From protest to political parties:
online deliberation in the new parties arising in Spain.

(preliminary version)

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Abstract:

The protest movements that began in 2011 have evolved into different organisational forms, maintaining their original idea of participatory and deliberative democracy and transfering it to these new organisations. Online tools remain crucial for implementing their participatory and deliberative ideal of democracy.

The aim of this paper is to describe and assess the main online deliberative processes of the two most important parties that emerged from the 15-M Movement -*Podemos* and *Barcelona En Comú*- in the light of the most common criteria and indicators measuring deliberation online, as they have been developed by relevant political theorists and scientists. We have also situated the study of these deliberative processes in the context of the evolution from social movements into political parties and the trade-offs they are facing to organize quickly and efficaciously for the upcoming elections while maintaining their participatory and deliberative ideals.

First we have examined the internal organization and the most important deliberative and participatory processes in *Podemos* and *Barcelona En Comú* and then we have empirically analysed the online platform called *Plaza Podemos,* which is based on the social website Reddit, and the online development of the electoral programme of *Barcelona en Comú*, which has been organised through DemocracyOS.

It is crucial to assess how the methods and practices carried out by the new parties are functioning in terms of deliberation because they could be applied into the institutions where they achieve representation due to the good electoral forecasts for both organisations.

1.- Introduction

The 15-M Movement[1] and its political offshoots such as *Podemos*, *Barcelona en Comú* or the X Party seek a more participatory and deliberative model of democracy against the extant representative model of democracy. Both the protest movement and its political derivatives apply or have applied several methods and practices to their decision-making process and daily functioning to ensure participation and deliberation of their followers and the general public. These methods and practices implemented within the parties have been in many cases previously used during the protests cycle started in 2011 and will probably play a role in the model of democracy these parties envisage for the political system in general.

The main objective of this paper is to describe and assess the deliberative practices of the two main parties, *Podemos* and *Barcelona en Comú*, which emerged from the 15-M Movement following the framework of the deliberative model of democracy and its corresponding criteria and indicators as they have been developed by relevant political theorists, scientists and practitioners (Dahlberg, 2004a; 2004b; Dahlgren, 2005; Kies, 2010; Friess & Eilders; 2014; Hendriks, Dryzek and Hunold, 2007).

It is crucial to assess how the methods and practices carried out by the new parties are functioning in terms of deliberation and how they match the model of deliberative democracy because they could be proposed for use in the political system as a whole. *Podemos* gained

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[1] Also known as *Indignados*.

electoral representation in the last European Parliament elections (5 seats) and the Andalusian Parliament (15 seats) and has very good prospects of gaining an important share of seats in the Spanish general elections in November[2]. Opinion polls show that *Barcelona En Comú* could win first or second position in the Barcelona local elections in May[3].

In addition, we want to contribute empirical insights into these two parties' deliberative capacity, since the transformation from social movements into political parties could entail restricting original ideals of inclusion, openness and widely spread deliberation for the sake of organizational efficacy and electoral competition. Also as we will test how the principles of participation and deliberation are difficult to realise at the same time in the same process even though an online platform is being used.

The outline of the paper is, first, to establish the antecedents of the new parties' deliberation and participatory practices from the 15-M Movement; second, to set out the most important criteria or traits for analysing the deliberative capacity of online forums or platforms; third, to explain the relevance of the two parties as cases for studying participatory and deliberative structures and efforts. Next, the internal organization and the most relevant processes of participation and deliberation within these parties will be examined in order to situate and understand the analysis of the two parties' online platforms selected. We will apply the deliberative criteria explained previously to the assessment of the deliberative capacity of two online debates held on *Plaza Podemos* and to the process of elaboration of the municipal electoral programme of *Barcelona En Comú*. Lastly, we will end with the discussion of results and conclusions.

2.- The search for a new model of democracy: deliberation in the 15-M Movement.

The ideal of participation and deliberation of all the people has been a key concept not only in the protest movement initiated in Spain in May 2011 with demonstrations in 50 cities and the camping in the main cities' public squares, but also in its evolution into different organizational forms and protest mobilizations till nowadays. The protestors and participants called for a new model of democracy and organized following an horizontal, decentralized and deliberative structure. On the one hand, they moved into the streets asking for a "Real Democracy Now" and complaining that "They don't represent us" and "We are not merchandise in the hands of the bankers" and, on the other, they organized basically in open assemblies distributed geographically (in the occupied squares, public spaces or civic centres, in neighbourhoods and towns) or by topics (committees and working groups focused on different problems and issues). In this respect, the spirit of the protest movement was to recover and enhance the democracy that has been stolen, in their opinion, by the political elites and the economic powers, and to experiment, build and practise a more participatory and deliberative way of organizing and decision-making. Some authors such as Romanos (2011: 5-7) or Castells (2012:

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[2] http://www.abc.es/espana/20150507/abci-barometro-elecciones-201505071118.html
[3] http://www.btv.cat/btvnoticies/2015/05/07/colau-enquesta-cis-eleccions/ or http://www.lavanguardia.com/local/barcelona/20150503/54431004786/encuesta-feedback-elecciones-barcelona.html

128-132) argue that the criteria used in the building and functioning of the assemblies and commissions resembled the basic principles of deliberative democracy: inclusion, equality, diversity, horizontal interaction, transparency, preferences transformation and decisions by consensus[4].

But this practice is not new in Spain and it has been inherited from a long tradition of self-managed cultural and civic centres, the squatters' movement, and the anti-globalisation movement of the end of the 20th and early 21st century[5]. What is new in this deliberative practice is two intertwined characteristics: the occupation of the squares with the objective of opening the public sphere and the attempt to include and involve everybody into the public debate. On the one hand, the occupation of the squares is not a simple seizure of the physical space but the location of deliberative assemblies and committees at the centre of a public space (Romanos, 2011: 9). In this respect, the 15-M Movement has managed to transfer the deliberative practices from relatively closed spaces to open and very visible spaces such as the squares. On the other, inclusiveness is a key value that refers not only to the participants but also to every citizen. Numerous initiatives to invite and encourage everybody to participate in the squares were developed: passer-by were invited to join in the debates in the assemblies and in the sectoral committees, and there were information-posts and open forums where experts or activists present a topic followed by an open discussion (Romanos, 2013: 9). In addition, since the beginning, the activists have tried very hard to build an inclusive sense of "us" based on the identification of the persons and policies responsible for the crisis, the preparation of general demands and proposals, the lack of partisan symbols, the development of very diverse thematic committees and the respect for anonymity, both online and offline (Romanos, 2013: 6). This search for inclusion of everybody in the squares, on the online spaces and within the discourse, and the openness of the assemblies, also inspired other later protest movements, such us Occupy, mainly in New York, where numerous Spanish activists were working or studying there (Lawrence, 2014).

It is important to highlight that other mass protests such as those in 2013 protests in Turkey and Brazil, which emerged after the cycle of protests initiated in 2011 with the Arab Sring and the Spanish *Indignados*, also show that contentious politics is not in opposition to deliberation. As happened with the 15-M, the Turkish and Brazilian protests denounced the fact that the extant democracy was not listening to the majority of the population and excluding them from the political decisions. As a more democratic alternative, they established open and deliberative assemblies, forums and thematic commissions in different spaces of cities and towns in Brazil and mainly in parks and public spaces from several neighbourhoods in Istanbul (Mendoça & Ercan, 2014).

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[4] See the "Quick guide for the activation of popular assemblies" (*Guía rápida para la dinamización de asambleas populares)* published by the people camping in *Plaza del Sol* (*acampadasol*) http://madrid.tomalaplaza.net/2011/05/31/guia-rapida-para-la-dinamizacion-de-asambleas-populares/
[5] Neither is new in other Western countries, since in many others the anti-globalisation movement and other self-managed and assembly forms of social and political organisation have also developed successfully (Della Porta, 2005).

In this cycle of protests all around the globe, deliberation was not only taking place at the physical spaces of the protests but also on online platforms and through social media. These devices were the main channels for mobilization and organization of the protests but also play a key role in personal expression, exchange of information and practices, and debate about ideas and alternatives to austerity measures (Toret, 2015). Online tools and networks enabled a leading role for individual contributions and recognition and not merely for organizations or groups (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

All these new online and offline forms of communication and debate brought about by the protest movements have worked as what Habermas and Sennett envisaged as the functioning of the deliberative democracy: a counter-power to the dominant power and a re-emergence of genuine public interaction that could resist and is independent of the constraints of changing economics (Kies, 2010: 21). In addition, as we have mentioned, some of the basic principles guiding assemblies, commissions and forums concur with several of the deliberative criteria that most authors (Dahlberg, 2004a and 2004b; Held, 2006; Stromer-Galley, 2007: Kies, 2010; Friess and Eilders, 2014) acknowledge as conditions fostering deliberation (i.e. inclusion, horizontal interaction, transparency) and attitudes characterising a deliberative space (i.e. discourse equality, reflexivity and transformation of preferences, and decisions by consensus).

3.- Online deliberation and its empirical criteria

In order to evaluate the deliberative capacity of the forums, tools or platforms unfolded by the two parties under study we will apply broad acknowledged criteria from the literature on deliberation in general and, specifically, on online deliberation. Most of the authors pinpoint that there are three levels that should be considered (Dahlgren, 2005; Wessler, 2008; Kies, 2010; Friess & Eilders, 2014): 1.- The institutional or structural dimensions of the online platforms or tools; 2.- The interactive or communicative traits of the online platforms or tools; and 3.- The outcome or impact of the online deliberation. Although the authors differ in the label they attach to these three dimensions, there is an agreement considering that the assessment of the deliberative capacity should take into account (1) the design, structure and technical conditions of the online platforms and tools, (2) the deliberative attitudes and characteristics of the interaction and discourse taking place, and (3) the collective or individual results of the deliberative process. A set of deliberative criteria and empirical indicators has been developed for each of the three dimensions. We will draw from the literature the most common criteria and indicators for every level or dimension, taking basically into account the great compilations already carried out by Kies (2010) and Friess and Eilders (2014). Next, we explain each dimension, the meaning of the related criteria and how can they be operationalized and assessed.

1) Institutional or structural dimension.

This dimension refers to how online spaces should be structured and organized to foster deliberation (Friess & Eilders, 2014: 6). The building of the deliberative space or process affects the communication and interaction raised in the online space and it is not possible to develop a deliberative space if its structure and organization are not carefully designed for deliberative purposes (Friess & Eilders, 2014: 15). There are several institutional and technical

characteristics in order to build a deliberative communication space, such as inclusiveness or inclusion (Kies, 2010: 42-44), asynchronous communication, content visibility, moderation, identity, perceived power of the communication spaces, division of labour into smaller units, relevant information and horizontal interaction (Friess & Eilders, 2014: 6-8).

The criterion of inclusion means that all those who are affected by and/or interested by the issues under discussion should be able to participate either actively o passively (Kies, 2010: 42). Thus, inclusion should be assessed by observing the technical characteristics of the online forum: the ease of access on the basis of connectivity and ICT skills, and discursive rules such as moderation, registration and identification that are not perceived as barriers to promoting inclusive participation (Kies, 2010: 56).

In addition, following Friess and Eilders' (2014: 6-8) explanation of the technical criteria, an asynchronous communication space is needed to allow participants spend more time reflecting and justifying their contributions. Moreover, user content should appear immediately in order to motivate contributions and lower perceived entry barriers. Moderation is also crucial to ensure deliberation in terms of civility, rationality and for promoting inclusive participation and good organization of the discussion. Besides, empirical evidence shows that personal identification have positive effects on the deliberative quality of online debates. The perceived power of communication spaces refers to the building of strong discussion spaces able to influence political outcomes[6]. This condition encourages people to participate and be more deliberative. The technical design of the online forum should enable a division of labour into smaller units focused on different issues and debate areas in order to enlarge the opportunities for and quality of deliberation. Finally, the designed structure of the online platform should enable horizontal interaction and communication with other users.

2) Communicative dimension.

This refers to the deliberative attitude of participants (Kies, 2010: 42) and what the communication process should look like, mainly in relation to the reaction of participants to each other's ideas (Friess & Eilders, 2014: 8). According to most of the authors, deliberation should be rational, interactive, equal and respectful. This is the core of the normative claims of deliberation theory as defended by Habermas (1990). The most crucial feature of deliberation is rationality in communication and discourse; that is, to state positions substantiated with arguments and empirical evidence, expecting critical exchange and diversity of arguments and being willing to change one's own opinion in the light of better arguments (Friess & Eilders, 2014: 8). Therefore, rationality involves criteria such as reciprocity, justification, reflexibility, empathy (including civility) and plurality. Other criteria that are also important for assessing this deliberative attitude of the participants are discourse equality, sincerity and plurality (Kies, 2010: 44-54).

In the following table, we present the most important criteria that characterize whether communication and interaction in an online platform is deliberative.

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[6] This criterion is similar to the trait of external impact stated by Kies (2010) as a crucial consequence that a successful deliberative process should have.

Table 1. The communication process in an online forum: deliberative criteria, their meaning and operationalization based on Kies (2010: 42, 56-57).

Deliberative criteria	Meaning	Operationalization
Discourse equality	Participants should have equal opportunity to introduce and question any assertion whatsoever and to express attitudes, desires and needs.	The criterion of "discourse equality" has been most convincingly assessed by identifying the phenomenon of discursive concentration and by analysing whether this concentration leads to control of the debate.
Reciprocity (component of rationality)	Participants should listen and react to the comments formulated by other participants.	The level of reciprocity should be measured through content analysis by assessing, at a basic level, the proportion of postings that are part of a thread versus the ones that initiate a thread and, at more in-depth level, by measuring the extent to which postings take into consideration arguments and opinions of a preceding posting. The evaluation of the degree of reciprocity should take into consideration the assessment of other deliberative criteria (justification, reflexivity, empathy).
Justification (component of rationality)	The opinions and propositions should be accompanied by reasoned, accessible, and moral justifications.	The extent to which messages in an online debate are rationally justified should be measured using content analysis by observing whether opinions and suggestions expressed in a forum are or are not justified and how complex the justifications are. An evaluation of justification should analyse whether the justification's arguments are either internal (based on personal viewpoints and values) or external (based on facts, figures, links to other information and evidence).
Reflexivity (component of rationality)	Participants should critically examine their values, assumptions, and interests, as well as the larger social context.	A meaningful measure of reflexivity requires the use of complementary research tools that include content analysis as well as surveys and, ideally, user interviews. The content analysis assesses apparent cases of reflexivity by notifying visible instances of opinion changes or conflict resolutions while the surveys and the interviews gauge more internal processes of reflexivity by directly asking the active and passive users of the forum whether they changed their opinions and/or felt more informed after participating in the online forum.
Empathy (including civility) (component of rationality)	Participants should be sensitive to other views and opinion, not only of those present during debates.	The criterion of empathy should be measured though content analysis (by counting the cases of disrespect) and by directly raising the question to the users via surveys and interviews. Additionally, the presence of empathy can also be estimated in a deductive way by observing other deliberative criteria as they are generally positively correlated with empathy. If we find in a forum that the levels of reflexivity, rationality and sincerity are high, then it is very likely that the level of empathy will be high.
Sincerity	Participants must take a sincere effort to make known all relevant information and their true intentions, interests, needs, and desires.	It has been highlighted that the criterion of sincerity is certainly the most complex one to measure. Certain measurements based on content analysis allow us to assess apparent traces of the absence of sincerity while questions raised by survey analysis and interviews reveal the perception of the presence and intensity of (in)sincerity by the users themselves.
Plurality (retaled to inclusion)	A deliberative context should be a context where a plurality of voices is heard even if these voices are critical with the dominant opinions/ ideologies.	The plurality of an online debate can be evaluated by the combination of content analysis and online survey analysis. The content analysis determines, on the one hand, the degree to which the debates refer to political ideologies and, on the other hand, whether any political ideology dominates the debate. The survey analysis assesses the forum user's diversity by focusing on sociodemographic profiles (gender, age, education, occupation) and their political involvement and affiliation as well as their familiarity with the use of Internet.

3) The outcome dimension.

This dimension alludes to the results or impact of the deliberation that could be individual or collective. At the individual level, the participation in deliberative forums can contribute to increase tolerance, political knowledge and efficacy, public-spirited attitudes, willingness to compromise or shift preferences (Friess & Eilders, 2014: 10; Hendricks et al, 2007). At the collective level, there are benefits related to the quality of decisions such as the generation of consensual decisions or at least decisions without errors, with high epistemic qualities because they will be informed by relevant reasons and evidence. As a result, the final decision will be more legitimated and supported by a wide public (Habermas, 1992; Friess & Eilders, 2014: 10).

In addition, Kies (2010: 54-55) highlights the relevance of the external impact of the deliberative process outside the context of the debate. That means that decisions resulting from the online forums should have an impact on public debates, political decisions and even shape binding norms in order to contribute to the participation of citizens and guide and scrutinize official decision making processes (Dalhberg, 2007: 49; Hendricks et al, 2007). Kies (2010: 57) poses several questions that help to evaluate the external impact: Are there explicit signs of extension of the discussion to an external agenda? Do influential political personalities participate in the forums? Do users participate in other discussion spaces? Did users create new contacts after participating in the forum? Did, for example in the case of an e-consultation forum, the debates lead to any concrete outcomes?. The author argues that these questions could be operationalized though content analysis and surveys (*ibid*.).

In the next section, we will present the two main parties that have emerged from the 15-M Movement and that apply and defend deliberative practices. Later, we will examine their deliberative capacity describing their internal structure, the participatory and deliberative processes they have deployed until now and the deliberation taking place on two online platforms. We will apply the aforementioned deliberative criteria and operationalization to the analysis of these two online platforms.

4.- From social movement to political parties: the two parties as a case study

But what happens to these deliberative and open processes when a social movement transforms into political parties?. In Spain, the new parties emerged from the 15-M Movement, such as *Podemos* or *Barcelona En Comú* clearly state that they aim to change old politics and build parties open to participation and deliberation of all the citizenry. They have inherited from the 15-M Movement many of the practices, tools and ways of organizing and most of their leaders and most active members have been involved in the 15-M Movement. *Podemos* and *Barcelona En Comú* try to reproduce the 15M Movement structure based on neighborhood assemblies, different issue groups and working committees, and the dominant position of the general assembly or plenary. They argue that the processes initiated from the 15M Movement have supposed a shift in the way of understanding the role of the institutions and the logic of citizen participation, from a perspective of delegation or representation

through institutions to a new framework based in being part of the institutions triggering a feeling of being co-responsible of their functioning[7].

The 2014 European elections marked the emergence of new parties that came out of the 15-M Movement to varying degrees. Although other small parties had previously appeared, the X Party was the first to stand as a real alternative to bring the ideals of the 15-M Movement to the electoral space. The X Party' electoral programme called "Democracy and Full-Stop" contained four main claims: binding referendums, wikigovernment, wikilegislation, real and permanent voting and transparency in public accounts. This party, very innovative in online tools for participation but without an electoral campaign in the mainstream media, did not gain any electoral representation in the 2014 European elections[8]. Shortly afterwards, they decided not to take part in any more elections but continue to fight against corruption and help other parties with more electoral possibilities, mainly through digital technologies and social networks. Some of the online designs widely used now by *Podemos* or *Barcelona En Comú* have been devised by former members of the X Party.

The *Podemos* party was officially registered on 11 March 2014, less than three months before the European Elections. The organization had previously collected more than 50,000 signatures through the website, as a required objective set up by the founders in order to proceed with the project. Nevertheless, the campaign had begun long before the party was formed because the leader of *Podemos*, Pablo Iglesias, was already a well-known commentator in mainstream television channels and talk shows. He and his colleagues, most of them political scientists, created their own TV program on YouTube (*La Tuerka*) and conducted other programs and participate in reputed online newspapers. *Podemos* entered the European Parliament with 5 MPs, as the fourth Spanish candidature with 1,245,948 votes. In the following electoral contest, the elections for the Andalusian Parliament, *Podemos* won 15 seats with 592,371 votes and became the third force in this Parliament hindering the presidential nomination of the winning socialist candidate, Susana Díez.

The *Barcelona En Comú* coalition appeared in June 2014 with the name of *Guanyem Barcelona*. Following a different approach from *Podemos*, the promoters have built a new left wing coalition for the 24 May 2015 local elections that has influenced the emergence of similar formations in different cities throughout Catalonia and Spain. As in the case of *Podemos*, the promoters collected a large amount of signatures -over 30,000- through the website, but also in person, to validate the initial manifesto and move forward. One of their main objectives is the so-called "confluence"; that is, to set up a strong electoral coalition and future collaboration among different social movements, social organizations, neighborhood associations, left wing parties (including *Podem Barcelona*) and professionals from academia, the cultural sphere, etc. in order to promote a change in the policies and government of the city of Barcelona. We have to take into account that Barcelona is a city with a long tradition of

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7 Presentation of Anna Asbert (technician and consultant in public participation) at the Workshop: "How do we build a political agenda in a participatory way?" organized by *Barcelona En Comú* on 18th April 2014. Available at: https://barcelonaencomu.cat/es/post/femciutatencomu-como-construimos-una-agenda-politica-de-forma-participada

[8] They obtained 110,561 votes.

civic organizations, neighborhood associations and popular struggles. The complaints are related to the development of a city divided between the people who have suffered the effects of the economic crisis and austerity measures and live in the poorest neighborhoods, and the needs of large corporations, especially those related to tourism industry. Their mayoral candidate is Ada Colau, former spokesperson of the *PAH* (Platform for People Affected by Mortgages), an organization born in Barcelona but that has successfully spread all over Spain, stopped over a thousand evictions across Spain since 2010 and reallocated around 800 people, all through direct action and civil disobedience.

The participatory and deliberative internal processes they are unfolding are being considered as new experiences through which to learn and test new spaces and modes of democratic practices. The processes have often been constrained by a lack of both human and material resources and the need of fit them into a tight electoral schedule. In less than a year, these political formations have carried out enormous activity in order to develop extensive participatory processes and platforms to define their internal structure, their identity bases, the content of organizational documents, statutes and electoral programmes and negotiations with other parties and social organizations.

The participatory processes of both political parties have been open to all citizens who would like to collaborate with different groups, organize their own groups (the so-called Circles or Neighborhood Groups) or participate in voting on proposals, by registering online or going to the different physical locations set up for this participation purpose. In addition to face-to-face meetings and collaboration, the new parties have carried out an intensive and systematic use of new technologies across different platforms. Apart from social media, such as Facebook and Twitter[9], the new formations have used different digital tools, such as Appgree, Agora Voting, Loomio, Reddit or DemocracyOS, with the purpose of internal communication, organization of members, undertaking collaborative tasks, voting on proposals and candidates and discussion of different political issues.

Both parties have very good electoral forecasts. *Barcelona En Comú* could win the first or second position in the local elections (26% or 17% of the votes depending on the surveys[10]) and *Podemos* could achieve the second or third position in the general elections that will

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[9] *Podemos* party's profile on Facebook has 955,248 followers, more than ten times the followers of the two main "traditional" parties, PP and PSOE, with 88,976 and 82,092 followers, respectively. On the other hand, Pablo Iglesias, leader of *Podemos,* has 327,667 followers on Facebook, while Mariano Rajoy (PP) has 129,518 and Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) has 75,733. On Twitter, the number of followers of *Podemos* (585,000) more than doubles the other two parties PP (234,000) and PSOE (237,000). The profile of the leader of *Podemos* has 930,000 followers, Mariano Rajoy 783,000 and Pedro Sánchez 153,000. The case of *Barcelona en Comú* is also remarkable, although not comparable as it is a municipal organization. *Barcelona en Comú* has 24,539 followers in Facebook and its leader Ada Colau has 134,554 followers (more than the two leaders of the main Spanish parties). In Twitter, the organization has 216,000 followers (similar to the two main Spanish parties) and its leader has 216,000 followers. (Data updated the 11 May 2015.)

[10] http://www.btv.cat/btvnoticies/2015/05/07/colau-enquesta-cis-eleccions/ or http://www.lavanguardia.com/local/barcelona/20150503/54431004786/encuesta-feedback-elecciones-barcelona.html

probably be held in Spain in November (24% or 16.5% of the votes[11]), possibly breaking the traditional dominance of the two main parties in Catalonia (CiU and PSC) and in Spain (PP and PSOE).

Therefore, given the relevance of these two parties, we will assess their deliberative capacity until now in detail. We will first analyse *Podemos* and later *Barcelona En Comú*. We will describe, firstly, their internal organisation in order to determine the participation and deliberation bodies and structures. Second, we will overview the main offline and online participation and deliberation processes that have been developed until now. Third, a quantitative analysis of the deliberation in two selected processes and online platforms will be carried out by following the deliberative criteria presented in the previous section. In the case of *Podemos* the analysis will study the online debates held on *Plaza Podemos* about the two proposals that have achieved a higher number of votes needed to begin the process of being voted by all the party members in binding referendum. In the case of *Barcelona En Comú*, we will study all the comments and new proposals generated during the online process for preparing the electoral program for the local elections.

It is important to highlight that the different territorial reaching of both parties (Spanish in the case of *Podemos* and municipal in the case of *Barcelona En Comú*), have led to different participation and deliberation channels, both face to face and online, and, logically, different levels of participation. Both processes form part of different frameworks, so the objective of the analysis is not to compare them, but to measure the deliberative level reached on each of the debates.

5.- *Podemos'* Internal Organization

The party organizational documents[12], the Secretary-General and the executive board were elected and approved in a Constituent Assembly called *"Sí se puede"* (Yes it is possible), taking place online from September 15 to November 15, 2014, but a physical presentation of the different proposals and candidatures were made in Madrid at the indoor arena "Vista Alegre" on October the 19th.This organizational document contains the description of the boards and bodies that compose the party structure: the Citizens' Assembly, the Citizen's Council, the Secretary-General, the Coordination Council, the Committee for Democratic Guarantees and the Circles.

In the next page, there is a diagram that shows the internal organization of *Podemos*. In addition, each territorial structure of *Podemos* replicates the internal organization formula at the state level:

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[11] http://www.abc.es/espana/20150507/abci-barometro-elecciones-201505071118.html
[12] https://web-podemos.s3.amazonaws.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/documento_organizativo_alta_03.pdf

Figure 1. *Podemos'* Internal Organization.
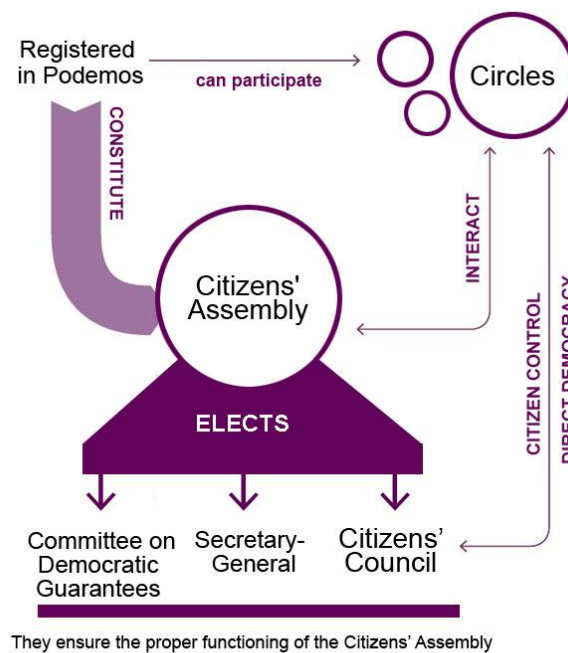
Source: Translation into English from the figure included in the organizational principles document[13].

The Citizens' Assembly is composed of all the people registered in *Podemos*. Anyone over 14 years can register in *Podemos* and obtain a permanent code for voting (following a simple process through the online platform of the party). The Citizens' Assembly is the highest decision-making body and exercises its functions continuously. All persons in *Podemos* are entitled to participate and vote at all times in the Citizens' Assembly. According to the organizational document, the Citizens' Assembly must pursue all available mechanisms to guarantee the exercise of the right to speak and vote of all registered, using all the face to face tools (circles, meeting spaces, voting points in squares and parks, etc.) and digital tools (*Plaza Podemos* based on Reddit, Loomio, Appgree, secure platforms for voting, streaming broadcasts deliberative spaces, etc.).

The Circles are supposed to be open spaces for participation and deliberation as broad and varied as possible so that the people can express their demands and contribute with their opinions and experiences, as well as propose solutions through different means such as: Internet and social networks, the Citizens' Assembly, individuals and groups concerning the social sphere (social movements, sports and cultural associations, etc.). They are meant "to become facilitators of the process of organization of civil society in our territories to provide

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[13] https://web-podemos.s3.amazonaws.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/documento_organizativo_alta_03.pdf (page 12).

collective answers to people's problems." [14] Born spontaneously using social networks for their organization, there are currently around 900 *Podemos'* Circles in Spain and also in other European and American countries. The circles can be territorial (districts, towns, cities, counties) or sectorial-thematic (health, education, labor, college, university, cultural, sporting, professional association or unemployed, etc). The constitution of the circles can be done in two ways: through a public call for an assembly (for the available means, either by creating a profile on Facebook or through posting or distributing paper posters), or after concluding a presentation event of the party.

The Citizen's Council, or Citizen's State Council, is the body of political leadership of *Podemos* with executive functions. The daily executive tasks will be developed within the framework of their respective responsibilities for the different areas of the Citizens' Council. It is the responsibility of the Secretary-General to ensure, in everyday functioning, the coordination between the various executive areas (a task for which it will rely on the Coordinating Council).

The Secretary-General is elected by the Citizens' Assembly (all the people registered in *Podemos*) through free and direct elections.

The Coordination Council is the team on which the Secretary-General is supported to do their job related to both public and internal coordination. It consist of a number between 10 and 15 persons elected by the Citizens' Council on the proposal of the Secretary-General. Members of the Coordination Council may be revoked by the Secretary-General, by an absolute majority of the Citizen Council or the Citizens' Assembly through a referendum.

The Committee for Democratic Guarantees is the body responsible for ensuring respect for the rights of those enrolled in *Podemos* and the fundamental organization's principles and rules.

All positions in *Podemos* can be subjected to revocatory processes. The number of supports required for revocation depends on the position to revoke. For example, to start a voting process intended to revoke the Secretary-General mandate it will be necessary to provide the support of 20% of those registered in *Podemos* or the 25% of validated Circles and only after half of the mandate has been accomplished[15].

6.- The map of online-offline deliberation and participation in *Podemos*

Podemos has conducted several participatory processes since its creation. The program for the European elections was made collaboratively through an online debate and individual contributions, the collective amendments from the Circles and an online referendum on the amendments. The primaries process for choosing the representatives for the European,

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[14] https://web-podemos.s3.amazonaws.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/GU%C3%8DA-PARA-C%C3%8DRCULOS.pdf

[15] The conditions for revocation of the different offices are set up in the party's organizational document, pages 19-21 and 43: https://web-podemos.s3.amazonaws.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/documento_organizativo_alta_03.pdf

Spanish, autonomic and municipal elections has been conducted online and the candidates used the social media of the party to expose their proposals. In the case of the Spanish, autonomic and municipal elections *Plaza Podemos'* users could make questions to the candidates in the forum called "Mass Conferences".

The Constituent Assembly (the first Citizens' Assembly of the party) was another important participatory event. It consisted of the presentation of the documents and candidatures through the *Plaza Podemos* digital platform based on Reddit[16] and different "Mass Conferences" held also in the platform, by which the candidates could answer to the questions posted by any user. Voting was made through the digital platform "Agora voting". The big meeting held in Madrid at *Vista Alegre*, gathered more than one thousand people, in which the different proposals and candidatures were presented. The ethical, political and organizational documents proposed by the circle "Sure We Can", constituted by the founders of the party, were finally approved and Pablo Iglesias was elected Secretary-General with 88.6% of the 107,000 votes registered, from a total of approximately 250,000 voters that were registered in the party. In total this amounts 37.9% of the registered members. During the Citizens' Assembly, 38.279 people voted for 5 resolutions, 112.070 people voted the ethical, political and organizational documents and 107.488 people voted for the election of the members of the State's direction boards.

The organizational document voted by a majority during the Citizens' Assembly, also contains the procedures of the different participatory processes. According to this document, any person or group of persons being or not in a Circle, can make proposals that could be turned into a political initiative if supported by the majority, allowing the flow through the party of a concrete political will. There must be debate and clear information on what is decided. There should be all the information necessary to review it avoiding biased or partial information. According to the party's documents: "The existence of a mechanism of direct democracy as this one, supposes one of the differences between a traditional party structure and a new way of doing politics, and embodies our commitment that power must be exercised by the people[17]".

In addition, the party has used different online participation tools such as Appgree and Loomio. Appgree allows participating in discussions with thousands of people at once, introducing answers to questions and, with Loomio, any user can create a discussion forum for each subject he/she wants to discuss and it is designed to reach the broadest possible consensus about any issue.

Nevertheless, *Podemos'* main online space for deliberation is undoubtedly, *Plaza Podemos* (*Podemos* Square). In the next section we will explain in detail how it works and the level of participation risen up.

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[16] http://www.reddit.com/r/podemos/
[17] https://web-podemos.s3.amazonaws.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/documento_organizativo_alta_03.pdf (pg. 42)

7.- The main online deliberative space: Plaza Podemos.

Plaza Podemos is an online community hosted by Reddit platform. According to the "Participation Team" that manages the platform, *Plaza Podemos* "aims to be a global meeting place where people can discuss, argue, learn, and ultimately find everyone that are part of this project plus all the people who want to come and meet us[18]".

Reddit can be defined as a "social news website" that filter, curate and aggregate online content. Reddit is made up of thousands of other active communities known as "subreddits", which are devoted to all sorts of different topics and are created and maintained by regular users in a way that builds up an online community. Members of the site finally can either post hyperlinks, pointing to all kind of content found in the World Wide Web such as articles, web pages or videos, or they can also post articles and comments generated by them. Members can also give positive or negative votes to the different posts or comments submitted by other users. Those submissions that receive most positive votes are promoted to a more visible area, going up to the top of the page. Structural features of Reddit theoretically promote a fundamental equality of content, regardless of the original author of a thread. It is the community of readers who judge if the content is valuable or not and have the possibility of interacting with it. From the interactional perspective, Reddit is a discussion board. Discussion consists of individual comment entries, which are organized in a tree-like arrangement of nested threads. It is important to highlight that all the information posted in Reddit is public, so it is not necessary to be registered for accessing to all the discussions hosted in it.

Plaza Podemos "subreddit" was created by Aritza, a sympathizer of *Podemos* from the city of Bilbao, in April 2014, long before the party considered this possibility itself. Aritza created this subreddit independently of the party. Following the success of the European Elections, the party began to seek new digital tools to connect with people, being then when they thought of Reddit and saw that someone had already created a page. After contacting with him, they proposed him that the page became the official 'subreddit' of the party and he became part of the managing team.

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[18] http://www.reddit.com/r/podemos/comments/2bdx8u/mensaje_del_equipo_de_moderaci%C3%B3n/

Figure 2. Screenshot from *Plaza Podemos* with the two most voted proposals on 21th April, 2015.
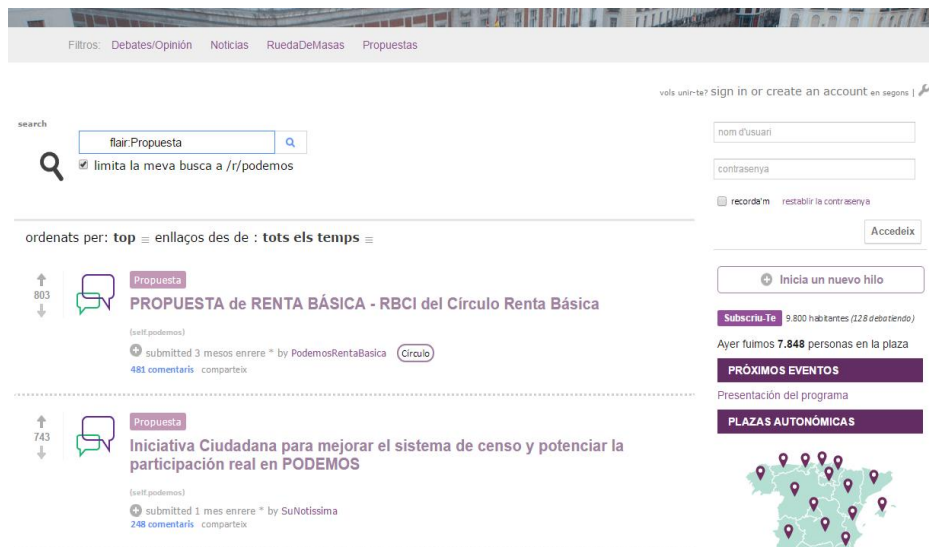
Plaza *Podemos* was officially opened on the 28th June 2014 with a "Mass Conference", in which the MEP Pablo Echenique answered questions from users. The thread reached 852 comments and marked the beginning of the discussions that have taken place since then in this platform. In an interview conducted to Miguel Ardanuy, responsible of the participation of Plaza *Podemos* he stated: "It is possible than at a first stage, the intention of Plaza *Podemos* won't be seen as a tool for making politics and more as a way to get organized or debate, but eventually why we cannot think that it is politics?. Beyond the classical conception of institutional power, the 15-M demonstrated that politics can be done in squares. Any space of encounter, dialogue and debate is inherently political. And that is what Plaza *Podemos* is proving to do " (El Asri, 2014).

According to Erik Martin, Reddit general manager: "Many politicians have used this tool earlier", but *Podemos* "is the first political party in the world that officially uses this platform to listen to citizens" (Moreno, 2014). Indeed, Reddit had been used on other occasions as a political communication tool, as in the case studied by Szabo (2013) in his PhD thesis consisting of "an evaluative study of Reddit's coverage of the 2012 US presidential election campaign", but it had never been used as a party's official online space before.

Plaza Podemos uses filters for classifying the different threads of the forum at the right hand side of the screen. Each of these filters corresponds to different categories of the debates. Some of them are general, as Videos, Proposals, Debates/opinions, News, Mass conferences, Ask *Podemos* or *Plaza Podemos* and others correspond to specific processes and vary over time, as the Citizens' Assembly and the Candidatures section. The nature of the debates of the forum varies according to each of the "sections". For example the section "Mass conference" is used for having a conversation with a member of the party or a candidate. On the other hand, the section "Videos" is used for posting videos of any kind that are considered interesting. The

characteristics of the deliberations held in each of the sections vary from one another, to the extent that we can affirm they host different types of deliberation.

From the general data collected from *Plaza Podemos* the month of the celebration of the Citizens' Assembly (November 2014), we can make the following general analysis of the level of participation. The table 2 below shows the participation in *Plaza Podemos* for the month of November 2014:

Table 2. Participation figures in *Plaza Podemos*, November 2014.

Filter / Categories	Threads	Comments	Average Comments per thread	Threads with comments over the average	Threads without comments	% Treads without comments
1. Videos	276	1.686	6	52	86	31%
2. Proposals	444	10.173	23	99	7	1,6%
3. Debates/ opinions	498	8.261	17	89	84	17%
4. News	471	4.707	10	90	94	20%
5. Mass conference	137	6.149	45	30	1	0,7%
6. Ask Podemos	99	1.473	15	19	13	13%
7. Podemos Square	76	1.591	21	18	12	15,8%
8. Citizens' Assembly	384	10.597	28	89	17	4,4%
9. Candidatures	335	8.679	26	77	15	4,5%
TOTAL Filtered Threads	2720	53.316	23	563	329	12%

Source: Own elaboration.

In November 2014, *Plaza Podemos* received 280,000 unique visitors and more than 2.4 million page views. The total threads of the different categories rose to 2,720 threads that, all together, had 53,316 comments[19]. There were considerable differences in the participation activity registered in each of the different categories.

A classification of the different categories can be done according both to their subject and their capacity in generating activity, as they are aligned in this regard. Thus, we would obtain the following classification:

A first group of categories would include the interventions of key members of the party and major political party groups and people or candidates within the party's internal organization processes, including the categories of Mass Conference, Citizens' Assembly and Candidatures. This category had a high level of participation and debate. It is important to note that some of the threads, as the Mass Conferences, and other threads proposed by the Participation Team of the party, are unique in that they remain "stuck" (stickied post) on the first page for users to constantly look and perform feedback, which affects increasing activity thereof. It seems to be

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[19] An analysis of the deliberative capacity of the thread with the majority of comments in the "Ask *Podemos*" section in November 2014 was carried out by E. Santamarina (2015).

confirmed, according to what is claimed by Kies (2010), that a greater external impact increases participation. In this sense, the category Mass Conference (that hosts the participation of key members and groups of the party and also the candidates) was the one that recorded the busiest activity, having the highest mean (45) of comments per thread and only 1 of the threads didn't produce any comment.

A second group focused on the relationship between the users and the party, which would include the categories of Proposals, Ask *Podemos*, *Plaza Podemos* and Debates / Opinions. This group presented a high average level of participation and debate, highlighting the category of Proposals with 444 threads, an average of 23 comments per thread and only 1.6% of threads without comments.

A third group of general categories, comprised of the sections of Videos and News, with considerably lower levels of participation and debate. 35% of threads of the Videos section and 20% of the threads of News section didn't generate any comment. In addition, the mean of the comments per thread were 6 and 10 respectively, the lowest in the different categories. In the News category, which had 471 threads, 7 threads included a much higher number than the rest (over 100) comments. These 7 threads contained all together 1,668 comments, supposing 35% of the comments. Given that political news of a very different nature (not only about *Podemos*) are included in this section, it is noteworthy that these 7 threads were all related to news closely linked to the party and its members, which suggests that the most active discussions in this section are those related to internal affairs.

In the next section we will measure the degree of deliberation of Plaza *Podemos* following the criteria explained in section 3.

8.- Assessment of the degree of deliberation in *Plaza Podemos*.

As was explained in section 3, the three dimensions required to assess the deliberative capacity of an online forum were the institutional dimension, the communicative dimension and the outcome or impact dimension. We first examined the <u>institutional dimension</u>, which refers to the main structural and technological conditions that help to build up a deliberative space deliberation. We have carefully studied *Plaza Podemos'* subreddit and most of the deliberative criteria are satisfied. The platform allows the <u>asynchronous participation</u> of the users. Conversation is open so users can contribute with their post at any moment (they can spend more time reflecting and justifying their contributions), and the user contents <u>appear immediately</u>**,** allowing <u>horizontal interaction</u> (between users) by either commenting on other user's threads and comments or voting on their contributions. There is a <u>moderation team</u> although they do not participate in every debate. Moderators normally delete comments that contain insults or disrespectful words, although sometimes they also facilitate the conversations by grouping proposals or posting comments related to the treated issue. The platform is subdivided in different categories and every debate refers to a specific subject, so the <u>large tasks were divided into smaller units,</u> which usually contains <u>relevant information</u> concerning documents, links to explanatory videos or articles.

On the other hand, <u>user identification</u> only requires a user name (or nickname) and a password: it is not necessary to introduce an email address or to be registered as a member of the party. In this sense, it should be noted that the registration process makes it very easy for any user to create multiple profiles that could "distort" the votes on a specific proposal or thread in order to give it greater visibility.

Regarding the third level, that refers to the outcome or impact dimension *Plaza Podemos* can be perceived as having a <u>high external impact</u>**,** as it regularly hosts important debates concerning the party organization and public policies, is meant to be a space for communicating with the party members and it allows the presentation and deliberation of users' proposals that could be selected to be voted on in a binding referendum. Taking this into account and in order to measure the deliberativeness at the communicative level, we have chosen the category of <u>Proposals</u> because it probably has the highest direct impact for the party's decision making process. The objective of the debates generated under this category is to find the necessary support for a proposal to be voted on as a <u>"citizen initiative"</u> in a binding referendum for the whole party, whose terms are specified in the party's organizational document as follows[20]:

1. Collection and selection of proposals: Anyone can put forward a proposal on *Plaza Podemos* (plaza.podemos.info), where users can debate and vote the initiative. Whenever a proposal reach a certain number of positive votes (equivalent to 0.2% of those registered with *Podemos*[21]), the proposal is included in the participation portal of the party (participa.podemos.info) with a link where the debate about the proposal previously held in *Plaza Podemos* can be checked.

2. Proposal support: Once on the participation portal, anyone registered with *Podemos* can support the proposal. When 2% of those registered give their support to the proposal, an email is sent to all those registered announcing it. If 10% of those registered with *Podemos* or 20% of the circles support the proposal within 3 months, it goes to the next phase.

3. Proposal Development: The organization sets up a working group with those who initially made the proposal, and drafts the final document within a maximum period of one month. In case of no agreement, both versions of the proposal, the initial one and the one developed by the organization, are presented.

4. Binding Referendum: The proposal is then published and put to the vote on the Agora Voting platform[22]. The decision will be made by simple majority and will be binding and may be amended only by the same mechanism.

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[20] Pages 42-43. https://web-podemos.s3.amazonaws.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/documento_organizativo_alta_03.pdf
[21] In April 2015 there were 368,418 people registered with the party and *Plaza Podemos* had 9,619 users.
[22] Agora Voting is an open source voting software that allows voters to cast a vote securely and reliably on the Internet. https://agoravoting.com/

At the date of the analysis (April 2015), six proposals had reached enough votes to be included in the participation portal[23], and were in the process of being voted on by those registered with *Podemos* in order to become the subject of a binding referendum. The deliberative analysis presented below focuses on the study of the debate generated by the two proposals that have previously achieved a higher number of votes on *Plaza Podemos*. The first of them, relating to the incorporation of a Universal Basic Income in the party's programme for the general election (with 795 votes) and the second one aimed at changing the system for voting proposals (with 737 votes).

8.1.- Basic Income proposal

The thread about the Unconditional Citizen's Basic Income was posted in *Plaza Podemos*[24] on 10 April by the Basic Income Circle. This circle is formed by a group of people including activists from the Promotion Committee of the People's Legislative Initiative on Basic Income, that have been demanding to include the Basic Income even before the party was even fund.

In January 2014 this Committee had presented the Initiative to the Spanish Congress, accepted in March 2014, and began the process for obtaining the 500,000 signatures in a period of nine months, required in order for the lower chamber to debate the proposal. After the period established, the legislative initiative for Basic Income ended without enough signatures (185,000) to go to the Parliament.

The aim of the proposal posted on *Plaza Podemos* was to hold a referendum seeking the inclusion of the Unconditional Citizen's Basic Income in the electoral programme of the party for the 2015 general elections according to a document prepared by the Basic Income Circle. The document presented was the result of the activity of working groups through assemblies and different online spaces, including social networks like Twitter and Facebook, before being posted for voting on *Plaza Podemos*, and highlights that in any case could be attributed to an official party policy. The proposal of the Basic Income, with 795 votes, generated a total of 470 posts in *Plaza Podemos*, divided into 146 initial threads and 324 comments.

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[23] https://participa.podemos.info/es/propuestas

[24]http://www.reddit.com/r/podemos/comments/2uz9mg/propuesta_de_renta_b%C3%A1sica_rbci_del_c%C3%ADr culo_renta/

Figure 3. A section of a thread from the Basic Income proposal on *Plaza Podemos*. 23 April 2015.
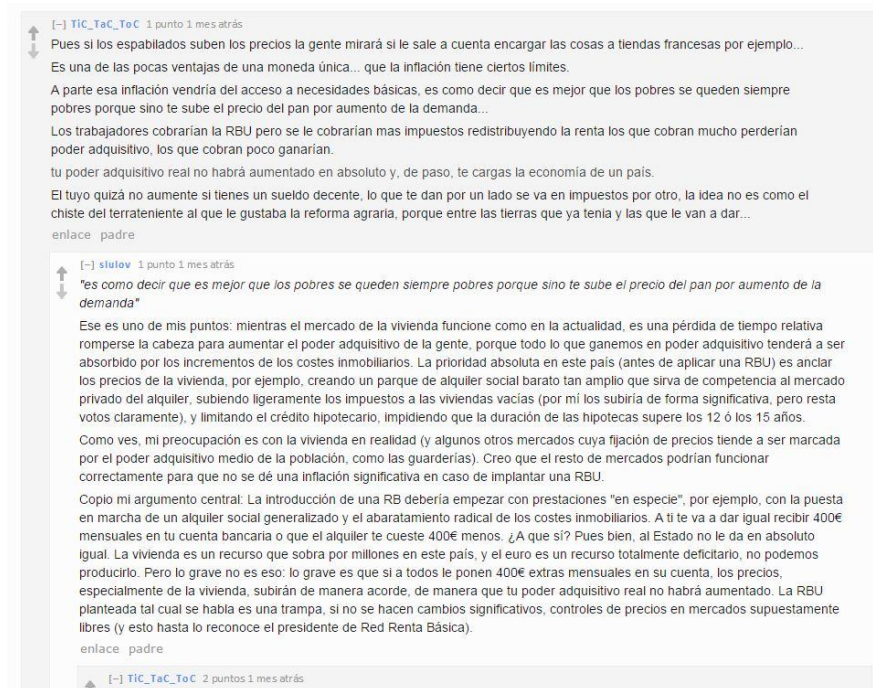
Let's proceed with the assessment of the deliberative capacity of the communication developed in the proposal.

Discourse Equality. There were four users that contributed with more than 20 posts, amounting to 119 posts in total, 25% of the total entries. Although this situation can be seen as discourse concentration, the high participation of these users is aligned to the conversations with a higher number of threads, in which users expressed their opposition to the proposal. These threads have generated rich debates among those against the proposal and other participants, leading to discussions with a high rational-thinking level and civic and constructive dialogues, trying to argue each of the points of views in detail under constant reflexivity. The talks represent a rich reflection regarding the different points of view about the problems of implementing the Unconditional Basic Income proposal.

Reciprocity. Of the 146 threads initiated, 62 of them (42%) generated at least one comment, and 27 (18%) generated three or more comments. On the other hand, and taking into account that 60 of the threads initiated referred exclusively to having voted on the proposal (sometimes using only a "+1" signal o "I have voted") or to the participation process, we can say out of the 86 threads that presented real considerations upon the issue at hand, 72% generated at least one comment, and 31% three or more comments.

Furthermore, nine on the threads had more than 10 comments and three of them had more than 30 comments. Of the latter, one thread generated 42 comments (13% of all comments of the debate) and engaged 13 users. This analysis reflects a high reciprocity level and

participation, where some of the participants demonstrate a broad knowledge on legal and tax issues, creating a rich debate based on examples, figures and information resources.

Justification**.** Of all the entries, 364 (77%) were justified with arguments. Most justifications - 172 (48%)- were internal (referring to personal experiences or arguments), and the remaining 144 (39%) presented arguments based on calculations and references to specific points of the proposal document. Moreover, 48 of the entries (13%) had at least one link to external sources and articles. The links included different YouTube videos talking about the Basic Income, such as the German-Swiss documentary "The Basic income, a cultural impulse[25]", which was "used as a basis for discussion in numerous groups during the time the Swiss petition for a Basic Income to be included in the Constitution was under way[26]".

Reflexivity. Six users have explicitly expressed a change or modification of their opinion about the Basic Income. One of the users expressed a change of opinion from the general conversation, deciding vote in favor of the proposal.

Civility**.** The debate had three comments that can be considered disrespectful but, in all cases, the comments did not flame the debate, leading instead to a justified response.

Although most of the interventions were in favor of the Universal Basic Income proposal included in the document, there were also users who were against the proposal, justifying their opinion and offering different reasons. Some of the arguments against the proposal included the idea that, due to the universal character of the Basic Income, many people would leave their jobs and learn to live on low incomes. Other users referred to a online survey[27] launched in Spain in which only 26.4% agreed the basic income to be truly universal, compared to 57% who considered it suitable only for those who do not have any income or are below the poverty line even if they had some kind of income. Some of the users believed that if the proposal was included as such in the party electoral programme, it would negatively affect the electoral results of the party, and it would "directly rule out a possible victory for *Podemos*".

On the other hand, some of the users supporting the proposal did so under the premise that it should only be part of a larger process, including it in the programme "as a referendum for all citizens to decide once we are in government and propitiate plural television debates where it should be explained in detail in order to assess its benefits and possible drawbacks", while others demanded a document explaining the proposal in a more understandable way for everybody.

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[25] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KngECyr5gg0

[26] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Basic_Income

[27] https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1z9fecHbnb0iOZqEZ8P-SnZckZKDUTrtseFm0Atr_udc/viewanalytics?usp=form_confirm

8.2. Proposal to improve the registration system

The proposal to improve the registration system and enhance real participation in *Podemos*[28], with 737 votes, was based on the assumption that "many people who are registered in *Podemos* do not want to participate anymore or they registered but never voted, and that that negatively affects the participation of the rest"[29]. To deal with this situation the proposal initiator suggested "the census should be updated creating one of inactive profiles, with all those enrolees who do not use their profile for four months (i.e. "who did not enter with their personal user name into the participation portal"). According to the proposal, the census of inactive profiles should not be taken into account when calculating the thresholds of the various internal processes of *Podemos*. The census would be divided between active and non-active profiles, with only the first used for calculating the thresholds necessary to implement processes such as Citizen Initiatives, revocation processes, or the call for consultations by the circles. Here we show a portion of one of the threads:

Figure 4. A section of a thread from the proposal on updating the registration system on *Plaza Podemos*. 23 April 2015.
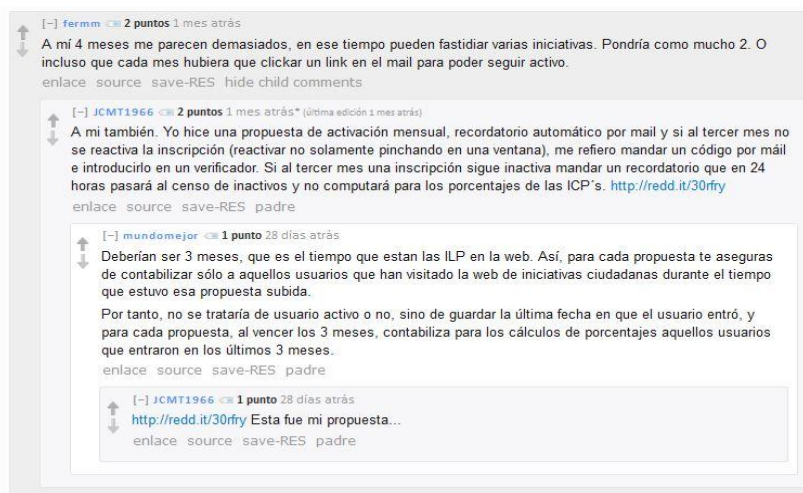
The proposal generated a total of 243 posts in *Plaza Podemos*, divided into 119 initial threads and 124 comments.

Discourse Equality. One of the users contributed to the debate with 49 entries (nine threads and 39 comments), representing 20% of total entries. Most of these entries consisted of encouraging other users to vote in favour of the proposal or announcing the number of votes received. The second user with more comments, 15 posts (6% of total) was the author of the proposal, which seems logical since he answered some questions related to it made by others users.

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[28] http://www.reddit.com/r/podemos/comments/31rg40/iniciativa_ciudadana_para_mejorar_el_sistema_de/
[29] As we explained previously, for a proposal to be voted on in binding referendum by all the registered members of the party, it has to pass high thresholds of support.

Reciprocity. 49 threads (41%) generated at least one comment and 29 of them (24% of the total threads) led to three or more comments. So we can consider there was a considerable reciprocity level.

Justification. The discussion had a high justification level. Of all the entries, 145 (60%) were performed justifiably. The justifications were mostly internal -101 (70%)-, referring to personal experiences; the remaining 33 (23%) referred to external facts and 11 of them (7%) also had a link to different external documents or articles.

Reflexivity. A user expressed a change of opinion on the proposal from the general conversation, deciding to vote in favour of it.

Civility. The debate had no disrespectful comment. As discussed for the previous thread, on those occasions when there was disagreement with the proposal users showed their disapproval respecting the position of the other participants.

The fact that the user who made the proposal did had not previously participated on *Plaza Podemos* generated suspicion among some users, but they later accepted his justification because he takes part in other areas of the party.

Some of the users who did not agree with the proposal suggested other ways to improve participation, giving rise to a rich debate on the channels of participation laid down by the party and how to improve them. Another sub-debate focused on the best way to keep count of those registered in the party, putting into question the party's current registration process. Some users suggested it should be mandatory to send a copy of the Spanish national identity document in order to register, and other users proposed to include a minimum monthly fee (of 1€) as they think the current process is too easy for considering a person to be part of *Podemos*.

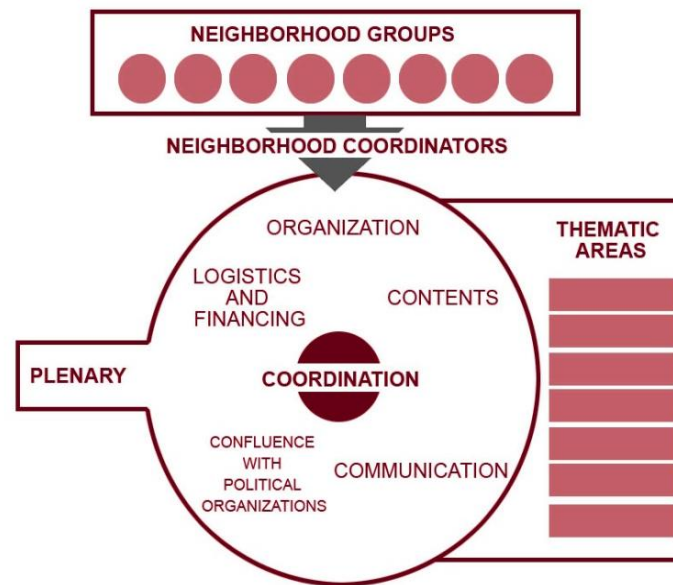**9.- *Barcelona en Comú*'s Internal Organization**

The internal organization of *Barcelona en Comú* began with several technical commissions and thematic areas and with three spokespersons. Little by little open groups were created at each Barcelona's neighborhoods or districts in collaboration with civic associations and local organizations. The internal structure was basically built up by the earliest commissions, nieghborhood groups and founders who wrote up a proposal of internal organization that is currently being applied. However the aim is to vary and adapt the structure to the changes and necessities facing the party, and the proposals and suggestions from the people involved in the project[30]. Maybe for that reason, the organizational document is a proposal and has not been subjected to voting. This structure is shown in the following diagram:

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[30] https://guanyembarcelona.cat/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/propuesta_organizativa_cast.pdf

Figure 5. *Barcelona en Comú*'s Internal Organization.

Source: Own elaboration based on the organizational document[31].

Barcelona en Comú Neighborhood groups. They are neighborhood or district dimension spaces in which everybody can participate and assist to the meetings proposed. These groups are organized as open and self-managed assemblies, but their functions and decision-making ability are bounded: they must meet the reality and the social fabric of the territory in which they are framed.

Neighborhood Coordinators. This team consists of two people from each *Barcelona en Comú* Neighborhood Group. They are spaces for the facilitation, support and coordination of *Barcelona en Comú* Neighborhood Groups. They are supposed to be proactive and brainstorming spaces for the development of diagnosis and program proposals focused on the problems of the neighborhoods. They are the link between the districts and the Plenary, through which diagnosis, proposals and consultations circulate.

Technical Commissions. They are workspaces in which the specific tasks essential to the daily functioning of *Barcelona en Comú* are made. Each committee defines the number of their members, their profile and internal organization (subcommittees, roles, working groups...).

Thematic Areas or Axes. They are meeting and participation spaces for entities and individuals linked to different thematic areas. In that sense, they are not *Barcelona en Comú* exclusive spaces, but their main role is to propose and validate the contents of *Barcelona en Comú*, the different issues that are important for Barcelona and to identify proposals for a future

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[31] Ibidem, page 2.

program. There are currently the following areas: health, education, employment, precariousness, inequality and poverty, the city's economy and environment, housing and urban development, migration, gender and sexual diversity, information society, culture, local governance, transparency and participation, security and civil rights.

General Coordination Group. It is the executive board. It oversees the development of the party (strategy, roadmap, overall schedule, analysis of current situation, etc.) and coordinates the different aspects of the organizational structure. It consists of three spokesperson and their support team, two people from each of the technical commissions, and other people who are part of the working groups (Technical Commissions or Thematic Areas) and occasionally by people who are invited by the Coordination Group itself.

The Plenary is the space of aggregation for making the important decisions of *Barcelona en Comú*, especially with regard to strategic decisions and internal organization. It is open to all members of the Technical Commissions and not the Thematic Areas, the Neighborhood Coordination Spaces, the General Coordination Group, the first signatories of the manifesto[32], and those who have been explicitly proposed by the whole General Coordination Group.

10.- The map of online-offline deliberation and participation in *Barcelona en Comú*.

The organization has held three collaborative and participatory online processes since its creation until May 2015, all of them through DemocracyOS free software tool: the elaboration of the party's ethical code, the municipal program and a set of citizens' demands for each district and neighborhood.

1) The elaboration of the party's ethical code. The process around an ethical code (understood as a contract with the citizenship) started with a document drafted collaboratively with the different political forces that form the confluence and was later presented in a workshop-conference. During the conference, a participatory process was launched through the DemocracyOS tool, generating a debate between what was being said in the meeting and the process being held on the network. The summary of these contributions[33] was finally validated by about 1,000 people.

2) The municipal program. For the elaboration of the municipal program, the organization worked for around 5 months in 13 thematic groups through physical meetings and working sessions. The documents that resulted from these working groups were submitted to a digital participation process open to all citizens. As a result, a "citizen mandate" was obtained. The result was 40 priority measures divided into 4 blocks, which constitute the core of *Barcelona en Comú*'s program. In the next section we will analyse the level of deliberation of this process.

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[32] https://guanyembarcelona.cat/es/firma/
[33] http://confluenciacodietic.cat/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/codi-etic-oct-cast-final1.pdf

3) <u>A set of citizens' demands for each district.</u> In parallel to the elaboration of the electoral program for the local elections, there were a process to collect demands, diagnosis and proposals for each of the districts and neighborhoods. This process, also held through DemocracyOS, consisted in different online spaces divided by neighborhoods where people raised and elaborated proposals that will be included in the future municipal action program and district action program, if the party finally gets electoral representation.

11.- Assessment of the degree of deliberation in the preparation of the municipal programme of *Barcelona En Comú*

The online participation process for the preparation of *Barcelona En Comú* municipal programme was split in two phases. The first phase consisted of the contributions to the document of urgent measures (previously drafted by the thematic areas of the organization) through the DemocracyOS online tool, where proposals were divided into 4 blocks. People were able to develop new proposals and improve the ones included in the initial document. The second phase consisted of the prioritization of the proposals. The proposals arising from the first phase were included in the Agora Voting tool so they could be prioritized by the citizens through voting.

The online development of the local electoral programme of *Barcelona En Comú*, made through the DemocracyOS tool, aimed to evaluate and debate a document or a given proposal. With this online tool, users can amend the original text and also give new proposals that can be voted on and receive comments from the rest of the community. In the next page there is an image of the DemocracyOS tool for *Barcelona En Comú*.

Figure 6. Screenshot from *Barcelona En Comú*'s online space for the preparation of the electoral program, 20 April 2015.

The tool was divided in two areas: The first one (amendments area) allows annotations to be made to the document previously developed in order to include specific improvements, by clicking on area on the right side of each of the paragraphs. In the second one, or new proposals area, placed at the bottom of the document, participants could make new proposals to be included in the programme.

Following the framework established in section 3, we have analysed the deliberative capacity of this process for the final configuration of the electoral program, taking place through DemocracyOS. As we have explained in section 3, there are three dimensions required to assess the deliberative capacity of an online forum: the institutional dimension, the communicative dimension and the outcome or impact dimension.

We first examined the institutional dimension, invloving the structural and technological conditions enabling deliberation. We can affirm that the DemocracyOS platform, as in the case of Reddit, used by *Podemos*, satisfies the conditions considered since it allows the asynchronous participation of the users, the immediate appearance of the users' comments and provides horizontal interaction by commenting on other users' threads and comments or voting on their contributions. The process had moderators who facilitated the discussions by

placing the proposals or improvements in the appropriate sections, grouping together similar proposals and eliminating the comments that were repeated, offensive or inappropriate. The documents on the platform included highly <u>relevant information</u> as they consisted of all the proposals for the electoral programme. The activity was subdivided into four thematic blocks (which will be explained later) so the <u>large tasks were subdivided into smaller units</u>. The <u>users' identification</u> was made using the name and surname of the participants, facilitating the quality of the debate.

Regarding the third dimension to test the deliberative capacity of an online forum, the process and space examined has a an important <u>external impact</u> since it is aimed at the final definition of the electoral program**.** That is, the proposals of the party and the contributions made through the platform were aimed to be included (after being voted on) in the party's electoral programme.

The development of the electoral programme began with 44 priority actions in four blocks (made by commissions and thematic groups of the organization) hosted in the tool. The aim of the process (which was open for 12 days) was to amend the 44 priority actions included in four documents and to generate 16 new proposals from the citizenship. With the 16 most voted city proposals, there were 60 final proposals, which were prioritized by the Agora Voting tool at a later stage. Users could then register and vote for the final programme. To support the process, several points in the city were established where the voting took place via laptops and tablets. Below, there is a flow chart of the process:

Figure 7. Phases and results of the online process for the deliberation and voting of *Barcelona en Comú*'s municipal electoral programme.
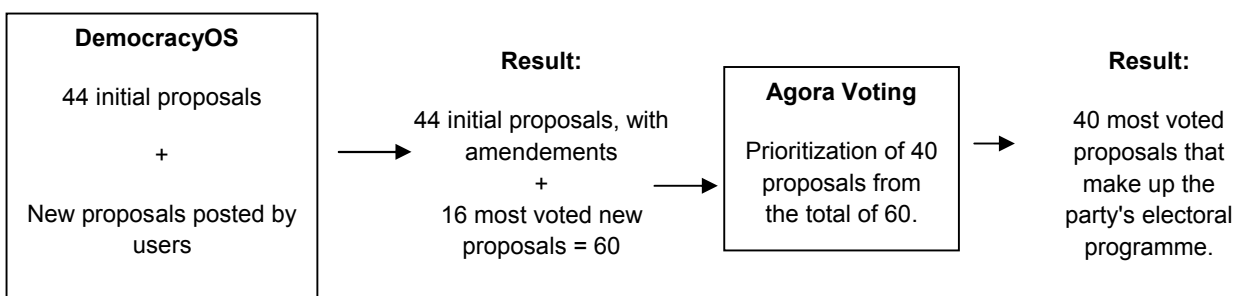
Source: Own elaboration.

The proposals were divided into four thematic blocks: (1) "Social emergency: for a Barcelona that addresses the social emergency and ensures a minimum standard of living for all"; (2) "Structural changes: for a fairer Barcelona, which generates decent employment and defends what is public and common"; (3) "A more human Barcelona: for a more human Barcelona, which takes care of its people and the environment"; (4) "Let's open the institutions: A Barcelona that returns power and the capacity to decide to the people".

The online process involved a total of 181 people. 120 were men (77%) and 60 women (33%)[34]. A total of 563 entries were generated, divided into 392 initial threads and 171 comments.

We next proceed to assess the application of the deliberative criteria characterizing the communication on this online space:

Discourse Equality. The participation of users in the debate was equally distributed, although three of them contributed with a total of 59 post, representing 10% of total entries.

Reciprocity. Of the 392 threads initiated in total (both in the amendment area and the new proposals area), 92 of them (23%) generated at least one comment, though only 45 threads (11%) generated three or more comments. The part related to the amendment of documents generated a total of 50 threads and 73 comments (nearly 1.5 comments per thread) concerning the realization, enrichment and improvement in the drafting of the different proposals. The reason why the amendments area generated a high number of comments regarding the initial threads is that this activity is basically focused on the proposal presented and not so much on the threads in particular. It is important to underline that none of the comments made showed disagreement with any of the parts of the proposals. In the section reserved for the new proposals, 342 new proposals were made, yielding 98 comments. 63 proposals (18%) generated at least one comment, most of them oriented to the extension or detail of the proposal. In this section, and from the four blocks that divide the programme, the third section "For a more human Barcelona" generated most activity, with a total of 125 threads, of which 33 (26%) started at least one comment, resulting in a total of 60 comments.

Justification. Within the area of new proposals, there were a total of the 440 proposals and comments associated with them, 288 (65%) were supported with arguments or at least mentioned the problem to be improved, so it can be considered that the process had a high justification level. Most of these justifications -202 (70%)- were supported with personal or internal arguments, although they were also external justifications, referred repeatedly to examples or cases concerning the city and its institutions -86 (30%)-, some of them (16%) with external links to documents or websites of different organizations. Of the 98 comments addressed to the new proposals, 89 of them (91%) were aimed at improving, extending or specifying the proposals generated by users, so we can say that the intention of the participants was mostly focused on contributing constructively to the development of the programme.

Civility. The process took place with total respect for the other participants, with a complete absence of incivility or insults.

Reflexivity. The extent to which participants presented comments opposed to the proposals made by other users was very limited and did not generated debates that led to a change of opinion, so we can affirm there was a low level of reflexivity. In those cases (only 4 of the entries) in which there have been opposing views (related to legalizing prostitution, a free

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[34] The gender of one of the users could not be determined since he/she took part on behalf of a neighborhood group.

metro, the use of weapons by the local police of the city or the use of different apps for participation), participants expressed their point of view vigorously and with reasons, but failed to start a rich debate. On the other hand, some of the proposals (albeit only four in total) received negative votes, which can also be considered as a way of showing disagreement.

In conclusion, we can argue that the process was oriented to improving the already determined party proposals and generating new proposals from individual participation of interested people. The arguments were sound and effectively improved the quality of the proposals in general. The citizens taking part showed quite a civil participatory behavior at all times. However, the levels of reciprocity and reflexivity were very low, since there were not enough conversations between participants oriented to discuss the different proposals from different viewpoints, probably because the bulk of the debate had been held in previous meetings and workshops in person where the 44 initial proposals or priorities were established.

12.- Discussion and conclusions

The participatory and deliberative processes from both parties studied in the current paper show that it is possible to set up party online spaces that are open, inclusive, on a mass scale and with a relevant impact on party decision-making. The institutional design of both online spaces (*Plaza Podemos* based on Reditt and the preparation of the *Barcelona en Comú*'s municipal programme based on DemocracyOS) fulfils well the structural and technical criteria for fostering deliberation, compiled by Kies (2010) and Friess & Eilders (2014), which are: inclusion, asynchronous communication, content visibility, moderation, division of labour into smaller units, relevant information and horizontal interaction. Regarding the criteria of identification, on the *Barcelona en Comú's* online space citizens must identify themselves with name and surname, which is considered to ensure quality of the deliberation and more civility, but in the case of *Plaza Podemos*, it is possible to enter only with a nickname.

The inclusiveness or inclusion of these two spaces is very high at the technical level since everybody can participate with only a full name or a nickname, so anyone could participate either actively o passively. However, it seems that gender is not evenly distributed, with much more frequent participation by men, as the count of men and women on the *Barcelona En Comú* online space shows. The role of the moderators in the threads and proposals was not intrusive and they took part on very few occasions. Moderation, registration and identification are no barrier on these two spaces to promoting inclusive participation (Kies, 2010).

In any case, both parties are trying to maintain core principles very present in the 15-M Movement: inclusiveness, openness and wide participation of the citizenry. As we have explained, anybody can easily register online or offline[35] as a member of the party and participate in important decisions, such as primaries or the content of the electoral programme. In addition, the parties are formed at their base by circles or neighbourhood

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[35] Offline registration is not presently possible in the case of *Podemos*, which can undermine the ideal of inclusiveness.

groups, and thematic commissions and platforms, where anybody can have a voice and vote, whether a registered member or not. With respect to the participation principle, three aspects deserve attention: the circles, groups and commissions at the base work and make decisions autonomously; a general assembly formed by the party members[36] makes the most important decisions (i.e. the statutes); there are plans for consultation (i.e. referendum) on and channelling of the proposals of any individual member, and, in general, for important decisions affecting the party (i.e. electoral agreements, public policies and political positioning).

In terms of the external impact and influence of the two online spaces analyzed, we can conclude that it is very high since on both spaces the proposals with more votes would be accepted by the party as part of the programme. That is, probably, a very significant incentive to participate and deliberate (Kies, 2010).

With relation to the deliberative quality of the communication and discourse on *Plaza Podemos* and *Barcelona En Comú's* platform for the preparation of the municipal programme, we have carefully examined the content of the threads from the proposals and amendments but we have not carried out surveys or in-depth interviews with the participants in order to score better communicative criteria such as reflexivity, plurality or sincerity (see Table 1). Nevertheless, we think that the content analysis carried out is sufficient to determine a clear picture of the level of accomplishment of the majority of the criteria[37].

With regard to *Plaza Podemos*, the examination of the two most important proposals discussed shows a high level of discourse equality, reciprocity, justification and civility. Although there are repeated users that concentrate around 1/4 of the threads and comments, this is due to their being the initiators of the threads and their corresponding explanations and answers to other users. Most of the conversations showed multiple sources of information based on different points of view. Moreover, possible solutions and alternatives to the problems and policies presented were discussed. Despite these accomplishments, the level of reflexivity is very low, as very few users expressed a change of opinion or position. Also, the content of many comments refers to the direction of their vote or to encourage other people to vote but not so much to debate.

In the case of *Barcelona in Comú*'s DemocracyOS platform, and taking into account that the objectives were to make amendments and new proposals to the electoral programme, citizens have, in most cases, limited themselves to presenting proposals or corrections without questioning the other participants or stimulating the debate between them. The process has generated a more "aggregative" or "competitive" activity, based on making proposals that were voted for, rather than questioning or rationally improving them through deliberation. There is also a notable absence of conflict, which often acts as a trigger for debate (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). All that situation has produced a low level of reciprocity and reflexivity, although justification and civility were very high. In addition, in terms of the design features, two dimensions could have undermined the level of deliberation: first, although the proposals were divided into blocks, the topics were probably too broad and, second, the online

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[36] *Barcelona En Comú's* main body is the Plenary, which meets every 15 days and is formed by many delegates but not by all the members.

[37] The criterion of sincerity has not been studied since is very complex to measure (see Table 1).

discussion was open for only 12 days, which is a limited time for broad discussions. Notwithstanding, we should consider that the main lines and initial proposals for the municipal programme had already been discussed by thematic groups, neighborhood groups and in different workshops, and this online discussion space was open to other individual proposals and encouraged an open deliberation with the citizenry. All the online processes conducted to date by *Barcelona En Comú* have always consisted of a combination of offline and online participation that must be considered as complementary.

The online processes analyzed were designed to be both participatory and deliberative spaces. Therefore, they are a mixture of deliberation of different proposals which are being voted on at the same time. This "procedural duality" sometimes seems to hinder or complicate the process that often tends to increase user contributions to one of the two practices (purely deliberative or participatory). For example, in the case of *Plaza Podemos*, a high number of participants have made contributions only to communicate that they had voted in favour of the proposal or to encourage others to vote for it without providing any justification, and without adding therefore to the deliberative process. In fact, once the process achieved the necessary votes for the proposal to go on to the next phase, participation was drastically reduced and finally did not generate any more contributions, even when the thread remained open. Paradoxically, the process sometimes seems to reflect that it is precisely the aim of achieving the necessary number of votes that has encouraged the expression of arguments for and against the proposal. In the case of *Barcelona En Comú*, posts did not show so much competition for votes, but the proposals and amendments were not extensively discussed, although promoters gave sufficient justifications and reasoning. It seems that a mixed design of an online space could lean towards the competitive side of participation and, therefore, maybe it would be a better idea to separate the processes step by step. That is usually done in large participatory and deliberative processes that follow a sequential path without mixing the two practices as Fishkin (2011) and Elster (2013) have proposed for the participation and deliberation of constitutional reforms and public policies (Balcells & Padró-Solanet, 2015).

Fishkin (2011: 248) warns about the so-called democratic trilemma if the objective is to build up a real democratic organization or process. The democratic trilemma states that it is difficult to realize at the same time the three principles internal to the design of democratic institutions at a mass-level; these are political equality, mass participation and deliberation. Efforts to realize any two will make the third difficult and the new organization has to take this difficult trade-off into account. As we have seen, both online platforms have incurred problems over carrying out voting and deliberation at the same time, but also to accomplish important aspects of equality, such similar proportions of men and women taking part or plurality of opinions and ideologies. The fact that discussions are conducted within a space promoted by a particular party, which assumes a particular ideology, can hinder the diversity of interventions, which could undermine plurality in the debate (Hendriks, Dryzek & Hunold, 2007).

These new parties are starting to face some dilemmas and problems in order to find a balance between widespread participation and efficacy in electoral times, since in 2015 there are upcoming local and general elections and also elections to the majority of the Autonomous Communities. *Podemos* has suffered different problems in relation with the easy but not very safe online registration system, the mistakes in the list of registered members and the

intrusion of organized rightwing voters into some primaries (Alvarez, 2015; Gil, 2015). In addition, some active members coming from the 15-M Movement are already questioning the right to vote on internal initiatives of registered but passive members. As we have studied, the proposal to restrict the right to vote for a Citizen Initiative in *Podemos* is currently the second most supported one. There are also complaints about the lack of control of the proliferation all around the Spanish territory of the self-organized circles that can be in contradiction with the aims of the party. Moreover, opposing groups and factions are emerging and the Secretary-General, Pablo Iglesias, and the executive board (Citizens' Council) have been heavily criticized for promoting "official" candidacies for local and regional primaries and changing some of the electoral rules without consultation (Gil, 2015).

All these problems pinpoint to the typical tension in a new party coming from a popular movement between openness and closeness (Goldstone, 2003; Jiménez, 2005). Openness for having a wide popular base, bringing together the previously unheard anti-austerity and anti-corruption claims, and freely discussing and voting on the issues of common concern, but enough closeness and hierarchy to have an efficient structure, quick decision-making and voting, and rewards for the most active members. This is an explicit concern, for example, of *Barcelona En Comú*, when in the organizational document clearly states that they want to find a balance between horizontality and efficacy[38]. In addition, the tight electoral agenda has led to processes that lasted for a short time and did not provide the required tranquility for deliberation.

Both parties acknowledge that the internal deliberative and participatory processes deployed imply a high experimentation with new democratic practices that should provide lessons on how to remove barriers and foster dialogue between citizens and political institutions and how to induce a "participatory literacy" among citizens[39]. The organizational structure of both parties will also be subjected to future changes and adjustments, as they recognized in their internal documents[40].

Notwithstanding all the improvements needed, the functioning and results of the online platforms studied here demonstrate that self-managed deliberation between citizens is possible and that greater online citizen participation and deliberation seem possible with a properly planned design. The technology is available and there are citizens willing to get involved, but new parties should carefully design these processes in order to engage a greater plurality of people and find a balance between the different logics of voting and deliberation. As Steiner asserts (2012: 3), following Jane Mansbridge, the deliberative model of democracy is usually constructed as a regulative ideal, which "is unachievable in its full state but remains an ideal to which, all else equal, a practice should be judged as approaching more or less closely.... a standard with which we can compare ourselves, judging ourselves and thereby improving ourselves, even though we can never reach the standard".

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[38] https://guanyembarcelona.cat/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/propuesta_organizativa_cast.pdf (Page 1).
[39] http://teknosocial.drupalgardens.com/content/alfabetizaci%C3%B3n-participativa-en-barcelona
[40] https://guanyembarcelona.cat/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/propuesta_organizativa_cast.pdf
https://web-podemos.s3.amazonaws.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/documento_organizativo_alta_03.pdf

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