

Elstub S.

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*Representation* 2010, 46(3), 309-324.

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Representation* on 17/10/2010, available online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2010.499699>

**Date deposited:**

02/03/2016



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# **LINKING MICRO DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY & DECISION-MAKING: TRADE-OFFS BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE IN A PARTISAN CITIZEN FORUM**

**Stephen Elstub**

*The paper argues that decision-making is central to deliberative democracy, especially in its micro institutional form. However, distinct trade-offs between theory and practice are required to ensure that this link is present. These trade-offs also vary depending on whether the forums are based on sortition or partisanship. The paper locates the trade-offs at the various decision-making stages between theory and practice in a partisan citizen forum in the Peak District in the UK.*

The premise of this paper is that it is essential to the idea of deliberative democracy that it involves public debate that leads to decisions (Bohman 1996: 177; Dryzek 2000: 2; Squires 2002: 142; Leib 2004: 5-6, 39; Cohen 2007: 219; Elstub 2008a). A close link with decision-making is especially important in micro deliberation (Hendriks 2006). However, the approximation of micro deliberation in practice, and ensuring that it leads to collectively binding decisions, is made extremely difficult due to practical exigencies that require trade-offs (Blaug 1999). Empirical evidence from approximations of deliberative democracy in practice is therefore essential to illuminate the nature, location and extent of the trade-offs (Blaug 1999: 134; Eckersley 2000: 125; Thompson 2008; Smith 2009: 96).

However, most empirical research on micro deliberative democracy has focused on mini-publics, which bring together a random sample of unpartisan citizens and rarely result in binding decisions. This is not to say that these mini-publics are not illuminating and important sources of empirical evidence, or that they are not vital institutions with an important role to play in approximating deliberative democracy in practice, but rather that research is also required on approximations of partisan micro-deliberation where those participating are coming together to make collectively binding decisions that affect themselves. Consequently, this paper will review such a

case study, the Stanage Forum, the purpose of which was to produce an effective Management Plan, through the participation of all key stakeholders, for the North Lees Estate, an area in the Peak District, a national park in the UK. The analysis of events and processes in the Stanage Forum, and comparison with mini-publics, will aid the understanding of the specific tensions that exist between theory and practice in partisan micro deliberative democracy and its link with decision making. Although such trade-offs are relative to the context, it is thought that the case is representative to a degree, so some general themes in relation to theory and practice will be articulated. After first making the case for the importance of a link between micro deliberation and decision-making, the paper will introduce the Stanage Forum. Trade-offs between the theory of deliberative democracy and the processes of the five decision-making stages present in the Stanage Forum, (Agenda setting, deliberation, decision-making, implementation and review), will then be mapped in turn. As Smith argues this is ‘a highly stylized’ account of decision-making processes, but it does still act as a ‘useful heuristic’ (Smith 2009: 23). Similarly Habermas’s (1990) ideal speech situation (ISS) is employed as a theoretical heuristic.

### **Micro-Deliberative Democracy and Partisan Decision-Making**

The argument here is that democracy in general, and therefore deliberative democracy, involves collective decision-making. Furthermore, that micro deliberative democracy in particular is the institutionalised decision-making element of deliberative democracy.

Democracy involves ‘collective decision-making through the equal participation of all relevant actors’, while deliberation is ‘the give-and-take of rational arguments’ (Elstun 2006: 302; cf. Elster 1998: 8). Therefore deliberative democracy is ultimately a decision-making mechanism: ‘Deliberation, generically understood is about weighing the reasons relevant to that decision with a view to making a decision on the basis of that weighing’; while ‘democracy is a way of making binding, collective decisions’ (Cohen 2007: 219; see also Bohman 1996: 177; Elster 1998: 492; Dryzek 2000: 2; Squires 2002: 142; Leib 2004: 5-6, 39; Elstun 2008a: 170). It is though important to acknowledge that the link between deliberation and decision-

making, is far from being an all or nothing affair, but is scalar and an issue of proximity (Chambers 2009).

Hendriks (2006) suggests that there are two broad types of strategy for institutionalizing deliberative democracy micro and macro, which are distinguished in relation to scale and formality of deliberation. Micro deliberative democracy focuses on ideal deliberative procedures, within small-scale structured arenas within the state, orientated to decision-making, with impartial participants deliberating together in one place and at one time. Alternatively, macro deliberative democracy favours informal and unstructured, and spontaneous discursive communication that occurs across space and time, aimed at opinion formation, within civil society, outside and often against the formal decision-making institutions of the state, with partisan deliberators.

Micro conceptions of deliberative democracy tend to be made up of free and equal impartial participants selected through random stratified sampling such as mini-publics (Hendriks 2006: 492). They do engage partisan participants in their processes as a mechanism to ensure a range of relevant opinions and information are articulated to the random sample of citizens, but not to deliberate themselves (Hendriks 2006). As Goodin (2008: 11) explains mini-publics are made up of ordinary, non-partisan, lay citizens and are ‘designed to be groups small enough to be genuinely deliberative and representative enough to be genuinely democratic’ and include citizens’ juries, deliberative opinion polls, planning cells and consensus conferences. Mini-publics rarely result in binding decisions because they usually involve a stratified random sample of unpartisan participants who are not affected by a decision. In fact it is unlikely that these mini-publics would be seen as legitimate if they did result in binding decisions, precisely because of this factor, and go against traditional notions of democratic accountability. Ultimately if a random selection of citizens were to make decisions, there is no mechanism to hold them accountable for the decision (Bader and Bartlett 2005; Parkinson 2006; Goodin 2008; Smith 2009: 169, 176, 187; 191).<sup>i</sup> The commissioning authority therefore pick and choose which recommendations from the jury to accept (McLaverty 2009; Smith 2009), which is for some critics means they are too easily manipulated (Furedi 2005: 118-19). Citizens’ juries are then easily co-opted by government ‘for if the jury’s recommendations are

not already supported by the government, they are likely to be ignored' (McLaverty 2009; see also Smith 2009).

Nevertheless, mini-publics have generally been the preferred method for the institutionalisation of micro deliberative democracy as it is thought that non-partisan participants are more likely to transform their preferences in light of new reasons (Pelletier et al. 1999; Smith 2000; Hendriks 2006: 497; Hendriks 2002: 70; Dryzek 2007; Hendriks et al. 2007), which is an essential element of deliberative democracy (Elster 1998: 6; Elstub 2006: 303). It is the contention here that deliberation in small scale decision-making and deliberative forums that involve partisan deliberators should also be classed as micro deliberation. Habermas argues that having to justify preferences for a decision to those who will be affected by the decision encourages deliberators to form preferences in accordance with public concerns and motivates us to offer reasons that can be accepted by all. This is the principle at the heart of the ISS, which embodies the norms of deliberative democracy (Habermas 1990). In fact Dryzek suggests that 'theoretical presentations of deliberative democracy normally assume that deliberators are partisans' (Dryzek 2007: 246). Deliberative democrats that feel mini-publics are the only methods available to institutionalise deliberative democracy seem to lack faith in the power of public reason, instead thinking it seemingly necessary to ensure a focus on the common good and a willingness to change preferences by ensuring that those deliberating do not have an interest or opinion in the decision itself. Although having unpartisan participants does indeed facilitate this, partisanship cannot be removed from the political process; we must and should have faith in the deliberative process itself to encourage preference transformation and recognition of the common good.

Moreover, there are deliberative democrats that do not see partisan deliberation as a barrier to preference transformation (Urbinati 2000: 775). The more proximate a decision is to deliberation the greater the incentive to participate and to attempt to persuade other participants with reasons (Walsh 2007; Elstub 2008b). The need for a decision to be reached can make preference differences seem 'less germane' (Cohen 2007: 224), while an unproximate decision can 'exacerbate divides' (Walsh 2007: 24). Partisanship in politics does seem to be inevitable, we cannot dismiss and eliminate it, and neither is partisanship necessarily bad. It is necessary

therefore to ‘think about how they can be harnessed in the effort to constitute a good political regime’ (Elkin 2004: 75; Elstub 2008). Micro deliberative partisan forums attempt to do just this. This type of mechanism accepts partisanship and self-interest as facts of the political process, but tries to incorporate these interests into a deliberatively democratic opinion formation and decision-making process that will encourage consideration of the interests of others. More empirical evidence then is also required on partisan deliberative forums, and the trade-offs required between theory and practice, as these are likely to be different to the trade-offs in unpartisan forums. One such case study, that meets all these criteria, is the Stanage Forum, to which the paper now turns.

### **Introducing the Stanage Forum**

The Peak District is a national park in the north of England in the UK which the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA) has been devolved the power to manage. The PDNPA have opened up their meetings to more direct participation from the public, and implemented several public participation initiatives. One such initiative is the Stanage Forum. The purpose of the Stanage Forum is to produce an effective ten year Management Plan, for the North Lees Estate.

Stanage Edge is a cliff feature that is central to the North Lees Estate, (hence the name of the Forum), and attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. The area is also internationally important for wildlife, as it provides a range of habitats (PDNPA 2000; Croney and Smith 2003: 15). There are also areas of archaeological, cultural and historical interest on the estate. In addition the estate hosts a working farm and has several rural communities within it and nearby. As the estate is situated between two large cities, Sheffield and Manchester, meaning there is also significant commuter traffic, as no motorway links these cities. This range of uses and features has meant that a tension between recreational use, cultural, economic and environmental concerns exists in the Estate.

Between 2000 and 2002 there were four Forums held to form the Management Plan and since then there has been an annual Forum to review and revise it. Each Forum lasts a day. In addition to the PDNPA, and the Forum, there was also a Forum

facilitator, a Design and a Steering Group. The Design Group's roles included helping design a process and a set of procedures for the first Forum meeting, and selecting those who would be members of the Steering Group. The Steering Group's roles included discussion and clarification of issues covered in the Forum; selection and consultation of Technical Groups to act as advisers; setting of deadlines for the various stages of the Management Plan process; approving and commenting upon the draft of the Management Plan and providing representation for the key stakeholders. In total the Steering Group met twenty-two times over the two years the Management Plan was decided upon (Croney and Smith 2003: 16), and has met quarterly since. Issue-based Technical Groups, selected by the Steering Group, were also used to provide specialist information on certain areas where information was lacking, such as ecological issues and traffic management, but had no decision-making powers themselves (Elstub 2009).

Participants in the Stanage Forum can be categorised into three broad stakeholder groups: recreationalists, environmentalists, and locals (residents and business). Although these stakeholder groups are not mutually exclusive as it is possible to be in all three at once, in general the recreationalists' main concern was access. The environmentalists' priorities were the conservation and enhancement of the local ecology. The locals were seeking to foster the economic and social well being of the local communities. This was by far the most divided stakeholder group. Much of the local economy is generated by the tourism of the area, so many locals were loathed to restrict access. They also wanted to ensure convenient commuter links to the cities of Sheffield and Manchester and to preserve the area as a nice place to live, and limiting tourism was seen as important to achieve this. Although there are many commonalities of interests between the stakeholder groups, there are also clear tensions. Unrestricted access is incompatible with the preservation of the environment. Easy access by car is incompatible with farming, maintenance of the beauty of the estate, lack of pollution of the area, and the area being a nice place to live. Use for all recreational pursuits is incompatible with peacefulness, wilderness and environmental considerations of the area (Elstub 2009).

### **Trade-Offs between the Theory and Practice of Deliberative Democracy in the Stanage Forum**

The theoretical norms of deliberative democracy are best embodied by Habermas's ISS, where communication is undistorted because all participants are free and equal, all views are aired in an unlimited discourse, aimed at rational consensus and the 'unforced force of the better argument' is decisive (Habermas 1990: 56-58; Elstub 2008b: 61). Practical realities mean that such ideal deliberative democracy only exists as a theoretical construct, as the ISS is a 'methodological fiction', (Habermas 1996: 326), but should still be employed to guide practice (Habermas 1996: 340), even if it can only 'ever be approximated (rather than fully realised) in everyday politics' (Eckersley 2000: 127; see also Cohen 1997; Lieb 2004: 40; Elstub 2008b: 99). Trade-offs between the ideal and practice, to regulate between legitimacy and efficiency, are therefore inevitable and these trade-offs will vary in relation to the practical situation (Blaug 1999: 140). The paper therefore uses the ISS and the decision-making stage process as useful heuristics to analyse the processes of the Stanage forum, the trade-offs that have occurred there, and in micro partisan forums more generally. Inevitably instances of micro deliberative democracy will approximate some aspects of deliberative democracy more closely than others. These trade-offs will vary from partisan to unpartisan forums too. It seems likely that the elements are all interrelated and the very fact that a practical example can approximate one aspect of deliberative democracy relatively closely might prevent it from approximating another aspect more closely. As Thompson (2008: 511) explains 'we miss the complexity and power of deliberative democracy if we do not recognise the possibility that its elements may conflict with one another, that not all the goods it promises can be secured at the same time, and that we have to make hard choices among them.' The empirical study of this case study will help expose these inevitable trade-offs. The empirical data has been generated through a triangular combination of documentary analysis, participatory observational analysis (through participation in all of the Forums between 2000 and 2002 and several of the Steering group meetings), and semi-structured interviews with the Forum organiser and the Forum facilitator.

### **Agenda Setting**

The controlling of the agenda is one of the most dynamic 'faces' of power (Bachrach and Barratz 1962; Lukes 1974; Schattsneider 1975). Ideally, in a

deliberative democracy the agenda would be set through equal democratic deliberation, to ensure that it was in accordance with public reason, and that all affected had an equal chance to influence it (Habermas 1990; Parkinson 2006: 170). Such an ideal process is though extremely difficult to achieve, as it leads to an inevitable regression (Michelman 1997), as who would organise and set the agenda for the deliberation on the agenda and so on. In practice deliberation must start somewhere, and it tends to be elites that will determine the start (Parkinson 2006: 128-33). Consequently, in the agenda-setting stage, the 'mobilisation of bias is at its highest' (Smith 2001: 84), especially as all the stages of decisions being considered here are path dependent upon this first initial agenda-setting stage (Goodin 2005).

This problem is clearly demonstrated in the Stanage Forum. Here the PDNPA had a significant agenda setting role as they decided the forum must produce a Management Plan. This is significant because the PDNPA is not a neutral apolitical body, but has its own interests. This then constrained the decision-making process to a degree especially as the PDNPA had a clear idea of what criteria they wanted the Management Plan to fulfil, which was disputed by the climbers. Nonetheless, the proposal for a forum did not emerge solely from the PDNPA acting in isolation. It was a response to the legitimacy and implementation problems they had experienced with the previous top-down Management Plan, but also demands from recreational visitors to the area, particularly climbers, and especially the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) who opposed the PDNPA's decision to introduce car park charges and launched a national campaign against it (Croney and Smith 2003).

The PDNPA were conscious of the influence they held over the Forum and wanted the initial stages of the Forum design to be seen as legitimate. Consequently, in order to ensure that the PDNPA did not exert excessive control at the initiation of the Forum, a Design Group was constructed by the facilitator and the PDNPA to help with the Forum design. However, the role of the very first Forum was to set an agenda for the rest of the Forums by deciding what the key problems and tensions were that needed to be resolved in the Management Plan. Therefore, although the PDNPA, and the Design Group, did enjoy much influence in the first stage of the decision-making process, this was combined with influence from the participating stakeholders in the first Forum (Elstub 2009). In general much of the agenda did derive from public

deliberation itself, as the theory advocates it should, although with some influence from elites, which might be inescapable in practice. Smith also acknowledges that partisan citizen forums tend to have greater agenda-setting powers than mini-publics (Smith 2009: 171). In mini-publics the agenda is determined by the commissioning authority. For Fereudi (2005: 117-19) this means they are easily open to manipulation.

## **Deliberation**

Two issues in relation to deliberation must be considered. Firstly, who did the deliberating and secondly the form of deliberation. Each of the aspects will be considered in turn with respect to the Stanage Forum.

### ***The Deliberators***

Decisions can be framed through controlling who participates in the deliberations (Reich 1988: 140-1; Rippe and Schaber 1999: 82), and therefore the manner in which the PDNPA has sought to engage citizens in the Forum is of paramount importance. As with all democratic arrangements, who participates and to what level and who does not participate and why, determines the nature of the conflict and ultimately the decision (Schattsneider 1975). In the ISS all affected by a decision will participate equally in the exchange of public reasons together. Achieving the inclusion of all in debates is a key problem facing the institutionalisation of micro deliberative democracy in practice, due to logistical difficulties. To have all citizens meet together and deliberate together, actually or virtually, is an empirical impossibility, especially if debates are to be inclusive and have depth (Bohman 1996: 2; Parkinson 2006: 151; Elstub 2007: 15). Consequently, micro conceptions of deliberative democracy can be quite exclusive over who gets to deliberate, in order to ensure quality deliberation (Hendriks 2006: 492). Furthermore, collective action problems mean that not all affected want to participate directly in decision-making (Olson 1965).

Inclusion is made easier with forums like Stanage as it is operating at a decentralised level and this means that decisions affect less people, alleviating the scale problem (Warren 2002: 188-189; Elstub 2007: 16). Decentralisation can also

enable citizens to have a potentially greater influence on decisions, which can lead to greater efficacy and, consequently, greater levels of participation (Elstub 2008b: 194). Nevertheless even in a decentred forum like Stanage, significant problems in including all stakeholders in open, public, transparent and inclusive debate pertain (Connelly et al 2006: 273). In contrast mini-publics adapt to scale, not necessarily through decentralisation (although they can be used at different levels of governance), but through random sampling.

In the Stanage Forum there were no formal barriers to participating, as anyone who wanted to was allowed to attend. Therefore the participants in the Stanage Forum are predominantly self-selected representatives from the local community and voluntary associations. Numbers of participants in the forum ranged from 35-67. In total approximately one hundred and fifty different people participated in the first four Forums. However, informal barriers also exist which prevent people from participating in such forums. Socio-economic inequalities certainly affect the potential for certain socio-economic groups to participate equally (Schattsneider 1975; Verba et al 1995; Smith 2009). There is also an element of self-selection with mini-publics (Goodin 2008: 14), but through random selection they overcome the socio-economic variables that infect open participation mechanisms (Smith 2009).

Other informal barriers include being unaware of the forum. One of the principal factors in ensuring participation is to ask people to participate, and this can help address socio-economic barriers to participation (Smith 2009: 164). Again this is why mini-publics are useful as those randomly selected are then invited and usually accept, and if they do not then someone with similar socio-demographics is invited instead (Smith 2009: 166). Although this presents a danger of 'endogeneity' (Cohen 2007: 223). Furthermore, Phillips, who is committed to a 'politics of presence' (1999: 117) is still critical of mini-publics ability to include all relevant groups and opinions. The PDNPA made a genuine effort to contact easily identifiable stakeholders and to advertise the Stanage Forum, all be it through predominantly middle class media. Another informal barrier is being unable to attend due to the time and location. The time and day of the week (i.e. weekend, weekday; evening, daytime) for the Forums was altered with the hope of enabling all stakeholders to participate, at least in part of the process, if they wished (Elstub 2009). Another solution to the scale problem is

virtual deliberation, which also enables people to participate in deliberation at their own convenience. In the Stanage Forum those unable to attend the Forums have been able to participate in the on-line discussion on the website. Such electronic and interactive media can therefore facilitate openness and inclusive deliberation (Ward et al 2003: 291-2).

There are significant inequalities of power and resources between the associations involved and although they have all been involved in some manner, they have participated in different ways and to different extents. For example, some associations were involved in both the Design Group and the Steering Group, and attendances in the Forums themselves have varied considerably. There have been participants from each of the three key stakeholder groups at all four of the Forums, although some stakeholders have been represented more than others. Recreationalists were the best represented, especially climbers and in particular the BMC. There have been notable absentees from particular interests; specifically from the motorised recreational section, the local cement works factory, a gas works company and local transport companies. This is a key difference between instances of micro deliberation. Mini-publics are able to remove many of the inequalities of presence through random selection (Elstub 2009).

Therefore representation is required to ensure all those who are affected by a decision, but do not participate in making the decision, or in the deliberations, are represented. Civil society associations are seen as an important source of representation and in the Stanage Forum represented a diverse array of interests and identities. If members of these associations were unable to attend, or were not sufficiently interested in, the Forums themselves, another member of their association could still represent them, as they are likely to share some relevant interests or identities or through virtue of being a member of the same association. Mini-publics also rely on representation, but descriptive representation. Here representatives are not accountable as there is no opportunity for recourse by those being represented. They are representative in the sense that they share key socio-demographics. Due to the lack of internal democratic arrangements representatives from associations are unlikely to be accountable to those they represent either.

### ***The Process of Deliberation***

In the first Stanage Forum and steering group meetings all participants agreed to principles that clearly embody the ideals of deliberative democracy. Embodied in these procedures are the ideals that problems should be resolved through discussion, aimed at consensus on the common good, that all affected should have a chance to participate, and that all views should be listened to and included in the debate (Cronney and Smith 2003: 16). The Stanage Forum can therefore be considered a genuine attempt to approximate democratic deliberation in practice, as they strongly resemble the principles of the ISS (Habermas 1990).

Despite the use of decentralization and representation, problems of scale, within the Forum, affected the deliberative process and the opportunities for all to deliberate together. The forty to seventy people typically attending the Stanage Forum, is too many to ensure effective, equal and inclusive deliberation, as the number of people that can deliberate together is very limited (Gutmann and Thompson 1996: 131). This is a strength of citizen juries, but not deliberative opinion polls or citizen assemblies, which also have larger numbers of participants. However, the small number that participate in citizen juries precludes other key norms of deliberative democracy being approximated, such as ensuring all affected participate or are represented in the decision-making process, and that all relevant reasons are made public. Therefore innovative mechanisms are required to adapt deliberative democracy to the scale of the decision and participants affected. In all the Stanage Forums participants were split into mixed stakeholder groups, with seven in each group, with each group discussing the same issues. This method allowed each individual a reasonable amount of opportunity to participate, and with the mixture of groups, still allows people to hear a range of views and express their views to a range of people. Such methods are common in German Planning Cells, Deliberative Opinion Polls and Consensus Conferences. This is a trade-off between the ISS, in which all participants are involved in the same debate, and the practical necessities of real life deliberation. Such methods can also reduce the potential for the development of factions that would otherwise offset the benefits of the deliberative process. This is because in small groups, factions and ‘internal psychological divisions’ are less likely to develop. Moreover, these subgroups do not need to have ‘rigidly defined boundaries’, if the subgroups have revolving membership, which was the case in the

Stanage Forum (Thompson and Hoggert 2001: 358). One of the deficiencies of the methods used here in the Stanage Forum is that there is a lack of communication and debate between each sub-group, meaning all participants do not get to hear all arguments which could potentially affect their preferences, so the sub-groups need to be combined with deliberative plenary sessions (Thompson and Hoggert 2001). Deliberation also occurred in the Steering Group but with much smaller numbers, with a maximum of seventeen participants, which is much closer to the optimum. Consequently the Steering Group all deliberated together and sub-groups were not needed (Elstub 2009).

The steering group agreed to be transparent and to publicise their minutes and decisions through the website, and by reporting back to the Forum (PDNPA 2001; Connelly et al 2006: 273). Without such processes the general Forum participants are completely excluded from hearing the reasons of the representatives, and the element of publicity, an essential aspect of deliberative democracy, is significantly compromised. The Steering Group did report back to the forum and all meeting reports were posted on the PDNPA website, but communication from the Steering Group to the forum was still something that could have been increased to ensure greater accountability. For example after the Steering Group had drafted the Management Plan and it was presented at the fourth Forum, the Forum participants were not given the opportunity to raise any issues as to whether it accurately encapsulated the decisions made at the previous Forum. Steering Group members were given an opportunity to justify their decisions, but Forum participants were not given the opportunity to challenge them.<sup>ii</sup> In practice micro deliberation requires representation, but it should be an interactive and deliberative relationship; and not one where the represented just receive reasons, but one where they can give them as well (Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Young 2000: 125).

The ideal in a deliberative democracy is that all participants should receive the same information, as it can impact upon preferences. However, in the Stanage Forum information supplied by the Technical Groups was only presented to the Steering Group because of insufficient time for the Technical Groups to report all their information to the Forums, meaning the Forum did not receive the information directly. Again then there is a trade-off between the ideal and the practical need for

efficiency and perhaps displaying the information on the website is a good method to provide a balance between these two aims. In general though partisan forums are effective at publicising their events and processes; making them transparent. We see this here with the Stanage Forum, as the various associational members disseminate details of the forum to their members. In contrast this is a weakness of mini-publics, with the broader public tending to be unaware of the mini-public, let alone its process (Smith 2009: 177).

### **Decision-Making**

For Habermas consensus is the ostensible goal of the ISS. Due to the relationship between deliberative democracy and public reason, where participants are encouraged to find reasons that all affected will find convincing, it has been suggested that decisions in a deliberative democracy could be consensual as participants form and find common interests through the exchange of reasons (Habermas 1996: 17-19; Cohen 1989: 23; Elstub 2006: 308). A consensus building approach to decision-making was explicitly employed in the Stanage Forum from the outset.

Despite this there certainly was no agreement upon all the specifics of the Management Plan, but perhaps there was a broader agreement upon its overarching general principles. Other deliberative theorists also argue that if consensus is not reached, then compromise, achieved under deliberatively democratic conditions, might be the best alternative (Dryzek 1990: 16-17; Festenstein 2002: 92-95; Richardson 2002; Warren 2002: 185). Deliberation helps make compromise easier to achieve, as it improves understanding of alternatives and rival positions, which can in turn lead to respect and empathy (Warren 2002: 184; Elstub 2008b: 67). It is something like a deliberative compromise that was reached in the Stanage Forum over the general principles of the Management Plan. Due to the absence of consensus or deliberative compromise, on the specific aspects of the Management Plan, voting was necessary. However, voting occurred following deliberatively democratic debate, therefore the aggregation was of transformed, post-deliberative preferences. The fact that voting did have to occur for decisions to be made does indicate the necessity for participation to be evenly spread across all interested stakeholders. It was unfair that

the BMC had more votes than any other association due to having more participants at the forum (Elstub 2009).

Many of the decisions in forming the specifics of the Management Plan were not taken in the Forum itself, but in the Steering Group (2002: Section 2.4). The Steering Group used a range of decision-making procedures, at times accepting the advice of the technical experts, at others rejecting it and taking suggestions from the Forum or website. Some of the Steering Group's decisions were made through consensus, but in general it took majority decisions as the necessity of time and the need for decisions to be made overrode the desire for consensus (Connelly et al 2006: 273). Similar mixed processes of decision-making occur in mini-publics, however, there is less incentive to achieve consensus and compromise in many of these, as they are not making binding decisions, and the unpartisan nature of the representation means that the participants will not be affected by the decision themselves. It is argued that this makes mini-publics more willing to change preferences in light of reason, precisely because they are not partisan. This may be the case, but what the Stanage Forum indicates is that partisan deliberators will adapt preferences in light of reasons offered, and are willing to compromise in order to achieve working decisions (Elstub 2009), or at least likely to lead to deliberative compromise (Immergut 1995: 205; Hendriks et al 2007: 370; Elstub 2008a: 191); especially if local and specific issues are being addressed (Fung and Wright 2003; Elstub 2008a: 191).

The Steering Group's considerable decision-making powers were predominantly justified because the output from the Forum was uncoordinated, with little or no direction. The co-ordination problems have been enhanced due to some of the procedures in the Forum, which have divided participants into small, mixed stakeholder, deliberative sub-groups. Here we see a discursive dilemma. The Management Plan could reflect the preferences that received majority support in the Forum vote, regardless of their compatibility. Alternatively decisions could be co-ordinated to be rationally consistent, but be unresponsive to the Forum's preferences. The former is more democratic, but at a sacrifice to deliberation and the latter more deliberative, but at a loss to democracy (Pettit 2003: 138). Pettit suggests that it is more important that decisions meet deliberative requirements and are rationally compatible (Pettit 2003: 155), which is what the Steering Group in the Stanage Forum

attempted to ensure. Such dilemmas affect all decision-making and therefore mini-publics too. However, as mini-publics rarely make decisions the dilemma is relocated to the commissioner of the event e.g. the relevant local authority. In this sense partisan forums that are empowered to make binding decisions, such as Stanage, are able to resolve this dilemma through its own process, perhaps more democratically. The use of a representative institution like a steering group can therefore be justified from a deliberative perspective.

## **Implementation**

Since 2002 implementation of the Management Plan has been ongoing and it has been suggested it is stalling as the original conflicts that were present at the start of the Forum, between recreationalists and environmentalists, over access and conservation are still persisting (Connelly et al 2006: 272). Certainly more research is required on the implementation of the Stanage Forum's Management Plan to establish if this is the case.

Nevertheless, many of the aspects of the Management Plan have been implemented and many of the stakeholders have been actively involved in this implementation. Theory suggests that the main advantage of stakeholders being actively involved in decision-making processes is that once the decision has been made, it generally becomes easier to implement (Fung and Wright 2001: 26; Richardson and Connelly 2002: 16-17). Here mini-publics fail as those affected by the decision are deliberately not included in it (Goodin 2008). If the deliberative process did end in consensus and include all affected as stipulated by the ISS then this would certainly be the case, as all would have consented to all aspects of the binding decisions. As already stipulated these normative criteria are impossible to realise in practice. Nevertheless the fact that stakeholders, who have participated in making the decision, are more likely to see the process as a legitimate one and, therefore, accept the consequential decision, even if it is not what they initially hoped for, than if it was imposed by an external authority without their involvement. Here we see a potential advantage of partisan micro-deliberative forums over mini-publics, where those making the decisions (or recommendations for decisions) will not be bound by the decisions or required to implement them (Smith 2009: 187). As Fung argues

partisanship therefore essential at some stage of the decision-making process if decisions are to be supported and implemented (Fung 2003: 345). If the members have been engaged in democratic debate about these issues themselves, they can see how their own views may have influenced that debate, again making the resulting decision even more legitimate. The participants can then help in the implementation of the decision, either through the carrying out of the services/ activities set out, or in disseminating information about the decision. Due to the fact that decisions are now easier to enforce, more options become available in decision-making (Fung and Wright 2001: 18). Many of the voluntary associations, involved in the Forum, have been actively involved in the implementation of much of the Management Plan and have been able to disseminate the content of the Management Plan and advice on the most environmentally friendly ways to access the Estate, to their members. Although this has not led to complete compliance, by all recreationalists, with all the decisions made in the Plan, it is suggested that implementation 'has been much easier and much more successful than before the Forum process began', and in comparison with the previous top-down Management Plans (PDNPA 2008).

It is further suggested that participatory processes mean that powerful organisations have less ability to veto any decisions that they dislike because their co-operation will become less important, due to the increased co-operation of other stakeholders (Cohen and Rogers 1995: 65-6; Smith 2001: 78). However, the experience of the Stanage Forum process suggests that certain organisations are so powerful, and their co-operation so vital to implementing decisions, that they can derail any decisions they dislike. There were several pertinent examples of this in the Stanage Forum including local bus companies, the cement and gas works, none of which the PDNPA has been devolved sufficient powers to control, despite proposals included in the Management Plan that aimed to increase and integrate bus provision to the Estate and reduce pollution. Consequently, these companies cannot be forced to abide by these proposals and the PDNPA was left to try and persuade, negotiate, and compromise with these companies in order to implement these proposals, which ultimately proved unsuccessful. A key problem to the success of micro forums is that many stakeholder groups will be unwilling for authority to be democratically shared, when a continuation of conflict will more effectively further their interests, especially if they have 'a lot to lose' (Hendriks 2002: 65; Richardson and Connelly 2002: 21;

Cohen and Rogers 2003: 252; Hendriks 2006). This certainly seems to be the case with local bus companies, the cement works and gas company, as they have been able to achieve the promotion of their interests without having to participate in the Stanage Forum, where they would have had to justify and defend these interests publicly, with reasons.

If deliberative democracy is to be genuinely institutionalised, and deliberation and decision-making linked, then it is essential that micro forums, like Stanage, have binding decision making power to ensure the decisions are implemented and enforced. If micro deliberative sites do result in binding and enforceable decisions, stakeholders are more likely to want to participate, precisely because they have a lot to lose or gain, as the most effective way to influence outcomes will be through participation in the forums (Fung and Wright 2001: 24; Hendriks 2006; Elstub 2008b: 149). Smith points to the extent a public authority will cede power to a democratic citizen forum is a limiting factor over their relationship to decision-making (Smith 2009: 173). This is certainly the case, but we also see how other powerful organisations, often private firms, can limit decision-making. Much then depends on how much power the public authority has been ceded to in the first place.

## **Review**

Deliberative democracy is not a decision-making mechanism that leads to 'final' decisions, as the process often reveals deeper problems than had been anticipated, preferences continue to change in light of new information arising, and because participants will change over time. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that all decisions remain contestable (Pettit 2003: 156), as they have done in the Stanage Forum. Although the Management Plan was ratified in the fourth Forum in 2002, it was not the end of the forum or the democratic deliberative process, as there has been an annual Forum held to evaluate the Management Plan, its implementation and its effectiveness. Several proposals, incorporated in the original Management Plan have been reviewed, changed, and implemented through this process, although the overriding principles, of the Management Plan, agreed in the Forum have remained the same. Mini-publics could be used to review decisions too, but they have rarely

been used in this manner and are usually terminated after an initial recommendation has been reached.

Unpartisan participation is perhaps more difficult to sustain because partisanship provides greater motivation to participate and therefore increases the sustainability of the forums (Fung 2003: 345; Parkinson 2006: 134). Although they might be more sustainable than unpartisan forums, despite attracting a large number of new participants, levels of participation in these review Forums has declined. The Steering Group has also continued to meet and review the Plan, holding approximately four meetings a year to do this. Overall the Steering Group has gained in power over the Forum since the launch of the Management Plan. The Forum meetings now have fewer opportunities for deliberative participation, and tend to be dominated by reports from the Steering Group. The Forum is now used more as a body to ratify suggestions for reform that have originated from the Steering Group, rather a deliberative event to produce suggestions.

## **Conclusion**

Decision-making is implicit in the ideal of deliberative democracy, and particularly identifiable in instances of micro deliberation. However, there remain significant challenges to linking micro deliberative democracy with partisan decision-making, which the case study of the Stanage Forum highlights. This evidence is important as most empirical research on micro deliberation has been on mini-publics, which tend not to result in decisions, or include those affected by decisions. Ultimately many trade-offs need to be made between the ideal of deliberative democracy and its approximation in practice. The trade-offs, between ideal and practice, are to do with empirical necessities, which vary from situation to situation, so the nature of the trade-offs differs from context to context. However an investigation of the Stanage Forum has identified some general problems, and solutions, in relation to the various decision-making stages and demonstrates the type of trade-offs that are likely, and necessary, in cases of micro-deliberation, where partisan participants deliberate with the aim of making decisions. It further suggests that different trade-offs are made to those found in mini-publics. In general partisan forums are able to deal with agenda-setting, decision-making, implementation and

review more successfully than mini-publics. In contrast mini-publics are more inclusive and deliberative. Nevertheless, the Stanage Forum suggests good deliberation can occur in partisan forums too. However, this is just one case study, and much more empirical evidence from deliberative partisan citizen forums is still required.

In many ways Smith is right to argue that mini-publics represent more of a 'protected space' than partisan forums because citizens are not directly collaborating with public officials, where citizens are usually at a disadvantage, particularly with respect to time and technical knowledge (Smith 2009: 172). Consequently Smith argues that although partisan forums tend to exercise more power than mini-publics, this does not mean that the citizens participating in them do (Smith 2009: 172). However, mini-publics can also be manipulated and framed, and so it is perhaps not as clear cut as this. Smith (2009) is, though, certainly right so argue that neither mini-publics nor partisan forums can approximate all the norms of deliberative democracy, as we have seen here. As Dryzek (2007: 246) points out 'one very large institutional design question concerns the balance of, and roles for, partisan and non-partisan deliberators.' Ultimately we must investigate how best to combine these micro deliberative institutions to achieve the most appropriate trade-offs between theory and practice available.

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<sup>i</sup> Goodin (2008: 19-20) highlights a few exceptions like a Chinese Deliberative Poll in Zeguo in 2005 and the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform in British Columbia.

<sup>ii</sup> In the last forum, when one Steering Group member was challenged during one of the small group debates, she became indignant, as she and the Steering Group had obviously invested much time and energy into the process, she therefore felt that she was owed gratitude rather than appreciating that her actions did need to be held to account.