

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Deliberative Democracy in Higher Education: The Role of Critical Spaces Across Universities

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The capacity of democracies to serve as venues for the free expression of ideas and opinions has become threatened by discourse and debate in the global media that is ill-informed and unjustified while human suffering and inequities continue to plague the planet. This situation calls for scholars and universities to take greater initiative on behalf of the social good beyond the ivory tower. To this end, the application of deliberative democracy as a method for critical spaces in and across universities is explored. Such spaces would harness the potential of scholarship for social change by explicitly considering both multi-disciplinary knowledge and values to address global problems and counter neoliberal trends in higher education and societies generally. A theoretical model for scholarly deliberation in critical spaces is elaborated in four stages, culminating in the advancement of proposals for social change to the public sphere.

Keywords: Deliberative democracy; higher education; critical theory; interdisciplinarity; social change

Introduction

In the field of higher education, 'critical spaces' are conceived as places for scholars to deliberate on shared problems. These spaces consider knowledge from various disciplines and intellectual traditions, as well as underlying norms and values that inform participants' views. Far from the notion of college and university professors staying comfortable in their ivory towers, scholars' deliberations in critical spaces aim to reach wider populations and contribute to shaping public opinion and policymaking. Critical spaces, one could argue, play a role in subverting the logic of neoliberal universities.

How can we design critical spaces that can fulfill the transformative role of higher education? How can scholars play an active role in global deliberations about some of the world's most pressing issues? How can critical spaces be a deliberative, global, and consequential enterprise?

This article aims to answer these questions by proposing a model of critical spaces anchored on the theory and practice of deliberative democracy. I develop this argument in three parts. In the first section, I begin by providing an overview of the literature on critical spaces in the field of higher education. I conclude this section by identifying a gap with the way critical spaces are theorized thus far. I aim to address this gap in the second section by situating my discussion on critical spaces within the subfield of deliberative democracy and higher education. Based on my literature review, I find that scholars are portrayed

in the literature either as facilitators of deliberation in the classroom or subject matter experts in minipublics or public deliberation. I argue that scholars also need to be conceptualized as direct participants in deliberative democracy. In the third section, I develop my model of critical space by anchoring it on the developments in deliberative theory. Overall, this article aims to advance the idea that deliberative theory can be the basis for a broadened vision of organized inquiry, one that activates the results of traditional scholarship to develop proposals for social change while serving as a model of participatory democracy in the public sphere.

Critical spaces in higher education

The idea of a critical space is part of the intellectual tradition that views higher education as a transformative social institution. Contrary to contemporary trends of marketization of higher education, academic entrepreneurship, and privatization (Barnett, 2016; Calhoun, 2006; Filippakou & Williams, 2015; Readings, 1996; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), critical spaces aim to revitalize democratic principles in teaching and learning (Delanty, 2003; Giroux 2014; Mourad, 2020; Peters, 2011; Roberts & Peters, 2008; Shumar, 1997; White, 2017). Universities are conceived as spaces of critical reasoning where value-oriented positions that advance social and political projects are explored (Guzman-Valenzuela, 2016). Scholars throughout the years have described the normative functions of a university in this fashion. Universities act as shelters for politically controversial projects in relation to social movements in the public sphere (Marginson, 2011). They

are arenas of contestation for conflicting positions about moral principles in social life (MacIntyre, 1990, 2006). Universities are zones of agency for imaginative, critical discourse that seeks to influence global communicative networks (Barnett, 2016). They are institutions whose fundamental purpose is to seek solutions to global issues and problems of living based on values inquiry (Maxwell, 2007, 2014). And, indeed, universities are places where principles of deliberative communication are utilized to reach agreement on social action (Englund, 2006, 2016).

Critical spaces are examples of places in universities that realize these ideals. They are conceived as places where self-organizing groups of inquirers voluntarily participate to address essential contemporary problems or issues of practical life that are relevant across national borders, with the ultimate aim of taking solutions to broader publics and public officials. What is distinct about critical inquiry compared to traditional inquiry is its reach for solutions based on dialogue that explicitly involves extensive consideration of both scholarly knowledge and values. In doing so, critical spaces represent one response to the encroachment of neoliberal ideologies, practices, and norms (Mourad, 2018, 2020). They provide a means of extending academic freedom by encouraging the deliberation about values in the process of creating proposals for social change. Interdisciplinary research centers such as area, environmental, gender, and labor studies can be considered to represent a step in the direction of critical spaces. As conceived here, the distinction is that critical spaces would not be dedicated to a particular subject area. Instead, they would be incubators for the development of inquiries concerning the social good by scholar-participants.

While there are various ways in which critical spaces can be put to practice, this brief sketch raises a key question: how can a theoretical model for a critical space be conceived? An answer to this question can provide the impetus for institutionally legitimizing socially engaged scholarship toward the ultimate goal of making impactful contributions to discourse and action in the public sphere, at a time when questions of the common good are hotly contested by false narratives and morally compromised ideologies. I shall attempt to answer this question aided by concepts derived from deliberative democracy.

Deliberative democracy and higher education

The theory and practice of deliberative democracy are being increasingly employed in higher education, with particular focus on students, the teaching and learning experience, and campus-community partnerships (Longo, 2013; Longo & Shaffer, 2019; Shaffer, et al., 2017). Deliberative pedagogy, for example, teaches students to use the principles of deliberative democracy for tackling practical problems that involve contrasting viewpoints. Students learn how to engage in a structured process of open and respectful dialogue with the aims of mutual understanding, social learning, and improved relations, in contrast to contestation and debate between intractable positions (Shaffer, et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, organizations such as the Deliberative Citizenship Initiative, Everyday Democracy, the Kettering Foundation, the National Issues Forums Institute, Public Agenda, the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network, and the Talloires Network of Engaged Universities extend deliberative projects to help local communities address concrete problems (Dedrick, Grattan, & Dienstfrey, 2008; Gastil & Levine, 2005; Hoyt & Garrett, 2020; Longo & Shaffer, 2019). Students facilitate deliberation by members of the community with the aim of achieving consensus on an action plan to address the problem.

Among the more theoretically robust of these efforts, Martín Carcasson and Leah Sprain have advanced what they call deliberative inquiry (Carcasson & Sprain, 2012, 2016). This term, as originally introduced, refers to essential characteristics of most public policy and planning problems that, it is claimed, are inherently subjective, which distinguishes them fundamentally from scientific, mathematical, and engineering problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973). In order to proceed, judgments must be made and agreed upon throughout the planning process without the degree of unanimity afforded in the sciences, from problem formulation to solution. Deliberative inquiry is used to teach students how to evaluate and address practical social problems by fully considering alternative positions with honesty, integrity, and skill.

While there have been developments in the field of deliberative democracy and higher education, one issue that remains underexplored relates to the role of scholars as participants in deliberation. At best, the literature on deliberative democracy portrays scholars as resource persons in minipublics or subject matter experts on topics subject to wider public deliberation (Fishkin, 2009, 2013; Maia, et al., 2017; Sprain, Carcasson, & Merolla, 2014). Meanwhile, the higher education literature, as discussed in this section, portrays scholars or teachers as facilitators of deliberation in their classrooms. In this article, I aim to shift the focus of discussion to one where scholars themselves serve as direct participants in exercises of deliberative democracy by introducing the concept of 'critical space.' I argue that a critical space serves as a place for scholars to contribute their research and viewpoints on social issues in ways that are generally not available in the institutionally organized pursuit and production of knowledge, where the emphasis is on scientific discovery, explanations of natural and social phenomena, and technical applications. In this model, scholar participants take the results of their deliberation to the public for further deliberation, with the aim of influencing the deliberations of government policy.

Deliberative democracy as a guide for a critical space model

There are several reasons why I anchor my discussion on critical spaces within the literature on deliberative democracy. First, the theory and practice of deliberative democracy are concerned with empowering the public to directly participate in policymaking on identified issues of public concern that involve competing interests. It is motivated by ideals of participatory democracy as an

alternative or complement to elected representative democracy (Cohen, 2003; Dryzek, 2009; Fishkin, 2009, 2013; Gutmann & Thompson, 2003, 2004; Habermas, 1993, 1996). Deliberation can be distinguished from debate and discussion in terms of equality and equity (Beauvais & Bächtiger, 2016). Even though equality and equity are values that are consistent with collegiality, and debate and discussion are basic features of scholarly practice, differences in professional status and reputation—and personality—can impact adherence to these values. A senior renowned scholar could have undue influence on a deliberation. Further, there could be biases among participants based on the disciplines or fields that are their areas of expertise.

If principles of deliberative democracy are followed, these kinds of concerns are not present. While participants may bring to the group dialogue particular beliefs and values about what is right, in a deliberation, the mutual goal of individuals in the group is not to seek adoption of the respective beliefs and values. Rather, they participate in the deliberation with the understanding that each participant's beliefs and values are to be considered equally as raw material for the inquiry, regardless of individual status. If the process of working collaboratively is successful, it will yield a result that all participants will freely and readily recognize is based on the best reasons that can be determined. This result is a kind of disinterested discovery akin to the pursuit of knowledge, in that the participant is a kind of disinterested inquirer who seeks to follow a method that is open to what the method reveals.

Second, deliberative democratic theory advances models of group reasoning and provides guidance for the creation and execution of communicative action in practice. Beliefs, values, norms, and opinions are overt considerations in the design and execution of deliberative models (e.g., Eriksen, 2018; Niemeyer, 2019). These features are fundamental to critical spaces because these spaces are intended to be a means for enabling inquiry among scholars to move beyond explanation, interpretation, and prediction to proposals that explicitly evaluate values as well as knowledge.

Third, the literature on deliberative democracy provides different 'models' of communication that can provide a conceptual anchor for critical spaces. John Gastil's (2014) work on 'small group democracy' is particularly relevant for this article. What he presents as 'types of communication' suggests a provisional order for the operation of critical spaces. Inspired by Gastil's formulation, I identify a four-stage model of inquiry in critical spaces. Before doing so, in the next section I propose that the time is right for deliberative work by scholars in critical spaces by pointing out several current contexts in higher education that anticipate and justify the need for such work. These contexts include: a constellation of higher education literature that advocates a global activism role for universities in the public sphere; the rising global change movement among universities internationally; and in deliberative democracy theory, the concept of deliberative linkages or networks that would span institutional and

national borders. These currents provide evidence for an expanded idea of inquiry that justifies an activist approach by scholars who are interested in applying both advanced knowledge and values considerations using deliberative democracy principles to pursue social change at local, national, and global levels.

New directions in higher education and critical spaces

The transformative university is a reflective and critical university that attempts to transform the world so as to live under democratic values of freedom, inclusion, equality and justice. It is a university that contends with the status quo and the establishment and that promotes within and outside its walls a more equal society in which citizens can express a diversity of visions and values. What is public is here understood in the sense of a social commitment to society, for the sake of the 'public good' in global and collective terms (Guzman-Valenzuela, 2016, p. 673).

In recent higher education literature, normative visions by leading scholars advocate a more active role for universities and scholars in the public sphere to address major social problems across national borders (e.g. Barnett, 2016, 2018; Brennan, 2008; Calhoun, 2006; Filippakou & Williams, 2015; Marginson, 2011, 2016; Maxwell, 2007, 2014; Pusser, 2006; White, 2017). This work is often centered on the idea of global networks and global problems. For example, Simon Marginson advances a vision of universities in an evolving, interactive network, which he contrasts to neoliberal and status competition characterizations (Marginson, 2011). He asserts that the public good of higher education in current practice is primarily a question about fair competition of access to elite universities in order to obtain private goods, and questions the extent that vigorous social critique is actually present in universities. In his vision resides a 'potentially more egalitarian university world patterned by communications, collegiality, linkages, partnerships and global consortia' (Marginson, 2011, p. 422). Higher education ought to serve as 'an umbrella public sphere sheltering projects that pertain to the public good' in relation to emerging social change movements (p. 419).

Similarly, Ronald Barnett argues for a broadened, more socially and globally engaged university. He identifies three characteristics of universities to justify this idea. They include universities' capacity to change, their institutional diversity, and their autonomy compared to other kinds of institutions (Barnett, 2015). Even though universities are increasingly subject to government regulation and affected by social forces, they possess a number of powers of their own, including the power to engage in wider society, the power to depart from convention, and the power to create new discourses, among others. In sum, universities have the freedom and the power to conceive and work out its options in practice through creative acts. The imaginary challenge is 'discerning positive freedoms

for the university that expand its autonomy in the world . . . If such freedoms can be identified, then not only the university but the condition of the world might be enhanced' (Barnett, 2016, p. 178). In essence, it is 'the capacity of the university to have a concern for a world beyond itself . . . both on and off campus' that ought to be more imaginatively utilized (pp. 178–179).

A final example of the new global actor vision for higher education is the work of Nicholas Maxwell (2007, 2014), who has long advocated the need for an academic revolution that would place values inquiry as the most foundational category of thought. He argues that the traditional pursuit of knowledge is woefully insufficient for inquiry given the global scale of social problems such as poverty, hunger, disease, the environment, oppression, sustainability, terrorism, the third world, inequality, and international relations. Inquiry that proceeded according to what Maxwell calls a 'philosophy of wisdom' would have the basic task of improving society by seeking to discover what is of value in life and then articulating, proposing, and critically assessing possible solutions to its realization.

Evidence of this broadened role for higher education in practice is the global change movement by universities to take an active role in social change projects through international organizations such as the Global University Network for Innovation, the Talloires Network of Engaged Universities, UNESCO, and an array of world regional and national organizations, in which scholars collaborate with practitioners and communities to improve social conditions (Curnow, 2017; Escrigas, et al., 2013; Hall & Tandon, 2020; Hoyt & Newcomb Rowe, 2017). There are many examples of these university-community partnerships for social change involving economic justice, health, poverty, and sustainability (Hall, et al., 2013; Hall, Tandon, & Tremblay, 2015; Tandon, et al., 2016). The best of these efforts involves the co-production of knowledge by scholars and communities, using both academic knowledge and the informal knowledge of the community (Bivens, Haffenden, & Hall, 2015; Tandon & Jackson, 2013).

In the field of deliberative democracy, there are calls for a broadened conception of deliberative democracy on the global stage as an alternative to elected bodies (Dryzek, Bächtiger, & Milewicz, 2011; Vlerick, 2020). A theoretical vantage point for a broadened conception of inquiry that includes expert panels is the concept of 'deliberative systems' (Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012). A deliberative system is 'an overarching system made up of different component parts that overall plays host to a range of contesting discourses within and across both "micro"- and "macro" sites in an inclusive, deliberative and consequential manner' (Curato & Böker, 2016, p. 176). It expressly includes the role of experts, including the idea of expert deliberation (Mansbridge et al., 2012, pp. 13–17). Critical inquiries could serve this role in a deliberative system by working out complex issues using advanced knowledge and value considerations. In this role they could serve as dynamic, interconnected parts of a network that enhances overall deliberative capacity (Felicetti, 2017; Felicetti, Niemeyer, & Curato, 2015).

The foregoing depiction of a deliberative system would, then, place critical spaces in higher education as a kind of forum that takes on the role of expert deliberation, or 'faculty forum' relative to other deliberative forums. Scholars could perform this function in two ways. First, they take leadership by initiating critical inquiries. The results of their inquiries in the form of action plans could be disseminated to publics, public officials, and public interest and political advocacy groups for consideration and further deliberation. The second way that critical spaces could exercise this role in a deliberative system is to formalize strategic linkages with existing groups, including international advocacy and social action organizations.

What would inquiry in critical spaces look like, how would inquiry in them be conducted, and what would be their relationship to existing domains of knowledge? In the next section, I will describe a model for critical spaces using deliberative principles in four stages: (1) group and problem formation; (2) group study, including presentation and clarifying discussion about the problem and initial viewpoints about its causes and solutions; (3) deliberation, or the effort to reach consensus about what ought to be done to change the condition, with an action plan as its outcome; (4) implementation of the action plan, which involves the public and other actors at a new level of deliberation followed by social action. I present these stages in the next sections including a hypothetical example for purposes of illustration.

Deliberative model for critical spaces

Stage 1: Group and problem formation

Participants in critical spaces can be formed in many places, within and across universities. One can envision the initial formation of critical spaces as an informal grassroots movement within individual universities, leading scholars to pursue institutional recognition and expanding across institutions to regional, national, and international levels. For the purposes of this article, I envision a formal gathering like a global conference—whether in-person or online—with the primary aim of forming critical inquiry groups of scholars.

There are two ways in which this conference as a critical space can formulate shared problems and groups of scholars who will deliberate on them. First, critical inquiry groups are formed through participants' voluntary affiliation to an issue they consider to be relevant. The conference can cover a range of themes, from poverty and inequality to international conflict and cooperation. The themes are permeable and so participants are free to engage in different groups to discover common interests and overlaps in themes. Second, these groups are held together by their shared commitment to deliberative principles. These principles include: (1) *full transparency*, where all knowledge claims, viewpoints, and values are expressed honestly and accurately; (2) *equality*, where all claims, viewpoints, and values are heard and given equal consideration without prejudice; (3) *consensus*, where all participants understand and accept that claims, viewpoints, and values are shared with the purpose of

reaching unbiased consensus; (4) *pluralistic decision-making*, where the group has the option of inviting a facilitator to identify overlapping agreements, remaining differences, and mutually agreed-upon recommendations based on the ideal of meta-consensus; and finally, (5) *inclusivity*, where the wider public is involved in deliberation.

Within each stage of the critical inquiry process, each group has the freedom to determine exactly how they will carry out their critical inquiry (for example, frequency and schedule of meetings, details about the execution of meetings at each stage, consultation with others) but all participants are expected to adhere to the deliberative principles.

Turning now to a hypothetical example, among the many conference attendees who are drawn to the general theme of poverty and inequality, suppose that seven scholars find common interest in exploring how poverty could be understood and addressed at the micro- or neighborhood level (hereafter called 'Urban Poverty Initiative'). Comprising nationalities, genders, and races from several large developed countries, the group includes an anthropologist who investigates the lived experience of homelessness; an economist who studies the impact of government financed anti-poverty programs in urban areas; a historian of poverty and social policy; a professor of law who studies the impact of urban zoning laws that accommodate commercial development at the expense of low income residents; a neurologist who conducts research on brain development in children; a psychologist who studies the effects of poverty on educational attainment; and a sociologist who analyzes social inequities based on class, gender, and ethnicity using quantitative methods.

During the conference, the participants discuss the nature of their work and concerns on the subject of poverty at the local level with the aim of developing a problem definition for their particular inquiry. All participants recognize that poverty is a perennial problem in all societies. Based on each scholar's expertise, the group decided to focus their inquiry on poverty in high-income countries. The problem statement can be formulated in this manner:

There is considerable empirical research on the causes of poverty in high-income countries. Many initiatives have been attempted to address poverty in the last fifty years. While poverty has been reduced to some extent, it remains pervasive and persistent, affecting millions of people. We shall approach this problem from the standpoint of understanding what it looks like within large urban centers, with the aim of developing potential solutions that are conceptualized as action plans at the local or neighborhood level.

Stage 2: Study stage

The goals of stage 2, the study stage, are for participants to (a) educate each other about the nature of the problem based on each scholar's expertise and (b) share each scholar's personal viewpoints about the condition,

given the research and their concerns about the subject. The knowledge and viewpoints that are presented and discussed at this stage will inform the deliberation stage (Stage 3).

Stage 2 can be likened to a study group using a combination of presentations and group discussion. Scholars from different fields can deliver a 'state-of-the-art' presentation that incorporates developments not only in academia but also government reports, third party studies as well as reports of minipublics like citizen panels and other forms of public consultation. Scholars may consult with, gather data from, or even engage with the public, if, in their judgment, it would help inform their deliberation (direct involvement of the public in a deliberative capacity is reserved for stage 4). Students serve throughout the inquiry in a research and advisory role that can be likened to the staffs that support elected officials in the legislative arena.

Aside from presenting evidence, scholars may also express their *viewpoints*, based on knowledge and their personal values, about the causes of the problem and what could/should be done about it. Discussion is held to clarify knowledge and viewpoints presented. At this stage, knowledge and viewpoints are not rigorously evaluated. They are contributed for the purpose of serving as raw material for the deliberation that will proceed at the next stage. All the information generated at this stage will be made available to the public on the conference's website.

Using the Urban Poverty Initiative as a hypothetical example, the following narrative describes a presentation and discussion in capsule form, focusing on the neurologist member of the group. The neurologist presents research on the long-term health effects of childhood trauma. Traumatic childhood experiences can cause significant chemical changes that are associated with both mental and physical illness and increase the likelihood of serious medical problems in adulthood, including the cardiovascular system, the immune system, and metabolic regulatory systems. Long term repeated activations of this stress system, especially in early childhood, alters the chemistry of DNA in the brain, preventing it from properly regulating its response to stress, damaging the immune system, and the effects can persist over the lifespan, including cognitive impairment, attraction to high risk behaviors, and aggression.

Based on the foregoing, the neurologist advances the viewpoint that while there are undoubtedly many factors involved in the prevalence of poverty, and many ways to address it, the fundamental analysis needs to be on the human being as an individual organism. The debilitating effects of trauma greatly limit the individual's ability to acquire skills and habits in school that are necessary to qualify for gainful employment, economic independence, and a middle-class standard of living in a highly competitive world. Conversely, untreated trauma increases the likelihood for disease, substance abuse, school dropout, poverty, violence, and incarceration, all at great cost to the state.

The group discusses the neurologist's research and viewpoints to clarify their understanding of the

presentation. Fellow scholars ask questions about high-risk behaviors. Isn't it the case that disease is associated with smoking, alcoholism, illicit drug use, and poor nutrition, and that the incidence of these behaviors is much higher in disadvantaged communities? If so, isn't the problem essentially about changing health behavior? The neurologist clarifies that while these claims are true, there is a growing body of research showing increased rates of disease among those in poverty who do not engage in such behaviors. Therefore, a focus on prevention is too narrow and misses the large proportions of impoverished people who do not engage in these behaviors yet have experienced repetitive traumas across their lives. As a result, health problems associated with poverty need to be understood in the context of individual experience in the environment. Others in the group point out that this perspective requires a broader social analysis rather than a focus on the individual alone.

Before moving on to the deliberation stage, participants are given ample time to reflect on what transpired during the study stage. They will also be given time to develop their positions, which will be the subject of deliberation. A *position* answers the following two questions in detail: (a) what ought to be (desired condition of human living pertaining to the problem), and (b) what ought to be done (to realize the desired condition). Each participant's student staff is actively engaged in developing the position using deliberative principles. A fully developed position by each participant and their staff is the culmination of the study stage.

This period may include informal communication and discussion among participants. It is possible that two or more participants develop a shared position to present in preparation for the deliberation. In keeping with deliberative principles, in such instances the participants need to disclose that they are working on a shared position with the remaining members of the group. Additional presentation meetings may occur if all members of the group agree they are needed. The group may decide that the utilization of a skilled facilitator is advisable (Beauvais & Bächtiger, 2016).

Stage 3: Deliberation

In the deliberation stage, participants present their positions with the aim of reaching consensus on a desired change of condition that addresses the problem, and what ought to be done to realize the desired change of condition. At this stage, the dialogical process involves the juxtaposition of positions in a collaborative search for common ground following deliberative principles.

The deliberation stage is initiated by giving each participant the opportunity to present their position. Even though positions represent personal judgments and preferences based on interpretations of the knowledge and viewpoints shared in the previous stage, each position is conveyed transparently, and heard and considered equally, with the prevailing purpose of reaching a shared position on a desired condition and what ought to be done to accomplish it. This requires the willingness of each

participant to engage in the deliberation while treating their own position without favor.

As the group considers positions that are presented, it may find its way into a deeper analysis that uncovers and considers fundamental values that may be present implicitly in the positions. The deliberation stage culminates in an action plan that consists of a narrative summary of the study and deliberation, and a detailed proposal for addressing the problem, which includes *objectives* (desired condition and what ought to be done) and *means* (how to realize objectives).

Continuing with the hypothetical Urban Poverty Initiative, over several meetings, positions have been proposed and considered, resulting in two distinct subgroup positions. One position focuses on the welfare of the individual as the locus of social change. This subgroup consists of the anthropologist, the neurologist, and the psychologist. They share an emphasis on poverty as it is lived from the standpoint of concrete individual experience. The participants of this subgroup believe that the core problem of poverty is the material obstacles in which disadvantaged individuals are immersed. The persistence of these obstacles over time discourages the average person's efforts to overcome poverty and their belief in self-efficacy.

For example, the pressures placed on single parents to maintain a job that provides only minimal income leaves them insufficient time for the practical and emotional care of themselves, and for their children's cognitive and social development. Parents must be empowered through individualized job training for living wage employment while providing their children with leading-edge preschool care, schooling, after-school tutoring and supervised activities, individual and family therapy, and high-quality preventive health care.

The remaining participants, which include the economist, the historian, the jurist, and the sociologist, find themselves sharing a different position. This subgroup believes that the problem of urban poverty at the local level is best approached in terms of its impact on the residents of an impoverished region as a collective. From this position, an effective analysis of the problem understands those subjected to poverty as members of a population who are similarly subject to outside forces. These outside forces impose a myriad of conditions on the population that is largely beyond their control, and whose features may even be beyond what can be reasonably discerned by individuals. This subgroup believes that their colleagues' focus on individuals and families cannot be effective because the multiple forces impacting the community are too powerful and diffused. Under these circumstances, this subgroup believes, only a few individuals could conceivably achieve a comfortable standard of living. They advocate a coordinated, comprehensive government and private sector initiative involving major institutions as they are encountered on the local level.

There is agreement that the situation is more complex than either subgroup's position can sufficiently address by itself. From one vantage point, poverty is experienced most directly in the body and mind of an individual. The

ensuing discussion leads all participants to agree that it is unreasonable to expect poverty can be overcome by an intervention that focuses solely on the individual or individual families, or by an emphasis on the collective apart from the individual. Both have value for human well-being and must be addressed. All participants further agree that while government has traditionally been responsible for addressing the problem of poverty, the business sector and other institutions, which may benefit financially from socioeconomic disparities, have equal responsibility for providing the material and organizational resources that are necessary.

It is recognized that it would be inappropriate to impose an initiative without the participation of those whom the initiative is seeking to help. The group agrees to compose an action plan that merges focus on the individual and on the collective for further deliberation with representatives of disadvantaged neighborhoods. With the completion of the action plan, the formal deliberation among scholars ends and the critical inquiry moves to the implementation stage.

Stage 4: Implementation

The focus of critical inquiry on scholars as participants in the first three stages is intended to harness the specialized knowledge and insight that generally remains within the ivory tower, even when its subject matter and purpose are explicitly concerned with the public interest. However, the first three stages are preparatory to the implementation stage, in which representative members of the communities that are the subject of the inquiry participate in deliberation with scholars and representative students.

There are many possible configurations in the deliberative democracy literature (cf. Ackerman & Fishkin, 2003; Beauvais & Bächtiger, 2016; Bohman, 2012; Felicetti, Niemeyer, & Curato, 2015; Fishkin, 2013; Fung, 2003; Ryan & Smith, 2014). Guidance could also be derived from recent examples of university-community forums involving students (Longo & Shaffer, 2019). In the remainder of this paper, I will suggest several features of the implementation stage and how they might be situated regionally and globally.

The implementation stage embodies the social action element of critical spaces. The action plan that is the culmination of the scholarly deliberation is presented for public deliberation in several pilot forums managed by professional facilitators who are experienced in the planning and execution of minipublics. Prior to presentation and deliberation, the action plan is reformed by the scholars with the aid of these facilitators so that it is most accessible to the general public while retaining its most salient elements.

For instance, in the hypothetical example, a substantial international contingent from disadvantaged neighborhoods in representative countries could be invited to participate with the aid of change agents, students, and organizations focused on social justice. From this contingent, groups are formed to deliberate over particular elements of the action plan. Representatives

from other sectors including business, government, and social action NGOs would round out the deliberation participants.

The ultimate objectives of the deliberation at this stage are to raise public awareness and understanding, influence public opinion and public officials, and mobilize publics to act, within and across nation-states. Thus, the focus of this deliberation is outward, beyond individual universities and regions and across national borders, both in regard to the definition of problems to pursue and the advancement of its results to the global public sphere. The overall organization utilizes the idea of deliberative system (Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012). A deliberative system is 'an overarching system made up of different component parts that overall plays host to a range of contesting discourses within and across both 'micro'- and 'macro' sites in an inclusive, deliberative and consequential manner' (Curato & Böker, 2016, p. 176).

From a system perspective, the process described here serves to work out complex issues for broader publics. In doing so, critical spaces function as dynamic, interconnected parts of a network that enhances overall deliberative capacity (Curato & Böker, 2016; Felicetti, 2017; Felicetti, Niemeyer, & Curato, 2015; Parkinson, 2018; Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012). A web platform could serve the purpose of a progressively wider scope via virtual engagement (Shane, 2004). Thereby, critical study groups could deliberate across national borders while working toward intersubjective agreement and ultimately, broader proposals for change through widening consensus.

The foregoing depiction of a deliberative system would, then, place critical spaces in higher education as a kind of forum that takes on the role of expert deliberation relative to other deliberative forums. Scholars perform this function in two ways. First, they take leadership by initiating critical inquiries. The results of their inquiries in the form of action plans are disseminated to publics, public officials, and public interest and political advocacy groups for consideration and further deliberation. The second way that scholar forums exercise their role in a deliberative system is to formalize strategic linkages with existing groups, including international advocacy and social action organizations.

The idea of a broader deliberative system of networked groups should not be taken to anticipate a bounded system in any strict sense. Linkages, formal and informal, are contingent and fluid. For this reason, it might be more accurate to refer to a deliberative system as relatively open. Critical inquiry action plans could undergo significant modifications based on the input of citizen groups and individuals, while scholars could serve as participants or consultants based on their knowledge and on the quality of their deliberative experience, and critical spaces serve as a model for participatory, reason-based democracy.

The role of critical inquiries in these broader national and global contexts is an alternative to discourses that constrain thought by promoting narrow economic and ideological interests in the guise of democracy, liberty, and justice. Linkages of critical spaces beyond individual universities and regions through global communication

media could be fluid and evolving, with the aim of reaching greater populations, broadening consensus, influencing public opinion, and mobilizing social action movements.

Conclusion: Critical spaces, deliberation, and community engagement

Critical spaces are venues in which scholars conduct rigorous group inquiries using deliberative democracy principles to address basic problems or issues in human experience that are relevant across national borders. What is distinct about critical inquiry compared to customary work in established disciplines and fields is its consideration of both knowledge and values, with the ultimate aim of taking well-crafted proposals to broader publics for further deliberation in advancement of the common good.

The problems of humanity are too threatening to its survival, the extent of unnecessary suffering too great, and the interconnected nature of living across national borders too obvious for the customary pursuit of knowledge to end with discovery and publication. Without doubt, many scholars seek to improve life in their customary work, and through activities they may engage in as members of the public. The model of critical spaces, in which scholars would engage in deliberation about the best uses of knowledge to address basic problems facing humanity, could provide the architecture to pursue these great challenges as a collective enterprise.

There is a need to pilot critical spaces through a collaboration of universities and communities for the purpose of empirical research based on deliberative theory in the higher education context. This might proceed by recruiting a modest number of university participants from multiple countries that can contribute in several ways. First, universities with established interdisciplinary centres that focus on social change and whose subject areas complement each other could be recruited. Second, universities that have significant successful experience working hand-in-hand to empower communities to design and implement social change using deliberative principles could be identified. Third, the global change movement involving universities, such as the Global University Network for Innovation, the Talloires Network of Engaged Universities, and an array of international organizations and foundations could be tapped for their expertise and support (Curnow, 2017; Escrigas, et al., 2013; Hall & Tandon, 2020; Hoyt & Rowe, 2017).

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Competing Interests

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