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# **Overcoming Complexity: Institutionalising Deliberative Democracy through Secondary Associations**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most significant criticisms levelled at deliberative democracy is that it is an irrelevant, utopian and counterfactual ideal because it is unachievable in modern, large and complex societies.<sup>1</sup> In order to sufficiently explore the issues of institutionalization, this paper is unable to review its normative arguments and it therefore starts from the premise that deliberative democracy is normatively desirable. However, in order to achieve normative goals deliberative democracy needs ‘devices’ or institutions to ‘enact’ it,<sup>2</sup> and to ‘bring it down to earth’.<sup>3</sup> The belief here is that an associational democracy can make important contributions to achieving this, specifically by enabling deliberative democracy to adapt to, and overcome, many of the aspects of social complexity that include increased social pluralism, scale, inequality of deliberative and political skills and resources, the increasing reliance on specialists, and globalisation, that form such significant barriers to its institutionalisation.

This suggestion is linked to key functions of democracy that secondary associations, located in civil society, are particularly apt to fulfil. It is argued here that they are suitable locations for governance, providing the principle of subsidiarity is applied; that they can provide effective information and representation; increase and improve the provision of information; which enables them to contribute to public discourses in the public sphere; and can foster key political and civic skills and dispositions. However, not all associations will be able to fulfil all the functions that are attributed to them in this article. The fact that they are apt to fulfil one function may well mean they are unsuitable to fulfil another, with some types of secondary association hindering democracy, rather than promoting it.<sup>4 5</sup> This variability in the suitability of associations to fulfil these key democratic functions is not essentially a problem, providing there is a diversity of specialised associations to form, what Warren terms a ‘democratic ecology of associations’, which means all the functions can still be fulfilled.<sup>6</sup>

More significant problems for an associational democracy, to effectively contribute to the institutionalization of deliberative democracy, are the current socio-economic inequalities prevalent in the current associational system, the difficulty of ensuring associations are themselves deliberatively democratic and linking deliberations within the associational system with broader collective decisions. Therefore, an associational model is just one possibility that, in a deliberative democracy, would have to be combined with a whole array of other institutions that also fostered key features of deliberation and democracy and helped it adapt to social complexity. In this sense, secondary associations are far from the whole solution, but the argument here is that they are an important, and necessary, part of that solution.

### **THE BARRIERS OF SOCIAL COMPLEXITY**

Modern democracies are plagued by the problems associated with social complexity.<sup>7</sup> For Femia ‘social complexity’ is associated with the ‘number and variety of elements and interactions’ present’ and is increasing, primarily due to rapid changes in technology.<sup>8</sup> This increase in social complexity has led to a decline in the relevancy, potency and ability of the nation-state to fulfil many functions, meet the needs of society and meet standards of democratic legitimacy and this has led to a reappraisal of the state across the world.<sup>9</sup>

There are many aspects of social complexity, but this article will focus on those that are perceived to be the most significant barriers to deliberative democracy. The first of these is social pluralism as societies become ever more diverse and multicultural. An increasing perception of the state is that it excludes certain subordinate social groups. It is thought that the state’s universal approach is becoming increasingly unable to take account of differences between social groups and this has caused the corresponding retrenchment of the state as a welfare agency.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, increasing pluralism has compromised the effectiveness of traditional, and formal, representative structures of liberal democracies, as their ability to include all social groups in decision-making has correspondingly declined.<sup>11</sup> Increased pluralism also makes deliberative democracy unlikely, as it decreases the chance of reaching consensus on a common good and makes the inclusion of all relevant views harder to attain.

The second aspect is that modern societies are too big and contain millions of people dispersed over large geographical areas, which, has led to the centralisation and bureaucracy that characterises present nation states, and means decisions are far removed from citizens, with little potential for meaningful citizen participation. Problems of scale then also challenge the possibility of democratic deliberation with its reliance on participation in discussion. 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,<sup>12</sup> and we must also be wary of the available time citizens have to participate,<sup>13</sup> with participation in deliberation being potentially more time consuming than other forms of participation, like voting.

The third aspect of complexity is the inequality of resources and deliberative skills in society that are necessary to participate effectively. These democratic capacities are of two types: civic capacities, which involve civic consciousness and trust, and deliberative skills, which include listening and analysing the assertions of others, and rationally forming and expressing ones own preferences in light of available information, in a manner that will be persuasive to others. It is then important to democracy that these skills be distributed widely and reasonably equally.<sup>14</sup>

All these factors of social complexity are intensified, by the fourth, which is the growing need for greater levels of specialism in making decisions. New problems arise as society changes and, correspondingly, the state expands its functions. This combined with constant technological development has meant many more problems requiring technical solutions and, therefore, decisions are thought to require high demands of expertise. This, in turn, leads to a decline in informed participation, as being informed requires too much time.<sup>15</sup> Present trends of increasing division of labour and new technologies has meant more citizens are incapable of participating directly in making decisions, which correspondingly leads to a decline in democracy.<sup>16</sup> As well as making lay citizen participation in a deliberative democracy more difficult to achieve it has led to the decreasing legitimacy of state institutions, as they increasingly rely on experts for policy decisions, which has led to the proliferation of quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations in, all aspects of, the policy process.

The fifth, and final aspect to be considered, is globalisation, which has led to, and been

caused by, increasing global competition and integration, increasing technological diversity and rapid change and increased dispersion of the labour market.<sup>17</sup> This has significantly hindered the potential for democratic control, especially at the level of the nation-state and it does not, and cannot, now monopolise the functions of governance.<sup>18</sup> Globalisation has therefore intensified problems of scale, as it is thought that many decisions now need to be made at a transnational, or even international level.<sup>19</sup> This correspondingly increases the plurality of those affected by decisions, and therefore of those who should be included, either directly or indirectly, in decision-making. Identifying those who are affected also becomes more problematic. Furthermore, globalisation has contributed to inequalities and fuelled the need for expertise in decision-making. Together, these aspects of complexity provide significant barriers to the institutionalisation of deliberative democracy. However, associational democracy could be part of the solution, to which we now turn.

### **OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS OF SOCIAL COMPLEXITY**

The conclusion drawn from these changing economic, political and cultural aspects of power, attributed to social complexity, by associationalists, is that the nation-state cannot remain as the key focus for political participation.<sup>20</sup> It is argued that secondary associations provide an attractive alternative location for direct political participation and enable non-statist planning, decision-making, task fulfilment and interaction and provide channels for citizens entering into public discourse.<sup>21</sup> However, the arguments that secondary associations, in an associational democracy, can alleviate many of the problems of social complexity affecting the state will not be reviewed in full, as these debates have been covered extensively in the literature. The further argument that these secondary associations can also be locations of participation, that will enable deliberative democracy to be meaningfully approximated, and therefore, also overcome the features of social complexity, has not been considered in full, and will therefore be the focus here.

#### *Associations as Mechanisms for Subsidiarity and Locations of Governance*

The exclusivity, and overstretching of the roles, of the principle fulcrums of liberal democratic institutions, political parties and representative legislative assemblies, has

led to a legitimisation crisis for such structures and the state as a whole<sup>22</sup> as the representative structures and bureaucratic administration that characterise the modern state ‘frequently operate in unjust, unaccountable and ineffective ways’.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, it is argued that in modern complex and globalising societies decentralisation and a plurality of organisations is required as a single, unitary elite cannot ‘exercise positive directive control’.<sup>24</sup> For associational democrats, secondary associations are the solution, as they offer the potential for greater levels of inclusiveness in collective decision-making, by reducing the scale of decisions,<sup>25</sup> as they operate at ‘accessible decentralised levels...’ in ‘which citizens can participate more fully and with greater knowledge of the affairs being discussed.’<sup>26</sup> Potentially, then, decentralisation of roles to associations can help overcome both the problem of size and the need for specialists, through implementing legislation and fulfilling ‘quasi-public functions’ in support, or in place, of the state,<sup>27</sup> removing much of the need for a ‘central co-ordinating mechanism’.<sup>28</sup>

There is nothing inherently democratic about decentralisation, as it can mean the restriction or elimination of legitimate participants from participation in decisions.<sup>29</sup> Decentralisation inevitably alters the nature of participation, which inevitably changes the nature of political conflict.<sup>30</sup> Decentralisation is therefore only democratic to the extent that it ‘socialises conflict’ by linking collective actions to collective justifications that includes all those affected.<sup>31</sup> Decentralisation, therefore, needs to be based upon a sound principle in order to provide guidance on who should receive devolved powers, on what policy areas, to what extent and on how it should be implemented.

One such possibility is ‘subsidiarity’, with the guiding idea being that ‘decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen.’<sup>32</sup> Consequently subsidiarity can bring collective actions and decisions closer to the citizens they affect and therefore aid self-governance,<sup>33</sup> making deliberative participation available to more citizens.<sup>34</sup> The principle of subsidiarity is clearly compatible with both aspects of deliberative democracy: Deliberation, as ‘the continuous and active involvement of those directly affected in an ongoing discourse about the way their lives should be ordered is a key feature of subsidiarity.’<sup>35</sup> Democracy, because a normative ideal of subsidiarity is that ‘policies must be controlled by those affected, to ensure that institutions and laws reflect the interests of the individuals under conditions where all count as equals.’<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, the argument that deliberative democracy is counterfactual, because it cannot be implemented on a large scale, then does not prove the impracticality of deliberative democracy, but rather demonstrates the necessity for the units of decision-making to be reduced. Subsidiarity is the most coherent principle to achieve this and hence deliberative democracy is unlikely to be achieved without it. Follesdal<sup>37</sup> identifies three strong, mutually supporting connections, of how subsidiarity can enable deliberative democracy to adapt to features of social complexity:

1. *Reduction of Size:* Smaller units, such as secondary associations, are more suitable than larger units (communities/ nations) to both develop shared interests through deliberation and to secure their representation.<sup>38</sup> As inclusion of all affected becomes more attainable, subsidiarity can also help address increasing social pluralism.
2. *Reduction of Domination:* Subsidiarity would reduce the exterior domination over preferences of the members of the associations as it specifically prescribes the justifiable grounds for ‘exterior’ intervention, providing the ‘institutional space’ necessary for democratic preference formation to be based upon collective deliberation.<sup>39</sup>
3. *Reduction of Agenda:* having less participants, and less issues on the agenda, means less information is relevant to the decision,<sup>40</sup> making it easier to attain relevant information. When the agenda is reduced, participants are, therefore, better able to understand what the available choices are and what these entail on any specific issue, and this helps address the need for specialists. Subsidiarity also helps overcome the social choice critique against democracy. For Arrow<sup>41</sup> the key to making a coherent social choice was domain restriction, and subsidiarity restricts the domain and therefore it can ‘limit the possibilities for cycling across alternatives’.<sup>42</sup> Because the scale of preference rankings, which will need to be aggregated,<sup>43</sup> is reduced, clear, unambiguous results can be produced.

### *Associations and Representation*

Even in a society where the principle of subsidiarity is prevalent, and secondary associations fulfil many functions, currently fulfilled by the state, not all functions of governance will be devolved to associations. Broader policies at local, national, regional, transnational and international level will be made, and citizens need to be represented in these processes if they are to be democratic.

Representation has been seen as essential to democracies in order to address the problem of scale<sup>44</sup> as it enables all to have their preferences included in debate, without all having to directly participate, but also helps overcome inequalities in participation as representatives are often thought to represent the interests of their constituents more effectively than the constituents themselves. In addition it relieves demands on excessive participation, while still ensuring citizen's views and opinions are incorporated into decision-making processes. However, the mechanism of representation is key to the achievement of these aims and, the claim here is that, secondary associations are particularly apt at providing the relevant representation required for deliberative democracy as they enable a diversity of citizens with similar beliefs, preferences and needs to combine their voice and therefore increase the chance that they will be heard by other citizens, associations and relevant state agencies, in a detailed manner.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, they represent functional interests that are not territorially based which would go un(der)-represented through party politics.<sup>46</sup>

### *Associations and the Provision of Information*

Much of the content that secondary associations represent is information that they have formed, collected and organised. They are particularly useful at this because they specialise in certain areas, which are, of particular relevance to their members, and therefore help alleviate the need for specialists in decision-making. Such information helps associations hold government officials and institutions accountable,<sup>47</sup> and is likely to be more detailed, refined and abundant than information from other forms of representation.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, secondary associations create a division of labour in the collection and organisation of information, achieving economies of scale that enable citizens to acquire levels of information that they would be unable to obtain by

themselves and therefore contribute to overcoming inequality in information.<sup>49</sup> In addition, due to their close involvement with their members, associations can provide information that would otherwise be unavailable to the state, such as experiential knowledge<sup>50</sup> which is vital to ensuring inclusion of all social groups in the deliberative process.<sup>51</sup>

In addition this representation of information enables co-ordination in a disparate and plural society. Environmental policy, provides a good example as it is currently limited due to the problems that the state has with ‘command, control and co-operation’, in establishing environmental public standards in the face of a diversity of sites, enforcing compliance to the standards, and gaining co-operation in setting standards. Greater co-operation from a plurality of associations could lead to more relevant, and detailed, specialist information about environmental damage and costs of environmental protection. They can provide co-operation from members to agreed environmental legislation and in the implementation of environmental protection methods. Associations can further help in the process of dissemination of knowledge and information about the new measures to other groups such as consumers; all in a manner unobtainable to state agencies.<sup>52</sup>

### *Associations in Public Spheres*

In exchanging, representing and communicating ideas, information, beliefs and preferences, secondary associations generate deliberation and form a generalised debate in the informal public sphere. Public spheres can be characterised as spaces ‘in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalised arena of discursive interaction’.<sup>53</sup> Associations by participating in the informal public sphere bring in new speakers to public debate, changing the parameters of debate.

The role of associations as communicators in the public sphere is an intrinsic one, as associations are established through communication between individuals themselves and because many try to influence the preferences of the state, general public and members of other associations by representing and voicing the views and interests of their members, trying to convince these other actors in the public sphere of their validity.<sup>54</sup> To achieve this, associations must be able to ‘employ and appeal to norms of

publicity’; limiting their potential to act as strategic actors.<sup>55</sup> These public spheres can appear at local, national, transnational, international or functional level, making them vital to democracy in the global era, as institutions and modes of governance and debate increasingly occur at these multilevels.<sup>56</sup> They also help overcome the scale problem as the public sphere transcends elements of time and space, potentially enabling all to participate in an anonymous discourse.

### *Schools of Democracy*

Liberal democracies are rife with inequalities of resources to form and participate in associations, many of which, both derive from, and cause, inequality in the distribution of democratic capacities, which are required for effective participation. However, it has been suggested that active and equal participation in secondary associations can provide the circumstances necessary for democratic capacities to be developed.<sup>57</sup> In addition it is thought that associations can provide ‘the free spaces’ where ‘people are able to learn a new self respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills and values of co-operation and civic virtue’,<sup>58</sup> which make citizens more likely to participate, cooperate and consider the interests of others, which are vital values to deliberative democracy, necessary to ground deliberative obligations. These include the provision of reasons that all can accept; listening and replying sincerely to all others; and trying to find a proposal that is acceptable to all through the modification of proposals in accordance with the reasons of others.<sup>59</sup> This is important to the effective functioning of deliberative democracy, as we cannot be sure that citizens will always abide by these obligations, as in certain circumstances it will not be in their interests to do so.<sup>60</sup>

The most recent and dominant articulation of the argument comes from Putnam,<sup>61</sup> who argues that participating in associations creates ‘social capital’, an important aspect of which is ‘generalised reciprocity’, amongst their members, where by interests are broadened and become more public in orientation. If this is the case participating in associations can provide people with a sense of responsibility and ‘enlightened self-interest’ as members become aware of their mutual dependency with members of other associations, appreciating the relevance of their interests, needs and preferences, and there by fostering the civic consciousness and trust that is necessary for collective action.<sup>62</sup> In comparison with market and state relationships, which are based on

inequality, hierarchy and compulsion; associational relationships are more voluntary and equal, consequently the relationships are based upon consent, which deepens these civic capacities.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, such trust, and concern for the public good, cannot be generated at the level of the nation state, but only in arenas like secondary associations, with powers decentralised to them.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, Putnam has argued that once these capacities of trust and civic virtue, have developed, then citizens can co-operate to solve collective problems, which in turn helps develop trust and civic virtue even further so a ‘virtuous cycle’ is developed.<sup>65</sup>

However, although trust and civic virtue could be generated within an association, it seems unlikely that they will be generated across society and between associations.<sup>66</sup> Interpersonal trust is by its very nature specific to its context and needs reciprocation to be directly experienced and so cannot ‘simply be transferred to others or to other contexts’.<sup>67</sup> In addition, associations are by their nature exclusionary and competitive, at best providing the location for ‘shifting involvements’ of individuals.<sup>68</sup> Cohen and Rogers’s more minimal claims therefore seem more accurate than Putnam’s, that associations can promote a ‘civic consciousness’, defined as a recognition and commitment to democratic procedures and norms as the basis for social co-operation and trust in the commitment of others to do the same.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, ‘civic consciousness’ should still be sufficient to ground deliberative obligations.

### **PROBLEMS FOR ASSOCIATIONAL DEMOCRACY**

Despite the potential of secondary associations to fulfil these key democratic functions, that contribute to enabling deliberative democracy in practice adapt too many of the features of social complexity, there are a number of significant problems that an associational democracy would face. These include the existence of socio-economic inequalities, the difficulty of democratising the internal structure of associations, and if this is achieved, linking these deliberations to broader decision-making mechanisms, necessary to avoid the mischief of faction. However, these problems can be overcome, to varying degrees, through the use of other institutions and mechanisms.

### *Socio-economic Inequalities*

The most significant problems for the associational system advocated here are the current levels of socio-economic inequalities that plague liberal democracies and the associational system itself.

The current political processes of interest group competition are analogous with the market, with interest groups competing for the loyalty of citizens and money, which is then used in competition to lobby government, which contributes to distributive unfairness. Those with greater resources e.g. associations pursuing business interests, are best able to represent their interests and so policies continue to be biased towards these already dominant groups'.<sup>70</sup>

Inequalities in power and money are perpetuated in associational membership.<sup>71</sup> Barriers to participation include the lack of income and education, and the presence of discrimination, which prevent equal participation in the associational system.<sup>72</sup> Individuals 'do not simply "join" associations; they are recruited' and 'dispositions' to join associations are affected by factors like 'ghettoization' and 'chronic unemployment', which results in people lacking the necessary resources to form their own associations and, or, the opportunities to be recruited into existing ones.<sup>73</sup> Therefore the greater the socio-economic level, the greater the level of associational participation and this reduces the potential of associations to instil civic virtues and political skills throughout the citizenry.<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, the public sphere is plagued by inequality of access, which would affect its potential to fulfil deliberative roles in a democratic manner, enabling the discourses of the powerful to dominate and 'crowd out everyone else'.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, Fraser argues that socio-economic inequalities cause the cultural ethos, developed by socio-economic groups, to be unequally valued. She further suggests that in everyday life, and within the public sphere, such powers are magnified because inequality, in the political economy, affects opportunities for access to participation, therefore, public spheres are not, and cannot be, neutral and equally 'expressive of any and every cultural ethos.'<sup>76</sup> Fraser suggests multiple public spheres are the solution, as they provide subordinate groups with the arenas to deliberate and form collective preferences, goals, strategies and

identities away from the unequal influence of dominant groups.<sup>77</sup>

Cohen and Rogers suggest limiting individual financial contributions to political groups, lowering barriers of entry to political processes and macro-economic measures such as ‘inheritance taxes, income redistribution and subsidies for the organisation and representation of under-represented interests’.<sup>78</sup> Young suggests there is a need for differentiated resource allocation to associations by the state, to address inequalities between social groups that have arisen from historical processes of disadvantage and oppression.<sup>79</sup> Equalisation of resources also limits the role of threats of sanctions in the public sphere, in turn making reasons more prominent and therefore promoting deliberation.<sup>80</sup>

### *Deliberative Democracy in Internal Associations*

If these socio-economic inequalities can be reduced then participation in associations could increase, and this article has attempted to establish that secondary associations could be key locations for deliberative democratic participation and governance. Moreover, if secondary associations are to fulfil their potential democratic functions then they need to have an internal deliberatively democratic structure: If associations are to be venues for more small-scale participation and democratic decision-making, then they must have a democratic structure. If the principle of subsidiarity is to be introduced then those associations that will be devolved powers must be accountable to those it serves, which requires an internal democratic structure.<sup>81</sup> If associations are to provide authentic information and representation, it must be formed through the participation of all those who are said to be represented.<sup>82</sup> If associations are to be schools of democracy and develop citizens’ capacities to participate deliberatively then this can only be achieved if members get to participate.<sup>83</sup>

However, most secondary associations do not have a minimally internal democratic structure whether in the UK,<sup>84</sup> Ireland,<sup>85</sup> the USA<sup>86</sup> or the Scandinavian democracies,<sup>87</sup> let alone a deliberatively democratic one. The same features of complexity are present within associations, and present similar barriers to achieving deliberative democracy within secondary associations, such as the iron law of oligarchy, time, number and disparity of members, although to a lesser extent than in nation states.

There is also the problem of whether citizens would want to actively participate in deliberative decision-making in associations. However, a fundamental belief for anyone who advocates a more participatory system is that if people are given real opportunities to participate in decision-making, that affects them, in a system that means their participation can actually affect those decisions, then most will participate, to an extent at least. This is even more likely to be the case if many of the socio-economic barriers, discussed above, are lessened. Consequently, if associations have a democratic internal structure, and if associations could influence public policy, or are devolved powers to fulfil key functions themselves, participation could be vastly increased. Nevertheless, if high levels of participation are to be maintained, then participatory demands must not be too excessive. This is why a deliberative and associational democracy can only expect associations to be minimally deliberatively democratic. Moreover, innovative procedural designs are required to help overcome these problems. However, these are problems that will be unique to each individual association and must be addressed by the association. No blueprint can be applied to such problems, as different measures will suit different associations.

*Joining Deliberation with Decision-Making and Avoiding the Mischief of  
Factionalism*

Democratising associations would be a significant achievement, but if democratic deliberation is located only in these associations, then we must be sceptical as to whether the resulting preferences could be actualised. For deliberative democracy to be, genuinely, institutionalised, it must link collective deliberation with decision-making.<sup>88</sup> This problem is overcome when decisions are devolved directly to associations to make for themselves, providing the associations are internally deliberatively democratic. However, as mentioned above, not all functions of governance will be devolved to associations, and broader policies will be required. Other institutions are, therefore, required to provide the link between the communication and opinions, formed through deliberation in the public sphere with decision-making. A variety of different institutional mechanisms have been advocated to make this link. For example, deliberative opinion polls and citizens juries have incorporated secondary associations as advisers to a randomly selected sample of citizens;<sup>89</sup> Habermas looks to traditional

legislative assemblies to act as sensors to discourses emerging from the informal public sphere;<sup>90</sup> and local, national, transnational and functional citizen forums, where a range of associations can participate to either make recommendations<sup>91</sup> or form policy<sup>92</sup> have also been advocated. Each has their relative strengths and weaknesses, and it is likely that a range of such methods are required, in different contexts, to link deliberation in civil society with decision-making at the multilevels of governance that exist in this global age.

These deliberatively democratic institutions, that bring associations into decision-making, are also required if the excessively narrow, and private, interests that secondary associations often promote, are to be compatible with the promotion of the common good. The presence of formal deliberatively democratic decision-making arenas, that include associations, can help to achieve this, preventing these associations from being too narrowly focused and factionalised.<sup>93</sup> Such a situation is far removed from the neo-liberal interest group system because rather than encouraging associations to pressure the state with private and selfish claims, it demands the associations formulate proposals and offer reasons, which the other associations could accept.<sup>94</sup> This, in turn, would mean that an associational democracy did not lead to the mischief of faction and increased bargaining, but to the possibility of the advancement of the common good.<sup>95</sup> Factionalism will be further avoided because citizens will join a variety of associations, as people have multiple and crosscutting, and diverse, identities and interests.<sup>96</sup> This will alleviate factionalism because ‘people are more likely to have some basis for understanding and empathising with others in societies where they inhabit crosscutting and overlapping roles’,<sup>97</sup> as the discussion of civic virtue above suggests.

## CONCLUSION

Features of social complexity present significant barriers for deliberative democracy to be meaningfully institutionalised. The claim here is that secondary associations, in an associational democracy, would help overcome many of these.

Secondary associations provide routes to accommodating social pluralism as they offer suitable locations for decentralisation, which makes the inclusion of all affected easier to achieve. This factor combined with the increased levels, and greater dissemination, of

information that associations provide, aids co-ordination in a plural society. They are also able to represent a greater diversity of people than territorially based mechanisms. Association can, furthermore, generate civic consciousness in their members, which is desperately needed in plural societies.

Secondary associations provide a passage for overcoming the barrier of scale as they are relatively smaller scale units that can enable citizens to directly participate in debate and decision-making. This is consistent with the principle of subsidiarity, which legislates for decisions to be taken at the lowest appropriate level to allow for those affected to participate and fulfil the task or provide the service they need and want. Decentralisation reduces the domain, making clear and unambiguous decisions more likely and therefore further reducing the problems caused by scale. Associations represent their members, enabling more people to be represented and included in decision-making and public debates, which can lead to the development of public spheres, which can transcend elements of time and space. Through these public spheres, associations aid in the dissemination of information to large numbers of geographically dispersed people.

Associations contribute to the more equal generation of key democratic capacities by providing the free spaces for citizens to learn and develop these capacities through participation on a small scale. Associations aid equality in democracy more broadly by providing representation, and access to public spheres, for a diversity of groups with specific interests and identities, that are not territorially based, and that, currently, tend to be un(der) represented. Again, economies of scale in the collection, and dissemination, of information are also achieved by associations.

This last aspect also aids in the reduction of the reliance on specialists. Furthermore, if associations are devolved powers there is less relevant information, and greater knowledge of the issues, which in turn aids co-ordination. Associations provide specialist information themselves and provide experiential information that would otherwise not be available, therefore, countering the dominance of specialists in current policy processes.

Finally, globalisation is accommodated as associations are so flexible that they can operate at international and transnational level, developing public spheres there, and if structured appropriately, even contributing to the decision-making processes of international and transnational, formal, institutions.

However, an associational system is far from perfect and faces many significant problems. The current level of socio-economic inequalities means some associations have far greater resources to achieve their aims, and have greater access to, and are more likely to have their views considered in, the public sphere. Furthermore, people from dominant social groups will find it easier to, and are more likely to, join and participate in associations. A range of measures including the formation of multiple public spheres, and differential allocation of resources to these groups, are essential if a deliberative and associational democracy is to be achieved.

The approximation of deliberative democracy within the associations is difficult due to the same barriers of social complexity that affect its institutionalisation more broadly. Nonetheless, they are easier to overcome within an association, and innovative mechanisms, specific to the association's context can achieve this, providing excessive participation demands on associational members are not made. Finally, these deliberations within associations need to be linked to a variety of formal deliberatively democratic decision-making institutions, to ensure both deliberation and democracy are combined and to avoid the mischief of factionalism. Associational democracy is therefore, in no way the sole solution to enabling deliberative democracy to overcome the barriers presented by the features of social complexity, but certainly offers significant contributions on this. If deliberative democracy is to be institutionalised effectively, associational democracy must be taken seriously, and inevitably seems to have many important roles to fulfil.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> S. Benhabib, '-Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy', in S. Benhabib (ed.) *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, (1996), pp. 67-94, p. 84; J. Femia, 'Complexity and Deliberative Democracy', *Inquiry*, Vol.39, 1996, pp.361-97; D. Miller, 'Is Deliberative Democracy Unfair to Disadvantaged Groups?', in D. Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000, pp. 142-160, p.143.

<sup>2</sup> M. Saward, 'Enacting Democracy', *Political Studies*, Vol.51, 2003, pp. 161-179.

<sup>3</sup> R. Blaug, *Democracy: Real and Ideal: Discourse Ethics and Radical Politic*, New York: Suny Press,

1999, p.49.

<sup>4</sup> A. Fung, 'Associations and Democracy: Between Theories, Hopes and, Realities' *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol.29, 2003, pp515-540, p.515.

<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, there is not the space here to elaborate on how each of these characteristics affects the ability of associations to fulfil the functions. However, Warren, 2001, *op. cit.*, provides detailed and excellent analysis on this.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> D. Zolo, *Democracy and Complexity: A Realist Approach*, University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992; Femia, 1996, *op. cit.*; J. Bohman, *Public Deliberation: Pluralism, Complexity and Democracy*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996.

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