



# Dupont Summit 2014

..... Science, Technology, and Environmental Policy Issues

December 5, 2014 ♦ Historic Whittemore House, Washington, DC

The Policy Studies Organization

## Speaker

Charles Balter- *Pomona College*

### "Nurturing Networks: A Path Forward for Democratic Deliberation"<sup>A</sup>

Democratic deliberation (DD) is a process of informed and reasoned consideration of policy issues by diverse groups of ordinary citizens that provides input to public authorities and officials. DD has been used extensively in the environmental policy field, and much of this paper draws on the authors' involvement in and research on the World Wide Views deliberations on climate change (2009) and biodiversity (2012), and other environmental cases.<sup>1</sup>

DD has experienced numerous periods of growth, change and decline over the past century, and the first decade and a half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been no exception.<sup>2</sup> Deliberative events involving as many as 13,000 citizens<sup>3</sup> have been conducted from local through global levels during this period, practitioner networks and academic interest have been institutionalized, and Barack Obama's first act as President of the United States was an Executive Order creating an Open Government Initiative that was designed to increase the transparency of government while expanding both collaboration with citizens and their participation in policy formulation. On the other hand, pioneering organizations such as *AmericaSpeaks* and the Danish Board of Technology have dissolved or lost critical government support,<sup>4</sup> and the Open Government Initiative focused on the familiar issue of transparency rather than the more challenging and potentially transformative issue of informed participation.<sup>5</sup>

With uncertainty looming, researchers and practitioners of deliberative democracy (DD) have given some attention to the structure and nature of their field, but their understandings of it have varied considerably. Five conceptions of the field have been used formally and informally to describe the constellation of individuals and institutions interested in advancing the values and practices of DD: industry, community of practice, social movement, strategic action field, and network or 'connexionist'. These five concepts simultaneously describe past developments and suggest future possibilities for the field. We see activity trending in ways that are best explained by the connexionist model,<sup>6</sup> and we think that this trend has promising implications for accelerating the impact of DD. Such acceleration is critical if global problems such as climate change are to be effectively addressed: reaction happens too late.

Our analysis builds on the notion that prospects for broad realization of deliberative ideals in the American political system will be affected not only by the norms, practices, and "micropolitics" of deliberation, which remain a central focus of researchers, but also by the nature of DD's internal and external connections and the field's basic social and organizational characteristics.

In this paper, we first review the practitioner and academic discourses around these five models in order to assess their contributions to understanding the evolution of the field and to substantiate our claim that the connexionist model is especially robust. The basic components of our argument are:

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- The network model is uniquely flexible and adaptable: while each of the five concepts points to activity that would advance the field in some way, the network concept incorporates these ideas and others, along with a framework for understanding how activities come together.
- Only the network concept demands identification of problems – a term we use to include challenges, issues, and opportunities – while neither narrowing the focus to a certain category of issues nor preventing a refined focus.
- Only the network and strategic action fields models emphasize connections both inside and outside the DD arena.
- Networks stand alone in identifying projects as the basic unit of social and economic organization, which enables the specification and evaluation of wide-ranging activity.

The connexionist framework also has clear practical implications, which are the primary concern of this paper. For example, the hypermobility of people, institutions and things in a world organized on network principles favors those who are versatile, adaptive and risk-tolerant, and creates largely invisible social relations through which mobile people exploit less mobile people who lack these qualities. Mitigating such imbalances thus means equalizing opportunities for mobility, supporting and rewarding efforts to establish connections and the mobility that goes with them, and strengthening mechanisms for holding the mobile managers of deliberative systems accountable. Practical steps for accomplishing these goals in the deliberative system might be the inclusion of citizen participants from deliberative events in the system's governance, and enhancing ways of recognizing participation (e.g., by permitting deliberative participation to satisfy jury duty requirements, or by publicizing the contributions of companies that compensate employees for participating in deliberative events). The larger purpose of such initiatives is to nurture the network of deliberative democracy, which we argue is a critical need if the deliberative system is to flourish rather than recede, and contribute to anticipatory governance of compounding environmental challenges from local through global levels.

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<sup>1</sup> H. Stevenson and J. Dryzek, (2014) *Democratizing Global Climate Governance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>2</sup> J. Gastil and W. Keith (2005) 'A nation that (sometimes) likes to talk: A brief history of public deliberation in the United States' in J. Gastil and P. Levin eds. *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Steve Brigham, *AmericaSpeaks*, January 10, 2013 and *AmericaSpeaks* website.

<sup>4</sup> Danish Board of Technology, accessed 5 October 2014 at

<http://www.tekno.dk/subpage.php3?article=1851&toppic=kategori11&language=uk&category=11>; Matt Leighninger, 'The audacity of *AmericaSpeaks* to improve democracy holds lessons for us all', *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, February 27, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Information regarding participation available on the White House's own website;

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/open/participation> is sparse. Furthermore, in a memorandum concerning guidance for 2014 agency open government plans, five of five new or enhanced initiatives are transparency-oriented, and only two of ten ongoing initiatives address participation

[http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/open\\_gov\\_plan\\_guidance\\_memo\\_final.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/open_gov_plan_guidance_memo_final.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> L. Boltanski and Y. Chiapello (2005) *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, London: Verso.



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## Biography

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**Charles Balter** is a student and researcher of democratic deliberation in the U.S. working under the guidance of Dr. Richard Worthington. He holds a B.A. in public policy analysis from Pomona College (Claremont, CA), where he studied environmental and natural resource economics, the ethics of climate change, and participatory methods in research and policy decision-making. He started his career working in a U.S. Senate office, where interactions with staff and constituents made him question whether citizens could and should have more input on decisions that affect their lives. He currently works for McKinstry, an engineering, construction, and facility management firm dedicated to making buildings efficient, comfortable, and safe.

