised the group's 'inclusivity' and particularly its 'consequentiality'.

Figure 7.1 Overview Modica

Modica

1. **Location:** Ragusa province, Sicily. (55,000)
2. **Type of community:** Small city. Service industry and agriculture
3. **Local political arrangements:** Christian-Democrat, progressive, conservative traditions mix. Worst budget deficit in Italy (2008)
4. **Situation on environmental issues:** Environmental disruptions and emergencies (organised crime and clientelism, ...)
5. **Type of local debates:** open public discussion, ignored debates (e.g. Climate change).
6. **Public Space features:** A degree of associationism and region-wide activist ferment.
7. **Statistics:**

Education: below regional and national levels

Income: below regional and well below national levels

Age: younger than regional and younger than national averages

Figure 7.2 Overview *Modica in Transizione*

Modica in Transizione (MT). 1. Year of start and Status: 2011, Unofficial 2. Repertoire: (Study) group form, meetings, very little activity. 3. People involved: About 50 people know of it. A dozen participate: 10 highly committed, 1 pioneer. 4. Form of the initiative: No structure, tendency to 'flat' and 'horizontal' group. No clear leader and active participants, alternative public. 5. Relationship with the rest of the community: Within public sphere from the beginning, connected to niches. Individuals' connections to other groups. No relationships with institutions but fostering discursive space. The only Transition in Sicily. 6. Finances: Very little money, self-financing. 7. Relationship with local political activism: Recognising problems and resources of the local public sphere. Everyday 'challenge' to customs. 8. Priorities: Focus on applying and communicating Transition, keeping to its principles (emphasis on reflection and democracy). 9. Existing Taboos: Talk on taboos. 10. Stance on Politics: No to institutional politics. Critical of politics. 11. Social background of participants: Variety of working background, higher level of education, gender-balanced, limited to community's active citizens, generally progressive. Limited space for private interests.

Chapter 8 Comparative Findings

Summary

This chapter provides a comparative analysis of the case studies and it is articulated in four sections. The first section compares the observed levels of deliberative capacity among the case studies. In particular, it focuses on the overall deliberative capacity of the four Transitions and also on the levels of authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentiality. The second section compares the deliberative and democratic qualities characterising each of the six activities into which the life of the organisations under examination was divided. The third section uses insights from both comparative analysis and relevant literature to investigate how deliberative capacity is developed. In particular, this section discusses the importance of the relationship between ‘internal’ and ‘contextual’ features as an overarching dynamic that might account for the development of deliberative capacity. Moreover, the section also seeks to engage with some specific concepts from literature in order to develop an in-depth understanding of how deliberative capacity is generated. Comparative insight from the case study and engagement with relevant literature is fundamental also in the development of the last section, which discusses possible ways to enhance deliberative capacity among organisations in the public space.

Deliberative Capacity in the four Case Studies

None of the four cases under examination displayed a very strong deliberative capacity. Each of them, in fact, had some shortcomings in one or more of the three dimensions of deliberative capacity. Yet the deliberative capacities of the four cases varied in significant ways. On the one hand Transition Kurilpa (TK) and particularly Transition Meander Valley (TMV) presented more problematic situations. On the other hand, albeit with some flaws, Transition Modica (MT), and, in particular, Transition Town Monteveglio (CT) showed several positive characteristics. A summary outline of each case study with regard to their deliberative capacity can be drawn on the basis of the previous chapters.

TMV displayed major problems in all three dimensions of deliberative capacity. TMV was not particularly active and while monthly meetings were the fundamental manifestation of the life of the local Transition as well as the main venue for discursive engagement, they were highly problematic in terms of deliberative capacity. Meetings were expected to be fundamental to the coordination and development of the local Transition, but in practice they seemed unable

to promote reflective and effective group action. Instead, TMV relied largely on the unquestioned individual initiative of some participants. This model granted some efficacy but hampered the development of consequential discursive engagement. Also, TMV's inclusivity was narrow. In fact, the group involved only one specific sector of the community (white Australians, largely of working age' with community-oriented jobs and higher education levels), and little engagement occurred across a limited pool of different views and interests.

In TK, group meetings were not given particular importance since the local Initiative focused more on 'getting things done' rather than on 'lots of talk' (to use expressions often used by interviewees). Group meetings were mainly attended by the most active participants. The coordination and organisation of group actions relied to a great extent on online communications and largely unchecked individual initiatives. The latter activities however presented problems from a deliberative capacity perspective. Although casual gatherings and other activities occurred with some regularity, these were largely unintegrated with the broader group action, and their potential in terms of deliberative capacity was not taken advantage of. Inclusivity, was also limited since TK was circumscribed within an alternative activist scene, and the group essentially was comprised of highly educated white Australians studying or working mainly in environment-related disciplines. Finally, a degree of consequentiality existed but it appeared to be minimal. In fact, the achievements that TK reached were often not the result of inclusive and authentic discursive engagement but of skilled and committed effort of few key individuals.

MT was essentially a study group on Transition. Since its beginning, MT was tied to the local activist scene. Nonetheless, MT distinguished itself from other initiatives as it was created specifically to explore and adopt the Transition method, which was being experimented with for the first time in Sicily. Transition participants showed a remarkable attention to the democratic and discursive qualities of the group. MT meetings represented satisfying examples of discussion in terms of their authenticity. However, MT's consequentiality and inclusivity were severely curtailed. Consequentiality was limited given that MT had had no substantial effect on the community other than promoting cultural change among a very small group of local people. Inclusivity was narrow also. Indeed, MT participants came from widely different backgrounds and, with the only exception of their higher educational level, they were more in line with the rest of the community compared to the other Transitions. Moreover, a variety of views emerged and was engaged with during meetings. Nonetheless, the MT audience was essentially an enclave within the community and the wider population had not been reached in any substantial way.

CT had a different structure from the other cases and had no group meetings at all.¹ Rather, it was constituted by a network of locals promoting Transition in different spheres within the community. Interactions among these actors were usually informal and accountability limited, with the exception of Streccapogn (the main sub-group of CT) which had fairly effective discursive procedures in place. The main actors of CT, however, were deeply committed to Transition ideals. They gave primary importance to the quality of communications during Transition activities, and in its various manifestations CT generally displayed a fine level of authentic discursive engagement. Inclusivity, on the one hand, was limited with regard to CT's most active participants (white Italians from professional backgrounds and with higher education) whilst, on the other hand, the local Transition activities had effectively involved hundreds of people in Montevoglio. A degree of consequential discursive engagement emerged in most of the activities organised by the local Transition.

The authenticity of the examined cases varied from weak (TMV and TK) to satisfying (e.g. Streccapogn and MT group meetings). Further observations can be made by considering the four aspects characterising the notion of authenticity (lack of coercion, capability to induce reflection, connection of claims to general principles, exhibition of reciprocity). Significant 'coercion' did not appear during discussions, and groups made an effort to maintain a respectful and balanced interaction. However, TK and TMV were not always able to screen discursive processes against the influence of status, power imbalances, and strategic behaviours. Generally, groups' activities induced reflection, although the extent of this process appeared more limited when interactions were of particularly poor quality (e.g. those in which no engagement between different views surfaced at all). The connection of single claims to more general principles, however, was not systematically observable, especially in those discussions in which conversations were not facilitated. Finally, reciprocity could not be observed in those interactions in which different views did not emerge (TMV) or were not substantially engaged (TK group meetings or online discussions). Reciprocity could emerge where space for discursive engagement was made available (e.g. MT study group) and it actually bridged the discussion between people with different perspectives or interests. For instance, at Streccapogn open meetings participants and some locals sought common ground to elaborate on their views on the association, going beyond the existing divide between those with solidaristic views and those with more instrumental ones.

Inclusivity showed less variation than authenticity and it was rather modest with the only exception being CT. In fact, Montevoglio's was the only Transition that had established

¹ The only group meetings to be held were those of the Transition-inspired social and agricultural association, Streccapogn.

connection not just within a local enclave (e.g.: Sunstein, 2002, 2005) but with many groups in the local public sphere and to a degree it had 'adjusted' to the local community (Mendonça, 2008). Generally, numbers of people involved in Transition were fairly small in all cases. The number of people aware of the existence of a local Transition was generally below one hundred; and CT was the only case where an estimated two hundred people knew about the local Transition. Around twenty or thirty people usually participated in the Transitions (and about fifty in the case of CT), yet only half of them were generally active, and social backgrounds tended to be homogenous in every case (with the exception of MT). The dominant ethnic group (white Australians or Italians respectively) accounted for the totality of participants in each case. Men and women contributed equally to the life of the Transitions in more or less similar numbers of active participants. However, men held the key roles (in TMV there was one woman out of four 'core' participants, in TK the main actor was a male as were the two leaders of CT and the initiator of MT).² Informal leaders were acknowledged in all cases (though MT presented a particularly democratic leadership). These people were appreciated because of their familiarity with Transition themes, and their outstanding commitment, which was instrumental to the life of these organisations and was similar to what could be observed in Global Justice Movement organisations (Saunders and Rootes, 2013: 82, della Porta and Rucht, 2013c: 217, 223).³ Participants were largely university students or people of working age. Participants' occupational backgrounds were predominantly community-oriented in TMV, environment-related in TK, whilst in CT and in particular MT there was more variation. Professionals from environment, community, and communication fields tended to have a more central role in the various groups. In all cases, some segments of the population were fundamental pools for the local Transitions: anti-development activists in TK, progressives in CT, newcomers in TMV, and local activists in MT. In every case the higher level of scholastic education was the most distinctive trait of Transition participants as compared to the rest of their communities. Such a finding seems in line with what is found among GJM organisations (Saunders and Rootes, 2013: 75, della Porta and Rucht, 2013c: 216). A fundamental barrier to inclusion seemed to occur already at the participatory level. Using Young's (Young, 2000: 53-4) jargon, one could say that the 'external' exclusion was more marked than the 'internal' type. Discursive engagement tended to be egalitarian although, especially in those groups where individual initiative was important, some participants tended to rise to dominant positions. In regard to interests, there was usually little room for their inclusion, and they tended to be limited to those of participants, while being included in a non-

² Saunders and Rootes (2013: 77-8) found no evidence of discrimination or major gender-based imbalance characterising GJM organisations' discussions, although subtle and complex gender dynamics affected the lives of these groups.

³ For an in-depth discussion of leadership and new social movements, see Diani (2003).

deliberative fashion. Diverging views did not always emerge or become significantly engaged with, especially where the quality of discursive engagement received little attention.

Consequentiality, finally, varied from very limited (TMV) to significant (CT). Consequentiality was obviously lacking where no substantial authentic and inclusive discursive engagement could be observed in practice (as in TMV). In TK, consequentiality was modest since objectives were achieved mainly in a non-deliberative fashion (e.g. the 'One Hundred Trees Action', and 'Energetic Kuripla') and group-wide discursive engagement only had a limited role. In the case of MT, a degree of consequentiality in the discursive sphere was paralleled by a virtually non-existent impact on the community in more practical terms. CT was the most consequential of the Transitions under observation. The effects of fairly good quality and partially inclusive discursive engagement could be observed, mainly in regard to the organisation of successful initiatives aimed at raising awareness and implementing actions within the community (e.g. bulk buying of solar panels) and especially in the activities of Streccapogn. However, the relationship with Council (though instrumental in carrying out many other projects) featured extremely reduced inclusivity and accountability. Collaboration on what were seen to be (in Montevoglio Mayor's words) 'big things' was almost non-existent. Instead, outside these issues the relationship between the Council and CT had been developing profitably. Finally, it is important to notice that the distinction between the groups that had more impact on their communities (CT in particular, and TK) and the less effective ones (TMV and MT) did not parallel the division between the groups with stronger deliberative and democratic discursive processes (CT and MT) and the less deliberative democratic ones (TK and TMV). This consideration suggests that possessing deliberative capacity may not be a fundamental resource for groups to achieve effectiveness, yet it does not appear that investing in developing quality discursive engagement prevents groups from being effective. Overall, it seems that establishing a direct connection between a group's deliberative democratic qualities and its efficacy may be problematic. Focusing on the relationship that organisations establish with the surrounding environment may help understanding how organisations develop deliberative capacity as they try to affect their contexts. Before moving to that discussion, however, the chapter explores the contribution that the various activities gave to the development of discursive engagement in the organisations under examination.

Figure 8.1 Deliberative Capacity Assessment Summary

Transition Meander Valley Authenticity: problematic Inclusivity: narrow Consequentiality: very limited	Transition Kurilpa Authenticity: problematic Inclusivity: narrow Consequentiality: limited
Modica <i>in Transizione</i> Authenticity: remarkable Inclusivity: narrow Consequentiality: limited	Monteveglia <i>Città di Transizione</i> Authenticity: fair Inclusivity: moderate Consequentiality: significant

Life and Deliberative Capacity of Organisations

It is possible to look deeper into the deliberative qualities of the four cases by comparing the six activities identified in each Transition. The six categories used in this study include: group meetings, discursive initiatives, online interactions, individual initiatives, practical actions, and casual activities.

Group Meetings

To begin with, group meetings were a fundamental manifestation of participation in a community initiative. Meetings tended to take place with regularity over time (monthly or fortnightly) as if their function was to punctuate the continuity of a Transition's life. Nonetheless, in some cases group meetings were valued only in so far as they were expected to contribute to the life of the group (or sub-group) and consequently their occurrence over time was more flexible. Two instances are Strecapogn's choice to call for meetings only when necessary and the 'One Hundred Trees Action' sub-group of TK calling for dedicated meetings (detached from TK monthly assemblies) to better project the progress of the activity.

Although group meetings were often central to the life of my cases and they served as the organisations' core venue for discursive engagement, the interest in and attention to their quality varied. Only in certain cases was the need for and role of assemblies investigated at all. Often, instead, meetings were expected to perform discursive functions that were vital to the group, without an effort to foster their ability to actually carry out the tasks that they were expected to perform. More specifically, I could observe in each case that some participants reflected critically on the way meetings were carried out (at times showing frustration), but this criticism was seldom discussed at group level. It was even rarer that these discussions

were translated into actions aimed at improving the quality of meetings (MT did so, for example). Another natural expectation was that meetings had to be of 'good' quality, but only in a few cases did I observe a group level reflection of what a 'good quality' meeting would consist of. The existence (or lack) of a discussion on the desired level of facilitation and types of interaction to be promoted at meetings was a clear manifestation of the attention dedicated to the quality of discursive engagement.

Four distinct situations emerged with regard to the importance that group assemblies had in the life of these Transitions and the attention that they received. At one extreme there was the particularly negative case of TMV where group meetings were at once central to the life of the initiative and neglected. Meetings had a celebrative function and ended up jeopardising the space for quality discursive engagement. In TK, meetings were not given any particular attention and they were not even particularly important to the life of the group. In TK, the debate on the desired quality of group meetings occurred at an early stage and the solution was to deliberately keep a low emphasis on meetings and focus more on practical actions. Meetings ended up functioning more like a ratification venue, for decisions taken elsewhere, rather than a deliberative one. From a deliberative capacity perspective, the problem was that there seemed to be no means of channelling the various discussions which took place in TK. In CT, group meetings were intentionally altogether absent. Interestingly, such a feature was not particularly problematic to the extent that great attention was given to the quality of interactions during sub-group meetings and single initiatives, which, once they were put in place, did manifest quality discursive engagement. Nonetheless, there remained a need for a forum where participants could discuss with each other the existing situation and future developments. While such a dynamic was present in CT's subgroups, there was in Montevoglio no Transition group to be held accountable to or even to deliberate with. At least on certain issues (e.g. how to spend public money received for a given project, the realisation of a particularly controversial idea, etc.) it might have been desirable to promote a level of engagement among interested participants rather than having individual initiatives and largely casual interactions. Finally, the possibility of a gap between the ideal function of group meetings and their actual qualities was taken seriously in MT. Participants conceived and implemented solutions to address this issue in ways that, as seen, seemed rather successful from a deliberative and democratic perspective.⁴

⁴ della Porta and Rucht (2013c: 230) remarked that the type of communication (and the deliberativeness) of meetings tended to vary 'for the same group, in the same session'. Although this observation is surely interesting, this study seeks to express an assessment of the overall quality of activities being observed. Rather than on the variation within each activity it focuses more on the difference between different

In regard to inclusivity, with the exception of Transition Modica only a minority of participants attended group (or sub-group) meetings. As compared to GJM organisations meetings, where one or two in three participants usually attended (see della Porta and Rucht, 2013c: 219), meetings were less popular among my case studies.⁵ There is likely to be a correlation between the quality of meetings and their attendance. In fact, at one extreme, TK meetings, which were neither central nor particularly effective, were the least attended among my case studies, whilst MT usually attracted all of its participants to its study group meetings. Where attendance at meetings was particularly low (e.g. TK) the influence of core participants tended to be reinforced – and usually the role of an already dominant social background (the one shared by active participants) was also reaffirmed. In contrast, where virtually all participants were engaged, group meetings seemed to promote equality in the group (MT). It is worth noting that inclusion in good quality deliberation is not equivalent with generic involvement in the activities of a group, and this may be more problematic when the background of the excluded differs from the dominant one. The absence of people with a disability and immigrant workers from Streccapogn assemblies was a clear example of how this phenomenon may unintentionally occur also in those groups that deeply care about inclusion and solidarity. In regard to views and interests, greater variety could be observed where meetings offered a space for their emergence and engagement. Yet two fundamental limitations should be noticed. Firstly, the interests and views of those attending meetings were more often aired than those of the rest of the community. Secondly, views and interests were presented only to the extent that it made sense to do so. Thus, despite a level of personal storytelling, it was hard to observe personal interests being articulated during MT study meetings, which focused on discussing ideas more than practical concerns. On the other hand, one could observe that personal issues were systematically aired during Streccapogn meetings. There, in fact, discussing about the life of the group meant talking about a significant source of income of some of the participants.

When authentic and inclusive group meetings occurred (e.g. MT and Streccapogn assemblies) they could be consequential in so far as having some discursive or practical impact on future actions. However, if at times assemblies might have a practical impact on the life of the group (e.g. Streccapogn meetings did determine to a great extent the future actions of the organisation), usually their effects on the wider community were exclusively discursive in nature; that is hardly any Transition group meeting could determine the contents of, or directly have an effect upon, a certain community issue without some further action (usually

activities (e.g. group meetings, online communications, etc.) within the same case study or the same activity between different case studies.

⁵ Though like at GJM meetings participants would as a norm sit in a circle (ibid.).

individual activities and informal contacts with local administrations). Overall, even when effective group meetings were possible they were usually not particularly consequential.

Discursive Activities

Although important, discursive activities did take up resources that community groups often did not have. These activities were acknowledged in all Transitions as a means to raise awareness in the community. In practice, however, only CT managed to organise these initiatives over time. TK, though, conducted some of these activities occasionally, but they were a rarity in the case of TMV and MT. In the case of CT, the collaboration with the local Council had surely bolstered the local Transition's capability to organise such events. CT was outstandingly active at this level and, as observed in the case study, these initiatives manifested positive features from a deliberative capacity perspective. Indeed, these activities were also remarkably effective in promoting Transition themes in the community and could also have led to some practical outcomes (e.g. the decision of local families to buy solar panels, and local farmers' attempt to start a social agriculture cooperative after Streccapogn's model).

On-line Communications

The importance of online interactions varied greatly from case to case. Similarly to GJM organisations, among my case studies the internet was primarily used for organising activities and participants paid different levels of attention to the quality of interactions (Mosca and della Porta, 2009: 213). TK relied heavily on online communication; CT was significantly present on the web, but in practice the internet was little more than a showcase and was not central in organising the local Transition's activities; TMV had a website and some email exchanges but overall was not very active online; and, finally, MT had almost no internet activity at all beyond a rare email exchange. With the exception of MT, the internet represented a good means to organise activities. More importantly, it was a formidable resource by which to make information available to Transition participants and other visitors, and was by far more successful than group meetings. The extent to which this information was actually read by a significant number of people, however, was a different matter that was hard to assess, although references to online materials were not particularly common in real-life discussions.

At any rate, discursive engagement that would meet the criteria of authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentiality could not be found in any of the discussions that took place online among my cases. Public discussions (that is, the ones open to all participants as opposed to private correspondence) hardly ever went beyond a few cursory remarks on a given issue. The people participating in these interactions were by and large those who were already most active in the life of groups (exacerbating therefore the existing inclusivity problems), and

public online discussion was hardly of consequence in discursive or practical terms. Finally, the focus on virtual interaction may have negatively affected at least two aspects of group life. In the first place whilst the internet permitted the efficient organization of activities and a channel for often captivating communication, it may have actually undermined the need for face-to-face meetings. My interviewees reported they would just check their email rather than attend the meetings. Secondly, whilst it facilitated networking, online interaction seemed to hinder the construction of a sense of community, especially with those outside the most active members group. Online communication therefore did not appear to contribute to the overall deliberative capacity, and ultimately it seemed to shape participation in the direction of spectatorship rather than discursive engagement among participants (see also: Wilhelm, 1998, Lupia and Sin, 2003).⁶

Individual Initiatives

Individual activities were common among my case studies (with the exception of MT) and tended to have a role for networking (e.g. in TMV only one person was in contact with the Tasmanian Transition network) and for specific activities. Often there were events, initiatives, projects (e.g. Energetic Kurilpa project in TK) which would not have taken place were it not for the efforts of a single individual, whilst the rest of the group had largely an ancillary function. Importantly, relationship-building with institutions was probably the activity in which the role of individual activities was most relevant. In TMV, the relationship with Council was quite literally personified in one individual (a local Councillor who was also a leader of the local Transition). In CT, the activity of one of the two leaders was the very basis of the relationship between the Transition and the local Council. In TK, the relationship with Council tended to be addressed on a slightly more collegial basis (at least involving the most active participants).⁷ Individual initiatives appeared largely detrimental to the overall deliberative capacity, as group deliberation was usually bypassed altogether causing an obvious restriction of inclusion in discursive engagement. Indeed, since the most active members were the ones usually involved in individual activities their position within the group was reinforced in practice, *pace* equality. These dynamics however did not imply that the quality of these actions was necessarily poor. In fact, usually it was those with some experience or expertise on a certain activity who took personal initiative. Yet, the actions of the people performing these activities were only mildly if ever questioned at all and, ultimately, individual activity seemed to prize effectiveness over

⁶ On the importance of performing interactions in physical public spaces, see Parkinson (2012a). Young (2000) also remarks that, in a democratic society it is important that citizens actually manifest their presence with democratic activities. For interesting and widely-differing takes on the deliberative and democratic potential of the internet, see among others (Dahlberg, 2001, Schlosberg and Dryzek, 2002, Witschge, 2004, Dahlgren, 2005, Smith et al., 2012).

⁷ In MT, there was no contact with institutions at all.

authentic, inclusive and consequential discursive engagement. A simple solution to exploit the benefits of individual activities without impinging on the deliberative and democratic qualities of the group was in use in Streccapogn. Here networking as well as partners and customers recruiting were overwhelmingly dependent upon the activities of the group's president and vice-president. However, these figures had been nominated and were 'entitled' to act as representatives of the rest of the group. Furthermore, although they disposed of great autonomy there was a shared expectation that they would discuss with other participants about past and future actions: the group had specified the basis for authority (see Polletta, 2002: 8) and during meetings accountability was actually implemented. Finally, individual initiatives could also be seen as ends in themselves. In fact, the achievement of observable lifestyle transformations or changes in their working activities were to many participants important objectives in themselves (e.g. embracing the Transition's ideals in one's business and making it more sustainable), a point which resonates widely in the literature on social movements (e.g. Mansbridge and Flaster, 2007).

Practical Actions

Practical activities were generally important for the Transitions under examination and all of them had organised such activities at some point (e.g. collective gardening, permablitzes, and 'do-it-yourself' workshops). Assessing the deliberative capacity of these events, however, is extremely difficult since the quality of interactions, especially from a discursive point-of-view, seemed to depend upon utterly circumstantial features and interactions were significantly dispersed. These events were usually popular within communities, and participating in these activities seemed to stand out for the emotional satisfaction they were able to provide (see della Porta and Giugni, 2013: 136).⁸ When, as in the case of MT, they were understood as an appendix to group assemblies they provided meetings with new arguments and views to be discussed (e.g. the need for MT to take a position on the NO MUOS campaign was first discussed during a practical activity and then debated at group level during a meeting). Where such a connection with group assemblies was not available or when the latter was not a particularly good venue for deliberation (e.g. TK) the discursive potential of practical activities was usually lost.

Casual Interactions

Similar considerations are relevant to casual activities. Like practical activities, casual ones were usually well attended and, when they took the form of casual gatherings (e.g. 'electricity free nights' in TK, and Produce Swap in TMV), they seemed to favour the socialisation of the group with the rest of the community (see also Saunders and Rootes, 2013: 94) and the

⁸ In their vast discussion on emotions and social movements, Goodwin et al. (2001a: 18) argue that pleasure stemming from participation can in itself be 'great enough to motivate participation'.

development of friendly relationships within the group (see also della Porta and Giugni, 2013: 133, della Porta and Rucht, 2013c: 217). Nonetheless, casual activities were markedly exclusionary when they were the main channel for carrying out important functions, such as the relationship with local institutions. In this sense, individual activities were usually also casual ones. Overall, the quality of casual activities was hard to observe, and their contribution to the global deliberative capacity depended on the way they were integrated with other activities. They could contribute to networking, decision-making, and the pursuit of ideas of a group to the extent that a wider group-level discursive platform was in place. However, casual activities could also work as the very venues where decisions were made by only a very few members.

In light of the discussion in this section it appears that assessing deliberative capacity requires acknowledging the complexity that characterises discursive processes within organisations. As seen, the quality of discursive engagement may vary significantly depending on the activities in which participants are engaged and on the way in which the discursive processes of different activities are connected to each other in everyday life. Having observed the deliberative qualities that groups feature in their daily activities, the next section investigates in detail the dynamics underlying the development of deliberative capacity.

The Drivers of Deliberative Capacity

The discussion in this section identifies some aspects that may account for the differences in the observed levels of deliberative capacity. This analysis refrains from a deterministic approach whilst claiming that the development of deliberative capacity does not depend on pure contingencies.

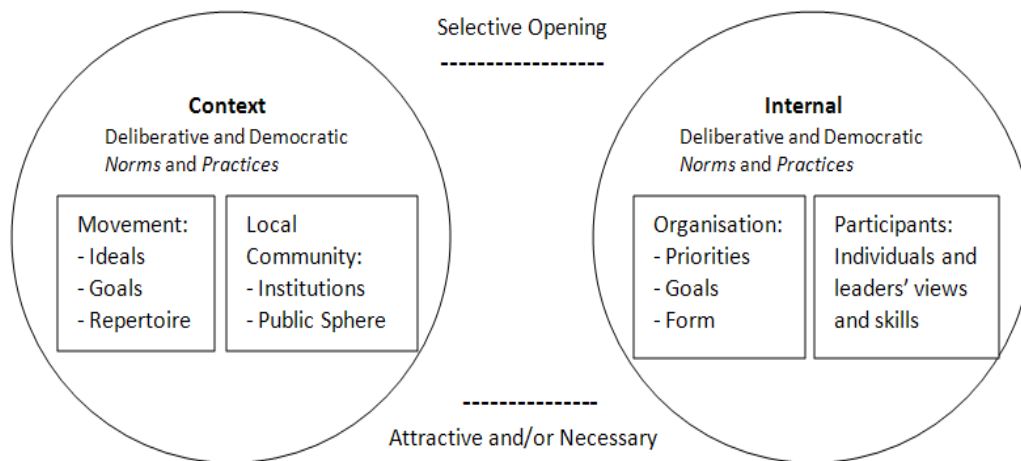
Deliberative Capacity and the Relationship between Internal and Contextual Aspects

This study suggests that the development of deliberative capacity can be understood in light of the interactions between a given organisation and the environment in which it takes action. Relevant elements for the generation of deliberative capacity can be clustered in two groups, that is 'context' and 'internal' features (see also: Rothschild and Whitt, 1986, della Porta, 2009d). 'Context' elements refer to the resources available to a group in terms of deliberative and democratic norms and practices. These elements can be found in the movement's ideals, goals and repertoire, or in the local community's public space and institutions.⁹ 'Internal' elements are related instead to an organisation's interest in and commitment to deliberative democratic norms and practices (see also: Gastil, 1992, Giugni and Nai, 2009). In particular,

⁹ As illustrated in the theoretical chapter, the goals and the values of the Transition movement to an extent display elements that resonate with deliberative and democratic ideals, although emphasis on practical and visible actions may arguably reduce spaces for deliberation within the Transitions.

these elements can be observed in connection with a local organisation's goals, priorities, and structural features, and participants' and leaders' 'personality' and skills (see also: Polletta, 2002, della Porta, 2009a, 2009b).¹⁰ To understand how deliberative capacity can be developed, it is important to analyse these 'internal' and 'context' features as well as the way they interact. That means, favourable conditions in the 'context' or, for that matter, positive 'internal' features do not necessarily imply high levels of deliberative capacity, and vice versa. Local organisations, in fact, seem to establish relationships within their context, and, specifically, groups develop a 'selective opening' to the elements of the context in which they take action (see della Porta, 2009f: 5). A fundamental aspect that affects the extent to which a given case will pursue a more deliberative democratic approach depends on whether groups perceive deliberative and democratic means as attractive and/or necessary (see Fig 8.2).

Figure 8.2 Deliberative Capacity Development



These dynamics can be seen at work in all four cases, and they do have an impact on the type of choices that local organisations make and the deliberative capacity they feature. In Transition Kurilpa, the group was rooted within an anti-development local protest scene. Although democratic values could be observed in this niche and among local Transitioners, a marked concern with practical aspects, an interest in 'getting things done' rather than 'just talking' – in participants' words – did not seem to leave room for either democratic or deliberative improvements. The group, starting with its leader, stressed the more pragmatic aspects of Transition, and some participants' attempts to foster more substantial discursive engagement were not successful. Indeed, the situation seemed to be made worse by interactions with a local context in which deliberative and democratic qualities were perceived

¹⁰ Although in its original formulation deliberative capacity refers particularly to structural elements rather than individuals' characteristics, it appears that the latter may have a role when small groups are under consideration rather than entire systems. In passing one could notice that Gastil (2010: ch.8) argues that deliberation at a community level is connected to the interaction between deliberative infrastructures and democratic leadership.

as unnecessary and sometimes actively discouraged, as occurred with the interactions with the Brisbane Council. Overall, discursive engagement had a rather marginal role. Individual initiatives instead were important in the life of the Transition, and the group relied to a great extent on online interactions, but neither of these offered a valid venue for authentic, inclusive, and consequential discussions. Indeed, many people were ultimately 'spectators' rather than participants in the local Transition, which was largely ineffectual in reaching out beyond the alternative circles in West End.

In Montevoglio, as already seen, there was no Transition group but rather a loose network of people firmly committed to the movement's values. The two leaders of the local Initiative attached special importance to the development of high quality interactions in the Transition-related activities. The relationship with the local Council represented the main point of disagreement within Transition Montevoglio and, partly as a consequence of this situation, the local Initiative had differentiated its activities between sub-groups. Thus, whilst many events were developed in collaboration with local institutions, there were initiatives that were only loosely connected to local politics, if at all. On the one hand, collaboration with Council was vital in developing numerous activities that allowed Transition Montevoglio to reach out to the community. The relationship with politics was problematic from a deliberative democratic standpoint, since it was largely based on private and informal interactions among community leaders. On the other hand, independent initiatives, such as Streccapogn, left more room to express the participatory values of its members and featured more substantial discursive engagement. Good quality inclusive and effective deliberation seemed both desirable and necessary in Streccapogn. Though far from perfect, through its differentiation Transition Montevoglio had managed to maintain its focus on the movement's values and developed some elements of a good quality, partially inclusive, and often consequential discursive engagement.

In Meander Valley, as seen in Chapter Six, the existence of a lively environmentalist tradition with strong emphasis on democratic and also deliberative norms was not at all embraced by the local Transition. Indeed, TMV's response in the face of the deep cleavage represented by local environmental issues was to remove discussion on these themes altogether, limiting engagement to subjects that allowed a more amiable discussion. Indeed, TMV tended to stress the non-conflictual nature of the movement more than did any other of my case studies. TMV was not particularly active and participants and leaders likewise did not seem to pay particular attention to the democratic qualities of the group or to its communication processes. The group did not attempt to enhance inclusivity and attracted only a very homogenous and numerically small group of people, who participated in meetings of rather poor quality from a

deliberative perspective. To the extent that group assemblies were the main forum for discussions this problem was increasingly deleterious to the group's capability to have authentic, inclusive, and consequential discursive engagement. Possibly the most illustrative image of the group's problems was embodied in its relationship with local politics, which was by no means generated through group engagement but depended almost exclusively on the activity of one local councillor, a founder of the local Transition.

Finally, Transition Modica originated in the lively local public sphere. By forming a Transition group, participants desired to create a space in which interaction would be based on Transition's approach rather than on 'the usual manners', which interviewees found particularly flawed. Also, interaction with local institutions was not a priority of the Transition, which was resolutely oriented to the public sphere. Participants, starting from the local initiator, attached a fundamental importance to the democratic and the communicative features of the group and a high quality interaction could be observed during the study meetings, the central activity of the group. Yet, possibly due to its early stage, the group did not reach out to the people outside the local activist scene. The group was successful in raising awareness among a limited number of people, but it was unable to affect the life of the community in a more practical way.

Internal Features and Context in Accounting for Democratic Qualities

The scheme presented above stems from the investigation of the deliberative capacity of the four case studies. Interestingly, it shares important commonalities with observations made in other studies on the democratic qualities of social movements and other organisations in the public space.

An early study to take into consideration in this regard is Rothschild and Whitt's analysis of the (participatory) democratic qualities of collectives. The authors (1986: 75) come to the conclusion that '*democratic modes of organizations are neither impossible nor inevitable*' (italics in original). Interestingly, Rothschild and Whitt (1986: esp.ch. 3-5) find that there are structural aspects which present organisational dilemmas to groups. Such dilemmas may be addressed in ways that promote 'conditions' that favour the development of participatory organisations. These conditions can be divided into external and internal ones. Internal conditions include: 'provisional orientation', 'mutual and self-criticism', 'limits to size and internal growth', 'homogeneity', 'dependence on internal support base', and 'diffusion of knowledge and technology'. External conditions are: 'oppositional services and values', 'supportive professional base' and 'social movement orientation'. Whilst groups are said to have some control over these 'external conditions', there are also some 'constraints' that hinder organisational democracy and groups have no significant power over them.

Organisational democracy, thus, has to be built in spite of such 'constraints', which include: 'time', 'emotional intensity', 'non-democratic habits and values', 'environmental constraints', and 'individual differences'.

This thesis, in line with Rothschild and Whitt's research, points to the existence of internal and external aspects facilitating or hindering democracy within organisations. Moreover, both studies highlight that internal and external aspects are not always a given and that the quality of democratic life within organisations is dependent on the problems that groups encounter and the solutions they devise. The aspects that this thesis highlights as relevant in the development of deliberative capacity are not formulated in the same way in which Rothschild and Whitt present the 'conditions' and 'constraints' conducive to (participatory) organisational democracy. The complex relationship between internal and external aspects is not best understood through a list of items that determine the democratic performance of groups, and it is even harder to identify specific enabling 'conditions' and immutable 'constraints'.¹¹ Some elements identified by Rothschild and Whitt can still be envisioned also in the dynamics discussed in this study. These include some of the aspects that they understand as 'conditions': 'mutual and self criticism', 'homogeneity', 'dependence on internal support base', 'oppositional service and values', and 'social movement orientation'; and also the 'constraints': 'time', 'emotional intensity', 'non-democratic habits and values', 'environmental constraints', and 'individual differences'.

In-depth engagement between the findings of this study and Rothschild and Whitt's is made difficult by the fact that the latter focuses on organizational aspects (rather than discursive engagement) and it adopts a participatory perspective that is quite distant from the deliberative norms employed in this study. Moreover, Rothschild and Whitt's study is rooted in an approach based on frameworks and opportunity structures. This approach, common in some social movement scholarship,¹² is not employed in the present investigation, which favours theoretical tools from deliberative democracy. Nonetheless, it is interesting to report that using the frame approach, on the basis of a study of the American labour movement, Clemens identified important dynamics affecting the organisational form of social movement organisations. Clemens (1996: 208-9) argued that social movement organisations develop their form on the basis of the organisational repertoires they have access to. These are distributed on three levels: normative (having to do with 'a culture's rules or prescriptions' regarding the

¹¹ As it has convincingly been argued by Polletta (2004) is also even more difficult to think in terms of structural opportunities and enabling cultural conditions embedded in activist's views. Indeed, culture can serve enabling and constraining functions and it not only influences activists' decisions but it also has a role in shaping the structures surrounding social movements.

¹² For instance, as argued by Clemens (1996: 206), dividing 'structures of constraint and opportunity' is instrumental in understanding how social movements develop their organisational frames.

appropriate organisational models for a given group of people), practical (depending on the 'different models of action' suited to a given situation), and institutional (having to do with the models available in social institutions). As she argued (1996: 226), social movement organisations would be shaped by how participants 'believed they should act', by 'what forms of action they have mastered at a practical level', and by the 'forms of actions which are embedded in institutionalized arrangements of power and resources'. The dynamics pointed out by Clemens with regard to organisational properties of social movement organisations seem also to emerge in this research, which focuses more specifically on discursive processes and their deliberative qualities. In fact, as seen in the case studies, references to normative, practical, and institutional aspects can be identified in the interviews with participants of the four Transitions.

An investigation focusing on the democratic qualities of social movements from a participatory standpoint and significantly influenced by deliberative democratic theory was completed by Polletta (2002). In her study of American social movements in the last century, Polletta highlights the relationship between an organisation and its environment as an important factor in understanding how democratic qualities are developed. According to Polletta (*ibid.*: 16): 'activists have never really started from square one' and participants 'may be influenced not only by what is likely to be instrumentally effective and what is likely to be ideologically consistent but also by what is familiar' (*ibid.* 21, see also 225). As claimed by Polletta these considerations represent a break from the traditional way of accounting for behaviour of social movements that has long been based on rational or strategic considerations. These observations seem to resonate with the findings of this study. All the case studies show that strategic choices, although important, are by no means the only aspect participants care about. Moreover, strategies can be understood in light of the specific contexts rather than abstract notions of instrumental rationality. More generally, Polletta challenges the view according to which internal democracy is desirable as an ideal but is not practical (*ibid.* ch:1) and shows how participatory decision-making has been an effective tool which some social movements have successfully employed to advance their claims. This seems to be confirmed in two ways in this research. First, in line with Polletta (*ibid.*), one could argue that participants do not always think of democratic practices as ineffective. The case studies show that only in TK did participants (and leaders in particular) envision a trade-off between discursive engagement and action. In TMV discursive engagement was neglected because of an overall low level of engagement in the group rather than a preference for action. In CT and MT, on the other hand, quality discursive engagement and action were both conceived as important components of the Transition experiment. Second, as seen, there is no evidence from this study that an

overall (deterministic) connection between a group's deliberative democratic qualities and the organisations' effectiveness can be established.¹³

The DEMOS studies, which considered both participatory and deliberative principles, represented a unique contribution to the investigation of the development of organizational structures. In particular, the book *Democracy in Social Movements* (della Porta, 2009d: 3) observed the relationship between context and internal features with regard to the organisational behaviour of social movement organisations. *Democracy in Social Movements* contained particularly closely related findings concerning the relationship between an organisation and its context. For example, speaking of the Global Justice Movement Giugni and Nai (2009: 147) found that 'both the internal structuring of the organisations (structural factors) and the tradition of contention upon which their mobilization rests (cultural factors) should be taken into account to explain the adoption of [a deliberative participatory] democratic model'. Moreover, the studies on the organisational qualities of the GJM provide refined findings that are instrumental to the investigation of the discursive processes.

As mentioned in the Chapter Two, recent studies (della Porta, 2009a, 2009b) have highlighted that participants' and groups' identification with the values of a movement, or with democratic values within collectives (Gastil, 1992), are important in explaining the adoption of deliberative and democratic attitudes. As Polletta (2002: 21-2, see also 2005b) first pointed out: '[a]n option may be appealing to activists because it accords with their view of what they are' or because 'of the groups with which particularly options are symbolically associated'. Della Porta (2005b: 79) has further investigated these dynamics and in her study of the values and norms affecting the organizational choices of Italian social forums she found that 'if movements have adopted some ideas from their environment, they have adapted them to suit their values and objectives'. Besides remarking that social movement organizations 'are clearly influenced by their environment' (2009f: 114) and that groups' values and objectives are developed in light of the possibilities provided by the different contexts (2009d: 3), della Porta has stressed the importance of cognitive aspects in group life. By arguing that 'organizations do not automatically adapt to their environments' and that actors' perceptions filter environmental pressure (2009e: 5) della Porta envisioned the dynamics that are here termed 'selective opening'. This term in particular refers to groups adopting those deliberative and democratic values and norms which they find ideally desirable or necessary to affect the community among those made available in the 'context' in which they take action. Finally, studies on the determinants of the quality of communications within social movements suggest that the role

¹³ As observed in the previous discussions CT was effective and featured deliberative democratic elements, MT had good discursive engagement but poor impact, TK was poorly deliberative but had achieved some results, TMV displayed neither particularly deliberative nor effective qualities.

of the context in which organisations take action has an effect on the way ‘democratic visions’ are developed by groups, whilst the prevailing norms appear to affect participants’ ‘conceptions and practices of democracy’ (della Porta and Rucht, 2013b: 11-2).¹⁴

The Generation of Deliberative Capacity among Organisations in Public Space

The relationship between ‘internal’ and ‘contextual’ aspects, while emphasised in this study, may not be the only dynamic accounting for the generation of deliberative capacity. Indeed, insights from similar studies, which do not seem to stand in opposition to the aforementioned dynamic, can be usefully employed to better understand the way deliberative capacity was developed among my case studies. Likewise, the fact that findings from related works can be compared to reflect upon the value of these case studies is highly relevant.

Symbolic Associations and Closeness to a Movement’s Values

One contribution from social movement scholarship that is highly relevant is Polletta’s (2002: 21-2) aforementioned claim that groups make choices because of their own understanding of their role and their symbolic associations with other organisations. This very dynamic seems to play a role among my case studies. For instance, in TMV, participants saw themselves as members of a non-confrontational group, and environmental issues were symbolically associated with confrontational environmentalist organisations and therefore disregarded.¹⁵ In Modica, the same dynamic seemed instead to favour a deliberative attitude. Participants, in fact, seemed rather conscious of their role as pioneers of Transition in Sicily and abided by the movement’s methods, following the example of ‘guys in Montevoglio’ (the pioneers of Italian Transition). Finally, in passing one could also notice that symbolic associations may be envisioned also among institutional actors’ idea of Transition groups, for instance when a local Councillor in Kurilpa referred to the transition as an expression of the ‘questioning part of the community’ (see Polletta, 2004: 107).

Interestingly, the organizations that adhered more closely to Transition ideals were also those that displayed more deliberative capacity. This finding seems to be in line with those of other studies on social movements. In particular, della Porta and Rucht (2013b: 12) found that at group level ‘the more a group identified with the GJMs at large the more likely it was to embrace deliberation and participation’ and, at the individual level, general norms ‘as

¹⁴ Although, as seen, it can be connected to other studies with wider interests in social movements, it should be remembered that this study seeks to assess the deliberativeness of discursive processes within its case study and its potential determinants. Organisations’ structural features and practices are important to this research to the extent that they are found to foster (or hinder) deliberative capacity but are not of primary interest *per se*.

¹⁵ As it appears from the case study, this dynamic was accompanied by the use of metonymy to describe particular social groups. According to Polletta (2012: 53-4), such a phenomenon is related to the same dynamics that generate symbolic association.

expressed for example, by identification with the GJMs ... accounted for a preference for a participatory and democratic conception of democracy' (ibid., see also della Porta, 2009a).

Varying Styles

Eliasoph and Lichterman's (2003) idea of 'group style' also helps to better understand the observed levels of deliberative capacity.¹⁶ Group style is defined as 'recurrent patterns of interaction that arise from a group's shared assumptions about what constitutes good or adequate participation in the group setting' (ibid. 737), and the 'implicit, culturally patterned styles of membership filter collective representations' (ibid. 735). In the context of a group, its style is made up of assumptions put into practice on three different grounds: 'group boundaries', that is, 'what the group's relationship (imagined and real) to the wider world should be'; 'group bonds', that is 'what members' mutual responsibilities should be'; and 'speech norms', that is 'what appropriate speech is' (ibid. 739). These attitudes could also be understood as a manifestation of the 'partly tacit rules and norms', which according to della Porta and Rucht (2013b: 13) play a crucial role in group interactions, or what Polletta calls (2012: 49-51) 'institutional norms'. Meander Valley's Transition is probably the case where group style was most pronounced (and less than deliberative). The group imagined itself as an umbrella organisation capable of attracting a wide array of fellow community members. Towards that end, it was fundamental not to display a 'green tinge', which it was believed would have given an unappealing connotation to the group. Participants (most of whom were newcomers to the area) were expected to use the local Transition as a venue to bond with other community members and support each other. At the same time, deploying an argumentative style was seen as running counter to the efforts to build an amicable environment, in which conflict was essentially avoided and facilitated interaction was experienced as somewhat extraneous to the group's nature. A similar phenomenon could be observed in Transition Kurilpa. Here an ideal openness to the broader community went hand in hand with a clear awareness of the groups' association with the local progressive and green activist scene. Moreover, the group's pragmatic orientation was resolutely reaffirmed from time to time, and though a degree of engagement could occasionally emerge, interactions between potentially conflicting views or structured interactions were avoided. These dynamics were particularly problematic since they seemed to engender a vicious circle. In fact, in those very groups lacking space for quality interaction it was easier to adapt to common views held

¹⁶ Sass and Dryzek(2011), in their work on deliberative cultures, provide an example of how this concept can be applied to deliberative democracy. Also Haug et al. (2013) and Haug and Rucht (2013) in their analyses of the qualities of social movement organisation, employ the notion of group style. In their experimental study of the role of groups in deliberation, Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2007) note, among other aspects, the importance of norms in influencing the quality of group interaction.

by (dominant) members (or drop the group altogether) rather than questioning or even engaging them.

Local over National Context

Interestingly, to Eliasoph and Lichterman, group styles 'are elements of culture' and 'shared across many groups' (ibid. 737). Indeed, it is worth noticing that the features that I observed in the Australian context, specifically with regard to conflict avoidance, were not manifested in the Italian cases. In this latter case, 'speech norms' seemed more open to the expression of diverging and potentially conflicting views.¹⁷ The expectation was that group members would advance their own views during the discussions and structured interactions were sought to regiment lively debates, similarly to GJM organisations (della Porta and Rucht, 2013c: 217, 221). Tentatively, however, one could argue that in comparison to the Italian cases the speech styles of the Australian groups may have been less prone to the emergence of and engagement with conflicting views, with rather detrimental effects on the quality of the discursive engagement.

My observations could not exclude that avoiding discussing divisive issues during group meetings may represent a rhetorically effective mode of interaction. Such behaviour would remain negative in that it may favour strategic (rather than deliberative) interactions in groups (see Leung, 1988). In passing, it should be noted that Gambetta's (1998) alleged divide between indexical and analytical cultures seemed to have no bearing on my observations. There did not seem to be any particular element to suggest that Australian or Italian case studies could be characterised along Gambetta's lines. Actually, if anything, the supposedly more analytical cultural setting of Australia seemed more problematic than indexical Italy. In this study, nonetheless, the better performance of Italian cases appeared not to be related to some national features in particular.

In accounting for the deliberative and democratic qualities among my case studies the role of local contexts seemed more important than the national one, a remark that emerges also from della Porta's research (2009c: 270). Of course, a study prominently based on national cases may have shown that national level characteristics could play a more relevant role in deliberative capacity.

¹⁷ For in depth studies on 'conflict avoidance' (see: Ulbig and Funk, 1999, Duchesne and Haegel, 2007). In passing, it is worth noticing that a different type of conflict may exist (e.g. interpersonal 'relationship conflict', 'task conflict' referring to different views on given issues, and 'process conflict' on how to accomplish a given objective) (Jehn and Mannix, 2001). Discursive processes without conflict tended to exclude any type of conflict whereas more engaging processes were characterised by 'task' and 'process' conflicts rather than 'relationship' ones.

Importantly, in this study neither the qualities of the local context nor the stage of development of an organisation inherently determined an organisation's deliberative capacity. It should be noticed, in fact, that two of my cases were younger groups in more problematic areas (Meander Valley and Modica) as compared to the more developed official Initiatives in more dynamic communities (Kurilpa and Monteveglio), yet the deliberative capacity they manifested varied in ways that seemed not to correspond to the above differentiation.

Finally, although it does not seem to be related to the deliberative capacity of the case studies, social capital may be relevant to account for the areas in which these initiatives were started. Each one of the communities that hosted Transition groups were somewhat more dynamic as compared to their neighbouring areas, and the possibility that different levels of social capital may account for this phenomenon deserves further examination.¹⁸

On Variables from Earlier Research

Research with GJM organisations has shown that 'smaller, younger and more resource-poor groups' favoured participatory and consensus oriented forms of internal democracy (della Porta and Rucht, 2013b: 11-2, della Porta, 2009b, Giugni and Nai, 2009: 147), although Saunders (2009: 168) specifies that among small groups 'very few seem to have specific rules to ensure that their organizations do not become vulnerable to implicit and unintentional oligarchies or power structures'. These findings concern the organisational aspects of movements rather than specifically their discussions. Thus it should not be particularly alarming that whilst all four groups I studied were small, young and resource poor, the deliberative and democratic qualities of their discursive processes varied and were far from substantial in some cases.

Luckily, studies exist that have aimed more specifically at assessing the quality of communication. Giugni and Nai (2013: 175) found that size is one of the factors to take into account to understand when controversies emerge: discussions which do not include a decision-making and are attended by a small and heterogeneous group of people tend to have fewer controversies (see also della Porta and Rucht, 2013c: 224).¹⁹ In line with expectation regarding size, controversies were not particularly common among my case studies. Actually,

¹⁸ 'Environmental opportunities' (McAdam et al., 1996) did not seem to explain why these community-based movements could get started (Kousis, 1999). In fact, among the organizations studied in this research only Transition Kurilpa could be traced back to an existing anti-development struggle. In the other cases, instead, it was hard to envision specific commitments to any environmental struggle in particular. More generally, following Polletta (2004), one may argue that the idea of structural opportunities unduly overlooks the role of cultural aspects in accounting for the emergence of movements.

¹⁹ Seeking to explain not just their frequency but how these controversies are handled, and what determines their deliberative quality, Giugni and Nai resort to 'the institutional settings in which groups are located' (ibid.) without finding any particular correlation.

controversies occurred less often than in the GJM groups, where they were 'far from rare' (Rucht, 2013: 61, della Porta and Rucht, 2013c: 221).

This study did not allow generalisations on whether a decision-making orientation favoured the emergence of different views during discussion on the relationship between homogeneity and level of controversy. However, with regard to the former it could be observed that the decision-oriented nature of discussions affected the interests rather than the views that were engaged with during meetings in two ways. First, the consequences of excluding someone's interests were more likely to be felt when there was a decision to be made (e.g. Streccapogn meetings and non-EU workers) than when the goal of discussion was to simply reflect upon an issue (e.g. MT study meetings). Secondly, where there was no purpose in voicing one's interests (e.g. TMV, TK, MT) it was particularly hard to propose different interests. In general, the need to make a decision seemed to affect positively the deliberativeness of discussions at CT and Streccapogn.

With regard to homogeneity/heterogeneity, this research finds that participants' heterogeneity benefited some of the most deliberative discussions, such as those at MT meetings and the Streccapogn open assembly. Such finding seems similar to Haug and Rucht (2013c: 207). From a theoretical standpoint, this investigation seems to support Bachtiger's (2010: 22, see also 2011) remark that 'an important pre-condition for effective agonistic inquiry is group heterogeneity'.

Della Porta and Rucht (2013c: 224) also remarked that there is a 'higher proportion of deliberative communication when the mode of interaction is co-operative, when incivility is absent or rare and when time pressure is limited or non-existent'. Since non-cooperative behaviour or incivility was not significantly observed, this research cannot report on whether either of these two aspects led to more deliberative interaction. However, this research finds that the existence of time constraints in MT seemed to benefit rather than hamper the quality of discussion.

The existence of mutual acquaintance or lack thereof between participants in a community group did not seem to be a fundamental aspect in generating deliberative capacity. Indeed, if anything, the desire to maintain friendly interactions may have favoured unanimity without necessarily fostering scrutiny or voicing disagreement (see Mansbridge, 1983). This study supports Mutz's observation (2006: 26) that 'it is those relationships characterized as "mere acquaintances," rather than as friends, that are most likely to involve political disagreement'. Also Polletta (2002: 4) remarks the same concerns represented already in groups in the 1960s were a barrier to the expansion of groups 'beyond an original core'. As it emerges from the

case studies (in Kurilpa and Meander Valley in particular) groups may display ‘net-talk’, which Haug (2013: 719) illustrates as the phenomenon in which ‘those who know and trust each other’ may engage more with each other than with the rest of the group. As Haug (ibid.) rightly points out ‘net-talk’ may be the result of a ‘hidden agenda’, whereby some participants strategically engage only with some group members, or an ‘unintended consequence of friendship’ but in any case it seems to hinder engagement with less connected participants. As seen in the case studies, the overwhelming majority of discursive processes unfold in friendly and welcoming settings. To use della Porta and Giugni’s threefold distinction between tense, mixed and relaxed situations (2013: 124), it is possible to say that discussions were never tense, almost always relaxed, and occasionally mixed (as for example, during Streccapogn participants meetings). Possibly, my case studies featured relaxed environments more often than did those of GJM organisations. Indeed, there was no significant variation among cases on this point suggesting that such a difference could be understood in light of the specific emotional culture (see: della Porta and Giugni, 2013, Goodwin et al., 2001b) of the Transition movement. Its attention to the development of positive inner attitudes among participants may be particularly important in this regard.

Most importantly, this research fully converges with studies on GJM organisations on a cardinal point: ‘deliberation is facilitated by the spread (linked with the culture of direct action) of rules and roles that are anchored in informal institutions’ (della Porta and Rucht, 2013c: 231). Informality seems to refer to participants’ efforts to attain democracy within organisations by following norms connected to equal and respectful exchange of ideas, and it should not be intended as a lack of regulated interaction (ibid.). Participants are highly critical of ‘the state of contemporary democracy at large’ and seek to implement the aforementioned democratic conception in their internal activities rather than a formal understanding of democracy anchored to ‘mechanisms of voting, delegation, and division of power’ (ibid.: 225). If democratic deliberation was not always attained, voting was not even proposed once during the activities I observed.

Same Movement, Different Associations and Different Capacities

Finally, the observation of everyday practice shows that organisations sharing the same ideas and trying to implement them in different local contexts vary from each other to the point that they resemble different associations. In fact, the case studies can be arranged by using the threefold classification of the ‘associative lifeworld’ (Young, 2000: 160-3) introduced in Chapter Three. The first one of these three categories is that of self-regarding ‘Private associations’ concerned with ‘basic matters’ and based on usually exclusive social relations. Secondly, there are outward-looking, community-minded ‘Civic associations’, which may do

more than the former to 'enhance democracy' and are 'open in principle to anyone' and occasionally 'proto-political' in that they may advance a specific cause. Finally, 'Political associations' that 'self-consciously [focus] on claims about what the social collective ought to do', they 'voic[e] issues for public debate', allow 'conflict to surface' and propose solutions, and their activities 'aim to politicize social or economical life' (ibid.: 160-3). By allocating the four cases along a continuum from private to public associations, it appears that TMV would be somewhere in between a 'civic' and 'private' association, MT and TK present more typical traits of 'civic' associations, with TK presenting proto-political aspects, and CT would be on the edge between 'civic' and 'political' association. Therefore, organisations within the same social movement in trying to implement its principles in different local contexts, end up performing significantly different activities.

Enhancing Authenticity, Inclusivity, and Consequentiality

Debunking the myth of Spontaneous Deliberation

An important consideration in all four cases is that authentic deliberation did not emerge, so to speak 'spontaneously' or 'naturally'. As seen above, and in line with findings from research on GJM organisations (e.g. Andretta, 2013: 101), there may be aspects that foster deliberative capacity but the development of good discursive engagement in a group requires commitment, efforts, and resources from participants.

Having a method of regulating interactions (especially during group meetings) seemed to improve the quality of discursive engagement. Though this consideration may appear obvious it is worth noticing how, for example, the absence of facilitation techniques is not uncommon among groups in civil society. The wider and pervasive 'tyranny of structurelessness' was famously identified long ago (Freeman, 1972). More recently, Mutz (2006: 144) argued that 'people involved in conversations naturally gravitate toward ideas or experiences that they have in common', and whereas 'like-minded interactions are unlikely to need much encouragement' (ibid. 148), more confrontational ones might. Ultimately Gastil (1993: 145) astutely remarked that: '[c]ompared to other social institutions, conversations are highly malleable, and earnest efforts to make them democratic can produce immediate and gratifying results'. Especially in my Australian cases there was a tendency for a 'natural', 'informal' approach to discussion, free from any structuring other than cultural norms. Importantly, as clearly emerged in Kuripla and Meander Valley, this attitude was paralleled among some interviewees by a belief that 'organic' interactions (that is, as much as possible non-mediated) or less argumentative ones may attract more people. However, the lack of engagement was a tedious and disheartening aspect that participants lamented most often, especially in Kurilpa's case. On the other hand, in Modica, though some found it somewhat challenging, participants

were largely enthusiastic about the use of a facilitation technique during group meetings.²⁰ This seems to support Combes et al.'s (2009: 232-3) remark that: 'informality and the goal of openness do not mean that this openness is always concretely realized. On the contrary, rather than reducing barriers, informality can maintain them while making them more difficult to identify and hence to bypass'.

Though structure does not guarantee good quality interactions, groups that attempted loosely (Streccapogn) or systematically (Modica) to follow a method during their discussions did perform better in terms of their authenticity. On the other hand, the incapability to engage with disagreement or confrontation (evident in the case of Meander Valley group meetings for example) could to an extent be connected also to the possibility of continually switching to different topics whenever an uncomfortable issue or view was about to emerge. This is not to praise 'norms of order' whose detrimental effects on deliberation Young (2000: 47-8) has well exposed. Rather, this observation, which resonates with della Porta and Rucht's (2013b: 13) remarks on the importance of 'roles to guide group processes', suggests that it is possible to develop satisfactory ways to facilitate engagement in discursive processes and actually include a wider variety of opinions and modes of expression. Facilitation enabled more democratic and deliberative discussions and enhanced a group's ability to learn how to overcome communication problems (della Porta and Rucht, 2013c: 231). Moreover, as argued by Saunders (2009: 168), also in small groups 'implicit power structures' are unavoidable and 'being aware of' and to 'militate against them by fostering inclusivity and equality' appears necessary (see also: della Porta, 2009c: 272). Indeed, as Haug and Rucht (2013: 211) reported, unless a meeting culture with rather demanding traits exists in a group, 'complete informality does not secure equality and internal democracy'. This is particularly important since, as remarked by Polletta (2002: 8), 'informality can conceal the operation of unaccountable powers' and, unlike in GJM organisations (see Rucht, 2013: 67), internal power was not a major concern of Transition participants, and only in Modica and Montevoglio did participants pay attention to it.

Reflecting upon Discursive Engagement

The 'form' that one local initiative took seemed to affect deliberative capacity. The 'group' form did not necessarily guarantee good quality discussions and it curtailed the inclusivity of local initiatives since only a small number of people usually attended 'group' meetings. Having the prescribed deliberative platform in a group meeting that does not work is so counter-

²⁰ Modica was also the best example of a group attempting to give even the more silent participants a chance to engage in conversation. Not just was such an effort often missing in other case studies but also as Saunders and Rootes (2013: 94) noted, it is not even particularly common among communications within GJM organisations.

productive in terms of deliberative capacity that it is probably no better than not having one at all. As argued by della Porta (2009d: 5), organisation is an important characteristic of social movements as ‘not just a means, but also an end in itself’ (see also Polletta 2002, esp. 52-4).²¹ Groups that reflected on the role of meetings within the organisation (in particular in Streccapogn and Modica) performed more effectively. In Modica, for example, it was understood that meetings needed to be facilitated, because otherwise good quality interaction would be difficult and some people may have dominated the discussion and undermined the egalitarian concerns of the group. Streccapogn, decided instead to have meetings only when someone required one, that is if someone felt it was necessary. This arrangement could actually be preferable to having largely unattended or inconclusive scheduled meetings with a ritualistic more than any deliberative function.

One way to overcome the inclusivity problem is to create wider assemblies open to the public paralleled by smaller meetings for group members (as in the case of Streccapogn). Such mechanisms might help to bring themes and people from the wider community into a group’s discussion. The organisation of numerous events of good quality can also bolster the discursive engagement that groups promote in their communities (as in CT). This observation points in the same direction as Haug and Rucht’s (2013: 206) finding that, in their observation of the European Social Forum, good quality communication ‘was not possible *in spite* but *because* of the absence of a formal group structure’.

The deliberative value of different activities in the life of a group depends not just on their quality *per se* but also fundamentally on the way they are integrated with each other. It seems preferable that an organisation develops not just casual individual interactions (such as those between Transition Montevoglio’s leader and the local administration) but also ways to allow engagement with those potentially interested, as happened in Streccapogn (where those who had particular roles had great freedom but were expected to discuss about these activities with the rest of the group). The absence of a group meeting space cast a shadow on the ‘publicity’ of CT: on some issues, in fact, ‘holding one another accountable’ was not possible (Young, 2000: 25). This problem should not be overlooked, as publicity is instrumental in the construction of spaces for deliberative communication (ibid.: 168-70).

Openness and Inclusivity

In regard to inclusivity, community groups like the four under examination may ultimately appeal only to certain sectors of the population, although one should refrain from

²¹ della Porta (2005b: 77) remarked that ‘internal democracy emerged as an important topic of discussion’ among GJMs organizations. This view is found also in normative feminist scholarship (e.g. Mansbridge, 1995).

simplistically associating them with the middle-class (della Porta and Diani, 1999: 48-9) as new social movements transcend class structure (Johnston et al., 1994).²² Actually, possibly the most accurate defining boundary to the movement's inclusivity is not to be found in its social characteristics as much as in its capability to attract those people with what Stern et al. (1999) define as 'personal proenvironmental norms – [that is], the belief that the individual and other social actors have an obligation to alleviate environmental problems'. Indeed, as affirmed by della Porta (2005b: 79), '[s]ocial movements, as communities of people sharing common values and identities, are by definition selective'. However, within such a broad category widely different levels of inclusivity are possible, and from a comparative perspective Transition Montevoglio fared remarkably well showing that, to an extent, limitations to inclusivity should be overridden. As rightly pointed out by Saunders and Rootes (2013: 84), 'the ability to attract and retain newcomers appears to help organizations to avoid cliques'. In fact, when such ability was lacking (e.g. MT, and in particular TK) the organisation did not succeed in expanding beyond the enclave it belonged to, or establishing connections with alternative sectors in communities (TMV). An open attitude was not enough to generate inclusivity, which required proactive effort from the group to engage with the rest of the community (as in CT and Streccapogn).

Enhancing Inclusivity through Authenticity

Inclusivity depends on authenticity to the extent that quality discursive engagement seems to favour at least discursive inclusivity. In fact, among the case studies, when a good quality forum existed discursive inclusivity was bolstered. To the extent that the participants' views can be expressed more fully a wider and more diverse range of perspectives can contribute to the discussion, enriching the group's discursive process. Thus, pursuing discursive inclusivity may represent a way for these groups to remedy the limitations to other aspects of inclusivity (e.g. narrow descriptive inclusion in terms of social background) whilst improving the quality of discursive engagement.

Connectivity and Safeguard of Democratic Qualities

An element that is surely connected to, and even dependent on, the other two dimensions of deliberative capacity is consequentiality, which cannot be generated without an authentic and inclusive discursive engagement. The instances in which a forum for good and inclusive discursive engagement is lacking thus represent a most problematic situation. Solving this issue could be a fundamental pre-condition for developing consequentiality.

Making discursive engagement more salient in the life of an organisation does not necessarily imply, however, that groups should become more speech-centric. Actually, in some cases (for

²² For an in-depth analysis of inclusivity in movements' networks, see della Porta (2005: 79).

example TMV) the forums gave plenty of room to a discussion of poor quality. A possible solution in this case would be to rethink the role and the space that discursive engagement has in the life of a group. Meetings, if needed, can be less numerous but it is necessary to make sure that they may be of greater import and that the quality of discursive activity receives attention.

A key element in the development of consequentiality lies in the relationship with other local organisations. Of these, collaboration with local institutions is possibly the most challenging. This research suggests that when not properly handled institutional collaboration fosters undeliberative effectiveness, wherein groups (or more often their leaders) focus on having an impact without regard to the way such impact is generated. As it is well known in social movement studies, and usually conveyed through the idea of frameworks, political opportunities influence the strategies of organisations (e.g. Kitschelt, 1986, Kriesi, 2004).

In this study it emerges that the role of responsive local institutions is not necessarily positive for the development of deliberative capacity among my cases. Actually, it usually appears to be detrimental. When institutions interacted with community groups they tended to do so in ways which forced the latter to be responsive to dynamics that rarely if ever fostered deliberative qualities. This observation seems to recast on a local scale the observations already made by Dryzek et al. (2003) on how active institutions may not necessarily represent the best partner for social movements. This study highlights that not just authenticity is (especially) constrained (ibid: 107) but also inclusivity is negatively affected as group wide engagement tends to be reduced.²³

My research shows consistent commonalities between Transition participants' attitudes towards institutions and the views of activists from other movements. The bulk of participants, similarly to activists in the GJM (della Porta, 2009f: 114), were generally open to institutions but mistrusted them. Group leaders were different in that they were willing (and devoted time) to collaborate with institutions. My research also supports three important observations by della Porta (ibid.). The first is that 'attitudes towards institutions are influenced by general

²³ Famously, in the midst of the deliberative turn in democratic theory, Walzer (1999: 68) argued that there is more to political life than deliberation and that '[d]eliberation's proper place is dependent on other activities that it doesn't constitute or control'. To Walzer, space for deliberation should be built without sacrificing spaces to more confronting political moments. However, deliberative democrats before and after Walzer's writing have been aware of this issue, especially in social movements. For instance, Mansbridge (1996: 57) remarked how activists may need to 'oscillate between protected enclaves, in which they can explore their ideas in an environment of mutual encouragement, and more hostile but also broader surroundings in which they can test those ideas against the reigning reality'. Finally, Dodge (2009: 237) argues that social change organisations in civil society can use discursive or coercive forms of power in pursuing political goals. She finds that coercive forms of power (for instance, threatening to leave the forum) is mostly used in face-to-face deliberation with government institutions, whilst discursive engagement tends to prevail in engaging the public.

attitudes towards democracy' (ibid.: 120; see also Haug et. al: 33). In fact, participants in all four Transitions tended to be highly critical of both. The second is that 'small, poor, voluntary, grass-roots organisations', tend to be particularly critical when it comes to collaboration with institutions (ibid.: 125). Thirdly, 'the more the groups stress democratic values of participation and deliberation, the more they are critical towards existing institutions' (ibid.). MT and Streccapogn were the groups more concerned with their deliberative democratic qualities and the ones that most distanced themselves from their local administrations. These findings suggest that relationship with institutions is a theme of relevance for contemporary movements including Transition, where the implementation of an ideal notion of collaboration is hindered by practical impediments.

Deliberating under Difficult Circumstances

Developing consequentiality does not require that organisations refrain from collaborating with institutions. Instead, groups should seek to enhance their consequentiality by exploiting available resources (e.g. securing institutional support) without sacrificing a group's deliberative and democratic qualities. As Fung maintains (2005), 'suboptimal circumstances' for deliberative engagement exist when there is substantial inequality and unwillingness to deliberate. As it emerged from the case studies, these circumstances seemed most evident when my case studies tried to engage with local institutions. When they are face-to-face with each other, the power imbalance between community groups and institutional politics is most clear, and it is the former that has to adapt (see also Head, 2007). As Fung (2005: 399) pointed out, although deliberative democratic ends can be better pursued through discursive engagement, groups that would limit themselves 'to communicative methods even under highly adverse conditions such as extreme inequality, pervasive disregard for deliberative norms, and systematic domination' are destined to fail. Thus, 'the extent of permissible deviation from deliberative norms increases according to the adversity of political circumstance' (ibid.: 397). As argued by Baber and Bartlett (2007: 15-16) '[a] firm commitment to the conceptual underpinning of deliberative democracy' would be instrumental in keeping environmental organisations democratic while pursuing political effectiveness in conditions of inequality. Nonetheless, in some cases such commitment can be far from firm and deliberative and democratic norms appear often desirable yet unnecessary to achieve certain goals. In these cases a solution could be to make sure that less deliberative means, necessary to affect the surrounding environment, are anchored to the more deliberative and democratic moments in the internal life of a local organisation.²⁴

²⁴ Polletta (2012) invites to refrain from portraying the cultural and strategic dimensions of social movement organisations as necessarily in opposition. In light of this remark the above observation can

Outward and Inward Functions

The problem of the relationship with political institutions becomes particularly interesting when analysed in light of the distinction between ‘offensive’ and ‘defensive’ functions of public space organisations (Cohen and Arato, 1992), which Young (2000) first employed in a deliberative democratic analysis (see ch.3), and which here are labelled as ‘outward’ and ‘inward’ functions respectively. Here, we can consider that their ‘outward functions’ include all instances in which Transitions related to local institutions, whilst the inward functions were those activities which did not involve direct contact with local institutions. Among the four case studies, it appeared that, with varying degrees of success, TMV and, in particular, MT were almost exclusively concerned with ‘inward functions’, similarly to TK which did however try occasionally to engage in ‘outward’ functions, whilst CT was the only one which was active on both fronts. By interpreting the comparative findings in light of this dual distinction, the case studies display varying deliberative capacity, in ways that were similar to their overall deliberative capacity (TMV and TK featured major shortcomings whereas MT and CT were more positive). However, when it came to ‘outward functions’ all case studies presented major problems in terms of authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentiality. Even where deliberative capacity existed in the ‘inward’ side, it disappeared in the ‘outward’ function.

This observation can be further elaborated by relating it to the distinction between ‘everyday activists’ and ‘organized activists’ (Mansbridge, 2005, Mansbridge and Flaster, 2007, Mansbridge, 2012) (see ch. 3). In each case study, some actors were acknowledged leaders (one in Kurilpa, two in Monteveglio, four in Meander Valley, and one in Modica). These participants were also those who more closely resembled ‘organized activists’ given the outstanding level of commitment they dedicated to Transition.

It appears that deliberative capacity was built in those cases in which these actors’ efforts were devoted to ‘outward’ functions and connecting with the others, the ‘everyday activists’ who composed the local Transition. The opposite happened when these concerns were absent and the ‘organized activists’ had a more ‘outward’-looking attitude, aimed at obtaining change through institutional collaboration.²⁵ In Transition Meander Valley, a limited effort was put into the development of ‘inward functions’. Whilst the most influential participant was devoted to managing a relationship with the Council on a personal basis (or with occasional

be understood as the possibility that the complex tension that may arise between instrumentally and normatively desirable behaviours can generate original solutions, which mix the two rather than favour one over the other.

²⁵ One could argue that in these cases there was a higher risk of ‘Astroturf organisation’, as Brulle (2000: 91) calls those groups that look like grassroots but lack an organic connection to the community. However, Brulle refers to a wider problem of representation whereas more modestly here, the issue is the connection between leaders and other group participants and the discursive qualities of these organisations.

contact with the other three local leaders), the group was substantially isolated from the rest of the local public sphere. Kurilpa's leader's pragmatic views seemed to provide only limited support to the enhancement of 'inward functions' and was instead concentrated on catching opportunities for projects. In Modica, the local group (and the 'leader') had renounced all 'outward' activity to focus exclusively on the 'inward' function and to find ways to reach out to the local public sphere. Finally, in Monteveglio, as seen, the key to the development of deliberative capacity was not in the single-handed management of the relationship with Council, rather, it was in the leaders' attention to the quality of engagement during Transition initiatives and in Streccapogn's intensive concentration on 'inward functions'.

Conclusions

This chapter has provided an in-depth comparative analysis of the four case studies and sought to explain the dynamics underlying the development of deliberative capacity. The first section illustrated the overall levels of deliberative capacity, the case studies' performance on the three main dimensions of deliberative capacity, and the discursive qualities featured by the different activities into which the life of these organisations has been divided. Although deliberative capacity was never particularly strong, the four cases displayed important variations in terms of the deliberative and democratic qualities of their discursive processes. In particular, whereas TMV and TK were problematic, MT and CT fared rather positively in most respects. Authenticity varied substantially among the four case studies; also regarding inclusivity, there were different levels of performance although all four cases tended not to be particularly inclusive. Consequentiality, finally, was significant just in one case study (CT).

The six activities into which group life was divided displayed different qualities from a discursive standpoint as showed in the second section. Group meetings were a central manifestation of the existence of a Transition although it was only in some instances that particular attention was given to their discursive quality. Often meetings of low quality were also poorly inclusive, and meetings were not always effective venues to direct the activities of an organisation. Discursive activities, although highly appreciated in theory, were rare due to a lack of resources. The importance of on-line communications varied depending on the group but they seemed flawed from a deliberative standpoint. Individual initiatives contributed to deliberative capacity when the activity of leaders was supported by broader group engagement; on the other hand, it was highly detrimental of groups' deliberative and democratic qualities when leaders bypassed broader engagement. Practical actions and casual interactions, finally, were hard to test for their deliberativeness; however, it is possible to say that they seemed to enhance deliberative capacity when they were conceived as auxiliary platforms for discursive engagement rather than just ends in themselves. Overall, deliberative

capacity was affected not just by the qualities of the above mentioned six activities but also by the way in which the different discursive processes they accommodated were channelled.

The third section focused on the drivers of deliberative capacity and engaged with findings from other studies on related matters. An illustration of the dynamics underlying the development of deliberative capacity in all four cases was introduced at the beginning of the section. As argued in this chapter the generation of deliberative capacity can be understood in light of the relationship between a set of 'internal' features characterising an organisation and a set of 'contextual' aspects belonging to the environment surrounding the organisation. The ensuing discussions further investigated deliberative capacity by employing concepts from related research. The role of symbolic associations and the influence of movements' values were thus considered as well as the varying styles between groups and the relevance of local (over national) context. The section also considered how the findings in this study speak to variables and ideas employed in earlier works on internal democracy of public sphere organisations. It was also showed that organisations implementing the same ideas in different local contexts end up resembling different types of associations and performing substantially different activities.

The final section envisioned strategies for organisations to enhance authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentiality. As argued, quality discursive processes do not emerge spontaneously. Instead, they seem dependant on the efforts of participants, and reflection on the role that discursive engagement should have in a group as well as on the ways to obtain the desired quality of engagement is central. The section has also showed that an open attitude does not suffice to generate inclusive discursive processes. Inclusivity requires also active efforts to reach out to the community and to maximise the quality of discursive engagement. The issue of consequentiality received particular attention with regard to the relationship between community groups and institutions. Whilst seeking to affect local politics, groups need to make an effort if they intend to safeguard their internal democratic engagement. By using the notion of 'inward' and 'outward' functions and the distinction between 'everyday' and 'organised' activists, it is argued that deliberative capacity is better secured when group leaders focus on 'inward' functions.

Chapter 9 Conclusions

This work has engaged with the notion of deliberative capacity (Dryzek, 2009, 2010a) and it has applied this idea to an investigation of community organisations in the public space. The study began with a discussion of deliberative capacity, and the role that such concept may have within empirical and theoretical research in deliberative democracy. The investigation of the deliberative capacity of public space organisations' was justified in light of deliberative democrats' interest in the public through its various manifestations and the renewed attention to the role of the public space in the perspective of a deliberative democratic society. Remarks on the research methodology and on relevant literature were also provided. This research investigated four local initiatives associated with Transition, a contemporary transnational grassroots movement. After illustrating its main characteristics as a social movement, Transition was framed within the literature on deliberative democracy. Four dedicated chapters presented the main features of each community organisation, the contexts in which they implemented initiatives, and, most importantly, the deliberative and democratic qualities that they displayed. These case studies provided insights into the resources and challenges encountered by organisations in the public space. In particular, the four Transitions were employed in this work to develop a comparative analysis that investigated in detail their deliberative capacity. Furthermore, the study also considered some aspects that may be particularly important in understanding how deliberative capacity was developed. This concluding chapter discusses some central observations made in this work and considers ways in which they may contribute to furthering deliberative democratic theory and practice.

On Deliberative Capacity

As discussed in Chapter One, the idea of deliberative capacity has deep roots in deliberative democratic theory. Indeed, authenticity, inclusivity, consequentiality, and each of their components, are based on deliberative democratic debates concerning the properties and functions of democratic deliberation. This research has generated some refinements and caveats to apply the idea of deliberative capacity to the empirical investigation of organisations within the public space.

To begin with authenticity, the absence of coercion and the capability to induce reflection are both original features of authentic deliberation which are at times mentioned together, whereas they are kept distinct at all times in this research. In fact, although they may be connected, they of course remain different issues, and, as observed in this research, groups

often have difficulties in substantially inducing reflection whilst they are generally capable of preventing coercion. In regard to this latter aspect, it should be stressed that coercion may come from a discursive process' own features as well as factors external to it (see also Young 2000 esp. 53-6).¹

In order to understand a discursive process' authenticity it is important to observe whether it displays either 'collaborative forms of argumentation' or 'agonistic and confrontational elements' or both (Manin, 1987, 2005, Bächtiger, 2010). Actually, this aspect, although it is not in the original formulations of deliberative capacity, seems relevant in assessing the quality of discursive engagement among my case studies. In fact, interactions in those case studies which performed poorly displayed only the first type of argumentation: disagreement rarely surfaced or was engaged with. On the other hand, those with a more thorough discussion displayed also a group-level engagement with dissent. Without questioning the idea that deliberation aims at 'persuasion rather than conversion' (Dryzek, 2005: 224), it is still possible to observe that disagreement and dissent play important roles in discursive processes and in societies at large (Young, 2000, Sunstein, 2005, della Porta and Rucht, 2013a). Furthermore, observing whether arguments are justified through value-based and/or pragmatic grounds (Nanz and Steffek, 2005) and the degree to which passions and emotions characterise interactions (della Porta and Giugni, 2013, Ruitenberg, 2010, Goodwin and Jasper, 2004, Gould, 2004, Goodwin et al., 2001b) may help refine the understanding of the quality of discursive processes. However, as it emerges from the introductory discussion about Transition, this movement may be particularly attractive to people with practical concerns. As shown, this can often be interpreted by participants in opposition to more discursive forms of engagement. The combination of this aspect and self-selection dynamics that are characteristic of social movement in general may have implied that agonistic forms of engagement would be hard to emerge among the selected case studies.

Another important task is to understand the varied aims of discussions. Although the decision-oriented nature of a discursive process is something embedded in the notion of consequentiality, discussions that are not oriented to decision-making should not be simply discarded as non-deliberative. An activity's contribution to an organisation's deliberative capacity is to be assessed in light of the extent to which it features deliberative and democratic qualities and not by whether its goal is to make a decision. Indeed, a fundamental original role of deliberation is to permit people to become better informed (e.g. Chambers, 2003, Manin,

¹ As famously argued by Saunders' (1997) one of the flaws of deliberation is its exposure to difference in status. This claim cannot be simply taken for granted and it seems in need of further qualification, and the extent of this issue seems to vary significantly in fact. As seen, citizens seem capable of limiting this problem, even during discursive processes outside the realm of protected deliberative assemblies.

1987). As it has emerged from this study, and as highlighted, among others, by Polletta (2002: 79), meeting goals and functions by no means always lead to immediate decision-making. Having elucidated what the goals of a discussion are it is easier to judge it on its own merits. There seems to be no conclusive evidence on whether the presence of a time for decision-making during discussions affects positively or negatively the deliberativeness of discussions (Giugni and Nai, 2013: 175). This study does not claim that the presence of a decisional moment automatically enhances the deliberative quality of group meetings, but in those meetings in which decisions are at stake (e.g. Streccapogn's) participants have one more reason to engage and to air their views and interests and reflect upon them. Moreover, when decision-making occurs during activities other than group meetings, decisions do not seem to be taken in a more deliberative and democratic way (e.g. during casual activities).²

Whereas authenticity is mainly related to the deliberative aspects of discursive processes, inclusivity, for Dryzek, and for Young (e.g., 2000), is the main dimension where democratic concerns are concentrated. In Young's analysis, however, inclusion and equality are clearly distinguished at least at an analytical level (ibid.: 23-4). The idea of deliberative capacity seems instead not to explicitly refer to whether inclusion in a discursive process occurs in more or less egalitarian ways. As observed in this research, it is not always granted that, people, interests, and views are included on an equal basis in the discursive processes of a group. Equality could be checked, for example, by observing the opportunities given to participants to question each other and to present their views (Gastil, 1993). As has been seen, where individual initiative was a major way of proceeding (e.g. TK, TMV and CT's relationships with Council) opportunities to question leaders' activity were extremely limited. Also, a reference to the background of people actually involved in discursive engagement could be added to the notion of inclusivity. Although the idea of structural group representation is not without problems (Bohman, 2005), participants' gender, education, ethnicity, age, occupation, class, physical ability could be usefully taken into account (Young, 2000, Young, 2001b). Participants' social background seems particularly important in understanding the life of local organisations, and social composition of new social movements should not just be simplistically limited to the middle class (della Porta and Diani, 1999: 48-9). Participants' background should thus be added (rather than substituted) to views and interests as an object for inclusivity assessments. Indeed, the research suggests that the type of interests included in a group's discursive

² Giugni and Nai (2013: 175) also claim that small groups tend to show limited controversies, which appears in line with what was observed among these case studies. Elaborating on Giugni and Nai's findings, della Porta and Rucht (2013c: 207) conclude that heterogeneity benefits group-level deliberation and the same conclusion seems to emerge also from this study (see Chapter Eight).

processes can be better understood in light of observations on the people who are physically included (or excluded from) its various activities.³

Consequentiality, as it has been argued in this dissertation, fundamentally depends on the existence of authentic and inclusive discursive processes to begin with. Indeed, consequentiality captures the extent to which organisations (or wider systems) are able to exploit (rather than just have) such spaces. On the basis of the original definitions of consequentiality, it is possible to point out that impacts of a deliberation can be direct (as in directly affecting policy-making) or indirect (when it influences the debate and promotes reflection on common topics of relevance for a community) – the latter being more common among my groups. In Chapter Three, a further useful distinction based on Dryzek's (2000, Dryzek et al., 2003) work was also drawn between effects that groups' deliberation can have when they act from within or outside state institutions. Unsurprisingly my case studies generated the latter type of effectiveness.

In its essence, deliberative capacity is not intended as a benchmark against which single activities can be found wanting of democratic deliberation (or can boast deliberative virtues) but as a means to envision ways to democratise ever-evolving processes of deliberation. Some observations can also be made with regard to the overall idea of deliberative capacity. Deliberative capacity is not just about having activities that when individually done comply with a preconceived ideal interaction but is more about developing an overall process of deliberative and democratic discursive engagement. It is more of an attribute of a process rather than a static property of an object, and it needs to be understood in light of a variety of internal and contextual aspects.

By dividing the life of the case studies into six different categories (group meetings, discursive initiatives, online interactions, individual initiatives, practical actions, and casual activities) it was possible to observe the deliberative democratic property of the various activities and how the way they were integrated in groups' lives mattered in terms of their overall deliberative capacity. As it emerged from this study, the deliberative capacity of community organisations is not the sum of the deliberative capacities manifested in each of their discursive processes. Rather, it results from the way different activities are connected within an organisation. Therefore, we should not just observe the authenticity, inclusivity, and consequentiality of individual activities but also the way these are related to each other in shaping a group's discursive process. For instance, in TK, group meetings were not given particular attention as the organisation relied on individual initiatives and sub-group actions. These latter activities as

³ This may well not be the case in system-level observations where discursive representation, rather than direct participation, may have a greater role (see Dryzek and Niemeyer, 2008).

well as casual gatherings provided plenty of potential issues for discussion and interest in TK. However, given the absence of a quality discursive platform, such contributions rather than fostering authentic, inclusive, and consequential discursive engagement often were channelled through rarefied virtual communications. This dynamic sufficed to elicit action only among a small number of participants but not to engage the rest of the potentially interested people. In MT, however, insight generated during casual activities was channelled into group meetings for thorough group-level consideration.

Among the six activities into which group life was divided, some casual interactions and practical activities in particular, although interesting from a deliberative perspective, were problematic to assess. In fact, their quality depended on utterly circumstantial aspects. Moreover, developing quality discursive engagement was a secondary concern in this type of interactions, which often were not even accessible to the researcher. Usually, assessments had to be based on partial observations or accounts from interviews. The above limitation notwithstanding, the use of deliberative capacity allowed a critical edge in observing public space organisations to be maintained.

By its very nature and that of the situations it has been applied to in this study, deliberative capacity requires a substantial level of observation and interpretation. Indeed, it does not seem advisable to employ deliberative capacity in a checklist fashion: without understanding the ways in which discursive processes develop, the extent to which they feature certain characteristics cannot be assessed. This observation is particularly important in light of the systemic turn in deliberative theory. In fact, as rightly urged by contemporary deliberative democrats (Neblo, 2005, Bächtiger et al., 2010: 33), concept-stretching (Sartori, 1970, Steiner, 2008) is a substantial danger in deliberative democratic research. Yet, deliberative capacity can be seen as a careful extension of the idea of deliberation, which retains critical edge whilst allowing empirical scrutiny of the public space necessary to a critical theory of democracy.

The Transition Movement and Deliberative Democratic Assessments

One of the objectives of this study was to introduce the main features of Transition and understand this contemporary manifestation of community engagement from a deliberative system standpoint. Literature on social movements has provided an important means to this end. Indeed, as shown in Chapter Three, despite some differences in ‘its ontological and strategic orientation’ (Barry and Quilley, 2009: 18), Transition embodies many features of contemporary social movements. Environmental concerns are central to Transition, although the movement conceives itself to be as distinct from traditional environmentalism and puts particular emphasis also on societal and communitarian issues. Transition, moreover, is self-

described as apolitical, even though the movement engages in politically relevant matters and interacts with political institutions at different levels. Such a feature is better understood as an effort by the movement to go beyond traditional divisions in political life and to pursue a non-adversarial approach, rather than as an expression of disengagement from politics.⁴

As shown, although direct reference to deliberative democracy was virtually absent in Transition discussions (and among my interviewees), democratic and deliberative concerns could certainly be discerned in the movement. Transition, in theory as well as in its manifestations at the local level, seems to swing between a markedly practical attitude and a more discursive approach. The former highlights the importance of obtaining tangible impacts in the communities. The latter stresses, instead, how good quality communication is fundamental to a successful Transition, an aspect that this research has endeavoured to study from a deliberative democratic standpoint.

In striving to build a more resilient and sustainable future Transition takes action at a variety of levels, yet engagement within local communities remains fundamental. Indeed, an important characteristic of the movement is that, although groups throughout the world share the movement's ideals and goals, there are significant variations in the local contexts in which Transitions implement them as well as in the stage of development of local Initiatives. Thus, whilst Transitions find in the global network an important resource, the success of local Initiatives largely depends on the way they interact with their own local communities.

This research was based on a comparative case study between four Transitions, both in Australia and in Italy. Another of its core goals was to observe whether, in realising the same ideas in different contexts, different Transitions displayed varying levels of deliberative capacity, and also to understand what aspects may account for the phenomena observed. Thus, from within each country I selected one Initiative – Transition Kurilpa (TK) and Transition Monteveglio (CT) – which, at the time of the observations, was arguably more advanced than the other one in the same country – respectively, Transition Meander Valley (TMV) and Transition Modica (MT). In particular, the former Transitions were older, had (unlike the others) an official status within the Transition Network and were more connected to other groups, had more participants and were better known in their communities, had had official collaborations with local institutions, and had some financial resources available. Also, the local contexts in which these Transitions took action varied widely. Kurilpa (extending over three neighbourhoods in central Brisbane) and Monteveglio appeared generally more progressive environments and clearly better off, at least economically and in terms of the levels of

⁴ Indeed among Transition participants I interviewed dissatisfaction with politics was often a reason to join the movement.

scholastic education of the populations, as compared to Meander Valley and Modica respectively. As it turned out, the movement's ideas were interpreted differently in each case, and the four groups would emphasise different aspects of Transition. Moreover, the local context appeared remarkably more significant than national differences in understanding the local Transitions and their deliberative capacities.⁵ However, importantly, the local context as such did not seem to determine the deliberative and democratic qualities of the Transitions. Instead, in engaging with their local social and political environments each Transition developed activities and discursive processes that featured different deliberative and democratic qualities. The next section looks more closely at these central aspects before providing some final remarks.

Observed Levels of Deliberative Capacity

The case studies displayed significant variations in terms of their deliberative capacity, yet all of them featured shortcomings in at least one of the three dimensions of deliberative capacity. In particular, whereas some cases showed a good degree of authentic discursive engagement (MT and CT), others had problems in this dimension (TK, and particularly TMV). Inclusivity was generally limited and only in one case (CT) did the local Transition engage people in the community beyond the particularly homogenous groups within the local population to which organisations were connected. Similarly, consequentiality was particularly limited, with the exception of CT where different forms of discursive engagement actually appeared to have some impact on the community.

In her ground-breaking analysis of the democratic qualities of groups associated with social movements, Polletta (2002: 7) reported being 'struck by participants' emphasis on *deliberative talk*'. The systematic observation of the discursive processes of the four Transitions, however, suggests a less enthusiastic position. Whilst some participants sought and often attained deliberative discursive engagement, in some cases such interaction was not even pursued. Only participants of two (CT and MT) out of the four organisations I studied engaged in ways that usually appeared satisfying from a deliberative and democratic standpoint. Thus, more modestly, it is possible to agree with della Porta and Rucht's (2013c: 230) remark that 'deliberation is not just a utopian ideal' and it actually occurs in social movement organisations.

Overall, with regard to authenticity, groups seemed generally successful in preventing coercion in their interactions. Yet, seldom was there evident a substantial capability to induce reflection. Moreover, often claims were not systematically connected to more general principles.

⁵ A similar observation was also made in della Porta's (2009c: 270) analysis of the Global Justice Movement.

Collaborative elements tended to dominate over more agonistic forms of discussion. Finally, reciprocity was hard to observe, mainly due to a lack of disagreement. Obviously, these tendencies were more typical of problematic case studies (TMV and TK) than those with more successful discursive engagement (MT and CT). Actually, the latter cases often overcame most if not all of these problems, displaying a fairly positive discursive engagement.

Inclusivity was essentially limited. All groups started and largely developed within a local enclave, and in one case only (CT) did a Transition surpass these boundaries. Local Transitions seemed to recruit mainly from among those concerned with 'personal pro-environmental norms' (Stern et al., 1999). The social background of participants tended to be homogenous, especially so when considering its more active members (though MT manifested a more diverse group of participants). The level of scholastic education of participants, in particular, was systematically higher than that of the rest of the population.⁶ All case studies were characterised by substantially small numbers, except in one instance (always CT) where about fifty people had been involved in some way and where an estimated two-hundred people within the community were aware of the local Transition. The interests of participants entered discussions only if it made sense to do so – that is, when the topic being debated left space to make connections with participants' real life experiences. Usually, however, private interests (especially professional ones) tended to be smuggled into the life of the group rather than being the object of open discussion. In particular, the majority of the most active participants had some work interests connected to the local Transition. This aspect affected the life of the groups in substantial ways. Generally, a stress upon the importance of personal initiative tended to go hand-in-hand with a lack of debate on the implications of these dynamics for the local group. In this regard, Streccapogn represented a positive exception, whereas the case of a local councillor being part of TMV was a most problematic example of this tendency: the politician would systematically bypass the group and single-handedly manage the relationship with Council discouraging group-level discussion on important issues. Different views were raised only when there was space to do so, and where participants expected to take part in engaging discussions (MT), or when it could be assumed that airing one's views was actually going to impact on the life of the group (Streccapogn).

With regard to the third and last dimension of deliberative capacity, consequentiality, only in one Transition (CT) was it clear that authentic and inclusive discussions had generated a discursive as well as a practical impact on the community. In the other three cases, authentic and inclusive discursive engagement was largely lacking (TMV); some impact was obtained

⁶ As seen in Chapter Eight, a similar phenomenon also characterised GJM's organisations (Saunders and Rootes, 2013: 75, della Porta and Rucht, 2013c: 216).

mainly without authentic and inclusive discursive engagement (TK); or authentic and partially inclusive discursive engagement had generated only a limited discursive outcome within the community and little or no impact in more practical terms (MT).

The way different activities were articulated and, obviously, the latter's discursive qualities were both important in determining the overall deliberative capacity of each Transition. The case studies with higher deliberative capacity, in fact, hosted sites of good quality discursive engagement but also managed to better connect more deliberative moments to less discursively engaging ones (MT and CT, and Streccapogn in particular). Deliberative capacity, on the other hand, was restricted where the main platforms for discursive engagement were severely flawed (TMV), or where a site for good quality discursive engagement was essentially missing (TK). In this latter case, the activities that could potentially foster deliberative capacity were not altogether absent but were unconnected and unexploited; the group's destiny was thus determined by isolated initiatives with little or no deliberative capacity.

With regard to the various activities that Transitions performed it emerged that, among my case studies, group meetings had usually an important role in theory but attention to their quality was often neglected in practice.⁷ The more assemblies were central to the life of a group (e.g. TMV), the more neglect proved detrimental to the overall deliberative capacity. On the other hand, groups that made an effort to raise the quality of meetings (e.g. MT) benefitted particularly from this undertaking (especially in terms of their authenticity). 'Discursive initiatives', however, represented a highly successful resource to develop deliberative capacity only where there were resources to organise good quality events (i.e. CT). In the other cases, rarely did the existing interest towards these activities translate into the organisation of events to engage communities. 'On-line communications' in no instance displayed authentic, inclusive, or consequential discussions. This was increasingly problematic the more a group relied on these forms of interaction, which also seemed to favour spectatorship more than actual participation in group life (e.g. TK). Individual initiatives were very common in every case under examination. These activities were particularly detrimental when they functioned as a means to bypass (rather than contribute to) group-level discursive engagement. Actually, although largely involuntarily, individual initiatives were not often anchored in group-level discussions and indeed they seemed to discourage the latter type of engagement. This was particularly true for networking activities and, most importantly, for relationships with local politics. The latter was possibly the single least engaging activity among those carried out by my case studies. Finally, practical actions and casual interactions (the

⁷ As seen in Chapter Eight, they were also less attended than was the case with GJMs organisations (see della Porta and Rucht, 2013c: 219).

latter often being the way in which individual initiatives were undertaken) were very popular. However, they were also extremely hard to assess given that interactions were often impossible to observe, were largely unstructured, and their quality seemed to depend on widely circumstantial aspects. Nonetheless, some groups (e.g. Streccapogn) better than others (e.g. TK) managed to connect these activities to instances of more public and structured engagement.

Accounting for the Development of Deliberative Capacity

This work argues that one way to understand how the observed levels of deliberative capacity are developed is by focusing on the relationship between a given community group and the environment in which it takes action (cf. Rothschild and Whitt, 1986, della Porta, 2009d, della Porta and Rucht, 2013b). In Chapter Eight, this approach was related to other research that came to highlight the relevance of similar dynamics and it was employed to illustrate the way deliberative capacity was developed in all four case studies. In particular, it is of primary importance to observe a local organisation's internal features, which can be articulated in two dimensions. The first is whether or not community group participants (and leaders in particular) are interested in an attempt to develop the communicative and democratic qualities of their organisations (see also: Polletta, 2002, della Porta, 2009a, 2009b). The second is the extent to which an organisation's goals and the type of activities being conducted offer ground for deliberative and democratic engagement among participants (see also Gastil, 1992, Giugni and Nai, 2009). To the extent that a community organisation seeks a more deliberative and democratic engagement, another fundamental aspect is represented by the deliberative and democratic resources provided by the surrounding environment. In particular, two elements that are most important in this regard are the local community (its institutions and its public space) and the movement with which the group is associated (its values, repertoire and goals) (see: della Porta, 2009a, 2009b). Local organisations engage with their contexts in a selective manner, and some of the existing deliberative and democratic values and practices in the surrounding context (when any is available at all) may be embraced by participants (see della Porta, 2009f). In this regard it is fundamental that, in light of the context, a group perceives that developing deliberative and democratic skills is desirable *per se* and/or necessary. In fact, participants' voluntary efforts can foster an organisations' deliberative capacity. Nonetheless, if there is no particular interest in developing good quality discursive engagement, or if groups can be effective without having any particular deliberative or democratic attribute, then a fundamental driver for the development of deliberative capacity may be missing. Thus, possibilities to build deliberative and democratic qualities may be jeopardised. Indeed, groups

with limited democratic and deliberative qualities may be less able to reflect upon their lack of deliberative capacity, and, if desirable, redress their situation.

Distinct characteristics already known in scholarship could be observed among my case studies and they affected their deliberative capacity. For instance, 'group styles' (Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2003) existed among my cases studies and where norms of conformity prevailed they were particularly detrimental to the quality of interaction (as in TMV). Organisations' self-understanding of their role within the community and their symbolic associations with other groups (Polletta, 2002: 21-2) also affected the discursive processes of case studies (as seen, for instance, negatively in TMV and positively in MT). In implementing ideas from the same movement in different places my case studies ended up not just having different deliberative capacities but performing different functions in their local public space. In fact, allocating my case studies along the continuum that goes from private, to civic, to political associations (Young, 2000: 160-3) TMV fell in between the first two categories, MT and TK were more typical examples of civic associations, and CT started to resemble a political association. Finally, in each of the case studies 'organised activists' and 'everyday activists' (Mansbridge, 2005, Mansbridge and Flaster, 2007, Mansbridge, 2012) could be identified.⁸ As argued in the comparative chapter the former's orientation to 'defensive' or 'offensive' functions (Cohen and Arato, 1992, Young, 2000) represented an important aspect in understanding the observed levels of deliberative capacity: in groups with higher deliberative capacity 'organised activists' paid significantly more attention to 'defensive' functions, whereas the opposite occurred in weak deliberative cases.

Some considerations concerning the development of specific aspects of deliberative capacity were also made. To begin with, the good quality of interactions within community organisations should not be taken for granted (see Gastil, 1992: 279) or be expected to come about 'naturally' (see also Andretta, 2013: 101).⁹ To remove this assumption, and start detecting and reflecting upon possible flaws, would surely benefit the quality of a group's discursive engagement. Meetings with some form of facilitation seemed to function remarkably better than those which were completely unstructured, or nearly so (see also: della Porta and Rucht, 2013b: 13, 2013c: 221). For instance, during the former, unlike the latter, it was easier to discuss given issues and reach a conclusion wherever possible, to grant consideration to topics on the agenda before engaging on other issues, to air and engage with different views in regard to specific arguments, and to allocate time to speakers more equally.

⁸ This distinction runs along the divide between leaders and other group participants. As shown in Chapter Eight, many characteristics of informal leadership observed here are common also among GJM organisations (see: Saunders and Rootes, 2013: 82, della Porta and Rucht, 2013c: 217, 223).

⁹ This circumstance is not even achieved in parliamentary debates (see Steiner, 2004).

Moreover, those groups that reflected upon the extent to which discursive engagement was needed, the quality that should be sought, and the goals it would serve fared remarkably better in deliberative democratic terms than those groups that did not.

Inclusivity would benefit however if the widely-shared open attitude of community groups were translated into a commitment to inclusion, which actually seeks to create channels through which community organisations are able to include a variety of community members and their differences, rather than welcoming whomever is interested *and* able to adapt to the organisation. Generic openness goes hand-in-hand with limited inclusivity, which to an extent is connected to the nature of these organisations (see: Stern et al., 1999, della Porta, 2005b: 79). On the other hand, active efforts to promote inclusive discursive engagement go a long way towards addressing the exclusionary problems of community groups. Moreover, high-quality discursive engagement encourages participants to air their views and interests enhancing at least the discursive inclusivity of groups which, as seen, may have only limited descriptive inclusivity. More generally, this dissertation, along with other studies (Polletta, 2002, della Porta and Rucht, 2013a), suggests that at least with regard to social movement organisations it is not always the case that the social environment that is conducive to participation ‘would naturally undermine’ the goal of deliberation (Mutz, 2006: 16). Moreover, highlighting that the bulk of exclusions occurs already at the participatory stage, this study questions those views which see in the participatory moments of democratic life an alternative to the allegedly more exclusionary deliberative moments, especially when the latter are collapsed into their mini-public form (Pateman, 2012). In public spaces, participation is a necessary yet insufficient condition for the development of good quality and inclusive discursive engagement.

Consequentiality of deliberation, finally, would surely be enhanced by the development of authentic and inclusive discursive engagement to begin with. Moreover, an effort to refrain from undeliberative efficacy – the impacts that can be achieved without any prior discursive engagement – would also favour a group’s deliberative consequentiality. However, it may be excessive to ask community groups who strive to change their communities to refrain from having an impact unless it is obtained through deliberative democratic processes. As Polletta (2002: 228-9) nicely put it, ‘I worry that activists’ concern with democratic process may substitute for the work of negotiating goals’ (see also Young, 2001a). Indeed, also those actions that are not deliberative may still benefit an overall system’s deliberative capacity (Dryzek, 2013). Therefore, in a context where deliberative and democratic values may be desirable yet unnecessary to achieve some goals a possible solution could be to make sure that

less deliberative means which are needed to take advantage of the resources from the context, are anchored to more deliberative and democratic processes in the life of a local initiative.

A fundamental observation is that, as noted, developing deliberative capacity in organisations (somewhat like deliberative democracy at large) is not about discussing everything at all times, nor it is necessarily about having more assemblies or greater meetings (especially when these happen to be highly ineffectual) but it is more about the way different discursive processes of varying quality interact. Organisations with high deliberative capacity are not necessarily those where discussion is prevalent. Rather, the more deliberative organisations might be those ones that are capable of eliciting and exploiting good quality discursive engagement in some of their activities. Such observations seem to support Mendonça's (2008) remark that a valuable service that public space associations could render to the deliberativeness of democratic societies (and that cannot be taken for granted) is to foster internal and external interactional *loci*, that is discursive platforms which enhance communicative flow.¹⁰

Advancing Deliberative Capacity

The claim that legitimacy in a democratic system is tied to competent actors reflecting in the public sphere, as Dryzek (2001) puts it, is one which embodies central concerns for deliberative democratic theory. As such it deserves theoretical attention (Parkinson, 2003: 186) and empirical scrutiny. Deliberative capacity, allows us to investigate empirically the discursive processes taking place in the public space and compare them against deliberative democratic normative standards. It therefore helps in the important effort to counter theory-laden optimism (or scepticism) about the democratic and deliberative qualities of organisations in the public space.

Deliberative capacity may vary over time and space, and any organisation's deliberative capacity may significantly change in its various manifestations. This research on its own is, then, by no means sufficient for any overall assessment of public space let alone of any claim on the perspective for democratisation in our societies, even more so since this work has studied the levels and possible drivers of deliberative capacity in groups within the public space, rather than whether they contribute to or negatively affect entire systems which would require a more systemic approach (Dryzek 2013, 13). This study, however, is a first step in this complex but worthwhile undertaking. Given that the deliberative capacity of a system cannot be reduced to that of its public space or even less so to certain groups within it, the parts of a system are such that they are related to one another. It is therefore important to understand

¹⁰ Mendonça's (ibid.) observation is made with regard to an analysis of the representativeness of civil society associations.

(rather than simply assume) the qualities of the various components in order to think accurately of each system as a whole.

This research can prompt ideas for future investigation, only some of which can be related here. These examples are illustrative also because they clarify certain efforts that this study could not undertake but could still help to pursue in the future, as existing research to link up with can be easily identified. For instance, it emerges that ideals which can be connected to deliberative democratic principles are not absent either from among my case studies or from among citizens. Nonetheless, deliberative democratic interactions appear to be something that may be developed somewhat unconsciously. Unsurprisingly, an extremely limited number of my interviewees, even those in groups acting in a more deliberative democratic fashion, ever even mentioned the idea of a deliberative democracy. Further research may show, for example, that alternative norms of engagement from those envisioned by deliberative democratic ideals may be central to contemporary activism.¹¹ Furthermore, although social capital and deliberative capacity emerge as two distinct concepts, future research on deliberative capacity may clarify the relationship between the two phenomena. A hint from this research is that the two concepts take into account very different types of democratisation and it cannot be excluded that the two may be generated under widely different or mutually exclusive conditions. Interesting research exists that has researched inter-organisational social capital and focuses on the relationship between local institutions and associations (e.g. Smith et al., 2004, Newton, 2006, Maloney and Rossteutscher, 2006) and that could represent an interesting starting point from which to engage in discussion on this matter.

This research has argued that the characteristics of the nation in which my case studies were based did not substantially affect their ability to develop deliberative capacity. It would be interesting to observe whether the same can be observed in countries other than liberal democratic ones. This study has argued that the generic notion of more or less deliberative cultures at national level provide little help in understanding the quality of discursive processes in public space organisations. Future research may contribute to enhancing our understanding of whether and how cultural patterns affecting the deliberative and democratic qualities of different publics can be envisioned. Deliberative democracy is slowly moving away from anecdotal accounts of culture in deliberation (Gambetta, 1998) and an investigation of deliberative cultures is slowly taking shape (Sass and Dryzek, 2011). Although an analysis of cultural dynamics in social movements was beyond the reach of this study, insights from this work may still contribute to the progress of a research agenda focused on the idea of

¹¹ This idea, for example, underlies some of the work of Henrik Bang (e.g. , 2010) on 'everyday makers'.

deliberative cultures, especially in light of its comparative and largely descriptive orientation. Indeed, the link between deliberative democracy and social movement scholarship proposed in some passages of this study may, in fact, be a promising one. On the one hand, in fact, whilst deliberative democrats like Sass (2006) and Bächtiger (2010: 22) remark that the holistic conception of culture appears substantially problematic in explaining deliberation, as opposed to a more contextual approach, sociological work on social movements in particular has developed a particularly refined understanding of the role of culture in these organisations (e.g. Polletta, 1997, 1999b, 2004, 2005a, 2008, 2012).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that although engaging with Transition's messages or understanding its performance against criteria other than deliberative democratic ones was not the objective of this research, such an undertaking would surely be worthwhile from a political and environmental theory point-of-view, particularly since both fields are presented with new challenges in 'climate changed' societies (see: Barry, 2012, Schlosberg, 2009, Schlosberg, 2013a).

The observation of the interaction among local publics and politics has generated many remarks largely critical of the ways in which contemporary institutions engage with the citizenry. This could be another issue deserving of further research (e.g. is collaboration between the same movement and institutions at higher levels more deliberative and democratic? Is the interaction between local institutions and businesses closer to democratic and/or deliberative norms or is it far removed from any democratic content?). These remarks are put forward only for general consideration. If the activities of social movements are intended as expressions of the life-world (see Baber and Bartlett, 2007: 12), the interaction with local institutions could resemble a colonisation of the life-world by the systemic forces Habermas (1984) describes, which at once provides a degree of power and offers fertile ground for developing strategic and instrumental rationality.¹² If building deliberative capacity does not seem to make sense – and it may make less sense the more instrumental rationality plays a role – it is less likely that groups will undertake particular efforts towards that goal. These cases suggest that in a daily context, accommodating actual systematically distorted communications rather than an ideal speech situation, it is hard to expect that the 'natural' form of discursive engagement will be deliberative. However, my cases show also that, when it is necessary or desirable to do so, deliberative and democratic qualities can be developed. As

¹² As noted in this study, interaction with institutions tended to include leaders rather than entire groups. Indeed, regular participants are often sceptical of local institutions and highly critical of politics, similarly to activists in the GJMs (see della Porta, 2009f). Similarly to what could be observed in GJMs organisations (see della Porta and Rucht, 2013c), participants' critique of democracy as performed in contemporary institutions went hand-in-hand with an effort to seek respectful and egalitarian interactions instead of implementing formal democratic practices, such as voting.

seen, deliberative and democratic norms can find expression in the public space and activists can build the conditions to give substance to these ideals, resisting colonisation and building a powerful life-world (Habermas, 1989). Ultimately, what is acknowledged in the systemic turn of deliberative democratic thinking applies also to active citizens: deliberation should also be a means to an end, rather than only a democratic ideal (Parkinson, 2012b: 159).

When thinking of deliberative capacity from a more systemic standpoint, a concerning and yet unresolved question may be raised on the basis of this study. If the deliberative and democratic qualities of the proactive citizens who are caring for and engaged within their communities are not particularly high, even under circumstances that are not incredibly constrained by strategic calculations, pressing economical imperatives, or, more broadly, instrumental rationality, then, what is to be expected from those individuals and organisations whose participation in political life unfold *prima facie* under significantly more problematic circumstances? The public space is host to widely different organisations, from mass-media to secret or overtly authoritarian organisations, that may well be particularly problematic, and, it is worth pointing out, also the empowered space may feature especially challenging situations. This study has tried to observe the main dynamics behind deliberative capacity and to suggest ways in which the latter may be developed among those groups that are interested to do so. How to counter those forces that bypass and undermine the connection between democratic deliberation in public and in institutions as the basis of democratic legitimacy is a question that this analysis may raise but cannot answer. However, such an analysis has sought to contribute to addressing another fundamental issue about the potential of deliberation in the public space.

This research focused on active citizens associated with a contemporary social movement. It showed that although hard to be built deliberative capacity is not beyond the reach of organisations in the public space. Neglecting and disregarding this potential altogether is a possibility in a society that appears far from deliberative democratic ideals. Such a position, however, would hardly help to enhance deliberative democracy in our societies. Indeed, without citizens' efforts and scholarly investigation even the precious few deliberative and democratic aspects that we may now envision may be spoiled and the prospect of a more deliberative and democratic society would be likely to move farther away. Possibly, a more desirable conclusion to be drawn from this research is that, although it is far from guaranteed, a more deliberative and democratic course is possible. This dissertation suggests ways to achieve this within public space organisations and help theorists of deliberative democracy to better understand the role and potential that such groups can have in developing more deliberative and democratic systems.

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Appendix – Script of the Interview with Transition Participants

The template below provides a list of questions that were asked to Transition participants during the semi-structured interviews.

- What is your name?
- May I also ask your age?
- What is your job?
- What type of education have you received? Do you hold a degree?
- In what area (of the local community) do you live?
- How many people participate in the local Transition?
- Is everybody involved at the same level or there are substantial variations?
- How do you usually make choices at a group level?
- How do you think of yourself within the group? Is there for example anything you take care of in particular?
- Do you reckon that what prevails during group discussions is generally agreement or disagreement?
- When disagreement emerges, do you think the group is capable of handling it constructively?
- Are there people that are more active during group meetings?
- Are there people that are more active in the Transition's activity overall?
- Do you think everybody has occasion to express his or her opinion and be heard?
- Do you think the local Transition Town is open to a wide array of views and people with different backgrounds or you are a mainly homogenous group?
- Do you think it possible and desirable that more people join the local Transition?
- What kind of people you would like to see joining this Transition Town?
- What is your view when it comes to environmental issues that the Transition engages on?
- What is the Transition Town project to you?
- What has the local Transition achieved so far?
- Why do you take part in the Transition?
- What do you think is (or should be) the role of the Transition Town role within your community?

- What are the greatest resources and major problems for the local Transition in setting and reaching its goals?
- Are there specific issues that this Transition group takes care of?
- (From an environmental standpoint), what are, if any, the main problems existing in this area?
- What is the relationship between the local Transition and the rest of the town?
- Do you receive feedback from the rest of the community? Is it helpful in shaping your discussions and actions?
- Could you please illustrate to me the main features of the local community?
- Are there relevant interests that overtly or in hidden ways oppose the goals of the local Transition?
- What is the Transition Town's relationship with the local entrepreneurs and business?
- Is local business more or less important than political institutions?
- Do you engage with other organisations in the area?
- What is the Transition Town's relationship with the local institutions?
- Do you think there is space to improve this relationship?
- Do you think collaboration with local institutions is important in achieving your goals?
- What has been the most effective way of taking action so far?
- How do you finance the Transition? Do you receive some help from the outside?
- How do you judge politics at local level?
- How do you judge national politics?
- Do you think the left and right difference still meaningful or important in politics?
- Is there a Transition 'way of life'?
- Why is it that only some of the locals that show an interest in the Transitions end up actively participating in your activities?
- Do you think the local Transition will continue in the future? And what do you imagine that will happen to the global movement?
- Is there anything you would like to talk about which we have not addressed so far?