2. The Deliberative Systems Approach

The deliberative systems approach provides the theoretical foundation of my observations regarding digital communication processes. I will therefore begin by presenting this approach, describing its central conceptions and ideas. Following this, I will introduce some reconceptualisations that are necessary for the analyses that I provide later in this book.

In the tradition of deliberative democratic theory, the systemic approach marked the latest theoretical turn, combining many of the ideas that had been formulated by the previous "generations". Four of these generations can be distinguished.[1] Scholars from each generation have focussed on different aspects of the theory and its practical implementation in real world democracies. However, all of their considerations start from the premise that democratic decisions need to be deliberative in order to be legitimate. In other words, it is presumed that these must be decisions that "'everyone could accept' or at least 'not reasonably reject'" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 25). According to this reasoning, the legitimacy of a decision depends on two aspects. Firstly, "decisions are seen as legitimate to the degree the individuals subject to them (or their representatives) have the right, capacity, or opportunity to participate in deliberation about their content" (Dryzek 2007: 242).[2] Secondly, deliberation must meet certain standards, so that the participants "as a result grant their reflective assent

1 Literature on the distinctions between these generations varies. While Mansbridge et al. (2012) identify three different phases, both Elstub (2010) and Elstub et al. (2016) describe four generations. I follow the latter description, since it is considerably more detailed and since the former can be included within it. A rather similar approach to the distinguishing different branches of deliberative democratic theory has been made by Chambers (2003), who, however, identifies five different research areas, three of which parallel Elstub et al.' first three "generations".

2 However, if I wanted to argue normatively, I would argue that the individuals should have the right, capacity *and* opportunity to participate.

to the outcome" (ibid. 2007: 242). The more ideal the deliberation – that is, the higher the deliberative quality – the more legitimate its outcome. Yet, deliberative democratic theory certainly has developed since its beginnings in the early 1990s. Across the generations, different conceptualisations of deliberative quality, of its preconditions, realisation and evaluation, have been developed.

The first generation drafted normative demands for deliberative quality in an almost entirely theoretical fashion. Scholars such as Haberman (1996), Cohen (1997) and Gutmann and Thompson (1997) emphasised the importance of deliberative procedures and laid out normative standards that obviously cannot be fully realised but should be aimed at in political practice (cf. Mansbridge et al. 2012: 25). Habermas's *Between Facts and Norms* (1996) played a prominent role in initiating this school of thought (cf. Chambers 2003: 309–310; Elstub et al. 2016: 141). He defined several standards for democratic deliberation: it must be a communication process that is characterised by the argumentative exchange of information and reasons between the parties, by inclusivity for all potentially affected persons, by publicity of discourse, by the absence of external constraints, by the absence of internal constraints (such as hierarchies or hegemonies), by openness to all topics amenable to public interest, by the aim of all deliberators at consensus (or at least compromise) and by the willingness of all deliberators to change their pre-deliberative views (cf. Habermas 1996: 305–306). These principles largely concur with what Cohen (1997) and Gutmann and Thompson (1997) regard as deliberation. The more these principles apply to a specific deliberative process, the better the deliberative qualities of that process. Moreover, Habermas laid the foundations for the systemic approach by describing how societal discourse is ordered as a network. He envisaged deliberative processes in terms of concentric circles. The best arguments would be "sluiced" throughout the system, from the outermost periphery to the centre. Thus, the most reasonable arguments emerging from deliberations among affected individuals, intellectuals and others in civil society would be transmitted, through deliberative sites that are located within increasing proximity to the political centre, into the political centre itself (which consists of the executive, judicative and legislative bodies) (cf. Habermas 1996: 381). This means that the extent to which communication processes classify as deliberation – in other words, the nature of deliberative quality – is not only defined by the degree of adherence to deliberative principles. It is also delineated by how society is ordered at the macro level and by the quality of the connections throughout society.

The second generation softened the theoretical demands formulated by first-generation scholars and took them closer to the realities of existing democracies. Scholars such as Bohman (1998), Dryzek (2000), Deveaux (2003) and Young (1996) acknowledged the existence of cultural pluralism and criticised previous deliberative theory for having been "too vague and abstract about the real-world barriers to authentic deliberation" (Chambers 2003: 322). In consequence, they opened the field to "'real-world' conflicts and dilemmas" (Elstub et al. 2016: 142) such as "potential inequalities within discursive processes" (ibid.), the "possibility of instrumentalization or strategic use of deliberation by powerful actors" (ibid.) and the systemic exclusion of permanent minorities and their perspectives (cf. ibid.: 293–294).[3] Second-generation scholars therefore added equality and diversity to the list of desirable deliberative qualities. Moreover, they softened the demand for consensus[4] and argued that, to enable greater inclusivity, deliberation should include – in addition to rational argumentation – storytelling, rhetoric and greetings as legitimate forms of communication (cf. Young 1996). Decisions resulting from deliberation are legitimate as long as they are made by a majority of participants and are "reached through compromise under deliberative conditions" (Elstub 2010: 296).

The third generation[5] marked the empirical turn of deliberative democratic theory. Authors such as Ackerman and Fishkin (2002), Fung (2003), Fung and Wright (2003), Gastil and Levine (2005), Elstub (2014) and Grönlund et al. (2014) focussed on the micro-level implementation of deliberative processes in real-world democracies via democratic innovations like mini-publics. On the one hand, these scholars focussed on deliberative theory's feasibility and on how to practically apply it to actually existing democratic processes (cf. Mansbridge et al. 2012: 25); on the other hand, they analysed these designed deliberative sites empirically in order to ascertain the conditions and design choices that enhance deliberative quality (cf. ibid.). Accordingly, they "sought […] suitable

3 By thus acknowledging the cultural pluralism of real-world democracies, scholars made the idea of deliberation more compatible with adjacent theoretical fields, such as postmodern difference theory and diversity theory (cf. Chambers 2003: 320; Elstub et al. 2016: 141–142).

4 They turned it into an appeal for "plural agreement" (Bohmann 2000) and "deliberative disagreement" (Gutmann/Thompson 1997), which emerge "if citizens are willing to accept the resulting majority decisions, or if these decisions are at least sufficiently acceptable that citizens continue to participate in deliberation" (Elstub 2010: 294).

5 For Mansbridge et al. (2012), this is the second phase of deliberative democratic theory.

methods" – that is, methods that would "enabl[e] the systematic and close investigation of deliberative processes" and that would "determine the required parameters for institutional design" (Elstub et al. 2016: 142).[6] These parameters were largely based on first-generation thoughts (cf. ibid.; Fishkin 2009: 33–34; Steenbergen et al. 2003: 27–30). Newer projects additionally considered the embeddedness of the analysed site in the discourse – by observing, for instance, the site's impact on public discourse and political outcomes (cf. Gastil/Broghammer 2021: 11) – and thereby took a step towards a more systemic understanding. Likewise, on the basis of their site analyses, third-generation projects often considered how democratic innovations must be organised and structured in order to produce high deliberative quality.

The fourth generation of deliberative democratic theory turned full circle. The ideas produced by the first three generations were considered, criticised, taken up and modified by the fourth generation of deliberative democratic theory (cf. Elstub et al. 2016: 143–144). Against this backdrop, fourth-generation scholars developed a macro-approach to deliberation: the deliberative systems approach. The term "deliberative system" was first coined by Jane Mansbridge (1999).[7] In 2012, John Parkinson and Mansbridge presented the first collection of papers on "deliberative systems" (cf. Kuyper 2020: 17; Owen/Smith 2015: 214–215). The introduction[8] to this collection is still the most comprehensive and most referred-to text on the approach, and it has even been called the "manifesto for the systemic turn" (Owen/Smith 2015: 213).

In many regards, the systems approach has returned to first-generation ideas – especially those of Habermas (cf. Mansbridge 1999).[9] Most importantly, it has gone back to acknowledging the importance of different sites and the connections between them, which had first been done by Habermas (1996). However, systems approach scholars have criticised the idea of hierarchically ordered deliberative sites that was implied by Habermas's concentric circles and have challenged the high profile given to democratic institutions (cf. Gaus

6 Major projects were the "deliberative opinion polls" conducted by Fishkin (2009) and the Discourse Quality Index by Steenbergen et al. (2003).

7 The idea was then taken up by Robert Goodin (2005), Carolyn Hendriks (2006) and John Dryzek (2009).

8 It was authored by Mansbridge, James Bohman, Simone Chambers, Thomas Christiano, Archon Fung, John Parkinson, Dennis F. Thompson and Mark E. Warren.

9 See also: Boswell et al. (2016: 263), Dryzek (2010: 7), Gaus et al. (2020: 5–6), Mendonça (2018: 34), Owen/Smith (2015: 214–215), Schäfer/Merkel (2020: 465).

2016: 517). In contrast, they have argued that different aspects of the deliberative task are distributed across different sites and that these sites should consequently be held to different deliberative standards (cf. Mansbridge et al. 2012: 2–3). Thus, deliberation "occurs in multiple, diverse yet partly overlapping spaces" (Elstub et al. 2016: 139–140), some of which must be more deliberative while others must be less so, with all of them contributing in their own way to the system's making of legitimate democratic decisions (cf. Mansbridge et al. 2012: 2–3; Thompson 2008: 514). Moreover, systems approach scholars have formulated normative demands for deliberative systems.[10] According to them, sites within the public sphere are considered to be especially vital for such systems (cf. Mansbridge 1999: 228). All sites within a deliberative system must be interconnected (cf. Chambers 2012: 54), and all relevant sites must be part of the system. Ideas and reasons must at least have the chance of being transmitted to other sites and thus of being introduced into the system-wide deliberation. This way, deliberative deficiencies in one site can be evened out "if the particular deficiency in one venue helps advance the deliberative quality of the system as a whole" (Bächtiger et al. 2018: 16). Thus, the deliberative systems approach both takes up and supersedes the previous generations' ideas.

Three aspects of the deliberative systems approach are especially interesting for analysing digital communication processes and studying the impact of digital technologies on society-wide, democratic decision-making processes. Firstly, the deliberative systems approach

> demonstrates that deliberative democratic ideals can be pursued on a large scale in ways that link particular forums and more informal practices, such as communication in old and new media. Deliberative democracy is not utopian; it is already implemented within, outside, and across governmental institutions worldwide. (Curato et al. 2017: 29)

Deliberative democracy after the systemic turn thus "offers a set of normative criteria upon which the actually existing democracies can be analysed, criticised and improved" (Ercan et al. 2017: 206; see also: Elstub et al. 2016: 146;

10 Though I will not argue normatively myself, I will use these normative demands when conceptualising the deliberative standards that will serve as standards for assessing the effects of social media platforms' architectures on the deliberative qualities of digital communication processes.

Mansbridge et al. 2012: 3). That is, "practices within and pertaining to the system may be appraised, criticized, or designed on the basis of the role they play and what they contribute to the system and its overall deliberative quality" (Milstein 2021: 5–6). In other words, the deliberative systems approach delivers a tool to *assess the deliberative qualities* of actually-existing deliberative systems, including their sites and the connections between these sites.

Secondly, the approach "introduces into the analysis large contextual issues and broad systemic inadequacies that have an impact on individual sites and shape the possibilities of effective deliberation" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 3). Already in the beginnings of the approach, Mansbridge stressed that "anyone concerned with deliberative democracy must also be concerned with the wider discursive context – and indeed the institutions and practices that structure that wider context" (Owen/Smith 2015: 217). Thus, the deliberative systems approach not only considers the communication processes within and between sites but also reflects on *what structures these processes*.

Thirdly, with its conception of interconnected deliberative sites, this approach is most suitable for addressing online communication and its role in democratic decision-making (cf. Ercan et al. 2019: 20; Mendonça 2018: 34). In fact, as Ercan et al. (2019: 20) state, "it enables the evaluation of this [digitised] era in ways that elude other democratic interpretations". Even scholars from outside the immediate range of deliberative democratic theory are aware of the systems approach's suitableness to *assess democracies in the digital constellation*:

> The digital revolution has created the hope that the need for representation is now over and that all citizens can and should now deliberate with each other at once, online, in what can be theorized as "mass online deliberation." The recent "systemic" turn in deliberative democracy may perhaps be read as a similar extension of the hope of realizing direct deliberation on a mass scale. (Landemore 2017: 57)

In sum, the deliberative systems approach is suitable as a basis for this book because it addresses deliberative qualities and the structuring forces beneath communication processes and because it is suitable for assessing democracies in the digital constellation.

The following chapters will zoom in on the deliberative systems approach itself, addressing its central theoretical concepts. Chapter 2.1 addresses the ground matter of deliberative systems, that is, the questions of what types of communication are conceptually included and of what standards are con-

ceptualised in order to assess a communication's deliberative qualities. The latter three sections of the chapters are concerned with the structures within deliberative systems. They focus on the conceptualisation of deliberative sites (chapter 2.2), the connections between deliberative sites (chapter 2.3) and the ways these sites and connections combine to form deliberative systems (chapter 2.4). None of these concepts are unanimously defined within the existing literature. For each concept, I will therefore portray the state of research, and I will summarise, weigh and sometimes criticise the scholars' differing views. Based on these observations, I will conclude each definitional chapter by proposing a comprehensive definition for the respective concept. Each chapter on a core concept of the deliberative systems approach will include observations on that concept's relation to deliberative qualities and, if necessary, formulate standards by which the deliberative qualities of the respective empirical realisations of each concept might be assessed. Together with the introductions to the digital constellation (chapter 3) and social media platforms (chapter 4), this theoretical outline will form the foundation for my analyses of the influences that structure digital communication processes.[11]

11 Throughout this chapter, it will become apparent that there are several parallels to the deliberative systems approach to systems theory and network theory – at least with regard to the terms. These parallels, however, remain mostly superficial. With regard to social systems theory based on the work of Niklas Luhmann, there is some obvious terminology overlap. Terms like system and communication, as well as strong and loose coupling, are central to both theoretical branches. Therefore, one might find it surprising that social systems theory has not been more substantively addressed by scholars of the deliberative systems approach, especially since Habermas himself repeatedly refers to Luhmann (positively, as well as negatively) in *Between Facts and Norms* (Habermas 1996), one of the foundational works not only for deliberative democratic theory, but also for systemic thinking. However, Luhmann notably developed a new conceptual toolkit for his sociological analyses of society. Each term in this toolkit, which for the most part is distinct from previous social theory, is meticulously defined and connected to his theoretical framework (cf. Rosa et al. 2009: 176). His analyses address completely different levels and perspectives, and, consequently, the concepts behind the terms bear entirely different gravamens. Additionally, the deliberative systems approach is more connected to the Anglo-Saxon scientific community, where Luhmann's social systems theory is less known (cf. Rehg in Habermas 1996: xx). In my own adaptation of the deliberative systems approach, I will refer to social systems theory that is based on Luhmann's thinking only in few instances. In network theory, the most appropriate approach seems to be the Actor Network Theory, and specifically the observations by Bruno Latour. Like Luhmann, Latour aspires to rethink and enlighten sociology by reconstructing action chains and illuminating hidden practices (cf. Gerten-

2.1 Deliberation

The definition of deliberation has been contested from the beginnings of deliberative democratic theory. "Beyond the bedrock agreement that democratic process should involve communication about, rather than merely aggregation of, (fixed) preferences, there is not much consensus about how deliberation is best conceptualized" (Bächtiger et al. 2010: 35). The definition of deliberation has evolved over the four generations, and scholars have stressed different aspects of its traits, procedures and functions. Thus, the standards that define deliberation vary throughout the research field. They have been adapted, amended and supplemented by scholars from the first generation of deliberative theorists onwards, and they continue to be discussed by systems approach scholars as well. This work has even been continued throughout the development of the systemic approach – in the early works prior to the "manifesto for the systemic turn" (Owen/Smith 2015: 213), in the "manifesto" itself and ever since.

Deliberative systems scholars have used various concepts, including deliberation, deliberative standards and deliberative qualities. These concepts represent different theoretical dimensions of the question: how can a scholar determine whether a communication process is deliberative? Deliberation refers to a communicative sequence that has certain characteristics and contributes

bach/Laux 2019: 199–200). His thoughts, too, have never been featured in the deliberative systems approach. Yet, Latour specifically addresses political questions, concerning himself with the nature of political issues (2007b), as well as with how these issues are discussed in various parts of society – that is, various collectives (2004). However, though there are obvious parallels between these schools of thought, Latour focusses on questions that serve as preludes to deliberative systems, and when he does address systemic processes that are relevant to deliberative theory or to my own project, he often provides less detail than the systemic approach. Therefore, there are only a few instances in which Latour's work will complement my thoughts. One of these instances is when he extends the scope of what can be part of a network and thereby acknowledges the relevance of non-human objects to processes within a network. This aspect will be relevant for structuring features, as well as for my reflections on the relevance of digital communication for deliberative systems. Moreover, in contrast to the deliberative systems approach, neither of these theories address the specifics of political communication or collective decision-making, and thus they lack the democratic angle of my research question. However, some aspects of social systems theory and network theory do seem useful, and I will include them in my conceptualisation accordingly.

to a democratic decision-making process. Deliberative standards are the characteristics that define a deliberation. Deliberative qualities in turn refer to the degree to which these standards are met. The definitions of all three concepts are subject to ongoing scholarly discussions of varying intensity. Therefore, in the literature, they are neither as clear nor as distinct as I have presented them just now. I will sketch the development of these concepts throughout deliberative systemic thinking before proposing the conceptualisations of deliberation, deliberative standards and deliberative qualities that I am going to use in my analyses of digital communication processes.

2.1.1 Systems Approach Perspectives on Deliberation

In the scholarly discourse surrounding the conceptions of deliberation, deliberative standards and deliberative quality, widening the range of admissible speech was one of the core points. Likewise, it was of central importance within the first article, by Mansbridge (1999), to ever introduce deliberative systems. In this article, Mansbridge

> draws attention to the fact that talk in its everyday sense can be part of a process of practical reasoning in some formal or informal group oriented to practical judgment, and that the larger deliberative system can correspondingly be understood as a process that includes many forms of reason-giving between equals oriented to a shared practical judgment (Owen/Smith 2015: 217).

Thus, Mansbridge emphasises the importance of everyday talk for deliberative systems.[12] This everyday talk "does not meet all of the criteria implicit in the or-

12 Prior to this, Lynn Sanders had already argued for the worth of supposedly undeliberative forms of communication. She even argued that deliberation – as conceptualised by the first generation of deliberative democracy – can systematically exclude potential participants from communication processes and thus have undemocratic effects: "taking deliberation as a signal of democratic practice paradoxically works undemocratically, discrediting on seemingly democratic grounds the views of those who are less likely to present their arguments in ways that we recognize as characteristically deliberative. In our political culture, these citizens are likely to be those who are already underrepresented in formal political institutions and who are systematically materially disadvantaged [...]. Deliberation requires not only equality in resources but also equality in 'epistemological authority,' in the capacity to evoke acknowledgement of one's arguments" (1997: 349). In other words, the first generation's version of deliberation

dinary use of the word 'deliberation'" (Mansbridge 1999: 211), as it "is not always self-conscious, reflective, or considered" (ibid.). But it is "nevertheless a crucial part of the full deliberative system" (ibid.) and an integral part of political decision-making. The definition of "political" in this context is "'that which the public ought to discuss,' when that discussion forms part of some, perhaps highly informal, version of a collective 'decision'" (ibid.: 214). Decision-making is thus not limited to the formal state apparatus here, but also addresses "[l]arge numbers of mutually interacting individual choices, weighted unequally through patterns of domination and subordination, chance, and other justifiable and unjustifiable inequalities, [that] together create a host of collective choices" (ibid.: 214–215). Everyday talk is one of the primary modes of communicating that is used to make these collective decisions. In sum, and according to Mansbridge (1999), standards of deliberation such as self-consciousness, reflectiveness and consideration by the participants must be met to varying degrees. Moreover, deliberation is assessed regarding the extent to which a subject is of public concern and the degree to which an orientation towards decision-making is displayed.

Just as Mansbridge pleads for the inclusion of everyday talk, Dryzek (2000: 1–2) argues for allowing "argument, rhetoric, humour, emotion, testimony or storytelling, and gossip", as they support the authenticity of deliberation. "The only condition for authentic deliberation is then the requirement that communication induce reflection upon preferences in non-coercive fashion" (ibid.). This requirement of non-coercion in turn "rules out domination via the exercise of power, manipulation, indoctrination, propaganda, deception, expressions of mere self-interest, threats (of the sort that characterize bargaining), and attempts to impose ideological conformity" (ibid.: 2). Thus, for Dryzek, a central deliberative standard is authenticity in terms of the inducement of reflection and the absence of coercion.

Moreover, in these early stages of the deliberative systems approach, scholars already pointed to the need to treat deliberative standards in a more systemic manner. That is, they have stressed the need to consider the division of labour within a deliberative system and assess the adherence to deliberative standards accordingly: "Different aspects of the 'deliberative task' are assigned

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results in "the devaluation of content uttered by those with low identity-related social status" (Asenbaum 2020: 234), and, to circumvent this, deviations from standards such as rationality are necessary. A similar argument has been presented by Iris Marion Young (1996: 123).

to different institutions, which can then be held to different deliberative standards" (Thompson 2008: 514). These standards include, for example, candour, reasonable arguments, common-good orientation, finding mutually acceptable compromises, fostering mutual respect and articulating the public interest (cf. ibid.). Goodin (2008: 194) concludes from a similar thought that deliberative sites ("agents") acting in concert within a system should be held to different standards than a single deliberative site performing the entire deliberative task.

> In a world of delegated deliberation, where different parts of the deliberative task are divided up and shared among various different agents, appropriate behaviour within each component part of that distributed deliberation is not necessarily the same as appropriate behaviour where one body is performing the whole deliberative task on its own. (Goodin 2008: 194)

Thus, it is not just that different deliberative sites must adhere to different deliberative standards, but that the behaviour of the participants within a site must meet its specific standards.

These are only some examples of how early scholars of deliberative systems – prior to the publication of the "manifesto for the systemic turn" (Owen/Smith 2015: 213) – widened the concept of deliberation and shifted its focus. They already indicate how the specific deliberative standards are somewhat side-lined by the new systemic perspective on deliberation. For systemic thinkers, it is more important to consider the different deliberative tasks, the way they are divided within a system and the deliberative qualities that are required for the fulfilment of these within each part of the system. It is less important to define universal deliberative standards to which all deliberation must adhere.

These considerations are collected and brought to the point in the "manifesto" of the deliberative turn (Mansbridge et al. 2012). In this "manifesto", Mansbridge and her co-authors circumvent the definition of deliberative standards almost entirely. There are two reasons for this. First, "a systemic approach complicates the question of standards. What might be considered low quality or undemocratic deliberation in an individual instance might from a systems perspective contribute to an overall healthy deliberation" (ibid.: 12). Thus, "[j]udging the quality of the whole system on the basis of the functions and goals one specifies for the system does not require that those functions be fully realized in all the parts" (ibid.: 13). The second reason the "manifesto" authors sidestep a clear definition of deliberation is that they perceive the

systems approach as an add-on to other deliberative approaches rather than a free-standing theory of deliberative democracy:

> While we may at times favour certain directions and theoretical orientations over others, we want to stress that the approach we outline could be taken up by any number of theories of deliberative democracy. Like any useful paradigm, deliberative democracy theory contains many theoretical variations, competing articulations, and contested definitions. (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 4)

However, the directions and theoretical orientations favoured by the authors become evident in several parts of the "manifesto". For example, they make some suggestions about the kinds of communication that should be included in the deliberative system. These suggestions unsurprisingly bear great similarities to the concepts proposed by Mansbridge (1999). Firstly, the authors argue for including only discussions that "involve matters of common concern and have a practical orientation", the latter meaning that "the discussion is not purely theoretical but involves an element of the question 'what is to be done?'" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 9).[13] Secondly, they return to the distribution of collective decisions throughout society. They conceive societal decisions as decisions that emerge from these distributed decision-points (cf. ibid.: 8), which once more shifts the focus from deliberative standards to the systemic view on deliberation.

Moreover, Mansbridge and colleagues (2012) describe three possible functions of a deliberative system: an epistemic, an ethical and a democratic (inclusive) function. "The successful realization of all three of these functions promotes the legitimacy of democratic decision-making by ensuring reasonably sound decisions in the context of mutual respect among citizens and an inclusive process of collective choice" (ibid.: 12). The authors argue that "high quality

13 The necessity of orientating a deliberation towards actions and decisions has been under discussion ever since. Smith (2016: 161), for example, regards action as constituting a deliberative system and the deliberation leading to the decisions upon such actions as necessarily practically oriented (cf. also Chambers 2012: 58). Bächtiger and Parkinson (2019: 14) also see the benefits of deliberation for a system in more indirect ways, "perhaps by educating citizens and collectivities or by performing a trust-based function". However, "if deliberation is not related to decisiveness or is just reduced to indirect effects, then its role for democracy is oddly restricted and in opposition to the original aspirations of deliberative theory" (ibid.: 14).

deliberation promotes these functions effectively" and that "low quality deliberation fails to do so as effectively" (ibid.: 13).[14] In order to achieve high-quality deliberation, "appropriate standards for deliberation that promote these functions" (ibid.) must be met. Here, the "manifesto" stops short of actually defining any standards of deliberation. Regarding the specifics of these standards, the authors refer the reader to a previous article, written by largely the same set of authors.

In this prior article, Mansbridge and colleagues (2010) describe the evolution of deliberative standards over time. They present a collection of deliberative standards that they consider to be the common denominator throughout this evolution:

> The deliberation should, ideally, be open to all those affected by the decision. The participants should have equal opportunity to influence the process, have equal resources, and be protected by basic rights. The process of "reason-giving" is required and central. In that process, participants should treat one another with mutual respect and equal concern. They should listen to one another and give reasons to one another that they think the others can comprehend and accept. They should aim at finding fair terms of cooperation among free and equal persons. They should speak truthfully. The criterion that most clearly distinguishes deliberative from non-deliberative mechanisms within democratic decision is that in the regulative ideal, coercive power should be absent from the purely deliberative mechanisms. Participants should not try to change others' behavior through the threat of sanction or the use of force. (ibid.: 65–66)

Additionally, Mansbridge and colleagues (2010) argue that, under certain conditions, both self-interest and the negotiation of conflicting interests can be considered compatible with these common deliberative standards. They maintain that deliberation – while not being "just any talk" – "can include the recognition and pursuit of self-interest, including material self-interest, and some forms of negotiation, constrained by the deliberative democratic ideals of mutual respect, equality, reciprocity, mutual justification, the search for fairness,

14 The conceptual line between deliberation as a communicative sequence and as a systemic process is being blurred here.

and the absence of coercive power" (ibid.: 94). The authors consider these situations[15] "forms of *deliberative* negotiations" (ibid.: 3, orig. emph.).

In the "manifesto", Mansbridge et al. (2012) give examples to illustrate the traits of and interdependencies within deliberative systems. In these instances, in order to legitimise the conceptualisation of the deliberative system, many of the common standards listed in the prior article by Mansbridge et al. (2010: 65–66), as well as the newly acknowledged forms of deliberative negotiation, are referred to. For example, with regard to highly partisan rhetoric, the authors argue that "even while violating some deliberative ideals such as mutual respect and accommodation, [it] may nonetheless help to fulfil other deliberative ideals such as inclusion" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 3). Another example illustrates that "elite discourse [in the European Union] provides expertise, reasoned and informed mutual accommodation, and mutual respect, while the nationally instigated deliberation provides perspectives that might otherwise not be heard" (ibid.).

There is one deliberative standard that is addressed in a more elaborate manner by the "manifesto": the absence of coercion, or, to use Habermas's language, the "forceless force of plausible reasons" (1996: 24). Mansbridge and colleagues (2012: 17–18) stress the necessity of distinguishing between pressure through coercion and persuasion, since "[d]eliberation is about genuine persuasion, not pressure". The question they pose regarding a "full systemic theory of deliberation" is: where one should draw the line between those two? They pose this question because there are forms of coercion that are not deliberative in a strict sense but that might nonetheless contribute to a system's overall deliberative qualities. For example,

> [b]oth paying people to agree with you and disrupting normal activity until you get your way appear to violate the very core of deliberative persuasion. But money and protest can be effective political tools to advance important social and political causes. A deliberative system approach allows us to step back and ask how this expenditure of money (e.g. in campaign advertisements) or that protest (e.g. an anti-immigrant demonstration or a Greenpeace action) enhances or detracts from the deliberative system. (ibid.: 18)

15 Mansbridge et al. (2010: 70–72) distinguish between four types of non-coercive, deliberative negotiations: convergence, incompletely theorized agreements, integrative negotiation and fully cooperative distributive negotiation. All these types "incorporate self-interest without deviating from the criteria for good deliberation" (ibid.: 70).

Thus, the deliberative systems approach seeks to acknowledge not only deliberation in a strict sense, but also other forms of communication that contribute to or impede the democratic decision-making process of a deliberative system. Prior generations would generally not have regarded protest as having any deliberative value. The systems approach nevertheless defines protest as being valuable for the system's deliberative qualities without necessarily considering it deliberative in a stricter sense. Instead of generally dismissing non-deliberative action, the systems approach assesses whether it contributes to or obstructs the realisation of the system's deliberative functions. Acknowledging the importance of non-deliberative acts is one of the central points of the "manifesto". However, this makes it necessary to (re)define the distinction between what deliberation is, what other forms of democratic communication there are and what is separate from this process and has no influence over it.

This distinction has mainly been discussed in later works that adopt the deliberative systems approach. One of the most thorough accounts has been given by André Bächtiger and John Parkinson (2019: 86–72). They maintain that the definition of deliberation does not have to be expanded any further, but that other forms of communication, with their independent contributions and their roles in democratic communication, should be acknowledged as distinct from deliberation and assessed independently (cf. ibid.: 68–69).[16] As they remark, "if every communicative act is deliberative or deliberative in function, then the concept loses its analytical and critical bite" (ibid.: 68). The deliberative qualities of these other forms of democratic communication must be assessed independently and with regard to the respective context (cf. ibid.: 71–72).[17]

After the publication of the "manifesto", acknowledging the importance of non-deliberative acts has remained central the approach. David Owen and Graham Smith even stress that "[n]on-deliberative speech acts and practices may have an important role to play in such sequences [of systemic deliberation] and, indeed, may be constitutive of the overall 'distributed deliberative' quality of the system" (2015: 219). Bächtiger and Parkinson likewise maintain that "deliberative forms of communication inevitably combine with other forms", and they "think of such clusters of communication as not just real-world approximations of an ideal, but as essential in realizing deliberative goals" (2019: 19). Thus, they arrive at a concept of deliberation that does not need

16 Owen and Smith (2015), too, criticise this move towards widening the definition of deliberation and handling the deliberative standards more flexibly.

17 I will elaborate on this in chapter 2.1.

> to expand to include a fuller account of democratic communication. Quite the reverse: it is that deliberative processes can be seen as clusters of different, often non-deliberative practices which vary by goals and contexts *without giving up on the idea of core deliberative values*. Deliberative processes entail a variety of communication modes and acts, including but not limited to deliberation strictly defined. It will just be the case that the precise configuration of the cluster – the balance between different communicative modes – will vary according to the demands of the moment, the setting, the issue, the participants, and their repertoires. (ibid.: 28)

Since the "manifesto", much work has addressed the differentiation between deliberative and non-deliberative acts. Scholars have discussed where the line between the two should be drawn, whether non-deliberative acts should be considered contributions to deliberation and the conditions under which this inclusion is legitimate.[18]

Of course, the acknowledgement of the worth of non-deliberative acts by deliberative systems scholars has also been criticised. Dominant among these critics are Owen and Smith (2015). Disapproving primarily of the way in which deliberative systems theorists consider non-deliberative speech acts and practices, they caution against the "currently dominant articulations of the deliberative system [that] could […] result in judging a system as deliberative with little, or even nothing, in the way of actual democratic deliberation between citizens taking place" (ibid.: 218). They acknowledge the need "to be attentive to the ways in which non-deliberative acts and practices enable or disable democratic deliberation", but they are concerned about the "uncomfortable position vis-à-vis the central tenets of deliberative democratic theory" (ibid.) that proponents of including non-deliberative acts are placed in. Owen and Smith strongly recommend that scholars "recognise and account for the *deliberative wrongs* that such acts involve and the harm that they frequently cause" (ibid.: 223); they also strongly recommend that scholars become aware of any trade-offs between, for example, opening up the public sphere through certain kinds of (hostile) rhetoric and undermining the freedom and equality of the members of a democratic polity (cf. ibid).

The acknowledgement of the value of non-deliberative acts for a deliberative system depends, firstly, on where in the system the communication

18 See, for example: Smith (2018), Owen/Smith (2015), Bächtiger/Parkinson (2019: 19), Kuyper (2020: 24), Elstub et al. (2016: 145), Dryzek (2017: 620), Boswell/Corbett (2017: 815), Bächtiger (2016: 271–272).

process takes place and on who exactly acts in a non-deliberative way. While, for example, non-deliberative acts by minorities or marginalised groups perform an important role in the attention economy and therefore might be welcome from a normative perspective, the performance of such acts by powerful and privileged actors is considerably more problematic (cf. Bächtiger 2016: 271–272). Secondly, whether non-deliberative acts are considered valuable depends on whether certain standards are upheld in the communication process in question, as well as in the larger system. According to the systemic approach, deliberative functions and standards must be realised in the wider system. But in view of the division of labour, some of these functions and standards can be regarded as systemically realised if they are addressed in specific but limited parts of the system.[19] Since the publication of the "manifesto", there has been continuous discussion of these standards. But the focus of this discussion has shifted a little,[20] and the older works' more general ideas make them more accessible to my equally general conceptualisations of deliberative standards.

In summary, deliberative systems scholars have ambiguously conceptualised deliberation, deliberative standards and deliberative quality. However, there are some ideas that are specific to systemic thinking and that have prevailed within fourth-generation literature. First and foremost, scholars have identified a division of labour within a deliberative system that ascribes different tasks to different parts of the system, rendering it necessary to have different expectations regarding deliberative standards. Thus, the exact standards that are to be met depend on the part of the system that is currently under analysis. Second, scholars generally agree that it is necessary to widen the range of admissible speech within a system. Thus, forms of everyday political talk – including rhetoric, negotiation and other modes of speech – are acknowledged as forms of deliberation, though not particularly deliberative ones. Third, scholars acknowledge the influence of non-deliberative acts on deliberative systems; they presume that these acts can make systems more deliberative or less so. Consequently, systems approach scholars distinguish between deliberation,

19 This point will be detailed in chapter 2.4.

20 The interesting questions now are: How can the systems approach, as an add-on, be connected to a certain set of theoretical ideas? What standards should be applied to what part of the system, and to what degree? Are there standards that should be applied to all parts equally? How can low performance regarding a certain standard in one part be compensated for by performance in another part?

non-deliberative acts that contribute to the deliberative system and non-deliberative acts distinct from the system. In the following section, based on these thoughts by deliberative systems theorists, I will propose my own conceptualisations of deliberation, deliberative standards and deliberative qualities.

2.1.2 Refined Conceptions of Deliberation, Deliberative Standards and Deliberative Qualities

In defining deliberation, I will take many of these ideas as points of departure, but I will sharpen the concept in some instances. I will start out by characterising the kind of statements that have the potential to contribute to a deliberative system in the first place: statements that communicate *political content*. According to Mansbridge, "political content" can be defined as what the public must discuss in order to come to a collective decision (1999: 214). This does not mean, however, that every expression should be aimed at making a decision. Communication that is potentially deliberative also includes all communication preliminary to the actual decision-making, that is, all communication that potentially influences the decision-making process, independently of its intentionally doing so.[21] For "communication", I will lean on an aspect that has been stressed by Niklas Luhmann in his social systems theory.[22] He maintains

21 The notion that deliberation does not have to result in actual decision-making was also advocated by Bächtiger and Parkinson (2019: 14, 88–89). They maintain that while deliberation and certain deliberative sites may be aimed at other democratic benefits, deliberative systems as a whole are defined by their intent to make democratic decisions at some point.

22 Interestingly, there does not seem to be an explicit, widely used definition of communication within deliberative democratic theory. Rather, the term communication – together with "talk" or "interaction" – is used as an auxiliary term in defining deliberation and has not been contested as such. There are some implications for Habermas's understanding of communication in his 1970s Princeton lectures (cf. Geulen 2010: 165–166). But these are of a rather normative nature and based on his take on an ideal speaking situation, which includes the participants' willingness to strive for the following qualities: "1. Jede Äußerung muss so abgefasst sein, dass sie für die anderen 'verständlich' (in einem durchaus alltagssprachlichen Sinne) ist. 2. Es wird unterstellt, dass Äußerungen in ihrem sachlichen, d.h. auf Gegenstände bezogenen Gehalt im Prinzip 'wahr' sind. 3. Der Anteil der Äußerung, der als eine soziale Handlung zu verstehen ist (in der Terminologie der Sprechakttheorie der 'illokutionäre Gehalt', z.B. ob sie als Mitteilung, Frage, Aufforderung, Rüge usw. zu verstehen ist) muss 'richtig' sein, d.h. allgemein für die betreffende Situation anerkannten Normen entsprechen. 4. Die

that communication occurs between at least two entities – the ego and the alter. When the ego expresses something for the alter to understand, she does not only try to transmit information; she also anticipates the alter's reaction:[23]

> The action understands itself not only as carrying out its intention but also (and often primarily!) as an action "for you," "against you," "in front of you," as an action meant for perception, or as a document of its own intention that does not want to be understood as an intention of documentation. (Luhmann 1995: 130)

Based on this, I conceptualise communication as an expression that is relayed in order to be heard and understood by at least one other individual. Therefore, the communicating individual not only relays her thoughts, but also anticipates how the receiving individuals might understand and react to these thoughts and then expresses the thoughts accordingly.[24]

Secondly, I follow the distinction that Bächtiger and Parkinson (2019) make between deliberation in a strict sense – that is, communication that adheres to certain deliberative standards – and communication processes that may possess certain deliberative qualities in certain contexts – and consequently may affect the deliberative system – but that are not deliberation in a strict sense.[25] I follow this distinction not because I think that pure deliberation exists in reality but because I seek to clarify the conceptual gap between, on the one hand, the normative concept of deliberation and, on the other hand, communication that may or may not be considered deliberative, depending on the respective empirical situation. In my analyses of real-world communication processes, I will therefore generally avoid the term "deliberation" and use "communication

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Äußerung muss 'wahrhaftig' sein, d.h. das zum Ausdruck bringen, was der Sprecher subjektiv tatsächlich meint" (ibid.: 166). The definition by Luhmann is minimal enough that it works well both with the ideas that have been presented by deliberative theory scholars on definitional, normative and descriptive levels and with Habermas's normative ideas of functioning communication.

23 Luhmann calls this "double contingency". There could possibly be a third entity, an audience; but I would argue that an audience would be equally anticipated by a speaker and thus qualify as part of the alter.

24 This distinction is not specified in the deliberative systems approach, but it is relevant for the conceptualisation of deliberative sites.

25 In doing so, I differ from the scholars that advocate a broader definition of deliberation.

processes" instead. These communication processes can adhere to the deliberative standards to varying degrees but will typically not qualify as strict deliberation.

Moreover, I will focus on the procedural traits of communication processes rather than their outcome. Procedural concepts "evaluate the deliberative performance of a system by the characteristics of the process(es) of deliberation (inclusiveness, fairness, etc.)" (Fleuß et al. 2018: 15) and "focus on the different tasks to be undertaken in deliberation" (Knops 2018: 122). Thus, a procedural focus addresses the deliberative standards that usually aim at realising certain functions and goals. Concentrating on the outcome of a deliberation would mean concentrating on "the performance based on the output of this very process" (Fleuß et al. 2018: 15), that is, on how far the desired goals and functions have been realised by a deliberation. While I will sporadically address this aspect as well, my focus on the procedural standards of deliberation aligns more naturally with an exploration of the structuring influences on digital communication processes and their impact on systemic communication.

More concretely, there is a certain set of procedural deliberative standards that can be condensed from the literature on deliberative systems; most of these standards have their roots in the works of prior generations of deliberative theory. These standards are normative in nature. But they can also be used descriptively, that is, they can serve as categories or measures for describing the effects, for instance, of social media platforms' architectures on the deliberative qualities of digital communication processes. In my analyses, I will therefore use these inherently normative standards in a descriptive manner.

Though not all deliberative systems scholars equally agree on a defined set of standards, André Bächtiger and John Parkinson have identified a "classic core" (2019: 22) of deliberative standards that comprises rational argument, common-good orientation, listening and interactivity, respect, equal participation and authenticity (cf. ibid.).[26] I will use and add to this list of standards. Since the terminology applied by the different scholars is inconsistent, I will cluster the standards in reference to the ideas behind them and name the different terms from the literature for each of these ideas.[27] An overview of all standards can be found in Table 1 (p. 44).

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26 However, the standards themselves and their status as part of a theoretical "core" have not been uncontested (cf. Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 22–23).

27 Further references regarding the specific standard will be collected in footnotes at the end of each paragraph.

Inclusivity, diversity, openness to individuals and perspectives. A first requirement of democratic deliberation is that communication processes be accessible to and inclusive of a wide variety of perspectives and individuals. This implies that "[n]o one may be excluded in principle; all of those who are possibly affected by the decisions have equal chances to enter and take part" (Habermas 1996: 305–306). In the "manifesto", Mansbridge and colleagues take up this first-generation idea and stress that the

> inclusion of multiple and plural voices, interests, concerns, and claims […] is the central element of what makes deliberative democratic processes democratic. Who gets to be at the table affects the scope and content of the deliberation. For those excluded, no deliberative democratic legitimacy is generated. (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 12)

Consequently, no individual should be excluded without a justification that is acceptable to both included and excluded individuals, and inclusion and equal opportunities to participate in the system should be actively promoted (cf. ibid.).[28]

Equality, non-coerciveness. Closely connected to the inclusivity standard is a second demand with regard to deliberation: that no participant be dominated by factors that are external or internal to the communication process. "Each has an equal opportunity to be heard, to introduce topics, to make contributions, to suggest and criticize proposals" (Habermas 1996: 305–306). This demand has also been reiterated by deliberative systems scholars, and it is considered a part of the "classic core" of deliberative standards (cf. Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 22).[29]

Rationality, reason-giving, validity, truth. This standard requires that perspectives that are rational, true and valid for their argument should prevail over rhetorically loaded, emotional or bargaining contributions – the "forceless force of plausible reasons" (Habermas 1996: 24). This fourth standard is one that has been at the core of deliberative theory since its beginnings, though

28 See also: Bächtiger/Parkinson (2019: 105–106, 2019: 9), Habermas (1996: 305–306), Rosenberg (2007: 9), Mansbridge et al. (2012: 12).

29 See also: Cohen (1997: 74), Fishkin (2009: 33–34), Habermas (1996: 305–306), Mansbridge (1999: 225), Mansbridge et al. (2010: 65–66), Mendonça (2018: 36), Rosenberg (2007: 9–10).

the systemic approach also acknowledges the deliberative worth of rhetoric and emotion for certain communication processes.[30]

Reciprocity, interactivity, listening, reflection. A fourth, repeatedly mentioned requirement is that participants should react to the contributions of other participants in a communication process. This implies that participants listen to each other, reflect on the points that are being made and address these points in the communication process, as "deliberation is not just about expressing one's views on an issue at stake" (Ercan et al. 2019: 25).[31]

Respect. Mutual respect implies that one is open to being convinced by another's arguments and that one acknowledges the other "as a source of reasons, claims, and perspectives" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 11–12).

> Prudentially, mutual respect helps keep the deliberative system running. It serves as the lubricant of effective communication. [...] To deliberate with another is to understand the other as a self-authoring source of reasons and claims. To fail to grant to another the moral status of authorship is, in effect, to remove oneself from the possibility of deliberative influence. By the same token, being open to being moved by the words of another is to respect the other as a source of reasons, claims, and perspectives. (ibid.: 11)

Hence, respect is a precondition of listening and reflection. In turn, it depends on equality and non-coercion between participants, "because relationships of domination have already short-circuited mutual respect and, with this, deliberative influence" (ibid.: 11–12).[32]

Openness, orientation towards the common good. According to this standard, participants weigh their own interests against those of others and aim their argumentation at finding and pursuing a solution that is favourable (or at least acceptable) to all. "The aim is to negate the influence of particular, selfish desires and to encourage the consideration of more general, social concerns" (Rosenberg 2004: 1). This standard concerns the attitude of the participants, that is, their general willingness and openness to put a common good above

30 See also: Bächtiger/Parkinson (2019: 2), Cohen (1997: 74), Gaus (2016: 507), Habermas (1996: 24–25), Mansbridge (1999: 213), Mansbridge et al. (2010: 65–66).

31 See also: Bächtiger/Parkinson (2019: 105–106), Elstub/Escober (2019: 20), Ercan et al. (2019: 25), Dryzek (2009: 1381, 2017: 612), Habermas (2022: 159), Mansbridge (1999: 222), Morrell (2018), Scudder (2020).

32 See also: Mansbridge (1999: 223), Mansbridge et al. (2012: 11–12), Rosenberg (2007: 9–10).

their own. The actual identifying of the common good additionally involves the standards of listening and reflection, as well as respect.[33]

Comprehensibility. In order to reflect, weigh and be convinced by other perspectives, these perspectives must be presented in a way that can be understood by other participants. This standard is included in the literature mostly in an implicit manner, but it is important for some aspects of my analyses.[34]

Authenticity. This is one of the more widely and ambiguously discussed standards within the literature. For my analyses, I follow the more classic understanding that authentic contributions "are grounded in experience, reflection, or evidential argument" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 12).[35] These contributions can also "reveal (as in 'testimony') the pain and anger, hate, or delight in another's pain, that someone actually feels, when expression or knowledge of those feelings furthers the understanding that is the goal of deliberation" (Mansbridge 1999: 223). Contributions are thus presented in ways that "those who do not share one's point of view can find meaningful and accept" (Dryzek 2010: 10). Authenticity is therefore closely connected with, but conceptually distinct from, comprehensibility.[36]

Accountability, publicity, visibility. According to this last standard, communication processes can be observed by the public and participants can be held responsible for their behaviour in communication processes. Publicity and accountability often serve as incentives for abiding by the other deliberative standards, which call for participants to behave in ways that are respectful, rational, open, authentic, etc. (cf. Thompson 2008: 510). Thus, "reason-giving is done visibly, both to exercise a disciplining force on the claims and proposals that can be made in a deliberative democracy […] and to ensure that scrutiny and accountability can be effectively exercised" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 12).[37]

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33 See also: (Bächtiger/Parkinson (2019: 22), Bohman (1998: 402), Elstub (2010: 295), Knops (2018: 121), Rosenberg (2004: 1).

34 See also: Bächtiger/Parkinson (2019: 40–41), Knops (2018: 121), Mendonça et al. (2022: 163).

35 There is also the concept of authentic deliberation, which is closer to what I described as openness (cf. Smith 2018: 22) or a superordinate for a set of other qualities, including non-coerciveness, rationality and reciprocity (cf. Dryzek 2009: 1382). To avoid confusion, I will not use the term authentic deliberation.

36 See also: Bächtiger/Parkinson (2019: 12), Dryzek (2009: 1382, 2010: 10), Mansbridge (1999: 223).

37 See also: Boswell et al. (2016: 278), Bächtiger/Parkinson (2019: 12–13), Chambers (2005), Dryzek (2009: 1386), Mansbridge (1999), Thompson (2008: 510).

Table 1: Deliberative qualities of communication processes

Deliberative Standards	**Description**
Inclusivity, diversity, openness to individuals and perspectives	Communication processes are accessible to and inclusive of a wide variety of perspectives and individuals. All who are potentially affected by the decision have the chance to partake in the deliberative system.
Equality, non-coerciveness	No participant or site is dominated by external or internal factors in the communication process. "Each has an equal opportunity to be heard, to introduce topics, to make contributions, to suggest and criticize proposals" (Habermas 1996: 305–306).
Rationality, reason-giving, validity, truth	Perspectives that are rational, true and valid for their argument prevail over rhetorically loaded, emotional or bargaining contributions – the "forceless force of plausible reasons" (Habermas 1996: 24–25).
Reciprocity, interactivity, listening, reflection	Participants or sites react to the contributions of other sites or participants in the communication process.
Respect	Mutual respect implies that one is open to being convinced by another's arguments and that one acknowledges the other "as a source of reasons, claims, and perspectives" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 11–12).
Openness, orientation towards the common good	Participants weigh their own interests with those of others and aim their argumentation at finding and pursuing a solution that is favourable (or at least acceptable) to all.
Comprehensibility	In order to reflect, weigh and be convinced by other perspectives, these must be presented in a way that can be understood by other participants.
Authenticity	Authentic contributions "are grounded in experience, reflection, or evidential argument" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 12) or in emotion (cf. Mansbridge 1999: 223) and are thus presented in ways that "those who do not share one's point of view can find meaningful and accept" (Dryzek 2010: 10).
Accountability, publicity, visibility	Participants are held responsible for their behaviour in communication processes. Communication processes are public in order to ensure accountability and, consequently, participant behaviour that is respectful, rational, authentic, etc.

Thus far in this text, deliberative standards have only been formulated with regard to deliberative quality in deliberative sites. Thus, all the standards I presented above have been conceptualised in reference to communication processes in individual sites. However, deliberative systems would not be deliberative systems if these sites were not connected in a "deliberative" way and if the composition of sites and connections within the systems were not "deliberative" after a fashion. Thus, there also must be deliberative standards for connections and systemic composition. On the one hand, some of the standards I presented here – such as inclusivity and equality – are also applicable to connections and systems. Though systems approach scholars have not made it as explicit, their assessments of communication processes on all these levels reveal as much. On the other hand, there are further deliberative standards that are specific to either connections or system composition. These standards can be derived from the definitions for and requirements of connections and systems that deliberative theory scholars have presented, and I will make this derivation in the subsequent chapters.

Using "deliberative qualities", I will address the degree to which sites, connections and systems meet the various deliberative standards, as well as the specific reification of how these standards are being met. However, there will be citations that refer to "deliberative quality" as an aggregated count of the deliberative qualities of a site or a system. Due to the complexity and context-dependency of such an overall assessment, even on the level of a single communication process, I refrain from suggesting that there is a reliable and systematic way to calculate an overall deliberative quality. By using the plural form, I maintain the distinction between the standards and stress the nuance involved in assessing communication processes.[38]

A last point I want to take up in my own conceptualisation of deliberative standards and qualities is that not all communication processes must abide by the same standards equally. Rather, deliberation and the communication processes that contribute to a deliberative system may have different contexts.[39] The assessment of the deliberative qualities of communication processes must be adjusted accordingly.

38 However, I will not be able to fully avoid citations that use "deliberative quality" in this less nuanced way.

39 Cf. Mansbridge et al. (2012: 11–13), Bächtiger/Parkinson (2019), Owen/Smith (2015: 228–229), Bächtiger et al. (2010: 33).

The context of deliberation refers to how the different goals of communication processes provide different incentives, norms and scripts that shape human action, including deliberative behaviour.[40] Conceptuality has been addressed in contested and even "unfortunate" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 37) ways. Bächtiger and Parkinson (ibid.: 39) particularly stress the necessity of considering whether a specific communication process takes place within an institution designed to realise deliberative ideals.

> The problem with such ideal or "transcendental" institutions is that they tend to ignore or downplay deep-rooted, real-world practices that are equally valuable to the functioning of democratic systems; or to treat those things as constraints and imperfections to be regretted. This is unwise for reasons we have already noted in the previous section: it blinds scholars to non- or not-terribly-deliberative but nonetheless highly valuable practices that undergird a democratic society, including in unfamiliar settings. (ibid.: 39)

Therefore, a consideration of the context is crucial to assessing the deliberative qualities of the communication process and their effect on the system's deliberative qualities.

In conclusion, Bächtiger and Parkinson (ibid.) argue – and I agree – that the assessment of how well a certain deliberative trait is achieved depends on the goal of this deliberation and the context in which it is placed. To take an example: suppose a deliberation's goal was to listen to as many perspectives as possible in coming to the decision, but only three individuals actually participated. In this instance, whether the decision that follows a deliberation is particularly well attuned to the common good is of no consequence, because the

40 Bächtiger and Parkinson identify three central democratic functions of communication processes within a deliberative system: inclusivity, representation and the capacity to make and impose binding decisions (cf. 2019: 9–14). Combinations of these functions with different weightings are, of course, possible. Moreover, Bächtiger and Parkinson differentiate between five deliberative goals: "epistemic, ethical, legitimacy-oriented, emancipatory, and a combined transformation and clarification goal" (ibid.: 15). These different deliberative goals "may lead to the activation of different deliberative and non-deliberative components", they "will entail selective deployment of its various components according to the goals of the event" and they will necessitate the application of different deliberative standards (ibid.: 72). I implicitly include these notions of possible goals and functions in my concept of context, without further addressing them throughout my analyses.

deliberation had a completely different goal. Similarly, the deliberative qualities of a communication process must be assessed in reference to where and when it takes place within a systemic deliberative process and in reference to what the intentions regarding deliberation have been for the respective situation.

This also translates to the systemic level. Scholars trying to assess the deliberative qualities of an entire system do not only need to assess the deliberative qualities of the individual communication processes in accordance with their respective contexts. They also need to consider that the "interplay of sites, agents, discourses, and other macro forces [produces] overall deliberative qualit[ies]" (ibid.: 136). Thus, one can perceive systemic deliberative qualities as qualities that are "produced by the scale and complexity of a given system, and not simply [as] ingredient[s] which go[…] into a system" (Parkinson 2018: 440). Hence, "a deliberative system can be made up of parts that do not meet all the deliberative criteria at once" (ibid.: 441), and "those goods [meeting the criteria] are emergent qualities of the interaction of many different elements" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 133). Therefore, assessing the deliberative qualities of a single site, or of a single instance within the communicative sequence, vastly differs from assessing the deliberative performance of a system.

2.2 Deliberative Sites

The concept of deliberative sites is one of the core concepts of the deliberative systems approach. Scholars have described sites belonging to a deliberative system by many names – including "spaces" (Elstub et al. 2016), "discursive arenas" (Mendonça 2018; Esau et al. 2021), "venues" (Doberstein 2020), "discursive spheres" (Hendriks 2006), "loci" (Erman 2016; Fleuß et al. 2018) and "forums" (Bächtiger et al. 2018; Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019). Meanwhile, most scholars refer to them as "deliberative sites".[41] These sites represent the building blocks of a deliberative system, and without deliberative sites there cannot be a deliberative system. In the following sections, I will elaborate on how deliberative sites are (not) defined in the deliberative systems approach and how deliberative qualities are addressed in the theory.

41 To name just a few: Boswell/Corbett (2017), Mansbridge (1999), Mansbridge et al. (2012), Parkinson et al. (2020 // 2022).

2.2.1 Defining Deliberative Sites

Although deliberative sites represent a central concept of the deliberative systems approach, and although scholars have given them many names, it seems difficult to define deliberative sites with regard to their principal features and their boundaries. The definitions given in the literature are hazy at best. Therefore, after collecting and connecting points of definition that have been made by systems approach scholars, I will propose an amended definition that will later enable me to identify deliberative sites on social media platforms and to distinguish them from other communicative interactions, such as the connections between deliberative sites.

In lieu of a definition, scholars usually provide lists of examples of deliberative sites that are systematised to varying degrees. The following collection gives an impression of the diversity of these examples and, simultaneously, of the difficulty involved in avoiding both maximalist and minimalist definitions.[42] Sites may include

> nation state bodies at different levels of government and with their different legislative houses, administrative agencies, the military, and the staffs of all of these; international bodies at different levels and their staffs; multinational corporations and local businesses; epistemic communities; foundations; political parties and factions within those parties; party campaigns and other partisan forums; religious bodies; schools; universities with their departments, fields, and disciplinary associations; unions, interest groups, voluntary associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) both *ad hoc* and long-standing; social movements with both their enclaves and their broader participation; the media including the internet, blogs, social media, interactive media, books, magazines, newspapers, film, and television; informal talk among politically active or less active individuals whether powerful or marginalized; and forms of subjugated and local knowledge that rarely surface for access by others without some opening in the deliberative system. (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 10)

Dryzek (2009: 1382–1383) adds to this list "[d]esigned forums – such as citizens juries and assemblies, deliberative polls, consensus conferences, stakeholder dialogues", and Bächtiger/Parkinson (2019: 113) further include, for example,

42 That is, the definition should not include theoretically irrelevant attributes or exclude theoretically relevant ones (cf. Munck/Verkuilen 2002: 9).

"departmental calls for tender for service delivery and research; court deliberations and judgments; policy discussion papers", as well as "banners, posters, flyers, and graffiti; consultation processes; minipublics; petitions and protest".

Obviously, the list of possible deliberative sites is long, manifold and far from complete. But the relevant point here with regard to arriving at a general definition of deliberative sites is that there is very little overlap between all of them. For example, when imagining deliberative sites, "multinational corporations and local businesses" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 10) are much easier to picture than are "forms of subjugated and local knowledge that rarely surface for access by others without some opening in the deliberative system" (ibid.). Thus, the keys to reconstructing a definition of deliberative sites are finding similarities, defining admissible differences and distinguishing sites from non-sites.

There seems to be only one *similarity* between all the sites listed above: some content of political nature is communicated from one party or medium to another. This refers back to two points that have been made with regard to defining admissible forms of communication for a deliberative system (chapter 2.1). With Mansbridge, political content can be conceptualised as "'that which the public ought to discuss,' when that discussion forms part of some, perhaps highly informal, version of a collective 'decision'" (Mansbridge 1999: 214). The demand for decision-orientation has been qualified to an even greater extent by later scholars (cf. Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 14, 88–89), as well as in this text. Communication, on the other hand, can be thought of as an expression that is relayed in order to be heard and understood by at least one other individual.

Since there may be very little similarity between sites, the *admissible differences* appear to be all the more numerable. It is plausible that this goes back to the deliberative standards of equal participation and inclusivity. On the system level, these standards require that all individuals who are potentially affected by a decision on a certain issue must be involved in the preparational communication on that issue and that their perspectives must have equal chances of being heard. Since these individuals are usually dispersed across society, they are active in diverse deliberative sites. Scholars of the systems approach have addressed this diversity of sites, focussing on numerous aspects of these sites: their various perspectives on an issue (cf. Parkinson et al. 2020), their relations to the state (cf. Ercan/Dryzek 2015; Ercan et al. 2017: 196), their goals and contexts (cf. Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 79), their functions within the system (cf. Beste 2016: 297; Ercan et al. 2019: 26; Mansbridge et al. 2012: 12), their degrees of

formality,[43] their degrees of structure (cf. Hendriks 2006: 499–500), their degrees of stability (cf. Ercan et al. 2017: 196; Hendriks 2006: 499–500) and their degrees of inclusiveness (cf. Hendriks 2006: 499–500). The diversity of the sites is connected with the functional division of labour within a deliberative system, due to which the different sites have different deliberative contexts. This makes different expectations regarding deliberative standards necessary. "Deliberative site" therefore does not necessarily mean that all the communication within the site actually is deliberation in a strict sense or that there is a high quality of deliberation for every standard. Dryzek has advised that one should

> not make the mistake of thinking [a site] has to be already deliberative – or meet some minimum threshold of deliberativeness to be analyzed in these terms. Rather, it is best to think of a particular system as being potentially deliberative. It is then possible to look at the actual performance of the parts – and the whole – in light of some deliberative standards about what they ought to be doing. (2016: 210–211)

Similarly, I will treat "deliberative sites" as being potentially deliberative. This approach is based on my awareness that it is rare for a communication process within a site to completely abide by all deliberative standards; rather, deliberative and non-deliberative modes of communication "inevitably combine" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 19) to produce the site's communication processes. However, "[m]ost spheres have a predominant form of communication" (Hendriks 2006: 499–500) that favours specific deliberative qualities.

The list of potential deliberative sites also includes sites that cannot be expected to greatly adhere to deliberative standards but that are still important to the system. The example most frequently quoted in this regard concerns the "politically partisan media": they "are of very low deliberative quality, but in conjunction with other media of equally low deliberative quality [they] bring out information and perspectives that television stations or newspapers aiming at the middle of the road do not raise or address" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 7). In consequence, there is no fixed, ideal configuration of deliberative sites (cf. Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 20). On the contrary, "there are many different possible configurations of sites, actors, and roles that will achieve deliberatively democratic outcomes" (Parkinson 2012b: 152). Thus, the admissible differences

43 Cf. Elstub et al. (2016: 145), Ercan/Dryzek (2015: 241–242), Ercan et al. (2017: 196), Fleuß et al. (2018: 16–17), Hendriks (2006: 499), Parkinson et al. (2020 // 2022).

between deliberative sites are manifold, due to the fundamentally inclusive concept of deliberative systems itself.

The concluding step of reconstructing a definition of deliberative sites is *distinguishing sites from non-sites*, that is, delineating the concept against the backdrop of all that, from a systems approach perspective, is *not* considered a deliberative site. Based on the required similarities between sites that I described above, it can be concluded that any site that does not host communication of political content cannot be a site included in a deliberative system. However, not all communication in deliberative system occurs within a site, since communication processes can also be transmission processes between sites. In the systems approach literature, the conceptual distinction between sites and connections is sometimes not very clear.[44]

In summary, the definition of deliberative sites in the systems approach literature is blurry at best. I therefore propose a revised definition of deliberative sites that enables a sharper conceptual distinction between a deliberative site and a connection between different deliberative sites. According to my definition, deliberative sites are arenas where individuals have the opportunity to communicate with each other on political issues. These individuals – henceforth: participants – are aware of other individuals' participation in the site. Participants "communicate" in the sense that has been given in social systems theory and proposed above: their expressions are relayed in order to be heard and understood by the other individuals; the communicating participant therefore not only expresses her thoughts, but also anticipates how the receiving participants will understand and react to these thoughts and then expresses herself accordingly. All participants have the possibility of listening to each other's contributions and the opportunity to react to them, though the respective opportunities do not have to be similar, and participants do not have to avail themselves of these opportunities in a similar manner. At least some of the participants must take the opportunity to interact.

This definition is considerably more fine-grained than the one reconstructed from the examples above, and it allows me to distinguish between various deliberative sites within the entities that have been considered to belong to one and the same site by Mansbridge and colleagues (2012: 10). For example, while ministries, companies and NGOs are listed as examples of deliberative sites, in my definition, deliberative systems are composed of several deliberative sites that are connected to each other via reports or individuals

44 For an example, see chapter 2.3.

participating in different sites. Moreover, a distinction is made between the actual media outlet and the discussion on its design and content – the outlet being a connection between, on one hand, the site of editorial and journalistic discussion and, on the other, the audience that filters the content and takes it into other deliberative sites.[45] In this book, the term "deliberative site" does not imply that the site exclusively or mostly features pure deliberation. It merely refers to the fact that a site belongs to the deliberative system and thus contributes to (or detracts from) the system's overall deliberative goals.

2.2.2 Deliberative Qualities in Deliberative Sites

Deliberative qualities within deliberative sites have been a prominent subject from the beginnings of deliberative democratic theory onward, and I have already presented the most important standards that have been considered in this discussion. Scholars of the first three generations based their theories on the assumption that a site displays high deliberative quality only when deliberative standards are realised as far as possible. Most scholars of the deliberative systems approach, however, have widened this definition of deliberation and "broaden[ed] the scope for admissible forms of speech" (Bächtiger et al. 2010: 43), as I described in chapter 2.1.

What is considered to be deliberation that adds value to the systemic process – and therefore what standards and degrees of deliberative qualities are called for – varies in accordance with the specific site's contexts (cf. Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 19). These contexts, in turn, "alter actors' goals and the ways actors talk and deliberate, as well as the standards we should invoke when judging the democratic and deliberative quality of these acts" (ibid.: 40). Moreover, the contexts are themselves "dynamic, not fixed, and intersecting with different deliberative goals. This leads to a much broader panoply of deliberative 'behaviours' than would be expected by a one-context-one-behaviour approach"

45 Parkinson makes a similar point: "There are decisions to be made about what counts as a connection and not a node: for example, are the news media simply channels which pump out whatever is pumped into them, or a set of venues, institutions with their own imperatives, which select, frame, and systematically structure outputs in various ways (Dahlgren 2005)? If they are the latter – and I think they are – then what *are* the connections between nodes meant to be representing?" (Parkinson 2018: 438, orig. emph.). In chapter 2.3, I will explain the concept of connections, so that the difference from sites will become clear.

(ibid.: 69).[46] In consequence, the assessment of a site's deliberative qualities must likewise account for a site's contexts.

The varieties of both sites and deliberative standards make it nearly impossible to make general statements on requirements regarding the deliberative qualities of sites. Many scholars in the deliberative systems approach have resorted to differentiating deliberative sites in terms of their degree of formality. More formal sites are expected to display different deliberative qualities than less formal ones. The following examples are positioned along this range from formal to informal sites: representative assemblies, public assemblies, the public sphere and everyday talk (cf. Elstub et al. 2016: 145).[47] In order to account for the different contexts, while still feasibly assessing the deliberative qualities of communication processes on a systemic level, Dannica Fleuß and colleagues (2018) have differentiated three categories of deliberative sites: sites of highly formal deliberations, sites of semi-formal deliberations and sites of informal deliberation.[48] I will use this distinction throughout the book, since it acknowledges the potential differences in contexts and the necessary adjustments involved in assessing the qualities of deliberative sites, while allowing for at least a minimum of generalisation.

Highly formal sites are those "that are constitutionally or otherwise legally installed, that follow certain (procedural) rules while deliberating and that have the power to make collectively binding decisions" (Fleuß et al. 2018: 17). They include national courts and parliaments, as well as democratic innovations such as mini-publics and participatory budgeting projects that have been legally established and "are empowered to make collectively binding decisions" (ibid.; see also Hendriks 2006: 502). Generally, sites of highly formal deliberation are expected to meet the "classic core" of deliberative standards – rational argument, common-good orientation, listening and interactivity, respect, equal participation and authenticity – to a higher degree than semi-

46 This proposition – that not only the level to which deliberative standards should be realised in a site but also the selection of the standards themselves should be adjusted according to the site's situation within the system – slightly differs from the more traditional view that different sites "should still be judged on the criteria [by which the respective scholars ground their work], while not expecting the same level of the criteria in each venue" (Elstub et al. 2016: 145; see also: Ercan et al. 2017: 196; Mansbridge 1999: 213; Smith 2016: 161).

47 See also: Ercan/Dryzek (2015: 241–242), Hendriks (2006: 492), Mansbridge (1999: 212).

48 They built this categorisation on considerations of Conover/Searing (2005), Mansbridge (1999) and, ultimately, Habermas (1996).

formal or informal sites (Fleuß et al. 2018: 16). Most of these sites are actually designed in such a way as to realise deliberative standards as far as possible. However, their specific contexts further influence their goals and the expectations regarding deliberative standards (cf. Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 40). Sites situated in the political centre, such as parliaments and national courts, will instead focus on legitimacy goals (cf. ibid.: 34–35) and ethical goals, that is, on generating mutual respect (cf. ibid.: 31). They therefore can be expected to display, for example, a higher degree of rational argument, respect and common-good orientation and a lower degree of authenticity. Democratic innovations are similar in this regard, but they also have epistemic goals, that is, they will also aim "to connect statements of ends with knowledge of means, and to connect the results with political representatives who should instruct and monitor the bureaucracy to act accordingly" (ibid.: 29). Therefore, they will, for example, abide by the standards of listening and interactivity, as well as equal participation, to a higher degree. But despite these general pointers, scholars always must account for specifics of the respective site when they are assessing highly formal sites.

In *semi-formal sites*, the expectation of adherence to deliberative standards is generally lower than in highly formal sites (cf. Fleuß et al. 2018: 16). These sites comply with two criteria, but they otherwise remain rather vaguely defined: a semi-formal site is "(1) the zone where members of the political elite and members of the public sphere deliberate, or where such encounters are prepared, and [a zone where] (2) there is a certain degree of institutionalization" (ibid.: 17). They include, for example, "conversations between constituents and government officials, and conversations in political parties, interest groups, and the media" (Conover/Searing 2005: 270); they also include conversations in clubs, professional associations, academies, universities and grass-roots initiatives, as well as NGO-related spaces and meetings, trade unions and other lobby groups (cf. Fleuß et al. 2018: 17). Semi-formal sites thus connect the formal institutions and the informal sphere within a deliberative system. Like the highly formal democratic innovations, epistemic goals are very important in semi-formal sites. Moreover, many of these sites will have emancipatory goals, that is, they will aim at providing opportunities for individuals to exercise their political freedom independently of their pre-deliberative positions in the existing political and societal structures (cf. Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 35–36). These sites can thus be expected to display, for example, higher degrees of rational argument and authenticity. However, with respect to the specifics of the site, expectations regarding deliberative

standards in semi-formal sites differ even more than those regarding highly formal sites.

Informal sites host "less deliberative everyday discussions among political activists, attentive publics and general publics"; these discussions involve "a form of political talk that is essential to the system's democratic character" (Conover/Searing 2005: 270), in short, communication processes within the public sphere. As presented above, such informal political communication processes constitute "a crucial part of the full deliberative system that democracies need if citizens are, in any sense, to rule themselves" (Mansbridge 1999: 211). For Mansbridge, informal sites comprise more open communication processes within the public sphere, including "everyday talk, as well as the media,[49] interest groups, and other venues of discussion" (ibid.), along with social movements (ibid.: 213) and the corridors of public forums (cf. ibid.: 223–224). More contemporarily, scholars also include "ad hoc forums, or online spaces within which ordinary citizens, members of social movements, and civil society actors can engage in discussion and debate" (Smith 2016: 154), along with "offline and online comments in response to news items, as well as marketplaces and their culturally specific equivalents" (Fleuß et al. 2018: 17; see also Hendriks et al. 2016: 1105–1106). But informal sites can also be very private spaces such as "the arms of a best friend" (Mansbridge 1999: 223) and other "informal settings, […] mostly with close friends and family" (Ferris 2020: 14). These sites are not regulated by formalised rules; they are rather "spaces of unmediated authenticity" (Mansbridge 1999: 223–224). Most of these sites are situated in civil society, and they are "the venue[s] where public opinion is formed, shaped and contested" (Hendriks 2006: 502). Beyond that, the variety of informal sites appears to be infinite.

Communication within informal sites is not expected to "meet all of the criteria implicit in the ordinary use of the word 'deliberation.' It is not always self-conscious, reflective, or considered" (Mansbridge 1999: 211; see also Fleuß et al. 2018: 16). In some sites, then, classic core standards such as rational argument, listening or respect might not be met to a very high degree.

However, informal sites can have many advantages for the deliberative system, and they can, in some respects, display more deliberative qualities

49 While Mansbridge (1999: 213) considers "[t]elevision, radio, newspapers, movies, and other media [that] influence their intended audiences and are influenced by them" to be deliberative sites, I categorise them as media outputs and therefore as connections between different sites (see chapter 2.2.1).

than formal sites. Correspondingly, Mansbridge (1999: 221–225) presents a whole list of advantages. According to her, creative thought often thrives in the protected space of informal sites, which are beyond the requirements of publicity and accountability; all the values subsumed under "reciprocity" by Gutmann and Thompson[50] can apply to informal talk; incivility is more justifiable in informal talk, and informal talk is "sometimes necessary not only to 'promote mutual respect in the long term'", but also to "achieve authenticity" and to "break down the barriers of the status quo" (ibid.: 223); and, finally, informal sites provide "freedom for everyday talk" since they are "relatively free from power" (ibid.: 224). These examples therefore focus on authenticity and respect. They show that there are different ways in which informal deliberative sites can achieve these goals that, in the first instance, might seem contrary to each other. Thus, both the presence and the absence of respect within a site could benefit the wider deliberative system, depending on the site's role within the system. Moreover, with regard to mass public debate online, Parkinson et al. (2020: 562) note that participants may "indeed hold each other to deliberative norms" such as giving reasons and evidence or calling out abuse. They furthermore establish that some informal deliberative sites "that otherwise had nothing to do with politics […] are more likely to allow people to debate across boundaries than expressly political sites" (ibid. 2020: 562). Parkinson and colleagues' observations refer to the standards of rationality, respect and interactivity. Ferris (2020: 14–15) adds that minority opinions can have greater influence in informal deliberations, especially if the group is "just having a discussion for its own sake […] and if the minority accept fundamental group norms and share an identity with the rest of the group, as is likely to often be the case in everyday talk between friends or neighbours". This observation, too, addresses the standards of respect, listening and interactivity. Again, the deliberative standards that are to be applied to and realised within a deliberative site depend on its specifics – even more so than in highly formal and semi-formal sites, since the variety is much larger.

In sum, different sites have different contexts and, accordingly, different deliberative standards to be applied to and realised within them. Generally,

50 "Gutmann and Thompson group under the heading of 'reciprocity' the values of mutual respect, the goals of consistency in speech and consistency between speech and action, the need to acknowledge the strongly held feelings and beliefs of others, and the values of openmindedness and 'economy of moral disagreement' (seeking rationales that minimize the rejection of an opposing position)" (Mansbridge 1999: 222).

scholars project that the less formal a deliberative site is, the lower is the expectation regarding the deliberative qualities of the communication within it.[51] However, the determination of which deliberative qualities in an individual site are positive or negative for the systemic deliberative qualities depends on the contexts of the site and its position within the system. Therefore, what might figure as low deliberative quality on a generalised scale can still be just what the site needs to deliver to the system in order to produce systemic advantages. However, the deliberative qualities within most individual sites are not decisive with regard to the system's overall deliberative qualities.[52]

2.3 Connections between Deliberative Sites

The connections between the various deliberative sites constitute the second key point of the deliberative systems approach (cf. Mendonça 2018: 40; Hendriks 2016: 45; Ercan et al. 2017: 201; Boswell et al. 2016: 264). "[D]eliberative systems require transmission of perspectives, norms, and claims from one setting to another" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 81). In other words, sites must be connected, so that the participants of one site can consider the arguments that have been brought forward in another site. This is because the many different sites, due to their different contexts, are likely to display different patterns and dynamics and therefore to discuss an issue differently and develop different perspectives on it (cf. ibid.). "Indeed, a diverse multiplicity of deliberative sites can only be described as a system insofar as its constituent parts are interconnected" (Ercan et al. 2017: 201).[53] In other words, without connections, there cannot be a deliberative system. In this chapter, I will address how these connections are conceptualised in the deliberative systems approach and what

51 The degree of formality is not the only distinction responsible for differing expectations, nor is it the most precise one. In fact, the list of advantages that informal deliberative sites carry already shows that there are many aspects of the different degrees of formality (ad-hoc quality, lack of formal rules, no publicity or accountability, etc.). I will revisit these aspects and break them up in the course of my analyses.

52 Parkinson (2012b: 154) even claims that whether perspectives resulting from the communication processes within a site "are generated deliberatively or not is neither here nor there so long as the decision-makers' processes themselves are deliberative" (ibid.). Lacking deliberative qualities can be compensated for by other deliberative sites within the system (cf. Dryzek 2009: 1388; Smith 2016: 152) – see chapter 2.4.

53 See also: Boswell et al. (2016: 264), Hendriks et al. (2020b: 00:17:53–00:18:15).

connection-specific deliberative standards can be derived from these conceptualisations.

2.3.1 Defining Deliberative Connections

Despite the centrality of connections to the deliberative systems approach, they have not been the focus of much conceptual work.[54] In the literature that has addressed this point, most of the studies have been concerned with connections between sites on supposedly different levels of the deliberative systems, that is, vertical connections.[55] Examples of vertical connections include reports that must be sent to sites that are closer to the decision-making spaces (cf. Hendriks 2016), hearings that include participants of sites on different levels (cf. Boswell et al. 2016: 268–269), decisions made in sites of participatory budgeting that are binding for the decision-making bodies (Smith 2009: 1–2) and petitions and other institutionalised kinds of designed connections that inform the participants in decision-making spaces about the views of the wider public (cf. Hendriks 2016: 47; Bächtiger 2014). Furthermore, the input of individuals who circulate between different sites on different levels within the system has been analysed as an instance of vertical connection between deliberative sites (cf. Doberstein 2020: 6). The hierarchy between

54 This has also been noticed by Bächtiger/Parkinson (2019: 93).

55 However, scholars do not explain the criteria that position one site over the other within a system. From the examples of vertical and horizontal connections given in the literature, it seems plausible that most of the scholars' understanding of hierarchy goes back to Habermas's original model of the deliberative system. He expected transmissions to migrate through the system, mainly from the periphery to the political centre, that is, from the private sphere to the empowered sphere, from bottom to top (cf. Habermas 1996: 381). He also described how important it is that the actors of the political centre explain their reasoning to the public (cf. ibid.: 183–184) and that the public is potentially able to "eclipse" the "processing matters according to the usual conventions" in cases of conflict (ibid.: 357). He clearly rates these vertical connections as being more important than horizontal ones, and this tendency is also evident, decades later, in the work of many scholars of the deliberative systems approach. This emphasis on vertical connections also explains why Habermas uses the "sluicing" metaphor, instead of "filters", for example. However, hierarchies could also be established due to the degree of formality, the degree of democratic legitimatisation of the sites, the number of participants, the attendance of elected representatives of specific groups or a site's overall influence within the system – not all of which correlate. Generally, the distinction of vertical and horizontal has been vague in the literature.

sites thus seems to be tied to the distance of the respective site from the decision-making. The analysis of supposedly vertical connections represents the majority of work that has thus far been done on deliberative connections.

However, most of the connections between digital sites can be considered horizontal, that is, as taking place between sites of equal positions within a deliberative system. I do not want to overemphasise the distinction between vertical and horizontal connections, since it seems imprecise and fruitless to try to ascribe exact positions to all sites within the hierarchy of a deliberative system. Nonetheless, I want to stress that connections that might be considered horizontal – including those on social media platforms – cannot be disregarded from a deliberative systems perspective. In fact, there are good theoretical and empirical reasons to consider horizontal connections as at least as important to deliberative systems as vertical ones are.

In scholarship on deliberative theory, horizontal connections have rarely been addressed, let alone in a systematic manner.[56] The little work that there is approaches these connections in a rather broad manner. For instance, Simon Beste (2016: 298) expects the discourses of the "anarchic" and the "organised" public to somehow "converge" without specifying anything about the horizontal connections that would be needed for such a convergence. Most of the more specific ideas concerning horizontal connections can be found in the ideas on individuals who circulate between different deliberative sites (cf. Doberstein 2020; Mendonça 2018). At first glance, the focus on vertical connections between sites seems reasonable. Even if there were no horizontal connections between sites at all, one could argue that the "higher levels" of deliberative sites filter, evaluate and consider the input from the "lower levels" and thus compensate for the lack of horizontal connections.

However, there are several reasons for the deliberative systems approach to consider horizontal connections. This becomes especially clear when considering what happens if the sites on similar levels within a system do not interact with each other, or if their interaction is too infrequent. First of all, without horizontal connections, citizens will not be able to know other perspectives, to position their own opinions in relation to them and to get a sense of a common good based on the variety of perspectives. Due to this lack of knowledge, they will not be able to hold accountable the decision-making spaces that claim

56 The few exceptions include qualitative empirical studies that sporadically mention horizontal connections (though usually not in these terms), such as Hendriks et al. (2020a) and Hendriks et al. (2016).

to have decided in the interest of a common good. Moreover, even in the beginnings of deliberative thinking, Habermas stressed the importance of connections between deliberative sites for developing and maintaining a common language. This common language is of paramount importance for deliberative democracy:

> Semantically closed systems [for example, deliberative sites] cannot be induced to invent on their own the common language necessary for the perception and articulation of the relevant issues and standards of evaluation that apply to society as a whole. For such tasks, an ordinary language is available, circulating throughout society and lying beneath the threshold of the special codes. (Habermas 1996: 352)

This circulation throughout society is simplified, if not enabled, by horizontal connections. If there is no common language, democratic exchange is severely hindered. Without a common language, participants in a deliberative system have no reliable ground for reasoning and, consequently, less potentiality for empathy in the face of dissenting experiences and opinions. Hence, there is less potential that participants will acknowledge a good argument that outweighs their own arguments. Finally, the grounds for democratic compromise, let alone consensus, are more limited. The result of a lack of horizontal connections is fragmentation, a situation that has been especially addressed with regard to the effects of online communication – the frequently used terms being "filter bubble" (Pariser 2011) and "echo chamber" (Sunstein 2002), among others.[57]

Empirically, horizontal connections do exist. They are especially paramount in the digital realm; connections between sites within digital platforms, connections to other platforms and connections to other kinds of deliberative sites are everywhere. Moreover, they constitute one of the core selling points of digital communication. These digital sites are becoming increasingly important to today's deliberative systems, as I will show in chapter 4.2. But there are also horizontal connections beyond the digital realm, for example, between NGOs, activist groups and other public actors that pursue a common goal and organise accordingly in order to gain more leverage. So, since deliberative theory seeks to be applicable to the real world, it should also consider the horizontal links that exist in the real world.

57 See also chapters 3.2, 5.2.2 and 6.3.

A last aspect concerning the importance of horizontal connections is the fact that the sites of a deliberative system can and do influence each other by definition. This relational interdependence is one of the core concepts that make a deliberative system an actual system (see chapter 2.4). Consequently, cultural norms and conventions can spread across sites, too (cf. Mansbridge et al. 2012: 22–23).[58] These cultural norms constitute one aspect of the contexts of deliberation that "provide incentives, norms, and scripts that shape human action, including deliberative behaviour" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 37). Such norms therefore influence what is communicated within a site, how it is communicated and how it is transmitted between different sites. Due to the relational interdependence within deliberative systems, the norms can disseminate vertically, or they can disseminate via horizontal connections, and in the latter case, they invariably affect what is transmitted to the "higher" levels. Hence, "meso and macro changes are almost certainly driven by different types of communication depending upon how those modes manage to tap in to, or disrupt, group norms" (Kuyper 2020: 24).

In sum, there has thus far been an implicit assumption that there is a hierarchy among the various sites of a deliberative system, and vertical connections have thus far been at the centre of systems approach scholars' theoretical and empirical research. However, there are good reasons to regard horizontal connections as at least equally important as vertical ones. The importance of horizontal connections becomes especially clear in analyses of communication processes as digital sites. The existence and characteristics of connections affect the deliberative qualities of digital communication processes, and they shape how digital publics and communities are formed and, thus, how transmissions flow across the system (see chapters 5 and 6). Horizontal connections should therefore be considered more often and more diligently in analyses of deliberative systems.

A second aspect of systems approach scholars' discourse regarding connections between sites that is relevant to my analyses is the distinction between "coupling" and "transmission". Scholars of the deliberative systems approach have developed both concepts, though the difference between them seems rather implicit. For example, coupling is one of the central subjects in the "manifesto" of the deliberative systems approach:

58 This, again, especially applies to digital communication on social media platforms (see chapter 6.1).

> The ideal of a deliberative system, then, is a loosely coupled group of institutions and practices that together perform the three functions we have identified – seeking truth, establishing mutual respect, and generating inclusive, egalitarian decision-making. (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 22)

On the other hand, Dryzek (2009: 1385–1386) conceptualises transmission as "some means by which public space can influence empowered space." According to him, such means include not only broader collective action like political campaigns or "social movements that come to pervade the understandings of formally empowered actors", but also small-scale connections like "personal links between actors in the two kinds of spaces" (ibid.: 1385). Moreover, he includes communicative forms such as "the deployment of rhetoric" and "the making of arguments" in his concept of transmission (ibid.). Both concepts seem to be fairly vague and quite similar in meaning.

Carolyn Hendriks (2016) was the first to explicitly conceptualise the distinction between coupling and transmission. According to this distinction, coupling stands for the more or less stable connections between certain sites. Thus, the coupling metaphor "draws our attention to the nature and strength of relationships between different parts in a deliberative system, and to the spaces that might develop in-between" (ibid.: 44). So, sites can be visualised as bodies of water, while couplings are the channels connecting them. The water running through these metaphoric channels are the reasons, pieces of information and opinions[59] that are "sluiced" (Habermas 1996: 356) from one site to the other.

I want to reiterate three differences between coupling and transmission that Hendriks (2016: 45–46) describes. First,

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59 Bächtiger/Parkinson (2019: 97) refer to these reasons, opinions and pieces of information as memes: "Memes are units of meaning that may be focused on a word or group of words but are also likely to include physical symbols, even actions or action sequences – the steps and agenda of an event are themselves symbols that convey meaning beyond the substantive topics listed. Memes will evolve and take different shapes depending on competing goals and strategic action, especially as they pass through a system and need to adapt in order to pass successfully through different settings: the words and action sequences used on a single topic will be rather different depending on whether it is being discussed in a community information session, a council decision-making forum, or a legal hearing." Though this actually concurs with my own conception of potential transmissions, the term memes is impractical in a work that largely addresses communication in the digital sphere, an integral part of which are memes with a generically different meaning. I will therefore stay with expressions such as contents or transmissions, depending on the context in which I use them.

> coupling focuses our analytic attention on the relational patterns between different components of a deliberative system, particularly where there may be both interdependence, as well as independence. Whereas transmission focuses on the flows and blockages in communication, the coupling metaphor evokes images about relationships – for example, linkage, interaction, interdependence and networking. (ibid.: 46)

In other words, "coupling" refers to the architecture of institutionalised connections between sites – that is, whether such connections exist at all and how they are constructed. "Transmission", on the other hand, addresses the communication processes performed through these connections. In other words, it refers to the flow of reasons, information and opinions between connected sites and throughout the system.[60]

Second, conceptualising coupling as connective architecture allows for analysing "multidirectional linkages between sites, rather than focusing on flows predominately from public to empowered sites" (ibid.). Hence, transmissions can flow in both directions across a coupling between two sites, independently of any hierarchies between these sites. This conception of transmission thus goes beyond a mere "uptake of reasons" from the public space by the decision-making sites.

A third distinction Hendriks makes is that "coupling brings into focus the deliberations, institutions and spaces that develop between parts of the system" (ibid.). This idea aligns with the fact that,

> [t]o date[,] transmission processes within deliberative scholarship have largely been conceptualised via institutions (for example, parliaments and media connecting the public sphere with decision-makers) or actors (for example, activists, social movements promoting discourses into the public sphere) (Ercan et al. 2017: 202).

60 Parkinson concurs with this take on transmission, but notes that the term implies too much permanence of the transmitted ideas. "It might be more appropriate to borrow more organic concepts of political ideas and transformation […]. Doing so might help square two conflicting deliberative requirements: the expectation that a system faithfully transmits ideas, yet also transforms them. Instead of focusing on ideas as fixed entities in the minds of participants, a more cultural focus, perhaps, would look at the processes by which ideas are created, shared, transformed, adapted, combined, and so forth, by agents, in contexts, for purposes" (2018: 441–442).

This again goes back to the focus on the connection between the decision-making sphere and the public sphere. According to this conception, less formal communicative situations, such as designed informal meetings of members from both spheres, fall into the category of coupling (Hendriks 2016: 53). But even more institutionalised setups, like mini-publics (cf. Boswell et al. 2016: 270), political parties (cf. ibid.: 269) and the media (cf. Parkinson 2018: 438), are occasionally treated as mere communicative connections between the empowered sphere and the public sphere.

In my eyes, however, this conception of coupling substantially blurs the distinction between coupling and site. More precisely, it blurs the line between a coupling between, on one hand, a site A and a site B and, on the other hand, an additional site C that might be positioned between sites A and B. This conundrum can be illustrated through the example of the categorisation of mini-publics and political parties: while Boswell et al. (2016: 269–270) define them as transmission mechanisms, many scholars of deliberative systems agree that they are valid and valuable sites of deliberation (cf. Fleuß et al. 2018: 17; Hendriks 2016; Mansbridge et al. 2012: 10), and most scholars do not categorise them as one or the other, but merely consider their relevance for systemic deliberation in general. As already observed (when defining deliberative sites), there is a discrepancy among scholars regarding the distinction between a communicative connection and a deliberative site. Especially concerning the substance of connections, "deliberative literature is unclear on this point, even that which attempts to address the question directly" (Parkinson 2018: 438).

So, while I propose to dismiss this last distinction of Hendriks's, I will introduce another one of my own: couplings and transmissions may each exist in the absence of the other.[61] While there might be a formal coupling between two sites, this does not necessarily mean that any reasons, opinions or pieces of information from one site are being taken up by the other. Therefore, couplings are merely the institutionally established links between sites (cf. Doberstein 2020: 5). First among these link-establishing institutions is, of course, the law (cf. Habermas 1996: 448), but couplings can also be upheld by technologies, rules, institutional design and political culture (cf. Mendonça 2018: 40), as well as by cooperations and partnerships between different institutions and orga-

61 The examples cited in the following two passages are conceptualised as inducers of connectivity by the respective authors, whilst I add to each of them the categorisation as either couplings or alternative carriers of transmissions.

nizational structures within the state. Doberstein (2020: 5–6) identifies three types of such couplings:

> (1) a reporting linkage, whereby one venue issues information reports to another; (2) a recommendation linkage, whereby one venue issues recommendations to be considered at another decision-making venue; and (3) an implementation linkage, whereby one venue makes decisions that must be interpreted and implemented by another.

Thus, couplings can be understood as the institutionally established links between two sites, independently of whether transmissions are actually conveyed through these links – that is, independently of whether, for example, the reports actually convey meaningful content and whether their content is introduced in the subsequent deliberation.[62]

Conversely, transmissions do not need the architecture of a coupling. They could be conveyed via alternative carriers of transmissions. Returning to the metaphor of the system of water bodies, transmissions can be imagined as random runnels or small amounts of water being carried from one body to another in an unsystematic manner. In the deliberative system, alternative carriers of transmissions might be uninstitutionalised ways of conveying communication, such as information sheets or pamphlets, but most importantly, transmissions beyond couplings are realised through "individuals participating in both sites carrying the outputs or insights from one site to the other, and vice versa" (Doberstein 2020: 5). For example, in most deliberative systems there are "regular representatives" who are "deeply engaged with certain issues and […] end up taking part in multiple conversations that occur across multiple arenas and moments of a deliberative system" (Mendonça 2018: 46–47). Doberstein (2020: 6) differentiates three types of connections that are reified via individuals:

> (1) shared membership across venues, whereby some actors are participants in multiple venues in the system; (2) guest membership across venues, whereby some actors visit venues for a specific purpose; and (3) a public engagement broker, an individual whose primary task is to share developments across the policy subsystem.

62 However, it can be argued that as the potential for actual transmissions and their uptake in the second site declines, the number of transmissions actually conveyed by the couplings declines.

Thus, transmissions can be conveyed through stable and institutionalised couplings or through unstable, alternative carriers of transmissions. Coupling and transmission are separate concepts, and their empirical realisations may appear independently of each other. Thus, each concept contributes in its own way to the systemic flow of reasons, opinions and information throughout a deliberative system.

In summary, I have made two adjustments to the conceptualisation of connections that has been presented by deliberative systems scholars. First, I have argued that horizontal connections are at least as important to deliberative systems as vertical ones are and that they should therefore be considered more often and more diligently in analyses of deliberative systems. Second, I challenged and dismissed the conception of couplings as communicative spaces that develop between parts of the system. Instead, I introduced the notion that couplings and transmissions may exist independently of each other.

2.3.2 Connections and Deliberative Qualities

The standards for the deliberative qualities of couplings and transmissions are as different as the respective concepts, though they can all be traced back to the deliberative standards I presented in chapter 2.1. Therefore, they will be addressed separately in the following two sections. The first section will outline how the deliberative quality of couplings varies in accordance with the strength of the connection and with its directionality. The second section describes how the deliberative qualities of transmissions are defined by the specific content that is actually transmitted and how this content is selected. The qualities of both couplings and transmissions contribute to the qualities of the overall system.

Deliberative Qualities and Couplings

As outlined above, couplings are stable and institutionalised connections between two or more sites within a deliberative system. Their deliberative qualities may vary, depending on the angle from which they are assessed. On the one hand, they "might approximate deliberative norms [such as being reflective, respectful and dialogic] to a greater or lesser extent" (Smith 2016: 161); in other words, the deliberative standards I introduced in chapter 2.1 can likewise be applied to couplings. For instance, Mansbridge and colleagues (2012: 24) have remarked on the possibility of social domination that "arises when a particular social interest or social class controls or exerts undue influence over

[other] parts of the deliberative systems". Such domination arises if there is a low degree of *equality* between the connected sites.

Another standard applicable to connections is *reciprocity*. In the context of connections, scholars have termed it directionality, but the idea is the same. Couplings can be designed as unidirectional, as well as bi- or multi-directional.[63] While unidirectional connections can hold systemic value, deliberative systems scholars generally advocate for bi- (or multi-)directional connections where "outputs or insights from one venue feeds [sic] into other venues" (Doberstein 2020: 13). This is because "mutual influence and adjustment between different parts of a deliberative system is more likely when institutional design facilitates two-directional or even multidirectional coupling" (Hendriks 2016: 57), that is, where there is reciprocity between sites.[64]

On the other hand, connections must additionally be assessed with regard to the opportunity that they provide for transmissions to cross from one site to another. Within the deliberative systems approach, this opportunity is usually addressed in terms of the *strength of a coupling*. Normative discussions on deliberative connections have concluded that the ideal strength is "a form of loose connectivity where institutions and actors mutually influence and adjust" (Hendriks 2016: 55). Such loose coupling is generally perceived as the ideal form of connectivity because it allows a natural deliberative filtering of good reasons through a system and because the defects of one site can be compensated for in the sites it is coupled with (cf. Mansbridge et al. 2012: 22–23; Hendriks 2016: 57). In practice, however, "the desirable strength of coupling between sites and activities depends on what is being connected, and where" (Hendriks 2016: 57), as well as on the time lapse between the connected communication processes. Couplings that are too tight or too loose are deemed problematic by systems approach scholars. These cases are the ones that attract the most attention in the deliberative systems literature.

Overly tight coupling has negative effects, not only on the sites involved, but potentially on the whole system. A particularly tight coupling can be visualised

63 Valuable unidirectional couplings include, for example, documents that summarise the central points of the deliberation of one site that are to be considered at another, such as reports or expert statements. Bi-directional couplings might be feedback mechanisms between sites or institutionalised hearings.

64 On a systemic level, reciprocity does not depend on the bidirectionality of individual connections, since reciprocity can also be established transitively, that is, via intermediate sites. In chapter 2.4, I will elaborate on the inherent value of mutual influence and adjustment between different parts of a deliberative system.

as a connection between two water bodies that is so wide that the bodies almost appear as one. So, there is much transmission and little filtering between the sites. However, one "virtue of a deliberative system is that failures in one institution can be compensated for in another part" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 22). If the coupling between two sites is too tight, this "self-corrective quality is lost" (ibid.: 23). Failures, such as dominant xenophobic or nationalist thinking in one site, may largely be transmitted to others (cf. ibid.). Again, there are also situations in which "tighter coupling may be desirable in some parts of the deliberative system to ensure that there are procedural mechanisms in place to hold decision makers to account" (Hendriks 2016: 57). Thus, tighter coupling might place empowered sites and their participants under public scrutiny, which these participants might otherwise try to avoid (cf. ibid.).

But coupling can also be too loose; sites and whole parts of a systems may become decoupled. The effects of *overly loose coupling* can be as negative as the effects of overly tight coupling. Visualised as the connections between water bodies, couplings are particularly loose if they are especially long or especially narrow. Long channels may represent couplings that have a considerable time lapse, during which the context of the deliberative output changes or due to which the transmissions are not remembered correctly. The water thus evaporates or is muddied. Long channels can also mean that the transmissions do not go directly from one site to the other but are forced to pass through several non-site locations. Such chains might, for example, be institutionalised procedures like parliamentary questions ("parlamentarische Anfragen") that lead to the production of documents by ministry staff. These documents are then processed throughout the various levels of administration and shortened into ever more condensed abstracts before they are received by the parliament and potentially introduced in its debates. In such cases, transmissions may be gradually altered, much in the same way that a story is altered in a game of "Telephone".

If a coupling is too loose, opinions, information and reasons may not be able to pass from one deliberative site to the other. Moreover, one may carry transmissions to another site in an intentionally partial manner in order to pretend that there is a unison of perspectives within this site's deliberation.

> In a broad process in which discourses ignore or neglect each other, specific discourses (or fragments of this constellation) may be mobilized as if they were the result of a proper deliberative process of opinion formation. Discur-

> sive fragments can, hence, be taken as representative of the public opinion and not as isolated stars within the constellation. (Mendonça 2018: 37)

In situations of overly loose coupling, such a fragmentation of transmission might go undetected.

Moreover, couplings can be overly loose if "some parts [of the system are] particularly resistant to arguments from other parts" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 23). In extreme cases, this can lead to a decoupling where whole parts of a system might be so divided by ideology, ethnicity, religion or other cleavages that the divided-apart sides will not even acknowledge transmissions from each other (cf. ibid.: 24). However, decoupling might in some cases be desirable. Emergent social movements or marginalised groups, for example, may need to deliberatively prepare their opinions and reasons before seeking to influence other sites within the system (Hendriks 2016: 57). The systemic value of the strength of a specific connection therefore must be assessed, once again, in accordance with the involved site's contexts.

Deliberative Qualities and Transmissions

"[A]lthough crucial, the institutional linkage between different spheres alone does not guarantee a successful transmission" (Boswell et al. 2016: 269). Thus, a suitable coupling does not guarantee a high-quality connection. The transmission processes can likewise have varying deliberative qualities. On the one hand, there is the question of the selection process itself, that is, the question of how reasons, pieces of information or opinions are selected for the transmission. The selection of transmission items can be explored with the deliberative standards *non-coerciveness, rationality, authenticity* and *comprehensibility*. So, the questions to be answered here concern the criteria that determine the selection process and the ways in which the transmissions are presented in the receiving site. In the spirit of systemic thinking, the assessment of the selection processes must once again consider the specific contexts of the involved sites; and there are no general standards for what a good selection process entails.

On the other hand, scholars need to consider how transmissions are heard and introduced within the communication processes of the receiving site. A successful transmission process implies not only that the respective transmission is carried out correctly and without bias, but also that it is included in the communication process it has been transmitted to. This inclusion "does not imply a deterministic 'use' of deliberations, recommendations, or decisions, but rather that the outputs from venues are shared, considered, and built upon as

decisions make their way through a complex governance system" (Doberstein 2020: 17). So, the standards of *listening* and *reflection* are applicable to transmissions as well.

I want to present two factors that shape both the selection process and the reception of those transmissions and that are especially relevant for digital communication processes. Firstly, transmission processes are shaped by the cultural, political and institutional context.[65] Secondly, individual carriers of a transmission have their own – individual – contexts that affect how they select and present their transmissions and how these transmissions are received in a site.

The cultural, political and institutional context of the system, the sites and the connections determine what is deemed important, what is taboo, how things can be said and understood and so on. So, a transmission "is vulnerable to the vagaries of the institutional and political context in which it occurs" (Boswell et al. 2016: 276). Laws, rules, institutional design and political culture do not just institutionalise couplings; they also influence what is transmitted from one site to another.[66] Institutionalised connections, in particular, would not be used to transmit societally sanctionable, much less illegal, contents.

According to Ercan et al. (2017: 204), "[m]uch of the empirical research on the institutional backdrop of public deliberation to date has focused on the structure of different political systems." Such research often

> considers the deliberative quality of certain political systems as independent of the actors or issues that trigger deliberation in the first place. The underlying assumption here is that the presence of certain institutional settings alone would ensure high quality deliberation. Studies relying on such assumptions emphasize [...] "the explanatory power of the structure of rules and norms that constrain individual agency". (Ercan et al. 2017: 204)

However, the cultural context of the sites is no less important. Cultural norms usually prompt a certain behaviour and discourage variant actions. They establish "'notions of who and what are considered reasonable, sensible and legitimate' (Koopmans 2004: 451) over the issue at stake", as well as of "who is recog-

65 Though the institutional, political and cultural context has been addressed neither frequently nor systematically by systems approach scholars, it is still important, especially with regard to digital communication.

66 The platform-related counterparts to laws, rules and institutional design are the platforms' logics and architectures.

nized as the main meaning-making body on the issue at hand" (Boswell et al. 2016: 269). The perceptions of the cultural, political and institutional context "vary to some extent from one policy arena to another, and from the point of view of one collective actor to that of another" (Koopmans 2004: 451).[67] The existence of a similar institutional, political and cultural context in all the involved sites will lead to a trade-off regarding the deliberative qualities. It will support qualities like *comprehensibility*, *listening*, *reflection* and *respect* between sites but at the same time reduce *inclusivity* and *diversity* of experiences, opinions and reasons (cf. Kuyper 2020: 8–9). Moreover, the reception of transmissions depends on how the sites transmitting them are being perceived by the sites receiving these transmissions. If, for example, the communication processes in a site are viewed as especially rational, truthful, authentic, common-good oriented and so on, transmissions might be taken up more willingly by other sites.[68]

How transmissions are presented and received (*authenticity*, *rationality*), how they are understood (*comprehensibility*) and who or what decides on the selection (*non-coerciveness*) are highly influenced by the specific institutional, political and cultural context of the involved sites. Therefore, scholars assessing the deliberative qualities of connections must "not only look *inside* particular venues but also at how those events are being perceived from the *outside*, and on what basis judgements are being made by onlookers" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 79, orig. emph.).

Besides the cultural, political and institutional context of the connection, there are also *individuals* who will filter the transmitted content at different points during the transmission process. There are individuals who decide upon what is to be included in reports and other transmission documents, individuals who carry the transmissions beyond the institutionalised couplings and individuals who introduce certain ideas from other sites in a deliberation.[69]

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67 In chapter 6.2, I will elaborate on the different cultural and communicational conventions of platform communities.

68 This depends on the value of the respective standards within the specific culture.

69 In the case of a report that is prepared in a mini-public and submitted to a legislative committee, for example, the filtering is performed in the decisions on what should be included in the report, which remains untouched throughout the transmission process itself and during its presentation in the legislative committee. What and how much content the coupling transmits is determined by possible institutional requirements concerning the report (addressing, for example, length, depth or formatting), as well as by the individuals that decide on the contents of the report. Another example would be committee members who directly observe the deliberation of the mini-public. What is

Individuals may follow different goals when they are transmitting contents between sites. They may want to generate policy impact; but they might also use a "transmission as a form of acknowledgment, legitimating the political value of identities (respectively activist, citizen and expert) that had been excluded or under-acknowledged" (Boswell et al. 2016: 276). To reach these goals, individuals may use their agency in various ways. They may assume a "mentoring role by encouraging others to listen to the voices of weaker publics and then ensuring that these publics' preferences are transmitted (with greater legitimacy) into empowered spaces" (ibid.: 277). Conversely, they may also "choose not to amplify particular claims" (ibid.: 277–278).

Depending on their respective positions in the sites, individuals will be more or less successful in their endeavours to introduce certain transmissions into a deliberation. Particular policy actors are "crucial in shaping what voices were heard and how messages were transmitted into more empowered sites" (ibid.: 277). Their importance may derive from their official status within a site, or even within the system. Experts or officials with decision-making power, for example, can easily dominate a deliberation (cf. Fleuß et al. 2018: 15; Thompson 2008: 509). But individuals might also gain an elevated status within sites by being present in many different deliberative sites that are all deliberating the same issue. "These regular representatives […] tend to become well known (in a positive or negative way) within policy communities and are usually regarded as individuals whose positions cannot be ignored" (Mendonça 2018: 47). The more important the position of an individual within the site, the better their chances to introduce certain transmissions into the deliberation.[70] With regard to deliberative qualities, an individual's ability to introduce transmissions in a site may have varying effects. On the one hand, the dominance of certain individuals counteracts equality. On the other hand, an influential individual's introduction and championing of relevant minority views might just as well enhance the inclusivity of the transmission (cf. Boswell et al. 2016: 273). Once

transmitted to the committee for deliberation depends on which committee member observed the mini-public at which point of the deliberation, for how long and with what intention; it also depends on what that member heard, understood and chose to repeat and on how they chose to frame it in the committee's own deliberations. These examples are based on a study presented by Hendriks (2016), and more details can be found in her publication.

70 In chapter 6.3, I will come back to the individual's influence on a deliberation and its meaning for deliberative quality.

again, the assessment of the transmission process must include the sites' contexts.

Apart from the importance of a position within the deliberative site, there are other factors that may help to introduce transmissions into a deliberation by generating attention and influence. For example, "willing and well-resourced citizens" at the grassroots level may "work in ways that are informal, social, fun, and agile while, crucially, delivering results that are relevant to their electorates" (Hendriks et al. 2020a: 64). Individuals can use innovative modes of presentation to transmit content, rather than following intentionally designed, top-down participatory processes. Moreover, they can employ these modes to attract attention and thus to introduce transmissions into a deliberation. While the first generations of deliberative democratic theory frowned upon the use of innovative modes of transmission, the deliberative systems approach has acknowledged their value and the possibility that they "may have consequences that are positive for the deliberative qualities of the system as a whole" (Owen/Smith 2015: 221).[71]

Of course, the actions of individuals are always affected by the cultural, political and institutional context they act in at a given time. For example, these contexts assign certain positions to certain individuals. Such contexts may enable these individuals, may give them a certain influence over transmissions or may restrict their influence over the reception of a transmission. The contexts also set the limits of what can be said; they define taboos and give certain guidelines on what is appropriate at a given position within the system (regarding network and sequence). Thus, the context of a connection shapes transmissions not only directly but also via the individuals acting within it. Conversely, the individuals find their own ways of handling these principles that apply in a given context. For instance, they might diverge from the usual conventions in order to bring certain transmissions to attention. The deliberative quality of a transmission is affected accordingly.[72]

In summary, the deliberative qualities of transmissions can be assessed by the general standards I introduced in chapter 2.1, especially *authenticity*, *rationality*, *comprehensibility*, *non-coerciveness*, *equality* and *inclusivity*. The deliberative

71 In chapter 6.1, I will address the various modes of presenting reasons, opinions and information on social media platforms, and I will comment on their effects on deliberative qualities.

72 In chapter 6.3, the interdependences of individuals, societal contexts and communication will again be addressed.

qualities are shaped by the institutional, political and cultural background of the transmission, as well as the individuals involved in the transmission process.

2.4 Deliberative Systems

Thus far, I have alluded to most of the central ideas regarding the concept of deliberative systems. In this chapter, I will give some theoretical and empirical background for these ideas and connect them with the points I have made concerning deliberation, deliberative sites and connections. On this basis, I will present a definition of deliberative systems that will serve as the foundation for the analyses in the following parts. In the second step, I will make the connection to systemic deliberative qualities. The following explications will mainly be based on theoretical work by scholars of the deliberative systems approach, since research thus far on the systemic aspects of deliberative systems has largely been done from a theoretical perspective.[73]

2.4.1 The Definition and Traits of Deliberative Systems

In contrast to deliberative sites and the connections between them, deliberative systems have been defined, and their traits have been analysed in abundance – though no less ambiguously. In their definitions, different scholars place their emphases on different aspects and thus arrive at slightly (or less

73 Empirical research is difficult due to the vastness and complexity of most deliberative systems. The majority of the studies conducted thus far have focussed "on the connections between one or more small-scale, citizen-centred forums and a wider or more formal democratic process" (Parkinson et al. 2020: 544). They have often studied the connections between just two or three sites and concentrated more "on deliberation, the noun, rather than the distributed, adjectival, deliberative quality that social systems theory suggests is so important" (ibid.: 544). Moreover, Boswell et al. (2016: 265) found that existing empirical research covers mainly two areas: the links between mass media coverage and legislative attention, on the one hand, and policy responsiveness to public opinion, on the other. "However, neither body of literature encompasses the broad array of sites and institutions through which claims travel in a deliberative system" (ibid.). Thus, they have called for "a deeper analysis of how diverse viewpoints are expressed, acknowledged and facilitated, and whether the claims associated with these viewpoints cross-pollinate different deliberative sites" (ibid.).

slightly) different definitions.[74] In the following sections, I will present the points where scholars of the systems approach agree and where they differ, and I will present my own conception of deliberative systems based on that.

The first account of deliberative systems was given by Jane Mansbridge (1999: 211) in a piece on the importance of everyday political talk.[75] The following pieces in early deliberative systems theory add further aspects and emphases to this conceptualisation and build the foundation of the "manifesto" of the systemic turn by Mansbridge and colleagues (2012).[76] The authors of the "manifesto" define deliberative systems as follows:

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74 Within the literature on the deliberative systems approach, definitions are usually given by starting from the macro-aspects and going through to the micro-aspects of the approach. Thus, the system is usually defined first, and then – if at all – scholars turn to the connections and sites. This is why some points made in the following with regard to defining the concept of deliberative systems have already been addressed in the course of defining deliberative sites and connections.

75 Mansbridge described deliberative systems as "talk among formal and informal representatives in designated public forums, talk back and forth between constituents and elected representatives or other representatives in politically oriented organizations, talk in the media, talk among political activists, and everyday talk in formally private spaces about things the public ought to discuss [in order for citizens] to understand better what they want and need, individually as well as collectively" (Mansbridge 1999: 211). According to this account, democracies need such a full deliberative system "if citizens are, in any sense, to rule themselves" (ibid.).

76 Central among these contributions are those by Robert Goodin (2005), Carolyn Hendriks (2006) and John Dryzek (2009).[83]Goodin (2005; 2008: 186) presents a model of distributed deliberation in which deliberation is viewed as sequential. The deliberative process develops over different stages in various component parts, with different agents playing different deliberative roles, and each stage has to answer different deliberative expectations. Hendriks (2006) explores the role of civil society within the system-wide deliberative process. Based on her analysis, she promotes the concept of an integrated deliberative system that emphasises the multiplicity of "discursive spheres" and the connections between these spheres, as well as the significance of actors (cf. ibid.: 499). Dryzek (2009) concerns himself with how to evaluate the deliberative capacity of a system. Pursuing this angle, he defines five components of deliberative systems: public space, empowered space, transmission, accountability and decisiveness, and he later adds meta-deliberation (2010: 10–12) to this list. He introduces the idea that these components may be more or less deliberative and, furthermore, that "[s]eemingly low deliberative quality in one location […] may be compensated by, or even inspire, higher deliberative quality in another location" (2009: 1388) or – conversely – undermine it.

> A *system* here means a set of distinguishable, differentiated, but to some degree interdependent parts, often with distributed functions and a division of labour, connected in such a way as to form a complex whole. It requires both differentiation and integration among the parts. It requires some functional division of labour, so that some parts do work that others cannot do as well. And it requires some relational interdependence, so that a change in one component will bring about changes in some others. A *deliberative* system is one that encompasses a talk-based approach to political conflict and problem-solving – through arguing, demonstrating, expressing, and persuading. (ibid.: 4–5)

According to this account, a deliberative system is generally talk-based and oriented towards the solving of political problems. Both of these aspects can apply to deliberation processes of all types and sizes –within sites and across systems. Moreover, for a system to be a system, it must be constituted of different parts or interconnected sites. Thus far, this account revises parts of what was addressed in the previous chapters. However, it also introduces a genuinely systemic angle: the sites should not only be connected in a certain way; they should also feature a "functional division of labour" and "relational interdependence" between the sites in order to build "a complex whole".

The division of labour refers to the idea that "the entire burden of decision making and legitimacy does not fall on one forum or institution but is distributed among different components in different cases" (ibid.: 5). Therefore, different parts of the system fulfil different functions and contribute differently to the systemic decision-making. Hence, "not all the virtues need to be displayed to equal extent – or even at all – in different locations in a deliberative system" (Dryzek 2016: 212). However, Simone Chambers rejects

> a full division of labour in which one part of the system, say representative institutions or mini-publics, performs an epistemic function based in high quality deliberation, while another part of the system, say elections, performs a democratic function of mass participation. (2012: 65)

As she goes on to remark: "This would be dysfunctional it seems to me" (ibid.). Rather, one site can pursue different goals at the same time, and different sites fulfil the various goals to different degrees (cf. ibid.: 65). Yet it is unlikely that one will find a site that can realise all goals at once.

Deliberative systems scholars have not addressed the relational interdependence between deliberative sites as expressly as they have the division of

labour. But the idea that "change in one component will bring about changes in some others" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 4–5) nonetheless appears in their work. It can be understood as the conceptual counterpart to the division of labour, and it is an integral aspect of the system: in order to have a systemic effect, a division of labour needs to combine the results of this labour. This is because "[d]eliberative systems do not exist naturally and they cannot be assumed as being already or always there. The porosity between discursive arenas must be built and supported, requiring inducers that contribute to stitching the parts together" (Mendonça 2018: 40). For example, in a deliberative system, there must be sites for listening to and reflecting on different views, but in order for these sites to influence the deliberation in other sites and, perhaps, the actual decision-making, their results must somehow be transmitted to and acknowledged by the other sites. Thus, "the problem is not the lack of spaces for listening and reflection, but whether these spaces are integrated with spaces involving expressive function and decision making" (Ercan et al. 2019: 26).[77]

Relational interdependence not only concerns the different deliberative functions and goals of a system. It also means that a certain part can set or alter the context of deliberation for other parts. For example, "[i]nformal discussion can contribute to an eventual state decision and to broad societal decisions [if] the majority of a society or a subgroup changes its norms and practices, bringing to bear social sanctions on those who deviate from the new norms and practices […]" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 8). Thus, relational interdependence is integral to a system's being a system. It resembles the conceptual counterpart to the division of labour because it addresses the connections between different parts, which have different goals and functions that may affect each other's deliberative contents and contexts.[78]

In sum, there is a consensus among scholars that deliberative systems are based on political communication, that they aim at political decision-making,

77 According to Ricardo Mendonça (2018: 40), this likewise translates to the participants in the sites: "The actors discussing in a particular point in time and space ought to be affected by whilst also affecting discussions happening in other points in time and space, if a system is to be a system." However, it seems very implausible that participants will be aware of and responsive to all other perspectives within the system. Moreover, this demand seems to partially defeat the purpose of deliberative systems, as the sluicing of perspectives and the decision-making in the dedicated spaces is supposed to absolve the individual lay participant of the need for omniscience and absolute circumspection.

78 I will revisit relational interdependence in chapter 2.4.2.

that they are composed of diverse interconnected sites with different contexts and that they display a division of labour and relational interdependence. But there are further conceptual aspects that are treated more ambiguously among scholars. For instance, there have been two dominant models for visualising deliberative systems since the beginnings of the systems approach: a networked and a sequenced model.

The networked model conceptualises deliberative systems as a "map of nodes […], with multiple forms of communication among them" (ibid.: 10), where the nodes are the various deliberative sites that are connected with each other. Such a view enables scholars to "model[…] patterns of communicative inclusion and exclusion, including the theoretically-important concept of deliberative enclaves" (Parkinson 2018: 439). Moreover, this kind of model demonstrates the weight of the more informal sites of the public sphere by indicating their sheer numeric preponderance. It is also a useful tool for empirical research on deliberative systems due to its relative simplicity (cf. ibid.).

However, Parkinson (ibid: 438–439) sees two major disadvantages of network maps. First, they cannot clearly show the substance of the connections between the nodes, and the difference between nodes and connections remains concealed.[79] Second, networked models are largely static, since they "better represent formal or well-institutionalized relationships, or moments in time of what is otherwise a dynamic and evolving set of relationships" (ibid.). The notion that deliberative systems are not stable but are instead "complex, porous and shifting in nature" is also stressed by John Boswell and Jack Corbett (2017: 801). According to them, deliberative goods are, on the one hand, "distribut[ed] across space and time" and thus "flow across the system" (ibid.: 809). On the other hand, "their shape is inherently unstable. Because of their complex, ongoing interaction, they cannot manifest in exactly the same way in different contexts" (ibid.). Moreover, Parkinson (2018: 439) warns that networked models of deliberative systems are inadequate for revealing critical junctures of a deliberative process, like moments of collective decision or agenda-setting.

To capture these junctures, Parkinson (2006) and Goodin (2008) introduced an alternative, sequenced model of deliberative systems. This sequencing can be regarded as another mode of the division of labour (cf. Mansbridge

79 I have addressed, in chapter 2.3, the necessity of distinguishing between site and connection.

et al. 2012: 6–7). Therefore, like sites, different stages of the process have different contexts (cf. Goodin 2008: 194–201). But

> instead of modeling formal relationships between venues in a static fashion, [sequenced models] start with stages in a decision-making process, and thus model the dynamics as an idea or claim (or set of claims) passes – ideally – from the informal public sphere into formal processes in which policy options are generated, linked with evidence and arguments, weighed, and tested, before a binding collective decision is made and executive powers coerced into action. (Parkinson 2018: 439)[80]

Mansbridge and colleagues likewise conceptualise deliberative processes as "relatively open deliberations at the beginning[,] narrowing to a focus as the point of decision is reached" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 6). Bächtiger and Parkinson (2019: 90–92) go into more detail by roughly distinguishing three steps of the ideal deliberative sequence. The first step aims at democratic inclusiveness; there "should be relatively wild, inclusive, uncontrolled debate in the public sphere" (ibid.: 92). Such a debate can be initiated by formal leaders as well as by social movements or other actors (cf. ibid.: 90). The public sphere is thereby the birthplace for deliberative systems, and the degree of its diversity and inclusiveness shapes the diversity and inclusiveness of the entire system. In the second step, this wild debate is given "some institutional focal points […] to which other publics can and do attend" (ibid.: 92). These institutions may be smaller-scale deliberative institutions, like deliberative mini-publics, public inquiries or parliamentary committees (cf. ibid.: 90). They "channel public debate into the agenda-setting process" (ibid.: 92), testing and filtering the arguments in order to see which ones are supported by evidence and argument or are consonant with public values (cf. ibid.: 90). Based on that, they "provide

80 A similar distinction is made by Finlayson (2019: 105). Based on Habermas (1996), he differentiates between civil society, which raises problems, the "impulse-generating periphery", which gives these problems to the parliamentary complex, and the further discursive treatment of the problems in the formal public of the parliamentary system. In contrast to this bottom-up approach, Goodin (2008: 194–201) proposes four stages (beginning with caucus room discussion, which is followed by parliamentary debates). The public is involved only in the communication accompanying the election campaign and the election itself. The final step is the post-election bargaining. However, the bottom-up approach proposed by Parkinson starts long before an issue is brought to the attention of political parties and seems more akin to systemic thinking.

focused deliberation on the issues at hand, providing recommendations for further action" (ibid.: 92). The third step is the decision-making itself. Since it will be binding on everyone in a state, in order to be legitimate, it "ought to be made by every member of that state in a referendum or by their duly authorized and accountable representatives in a legislature" (ibid.). Thus, the deliberative process is distributed throughout the network as well as over time (see also Elstub et al. 2016: 144–145). Sometimes, the different sites and different steps produce different perspectives and arguments on an issue. Sometimes, the steps build upon each other, and "arguments made in one part of the system will be tested in another part" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 6–7). But it is not only the contents of deliberation that are distributed across network and sequence. Similarly, "the component deliberative virtues are on display sequentially, over the course of this staged deliberation involving various component parts" (Goodin 2008: 186).

However, sequential models, too, have some major weaknesses. First of all, they "can lend a rationalist glow to processes which almost never proceed in such an orderly fashion", as in reality "solutions frequently precede problems" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 89). Even more importantly, sequenced models "can often miss peripheral players that network analysis reveals" (Parkinson 2018: 439) and that are nonetheless relevant to the decision-making within the system. Therefore, in my own definition, I will opt for a hybrid model that includes aspects of both networks and sequences.

In doing so, I conceptualise deliberative systems as consisting of communication processes that are relevant to the system's foundational issue. These communication processes occur within the various deliberative sites, as well as in the form of transmission processes between these sites. Even communication processes within disconnected sites belong to the systems – although the disconnectedness usually detracts from the inclusivity of the system. Their exact position in reference to the network and sequence of the system is a relevant context for the assessment of the communication processes' deliberative qualities.

In order to distinguish between different deliberative systems, scholars have presented several approaches to defining the boundaries of a deliberative democratic system. Three main approaches of boundary setting have been discussed: institution-based, issue-based and action-based boundary setting. In an approach to boundary-setting based on political institutions, "the deliberative system is conceptualized and evaluated as it functions within the boundaries of nation states, supranational states, international decision-

making bodies, and […] international institutions" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 8). If a deliberative system has issue-based boundaries, it is not perceived as a stable structure waiting to process the next issue. Rather, a new system "always needs to be constructed and performed when an issue arises" (Dryzek 2010: 81). Lastly, defining action-based boundaries is a more normative endeavour (cf. Smith 2016: 160). These boundaries are "drawn around action that contributes to realizing its deliberative capacity" (Smith 2018: 17). This means that "[t]hose actions that[,] all things considered, enhance the epistemic, inclusive, or consequential credentials of the system might be categorized as internal to it, while those actions that likewise frustrate these functions might be categorized as external to the system" (ibid.).[81]

In defining the boundaries of a deliberative system, I opt for a mainly issue-based approach that also takes account of actions.[82] Singling out an action-based or institution-based approach poses problems: Boundaries based on purely deliberative action would only ignore important non-deliberative action, including probably any communication happening in the digital realm. Focussing on institutions alone would lead to the omission of non-institutionalised sites that may be central to certain deliberative processes. Therefore, I argue that scholars should define boundaries as issue-based but that they should also consider aspects of action in the process: only sites whose communication processes potentially contribute to deliberative decision-making should be considered part of the system. In other words, a deliberative system contains only deliberation and non-deliberative actions that are relevant to the systemic deliberation on its specific issue. "Relevant to the systemic deliberation" means that these actions address the issue central to the respective

81 Mark Bevir and Kai Chan further distinguish the ways that scholars of the systems approach treat boundary-setting. On the one hand, they identify functionalist approaches that "include as parts of the deliberative system those practices and sites that currently effect, or at least have the potential to effect, [the system's predefined] functional needs" (2021: 8). On the other hand, there are the interpretivist approaches that, in order to define what practices fall within a deliberative system, focus on the intentionality of the relevant agents (cf. ibid.: 11).

82 I follow Bächtiger/Parkinson (2019: 91, 2019: 112–113, 2019: 17), as well as Owen/Smith (2015: 215–216), who regard deliberative systems as connected with and contextualised by nation states, but not identical to them. "We can imagine systems that are focused on the formal institutions of nation states […] but even those that are focused on a given territory's decision making institutions are not likely to be coextensive with its borders" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 112–113).

deliberative system, and the systemic deliberation on this issue eventually culminates in a political decision. Deliberative systems thus include "a variety of institutions and social practices [that] combine to produce [deliberative] goods on an issue, over time and place, with differently situated actors" (Parkinson et al. 2020: 545). The shape of the system is nonetheless closely connected with its issue. For example,

> a communication system surrounding economic policy is likely to be characterized by transnational governance networks operating in relative isolation from the narratives of the wider public sphere; while, on the contrary, a system about migration is likely to be closely entangled with public sphere narratives, and have many national or regional characteristics with transnational linkages at the margins, but also feature enclaves of academic and activist opinion which have relatively little resonance in formal or informal debate. (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 113)

Hence, the actual form of a deliberative system is shaped by the issue under deliberation and the relevant expertise. The system is terminated by the final decision. Of course, in the system's sites, there will still be communication processes on the issue that cannot be included in the decision-making and that continue parallel to it. But these processes are part of further deliberative systems that may be consecutive to, and therefore may include, the original system.

From this perspective on the boundaries of deliberative systems, I would add that several systems may overlap and influence each other. A system may also comprise one or more smaller deliberative systems on issues relevant to or included in the overall system. Deliberative systems can become very large and complex when their issue is a particularly broad one. Since a broad issue is one in which many people are affected, many sites are involved and the expertise is spread widely, the deliberative system is especially complex.

The latest works on deliberative systems widen the focus yet again. Scholars are interested not only in communicative practices, but also in other practices that are not even potentially deliberative. Deliberative systems are now conceptualised as parts of wider democratic systems. Warren (2017: 39) terms these wider systems "democratic political systems" and formulates several demands of these systems that are closely related to, but not limited to, the ideas of deliberative systems scholars. Bächtiger and Parkinson (2019) likewise shift their demands from purely deliberative ones to those allowing for democratic

systems with a "deliberative timbre" (ibid.: 5). They claim "that deliberation is just one value among several in a democracy; and that the precise form it takes and its relationship to other forms of action depend on goals and contexts" (ibid.: 19). Similarly, Owen and Smith understand democratic deliberation "as one amongst many practices through which democratic institutions and systems realise a range of democratic goods. It is not the only democratic practice and will not always be appropriate" (2015: 231). Therefore, the systemic question is focussed on "the role of deliberation within democratic systems, rather than [on] whether democratic systems are deliberative in nature" (ibid.: 232).[83] However, these approaches do not contradict the points I am going to make by way of my definition and analysis. Since my main interest lies with communication processes across systems, be they "deliberative" or "democratic", I will keep my focus on the much more widely discussed deliberative systems approach.

In summary, deliberative systems can be modelled as systems that are composed in order to feature a division of labour and relational interdependence between its constituent parts. The systems consist of interconnected communication processes on a specific issue. These processes are contextualised by this issue, as well as by their individual contexts. The system culminates in the binding decision on its issue.

2.4.2 Systemic Deliberative Qualities

Deliberative systems, their composition and their performance have thus far been addressed mostly from a theoretical angle. Drawing on an account from Finlayson (2019: 105), which itself draws on key phrases from Habermas (1996), the following can be said: a system is working well if, after problems have been raised in civil society and transmitted through the "'impulse-generating periphery'", "the flows of communication and discourse are able to enter the parliamentary complex through the 'sluices' and 'portals' of representative government". Mansbridge (1999: 211) gives further detail to this observation:

83 According to Asenbaum (2022: 88), "democratic theorists situated in the participatory tradition have entered this debate" on how to go "beyond deliberative systems". One approach from a participatory democracy point of view involves exploring the systemic connections in large-scale democratic innovations, as is done by Dean et al. (2020) and Parry et al. (2021). Moreover, Asenbaum investigates how not only participatory, but also agonistic and transformative systems approaches can contribute to conceptualising "democratic ecosystems".

> If a deliberative system works well, it filters out and discards the worst ideas available on public matters while it picks up, adopts, and applies the best ideas. If the deliberative system works badly, it distorts facts, portrays ideas in forms that their originators would disown, and encourages citizens to adopt ways of thinking and acting that are good neither for them nor for the larger polity.

One might add that there are many more ways a deliberative system could work badly. It could, for example, fail to transmit any problems or contents to the decision-making spaces. Or it might connect only some of the potentially affected individuals to the decision-making. Either way, what deliberative democratic systems "need are institutions which allow for diversity of *input*, but then processes in which those inputs are *structured* into distinct perspectives", where this "structuration process is visible and open enough to allow for individual *endorsement*" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 10, orig. emph.) – this is spoken from the perspective of a normative systems scholar.[84] Attempts to assess deliberative systems in a more empirical manner are still in their beginnings. Scholars have done case studies on a limited number of sites and connections at a time (cf. Hendriks 2016); they have also done studies on how issues are dispersed across various sites (cf. Hendriks et al. 2020a). Other scholars have concerned themselves with how to conceptualise and measure the quality of deliberative systems (cf. Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019; Fleuß et al. 2018; Fleuß/Helbig 2021). In this section, I will build on my conceptualisation of deliberative systems and draw from both theoretical and empirical work by deliberative systems scholars in order to show how several of the deliberative standards I introduced in chapter 2.1 can be applied on the system level.

The starting points for most scholars of the deliberative systems approach are *inclusivity* and *diversity*. As I already stated, all individuals who are potentially affected by the decision on a certain issue must be involved in the preparational communication on that issue,[85] and since all these individuals are usually dispersed across society, they are involved in diverse deliberative sites. The diversity of sites demands a division of labour within the systemic deliberative

84 For the description of a system's deliberative qualities, the standards of systemic *inclusivity* and *diversity* can be derived from this normative statement.

85 Among others: Boswell et al. (2016: 277), Fleuß et al. (2018: 15), Habermas (1996: 181), Knops (2018: 121), Mansbridge et al. (2010: 65–66), Parkinson (2012a: 67), Smith (2016: 162).

process. Or, from the reverse angle, it can be said that a "system with a division of labour is deliberative to the extent that it increases the pool of perspectives, claims, narratives, and reasons available to decision-makers" (Parkinson 2012b: 154). The network nodes of a system must be composed in a way that promotes the system's goals. In view of the division of labour, different sites may perform different deliberative tasks. For example, deliberative systems need spaces for voice and expression, spaces for listening and reflection and spaces that involve decision-making (cf. Ercan et al. 2019). But there is no "fixed, ideal configuration of deliberative sites: deliberative acts can be spatially and temporally distributed and combined and recombined in sometimes surprising ways" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 20).

"Different sites can contribute to deliberative capacity [later: deliberative systems] in different proportions, in different societies and systems" (Dryzek 2009: 1383). Moreover, the deliberative qualities of this process are considered "dispersed goods" (Parkinson et al. 2020: 545). Among the variety of sites, "few, or perhaps none, entail all the ideal aspects of democratic deliberation in isolation, but, ideally, as a collective they foster inclusive and reflective discussion on matters of common concern" (Ercan et al. 2017: 196; see also Smith 2016: 161). Moreover, what "might be considered low quality or undemocratic deliberation in an individual instance might from a systems perspective contribute to an overall healthy deliberation" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 12–13). Consequently, a site "which in itself may have low or even negative deliberative quality with respect to one of several deliberative ideals, may nevertheless make an important contribution to an overall deliberative system" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 2–3; see also Bächtiger et al. 2018: 16). Mansbridge and colleagues offer a rather technocratic example for this:

> [S]erious discussions on European Union (EU)-wide matters take place mostly among elites, while the national media and, to a lesser degree, national politicians, organize the public debate on EU issues. Although the overall system is far from ideal epistemically, the elite discourse provides expertise, reasoned and informed mutual accommodation, and mutual respect, while the nationally instigated deliberation provides perspectives that might otherwise not be heard. By enhancing inclusion, the national media also increase the EU's normative democratic legitimacy. (2012: 3)

On the other hand, "high-quality deliberative acts in specific venues may not always mean higher deliberative quality at the system level" (Bächtiger/

Parkinson 2019: 80). If there is too much deliberation or communication on a matter, democratic functions such as decisiveness, accountability or responsiveness might be impaired (cf. ibid.).

Similarly, deliberative quality is distributed across time, that is, across the various steps of the deliberative sequence. Goodin (2008: 195) presumes that "each of those 'stages of the deliberative process' will display different virtues". For example, while he associates the respectful exchange of arguments with parliamentary debates and post-election bargaining, he assumes that authenticity is more likely to be found in the caucus room exchanges that precede and serve as preparation for the parliamentary debates (cf. ibid.: 196). In his eyes, the quality of a distributed deliberative process "presumably depends on having all of the deliberative virtues on display at *some* point or another in the decision process" (ibid.: 201, orig. emph.). This point is similar to what has been said with regard to the network distribution of deliberation.

In consequence, (1) measuring the deliberative performance of sites through use of a general measure applied to all the sites and communicative processes of a system and (2) cumulating these measurements in an additive manner will not lead to a reasonable assessment of the deliberative qualities of a system. Rather, each site and communication process must be considered with regard to its contexts, including the communication process's position in both the network and the deliberative sequence. For example, there is a difference between, on one hand, communication processes that occur directly before a decision and in a site that is directly connected with the decision-making space and, on the other, processes that occur during "wild, inclusive, uncontrolled debate in the public sphere" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 92), far from the actual decision-making in network and sequence. Both these types of sites contribute differently to the systemic process, and this must be reflected in the assessment of the deliberative qualities of these communication processes and the overall deliberative system.

Hence, truly systemic assessments of deliberative quality also must account for relational interdependence within deliberative systems, that is, for *connectedness* and *reciprocity* between the sites. Connections between the different sites, with their different qualities, are essential for the compensation and balance of deliberative qualities across the sites I just described. Through "processes of convergence, mutual influence, and mutual adjustment, each of these parts would consider reasons and proposals generated in the other parts" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 23). The perspectives are discussed in the various sites, and some of these perspectives are structured and selected in order

to be transmitted further through the system (cf. Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 10).

The diversity of deliberative sites comes with a diversity of deliberative qualities. The relational interdependence between the sites can affect these deliberative qualities as well.

> Seemingly low deliberative quality in one location (say, corporatist state institutions) may be compensated by, or even inspire, higher deliberative quality in another location (say, a flourishing public sphere). Conversely, high deliberative quality in one location may undermine deliberative quality in another. For example, if legislators know that their more dubious collective decisions will be overruled by a constitutional court, then they are free to engage in irresponsible rhetoric. (Dryzek 2009: 1388)

In other words, "it is the *interplay* of venues that can produce the deliberative quality […] in a democratic system" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 20, orig. emph.; see also Ercan et al. 2017: 201). For example, some communication processes might take place behind closed doors, but the results of these conversations must be known in order to be put forward for the public's consideration and censure (cf. Bächtiger 2016: 271). This reciprocity between the various sites is constitutive of a systemic flow of transmissions.

Reciprocity is equally important with regard to the sequences of deliberative systems. According to Goodin, the quality of systemically distributed deliberative processes "presumably depends on the deliberative virtues coming in the right combinations and the right order" (Goodin 2008: 201). For example, formal governmental decisions will reflect the considered will of the citizenry "only insofar as that will has gone through a process of effective citizen deliberation – in the everyday talk of homes, workplaces, and places where a few friends meet, as well as more formal talk in designated public assemblies" (Mansbridge 1999: 212). Only after these views have been collected in such "wild, inclusive, uncontrolled debate" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 92) can they be properly included and filtered in the systemic deliberation. Therefore, reciprocity regarding both the network and the sequence of a deliberative system is important for the systemic flow of transmissions.

However, the mere existence of connections does not guarantee reciprocity, much less a systemic flow of transmissions. As described above, connections can be formed by couplings or alternative inducers of transmissions. Both are "factors that can contribute to promote an actual system, in

which the parts do not ignore each other or operate independently" (Mendonça 2018: 40). These connections "may promote not only an awareness of what has been said in other arenas, but the consideration of discourses throughout the system" (ibid.). Yet stable couplings may be "clogged", or they may be used in a way that allows only heavily biased contents to be transmitted. Therefore, they are ideally reinforced by alternative inducers of transmissions.[86] This means that transmission will still occur, even if one of the connections is dysfunctional. Moreover, reinforcement of connections presumably leads to a wider variety of transmitted contents. Different couplings and alternative transmitters will follow different guidelines, incentives, interests and emphases in the contents they choose to transmit. Moreover, if contents are introduced into a discussion from multiple angles, they will probably generate more attention and discussion time in a site. Therefore, when there are more connections between two sites, there is probably a greater degree of transmission and uptake, and the connections are less biased by specific goals of transmitting and less filtered.

Here, I want to introduce another aspect regarding the structure of deliberative systems, one for which I can draw from some findings from systems approach scholars.[87] Deliberative systems develop clusters of sites with reinforced connections. These clusters may result in "'deliberative ecologies', in which [certain] contexts facilitate some forms of deliberation and avenues for information while others facilitate different forms and avenues" (Mansbridge et al. 2012: 6). Some of these clusters may form because similar political interests are communicated within the sites, and some may arise because the sites and the connection have a similar cultural, political and institutional context. Of course, to a certain degree, these clusters have their raison d'être.: they increase comprehensibility and authenticity and thus support listening, reflection and respect within the cluster. Moreover, "[l]ike-minded conversations […] are important for democracy because they may strengthen the positions of weaker political actors and foster the reinterpretation of public clashes of discourses" (Mendonça 2018: 35). For a balanced discussion of the various

86 Generally, individuals acting as carriers of a transmission across multiple sites and multiple steps of a deliberative system "play an important role in bringing parts of the system closer to each other" (Mendonça 2018: 47).

87 The concept of clusters has been inspired by the fragmentation discourse from digitization research and will become relevant in my analyses throughout chapters 3.2, 5 and 6.

transmissions across the system, however, these clusters must be embedded in the wider deliberative system. This embeddedness may have to counteract deep-rooted incompatibilities between the different parts. Incompatibilities occur

> because the logics, dynamics, and nature of given arenas may push debates in contrasting directions that cannot be combined. Even if content may flow across arenas and the substance of a speech may be translated, discourse cannot be reduced to its "content". Discourse […] is embedded in the arenas where it was formulated [and the] incompatibility of communicative dynamics can contribute to keeping certain feelings and worldviews invisible, due to a lack of translatability[, as there] are processes that occur in diverse arenas that simply cannot be transposed to other types of arenas. (ibid.: 39)

Yet, if clusters dominate the systemic deliberation, simply because they include more sites and individuals and have more connections beyond their own ranks, the systemic communication process displays low equality and non-coerciveness (cf. Mansbridge et al. 2012: 23–24).

Lastly, the systemic communication processes that collect diverse perspectives and structure them into diverse perspectives while sluicing them through the system need to be "visible and open enough to allow for individual *endorsement*" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 10, orig. emph.). Moreover, *visibility* and *publicity* are needed to ensure *accountability*, *respect*, *reflection*, etc. (cf. ibid.: 12; Thompson 2008: 510). On the other hand, visibility can be detrimental for other deliberative qualities. For example, "politicians who deliberate in private are more inclined to make candid arguments, recognize complexities, and offer concessions" (Thompson 2008: 510). Moreover, "some kinds of learning and the freedom to forge agreements often require deliberation and bargaining behind closed doors, so that the weight of prior commitments does not lock participants into predetermined positions" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 40–41; similarly, Mansbridge 1999: 221). More generally, "in the everyday talk of the larger deliberative system, creative thought often thrives in protected space" (Mansbridge 1999: 221). From a systemic perspective, the "visibility condition is one that must be […] fulfilled during the democratic process but should not be seen as [a] universal principle guiding the entire process" (Bächtiger/Parkinson 2019: 12). The adequacy of visibility depends, once again, on the position of the communication processes within the systemic network and sequence.

> [I]n the public square, political actors need to be effective advocates rather than just being open to the force of the better argument; but they can be expected to provide good reasons and engage with the arguments of their political opponents. By contrast, in a context behind closed doors, where pressures of public scrutiny are reduced, we can expect other deliberative virtues – reflection, open-mindedness, listening, and respect – to flourish more fully. (ibid.: 40–41)

Moreover, Mansbridge has concluded that a deliberative system needs "some mixture of protection and publicity in the early stages of a deliberative process, but maximum feasible publicity in the final stages" (1999: 221). Publicity therefore has positive effects in some parts of the system, whereas it is problematic in others.

In summary, integrated systems display high inclusivity and reciprocity. Deliberative systems can increase their inclusivity and diversity by including various sites and communication processes with diverse backgrounds. Reciprocity can be enhanced through the connections between deliberative sites. These connections can be reinforced by alternative inducers of transmissions in order to support a systemic flow of transmissions. Clusters of sites and communication processes with reinforced connections may enhance the system's deliberative qualities, but they must be connected to the system in equal and non-coercive ways in order to secure a system's overall equality. Furthermore, the publicity of communication processes can have different effects on the deliberative qualities of different parts and sequences of a deliberative system.