Reforming political party organization in the XXIst century

On the Transformative Effect of *Network Parties* on Modern Representative Democracy

Submitted by Maria Haberer to the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya
as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
from the Information and Knowledge Society Programme.

I certify that all material in this dissertation
which is not my own work has been identified.

Maria Haberer
Berlin, May, 9 2021

Acknowledgements

More than an academic one, the journey of this PhD project has been one of political growth. Studying the future of democracy and political parties, my political mindset for the better and I owe my gratitude to so many people who have inspired and supported me throughout this journey. First of all, I would like to thank my committee, without whom this project would have been impossible. Firstly, to my supervisor Ismael Peña-López. or his encouragement and his patience: Thank you for your enduring trust, your loyal support, your political guidance, and especially for your valuable friendship. I am also very grateful to have met Antonio Calleja-López. Thank you for your sharp mind, your bitter scrutiny and your indispensable advice: Your continuous engagement has inspired me.

And a very special thanks to Lance Bennett: For your support, the provision of new amazing networks and fruitful opportunities, your mindsets and your steady helpful feedback.

It is a great gift to know all of you.

Writing this dissertation and conducting the research would not have been possible without the amazing people I got to interview along the way. Most of you want to remain anonymous here so I generally thank all the interviewees from Barcelona, Madrid and Berlin.

There has been a lot of political developments since the foundation of the Pirate Party and the 15 Movement – and not always for the better. Your endurance and your visions for a better democratic future are a constant inspiration in times of democratic struggles around the globe.

There have been many others whose lives and thoughts have touched me during this time. I want to especially thank the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation for providing me the opportunity for a fellowship in 2019 which has been a highly rewarding experience for me.

Also I desperately need to thank Rosie Zahn and Farhad Mirza for the support in editing and revising the dissertation.

Moltes gràcies a mis amics de Barcelona: Amb molt amor a Eli, Kim, Aliza, Valentín, Ryan, Dani, Angeline, Gloria, Josh y Martí por una temporada llena de aprendizajes. Os llevo en mi corazón.

Abstract

One of the main pillars of the current crisis of Western democracies is the continuous and deep erosion of public trust in institutions which has resulted in a widening gulf between political parties and their electorates. Emerging from the global economic crash of 2008, a new wave of political parties have set new trends for party organization, criticising the prevailing representative model as inadequate in terms of democratic substance. Influenced by recent networked social movements such as the Arab Spring and the Spanish 15M Indignados movement, these parties aim at reforming the role and function of the political party as a vehicle between citizens and the State by adopting the normative values of participatory and deliberative democracy. Also the promising place of DDDPs (digital deliberation and decision-making platforms) in party organization and practices informs their views on how intra-party democratic standards can be reformed and renewed for the better.

This thesis contributes to a better understanding of current representative political parties, critically engaging with their merits through the lens of the *Network Society*. It draws on five case studies in order to flesh out the nuances of the *network party type*. I review the genealogy of party types, advancing the existing literature on a broad range of party types, from mass- to the catch-all party, as well as filling in the gaps related to *network party* type. Firstly, I argue that the crucial novelties brought on by network parties' are explicit in the following characteristics: A vision of expert-citizen democracy and 'strong' participation, a desideratum of openness and transparency, an alignment to 'disintermediation' and the revision of the concept of representation and an organizational vision of permeable intra-party democracy. Drawing on the five case studies, I then identify sub-types of *network parties* - the procedural, the plebiscitary and the municipalist.

Based on this conceptual framework, the thesis provides an in-depth study of three selected cases - the *Pirate Party Germany, Podemos* and *Barcelona en Comú*. I review commonalities and differences in organization, discourse and practice of these examples. Whereas the *Pirate Party Germany* can be described as a radical project that has tried to reimagine party organization through cyber-libertarian lenses, *Podemos* has made use of a populist rhetoric and seems to regress into the classic catch-all party type. While these parties tried to scale up into national parties, *Barcelona en Comú* worked on an urban scale. Its story depicts how the concept of the *network party* goes

beyond party organization and shapes institutional politics from below.

While discussing the potential of *network parties* to transform Western democratic polity, I note that network parties often face their own contradictions in holding up to their values on one side and entering the electoral scene on the other. In light of this, the thesis concludes that *network parties* might be interpreted as a transient phenomenon. However, their values and practices are influencing and sparking further processes of democratizing political institutions and the State.

IV

Resumen

Uno de los principales pilares de la actual crisis de las democracias occidentales es la contínua y profunda erosión de la confianza de los ciudadanos en las instituciones, que ha dado lugar a un abismo cada vez mayor entre los partidos políticos y sus electores. A raíz de la crisis económica mundial de 2008, una nueva ola de partidos políticos ha marcado nuevas tendencias en la organización de los mismos, criticando el modelo representativo imperante por considerarlo inadecuado en términos de sustancia democrática. Influidos por recientes movimientos sociales en red como la Primavera Árabe y el movimiento español 15M Indignados, estos partidos pretenden reformar el papel y la función del partido político como vehículo entre los ciudadanos y el Estado, adoptando los valores normativos de la democracia participativa y deliberativa. Asimismo, el prometedor lugar que ocupan las DDDP (plataformas digitales de deliberación y toma de decisiones) en la organización y las prácticas de estos partidos nos da información referente a sus puntos de vista sobre cómo se pueden reformar y renovar las normas democráticas intrapartidarias.

Esta tesis contribuye a una mejor comprensión de los actuales partidos políticos representativos, comprometiéndose críticamente con sus méritos a través de la lente de la Network Society. Se basa en cinco estudios de caso para establecer y definir los matices de cada tipo de network party. Repasa la genealogía de los tipos de partido, avanzando en la literatura existente sobre una amplia gama de tipos de partido, desde el partido de masas hasta el partido comodín, así como llenando las lagunas relacionadas con el tipo de network party. En primer lugar, sostengo que las novedades cruciales que aportan los „partidos en red" se hacen explícitas en las siguientes características: Una visión de la democracia experto-ciudadano y de la participación „fuerte", un desiderátum de apertura y transparencia, una alineación con la „desintermediación" y la revisión del concepto de representación y una visión organizativa de la democracia intrapartidaria permeable. Basándome en los cinco estudios de caso, identifico a continuación subtipos del network party: los procedimentales, los plebiscitarios y los municipalistas.

Sobre la base de este marco conceptual, la tesis ofrece un estudio en profundidad de tres casos seleccionados: el Partido Pirata de Alemania, Podemos y Barcelona en Comú. Se revisan los puntos comunes y las diferencias en la organización, el discurso y la práctica de estos ejemplos. Mientras que el Partido Pirata de Alemania puede de-

scribirse como un proyecto radical que ha tratado de reimaginar la organización de los partidos a través de lentes ciber-libertarias, Podemos ha hecho uso de una retórica populista y parece retroceder al tipo de partido clásico. Mientras que estos partidos trataron de convertirse en partidos nacionales, Barcelona en Comú trabajó a escala urbana. Su historia muestra cómo el concepto de network party va más allá de la organización partidista y da forma a la política institucional desde abajo.

Al tiempo que se discute el potencial de los network parties para transformar la política democrática occidental, se observa que los network parties a menudo se enfrentan a sus propias contradicciones a la hora de mantener sus valores por un lado y entrar en la escena electoral por otro. A la luz de esto, la tesis concluye que los network parties podrían interpretarse como un fenómeno transitorio. Sin embargo, sus valores y prácticas están influyendo y provocando nuevos procesos de democratización de las instituciones políticas y del Estado.

Resum

Un dels principals pilars de l'actual crisi de les democràcies occidentals és la contínua i profunda erosió de la confiança dels ciutadans en les institucions, que ha donat lloc a un abisme cada vegada major entre els partits polítics i els seus electors. Arran de la crisi econòmica mundial de 2008, una nova ona de partits polítics ha marcat noves tendències en l'organització d'aquests, criticant el model representatiu imperant per considerar-lo inadequat en termes de substància democràtica. Influïts per recents moviments socials en xarxa com la Primavera Àrab i el moviment espanyol 15M In-dignats, aquests partits pretenen reformar el paper i la funció del partit polític com a pont entre els ciutadans i l'Estat, adoptant els valors normatius de la democràcia participativa i deliberativa. Així mateix, el prometedor lloc que ocupen les DDDP (plataformes digitals de deliberació i presa de decisions) en l'organització i les pràc-tiques dels partits informa dels seus punts de vista sobre com es poden reformar i renovar per a millor les normes democràtiques interpartidàries.

Aquesta tesi contribueix a una millor comprensió dels actuals partits polítics representatius, comprometent-se críticament amb els seus mèrits a través de l'òptica de la Network Society. Es basa en cinc estudis de cas per a donar fonament als matisos del tipus de Network Party. Així mateix, es realitza una genealogia dels tipus de partits, avançant en la literatura existent sobre una àmplia gamma de tipus de partits, des del mass-party fins al catch-all party, així com omplint les mancances relacionades amb els tipus de network party. En primer lloc, es sosté que les novetats crucials que aporten els network parties s'expliciten en les següents característiques: una visió de la democràcia expert-ciutadà i de la participació „forta", un desideràtum d'obertura i transparència, una alineació amb la „desintermediació" i la revisió del concepte de representació i una visió organitzativa de la democràcia intrapartidària permeable. A partir dels cinc estudis de cas, s'identifica a continuació diferents subtipus de net-work party: els procedimentals, els plebiscitaris i els municipalistes.

Sobre la base d'aquest marc conceptual, la tesi ofereix un estudi en profunditat de tres casos seleccionats: el Partit Pirata d'Alemanya, Podemos i Barcelona en Comú. Es revisen els punts comuns i les diferències en l'organització, el discurs i la pràctica d'aquests exemples. Mentre que el Partit Pirata d'Alemanya pot descriure's com un projecte radical que ha tractat de reimaginar l'organització dels partits a través d'òp-

tiques ciber-llibertàries, Podemos ha fet ús d'una retòrica populista i sembla retro-cedir al tipus de partit clàssic. Mentre que aquests partits van tractar de convertir-se en partits nacionals, Barcelona en Comú va treballar a escala urbana. La seva història mostra com el concepte de network party va més enllà de l'organització partidista i dóna forma a la política institucional des de baix.

Al mateix temps que es debat el potencial dels network parties per a transformar la política democràtica occidental, s'observa que els network parties sovint s'enfront-en a les seves pròpies contradiccions a l'hora de mantenir els seus valors d'una banda i entrar en l'escena electoral per un altre. A la llum d'això, la tesi conclou que els net-work parties podrien interpretar-se com un fenomen transitori. No obstant això, els seus valors i pràctiques estan influint i provocant nous processos de democratització de les institucions polítiques i de l'Estat.

Declaration of Joint Research

This dissertation has benefitted from the results of joint research.

First from Kurban, C., Peña-López, I. & Haberer, M. (2017). "What is technopolitics? A conceptual scheme for understanding politics in the digital age". In *IDP. Revista de Internet, Derecho y Ciencia Política, 24*. Barcelona: Universitat Oberta de Catalunya.

Second, from Haberer, M. & Peña-López, I. (2016). "Structural Conditions for Citizen Deliberation: A Conceptual Scheme for the Assessment of "New" Parties". In Balcells, J., Borge, R., Delgado García, A.M., Fiori, M., Julià, M., Marsan Raventós, C., Peña-López, I., Pifarré de Moner, M.J., Torrubia, B. & Vilasau, M. (Coords.), *Building a European digital space*, 479–498. Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Internet, Law & Politics. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona, 7-8 July, 2016. Barcelona: UOC-Huygens Editorial.

Third from Haberer, M. & Angles Regos, R. (2016) Facilitating Deliberation and Decision-Making Online? A Pilot-Study of Nabú. [mimeo]

Finally, part of the conceptualization of the network party type is based on the joint work in Haberer, M. & Calleja-López, A. (n.d.) Network parties - Political party organization in response to citizen demands [Working Paper].

Table of Contents

Chapter V
Conclusion

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

BComú	Barcelona en Comú
BVV	Bezirksverordnetenversammlung
CatComú	Catalunya en Comú
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
CUP	Candidatura d'Unitat Popular
DDDP	Digital Deliberation and Decision-Making Platform
DIB	Demokratie in Bewegung
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICV	Initiativa per Catalunya Verds
IU	Izquierda Unida
FOSS	Free and Open Source Software Solutions
GDP	Gross domestic product
GNU	GNU's Not Unix
IA	Izquierda Anticapitalista
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LQFB	Liquid Feedback
NRW	Nordrhein-Westphalen
PAH	Plataforma de los Afectados por la Hipoteca
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê
PSC	Partit dels Sicialistes de Catalunya
PSOE	Partido Socialista Obrero Español
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland
TMB	Transports Metropolitans de Barcelona.
UCD	Unión de Centro Democrático
UNIX	Uniplexed Information and Computing Service

Preface

It is now only over nine years ago that the Pirate Party entered the Berlin parliament. The pictures that were shared in Germany in 2011 about the six ordinary nerds made 20-year-old citizens enthusiastic - including me and my friends. Our relationship to politics until then was characterized by sentiments identified by popular literature on the crisis of democracy: political fatigue, lack of interest and only basic knowledge on democratic institutions, such as the German voting system obtained in school. None of us was a member of a political party. The feeling prevailed that extra-institutional activities, such as demonstrating, or grassroot-engagement had no impact in a detached game that was determined by white old men using square language.

The Pirate Party seemed to grasp a trend that was overseen by established politicians, the Internet, that even after five years would be labelled as "unexplored territory" by chancellor Angela Merkel. In our view, a political party would finally represent us in manifold ways, in our identities and interests. The Pirate Party would push issues on transparency, data security, and real political participation. These issues were new and were better than what other parties had to say. And they transported a vision of humanity as learning individuals, curious and reflective, and deeply rationalist-humanist. Very naïve as we would have to learn - but visionary.

Since popular speakers such as Marina Weisband and many others have left the Pirate Party, since many battlefields have been fought within the Pirate Party, the puzzle of what political parties are, how they can be redefined and how they must face modern challenges has gained complexity. We have undertaken a quantum leap forward in terms of how political participation online can alter established political structures that have grown in Europe over the past century. Since then, many "new" political parties emerged that seem to prove two things: That the political party itself is still a main vehicle and pivotal interface between civil society and the state, but also - that it needs to be reformed because mass parties from yesterday and the catch-all parties from today fail on providing right answers.

This dissertation is written at the cross-section of the feeling that the old is dying but the new is not born yet. It thus is written to explore a range of new symptoms and tries to provide coordinates of a new political field crossing boundaries of political science, political theory, and philosophy.

Chapter I
Introduction

1.1 Polity in the *Network Society*

Following Modern theorists, the concurrent political landscape can be defined by two distinct but interrelated dynamics. On one hand, democratic institutions are based on unstable conditions and seem to be in a highly fragile state. The widely acknowledged crisis of representative democracy not only undermines trust in politicians but also confidence in democratic institutions themselves (Crouch, 2004, Ranciére, 2006; Beyne, 2013). Indeed, within the past years we have witnessed the electoral success of populist actors that aim at eroding the democratic fundamentals of democracy itself resulting in divided countries and the sharpening gap between societal milieus.

On the other hand, a rich number of attempts primarily from the political left harness digital technologies to experiment with institutionalizing direct democratic values and collective self-governance from a radical-reformist perspective. The caption of the *network society* (Castells, 2009) as depiction of a new communication paradigm of the Modern society describes these novel ways and infrastructures for communicating and organizing. The blueprint of the *network society* can well serve as an umbrella for a set of frames and participatory repertoires and aligns strongly with the primacy of "logic of connective action" over collective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) in social movements and a focus on (digital) infrastructures instead of traditional ways of organizing. This blueprint has also paved the way for rethinking commons and the relationship between public-common partnerships (Bauwens and Onzia, 2017; Russel and Milburn, 2018). Networked infrastructures and practices, however, not only affect organizing in social movements. They also challenge conventional party organization and the ways governments are informed by and interact with its citizens. In a nutshell: Whereas representative democracy seems to suffer a crisis of legitimacy, novel forms of connecting and constituting political power seem to herald a friction between an 'old' and a 'new' way of *doing politics*.

This thesis aims at exploring the emergent contradictions and ambiguities between the boundaries of representative democracy and the demand side of digi-

tally-fueled participatory claims and practices. It calls into question how political organization changes in the age of the *Network Society* and depicts the *network party type in the making*. I thus bring the important and well-studied literature of the crisis of representative democracy into conversation with the question on the future of political party organization imagined through the use and implementation of digital technologies.

1.2 The Crisis of Representative Democracy

The widely acknowledged crisis of representative democracy (Crouch, 2004; Ranciére, 2006; Wolin, 2008; Beyne, 2013) has repeatedly stimulated a certain 'hysteria' amongst academics. It is a challenging task to identify the multiple facets, causes and effects of this 'hysteria' since symptoms of the crisis of democracy are interwoven in a complex manner. Amongst other factors, the rise of global markets has 'hollowed out the nation state'[1] fueling concerns about national sovereignty and unfair corporate influence on political decision-making processes. Moreover, the proliferation of digital platforms has led to political communication opportunities that seem to undermine the information system flows of traditional media. These factors seem to strain established democratic institutions and call for an overhaul of our democratic apparatus and, consequently, political parties.[2] As main vehicles of communication between the citizens and the state institutions (Sartori, 1965; Riker, 1982) their credibility is in peril as they struggle to account for their purpose as political intermediaries. As Alonso (2011) stated, "representative mechanisms that lie at the heart of existing democracies are under severe stress" (Alonso et al. 2011: 24).

In general terms, representative democracy is understood as a governance system that permits its constituents to vote for representatives - organized in political parties - through regular elections in order to form the government and exercise administrative power. This form of representation is often considered synonymous with democracy itself (Dahl, 1989). The pre-conception of representation within the representative democracy is roughly based on the procedure of competitive, free, fair, and frequent elections of a representative government by a wide franchise (Dahl, 1998). However, many have argued that the 'crisis of democracy' may actually refer to the crisis of representative democracy and party democracy in particular, rather

---

1 Amongst others, Caruso (2016) argues that the increasing influence of corporate interests in politics push forward a hollowing out of democratic institutions and foster a general supposition that political servants are being led by economic interests through lobbyist control instead of acting in the public interest.

2 Seen through the wider lens of interrelated and integral characteristics of 21st century politics, the following factors will be considered in the course of this dissertation: Alleged new logics of social movements interpreted as practices of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg (2012); extra-institutional political action based on the idea of collective intelligence, p2p, and technopolitics (Toret et al, 2015) as well as the promises and pitfalls of digitally-mediated political communication and organization (Leggewie & Maar, 1998; Davies, 1999). Each of these moments has to be seen in conjunction with the other to reinforce the critique of representative democracy.

than 'democracy itself' (van Reybrouck, 2013). Agreeing with this, the question then becomes: Why is electoral representative democracy in a crisis, and which causes can be identified that provoked the current malaise of democratic institutions?

One diagnosis of the crisis of representative democracy I want to focus on points to the 'neoliberalization' of democratic institutions, an influential argument brought forward by the political theorist Colin Crouch in his analysis of what he polemically refers to as "post-democracy" (Crouch, 2004). The term, which has been widely adopted in political discourse, refers to the state of post-industrial societies in which globalized capitalist modes of production dominate public policy. In his view, the corollary is that a self-referential political class is created that is only concerned with interests of 'big business' rather than representing the interests of "ordinary" citizens. Crouch considers post-industrial democracy to be increasingly dictated by neo-liberal rationalities, becoming a shell of itself that retains "extensive freedom for lobbying activities, which mainly means business lobbies, and a form of polity that avoids interfering with capitalist economy" (ibid.: 3). As a result, he observes that "(t)he masses of citizens play a passive, quiescent, even apathetic part" (ibid.: 4).

Much of this intriguing critique encompasses a wider societal development rather than focusing only on the political realm. He thus perceives the post-democratic state as a logical consequence of the selfish and individualized behaviour of political actors that appease lobbyists, 'hollowing out' democratic institutions instead of acting in the public interest. As a result, political corruption is recognized as a „widespread feature of political life" (ibid.: 10) and has been considered as a key factor in the declining trust in politics.

1.3 The Political Party of the 21st Century

Against this backdrop, I observe a wave of new political parties – which I name *network parties* [3] - that revise the concept of the political party and simultaneously advocate for democratic experiments: Since its founding in 2006, the *Swedish Pirate Party* has precipitated the emergence of the *International Pirate Party* including *the Pirate Party Germany*. In Southern countries, a set of parties emerged that held similar values: *Partido X* and *Podemos* in Spain, the *Movimiento 5 Stelle (M5S)* and Municipalist Parties such as *Barcelona en Comú*.

Despite their differences, these parties share common features: Ideologically,

---

3 Initially, the scope of the dissertation was to examine the rise and fall of the Pirate Party Germany as a first institutional experiment that had put the promise of digital democracy into practice. In the research period, however, various political parties emerged that held similar values and that had a large impact on their respective political landscape. These parties include amongst others *Partido X*, *Podemos*, and Municipalist parties in Spain, *Partido de la red* in Argentina and *Wikipartido* in Mexico. Accordingly, I extended the scope to observe patterns and tendencies on a macro-scale.

they seem to navigate between traditional left-right divisions; organizationally, they nuance perspectives on intra-democracy by involving constituents as well as citizens in the development of their programs relying crucially on digital deliberation and decision-making platforms (DDDPs); and strategically, they propose means to re-form and institutionalize political participation, deliberating and re-negotiating the infrastructures through which citizens articulate and channel political expression. These parties are symptomatic of the crisis of representative democracies, however, as will be unfolded throughout this dissertation seem to correspond to the friction between the crisis of democracy and the advent of a participatory-deliberative democratic vision. A tentative finding thus describes the inherent contradictions which might prevent them from maintaining momentum in the electoral space.

This analysis of *network parties* is set between the successful election of the *Pirate Party Berlin* into the Berlin parliament in 2011 and the re-election of Barcelona's mayor, Ada Colau, in 2019. In the interim, numerous cases of what I will group as a family of *network parties* entered the public realm. In the course of this dissertation, I will focus on the following European cases, shown in Figure 1, with a particular focus on the *Pirate Party Germany* and *Podemos.* For pointing towards a promising local variance of the *network party*, *Barcelona en Comú* (*BComú*) and their impact on the practices of the city council in Barcelona will serve as a case of how these narratives go beyond party organization and shape institutional politics.

Partido X
Founded 2012

Participated unsuccessfully in the European Elections 2014.
Philosophy: Democracia y punto.

Podemos
Founded in 2014

Successfully participated in the European Elections 2014 and is part of the national government.
DDDP: Plaza.Podemos/Participa.Podemos

Pirate Party Germany
Founded in 2006

Forms part of the International Pirate Party (38 members).
Successful participation in General Elections in 2009.
Berlin branch entered parliament in 2011.
DDDP: Liquid Feedback

Barcelona en Comú
Founded in 2014

Successful participation in Local Elections in 2014.
Currently governing in minority in the City of Barcelona for the second legislative period.
DDDP: Decidim.Barcelona

Movimiento 5 Stelle (M5S)
Founded in 2009

Successful participation in the 2013 General Election (second-most popular single party). Is part of the current national government since 2019.
DDDP: Rousseau

Figure 1. Overview of case studies tackled in the thesis

With the advent of *network parties*, the challenge of defining and conceptualizing a political party's function and role has gained ever greater complexity. We have undertaken a quantum leap forward in terms of how digital participation can alter over two centuries of established political structures in Europe. More than anything else, their emergence has caused fundamental conflicts for contemporary democratic systems: These political parties vacillate between two paradigms – *networked democracy* understood as digitally-mediated participatory democracy and the prevailing boundary conditions of how democratic parliaments and established political parties function. This conflict has been formulated by the Argentinian activist and founder of *Partido de la red*, Pia Mancini, as follows:

> "*We are 21st-century citizens, doing our very, very best to interact with 19th century-designed institutions that are based on an information technology of the 15th century.*" [4]

1.4 Rationale and Research Questions

This thesis develops the concept of the *network party* in three steps. Firstly, I elaborate on the ideas that underpin the conception of the *network party* on the *macro*-level and discuss the conditions that led to its rise. Here, I argue that this generation of parties respond to the narratives and practices of the *network society* as proposed by sociologist Manuel Castells (2009; 2010) and link them to concepts of democratic theory such as representation and political deliberation and participation. Secondly, I propose to use the *network party type* as a heuristic instrument that provides useful insights into how party organization is in constant change on a *meso-level* (Margetts, 2006; Gerbaudo, 2018). Here, I refer to the scholarly debate around party types and their historical evolution, organization and programs (Katz & Mair, 1995). Thirdly, the *network party* serves as an umbrella term for differentiating party discourse, organization and strategies. In drawing closely on several existing *network parties*, I elaborate three sub-types which correspond to the case studies: *Proceduralist* parties, *Plebiscitary* parties, and *Municipalist* parties.

The first of these sub-types is characterised by a strong inclination towards ideological purity and revolutionary fervour inspired by cyber-libertarian world views. Examples here are *Partido X* and the *International Pirate Parties*. The second type, in the form of an 'anti-thesis' to the first type, can be labelled as a *plebiscitary* party. This sub-type responds to the failures of the first by applying catch-all strategies and prioritizing electoral success at the expense of initially proclaimed mass citizen involvement. This type corresponds to *Podemos* and *Movimiento 5 Stelle*.

Finally, I conceptualize the most recently formed *Municipalist* parties as an at-

---

4 Pia Mancini on her personal website. Retrieved by: https://www.piamancini.com/ [Last accessed: 20.08.2019]

tempt to moderate between civil society groups in order to achieve widespread consensus as well as success at the ballot box.

Against this backdrop, this thesis touches upon the following set of questions.

1. What are commonalities and differences of the cases under study? Which characteristics constitute the *network party* type?
2. How do the democratic visions of the three case studies (*Pirate Party Germany*, *Podemos*, *BComú*) translate into party organization?
3. How does their emergence impact the respective context, i.e. intra-party democracy, relationship to social movements and government organization and practice?
4. How do they affect the boundary conditions of democratic institutions and how do they elevate their practices to the institutional level?

These questions are accompanied by the question of the role and significance of digital technologies (DDDPs) as enablers of the aspired innovations of party organization.

1.5 Theoretical Focus

This dissertation sheds light on how *network parties* respond to the multifaceted crisis of representative democracy. Due to their complex nature, this thesis combines various strands of political theory, developing a composite theoretical framework consisting of democratic theory, political party research, social movement studies theories related to the digitization of democratic procedures.

These topics touch upon the question of how *network parties* embody different conceptions of democracy but they are primarily concerned with political party research and intra-party democracy. In line with this focus, the theoretical scope of this thesis is limited to party organization and cannot provide an account of related facets such as online communication including the use of social media within political parties. Although this field of investigation has received a great deal of attention in the past years and is essential to novel accounts of political communication (van Dijk, 2006; Borge et al., 2009, Zeng et al. 2010), I focus on DDDPs as a means of party democratization and partisan democratization.[5] I will thus revisit and elaborate the concept of intra-party democracy which seems inadequate for *network parties* due to their fluid boundaries between the 'inside' and the 'outside'; members and non-members. Whereas recent studies have investigated this issue from a more holistic and normative viewpoint (Wolkenstein, 2017), this dissertation will concentrate on the subjective impressions by party members.

---

5 One exception will be a short excursion to the use of Twitter by the *Pirate Party Germany* due to the study of their perception of transparency. The conceptual emphasis of the 'technopolitical dimension' thus lies on the responses of three case studies to the question of how DDDPs can alter intra-party democracy.

Conceptually, I focus on three approaches to *network parties*, in line with the classifications offered by Gunther & Diamond (2003): their *democratic vision* as instances of the networked democratic paradigm, their *organization* (entailing perspectives on intra-party democracy) and their participatory *(networked) practice*.

1.6 Methodological and Empirical Demarcation

I place the *network party* in the tradition of an ideal-typical approximation towards a phenomenon (Weber, 1949), which allows me to explore the theoretical possibilities of the concept while simultaneously confronting it with the empirical data obtained. Consequently, this thesis does not 'test' working hypotheses but rather follows research questions (see Chapter 4.1).

I mainly draw on secondary literature to develop the network party type and follow a qualitative research approach by interviewing participants and members of the respective parties. It goes beyond the scope of the thesis to provide an exhaustive contextualization of the case-studies, i.e. a profound analysis of the respective party system and other particularities on the national and sub-national level since a thorough analysis would be too ample for the aim of this thesis. Instead, each empirical chapter will only provide limited information on selected dimensions summarized as 'historical background'.[6] Whereas the focus of comparison lies on the three determinants *vision, organization and (networked) practice,* the empirical chapters will partly introduce other relevant aspects that colour and nuance the 'overall picture' of the case studies. Therefore, my analysis aims to provide a description of distinctive phenomena, selected events and general tendencies instead of operating solely with fixed variables and quantitative descriptions, i.e. membership numbers, online penetration rates etc.

Although I mainly treat the cases within a synchronic comparison, I have also attempted to include diachronic perspectives to how initial visions turned into contradictory practices. However, the main challenge has been the asynchrony of the cases that not only affected my methodological approach but hindered a thorough comparison. Bearing this in mind, the empirical chapter on the *Pirate Party Germany* is based entirely on interviews retrieved retrospectively, which may have biased the analysis. However, in this case I have attempted to sample the interviewees according to their political positions to prevent potential contamination and provide an expansive range of views.

Lastly, I will only touch upon and not focus on the question of how these parties differ programmatically from others. In Chapter 3, programmatic differences will

---

6 I am aware that the factors described in these sections are selective and that the formation of political parties results from a dense interplay between different variables. However, our choices are mostly congruent with other scholars' analyses and shed light on the main parameters.

be studied through a selective analysis of internal documents, manifestos and political programmes of the case studies. However, I will not provide thorough research such as the more quantitative research undertaken by the *Manifesto Project* [7]. Also, I have sought to complement and contrast direct impressions of party activists with impressions given by experts. This does not substitute a thorough investigation but aims to amend the subjective views of people directly involved with a more distanced view of the development of the case studies. [8]

1.7 Main Findings

Essentially, this thesis a) develops the *network party* type, and explores its multifarious practices, b) sheds light on the political strategies employed by the *Pirate Party Germany, Podemos* and *Barcelona en Comú* and c) offers interpretations of these parties as paradigmatic cases for *Proceduralist*, *Plebiscitary* and *Municipalist* sub-types.

While their respective backgrounds vary, the case studies have more in common than what meets the eye. Despite the heterogeneity of their context, timespan and significance, *network parties* share an insoluble dilemma: they have to negotiate the contradictions brought on by their commitment to, both, *networked democracy* as well as institutional boundaries. As long as institutional boundaries remain within the representative paradigm, the main underlying dilemma of *network parties* concerns the need to honour their commitment to digitally-mediated participatory democracy in party organization and practice. That means that they are often torn between pleasing the constituents on one hand and securing (re-) election by conforming to the institutional standards, on the other.

This thesis shows that *network parties* have come up with different methods of managing this 'balancing act' which have yielded differing results: All three have found similar strategies to engage citizens in political dialogue, calling on the wider public to strengthen ties and attachment to the party and introducing a *permeable* approach to party membership and intra-party democracy. However, this self-imposed requirement is often inconsistent with the demographic makeup of the party's activist wing. Here, *network parties* fail to 'descriptively' represent the diversity of their constituents, creating a new elitism within party ranks which could be interpreted as a contributor to its unsustainability. Furthermore, they have either been unable to spark a sizable participatory engagement or failed to maintain momentum after their initial success. This has often resulted in elitism and hierarchies that stir disappointment amongst voters, militants and constituents. This process is reminiscent of what political scholar Robert Michels (1911) calls the "iron law of oligarchy": the

---

7 For a statistical endorsement of this issue, see the Manifesto Project Database: https://visuals.manifesto-project.wzb.eu [Last accessed: 08.12.2019]

8 Regarding expert interviews, data extraction can be accessed via https://ches.data.eu [Last accessed: 10.07.2019]

need to appropriate horizontal organizations into vertical ones as soon as they enter the electoral space.

Similarly, the promise of a digitally-mediated participatory democracy has also fallen short of expectation or, in another interpretation, has evolved from a cyber-libertarian perspective into a more *technopolitical* reading concerning the intersection between the physical political space and digital solutions. In this context, another intriguing aspect of these case studies is the way in which *network parties* make use of DDDPs. Whereas *Liquid Feedback* (*Pirate Party Germany*) is marked by low standards of usability and a "tech-savvy" design, *Participa.Podemos* (*Podemos*), albeit being more user-friendly, still contains crucial thresholds and has mutated into a 'legitimizing' tool. Lastly, the implementation of *Decidim.Barcelona* as the most advanced tool embraces a holistic *technopolitical* vision by allowing meta-deliberation about the tool itself and at its core value incorporates offline and online participation.

The main finding of the thesis consists in the observation that the question of how party organization needs to be democratized does not seem to be an issue at stake and that - indeed - party decline might be the necessary outcome of the conflicting logics of representative and *networked democracy*. Instead, as drawn from the observation of *BComú*, the cure for representative democracy might lie in the emergence of local citizen platforms that utilize the party form as 'necessary evil' to hack institutions from below and place deliberation and participatory democracy at the center of a common government project.

1.8 Document Layout

In Chapter 2, I set the theoretical foundation for *networked democracy* by distinguishing between continuous and disruptive uses of ICTs in the political realm. After a presentation of the main criticisms against representative democracy I point towards a possible re-iteration in the concepts of political participation, deliberation and representation by the disruptive use of digital technologies in social movements, open government approaches and political party organization.

Chapter 3 focuses more specifically on the integration of the *network party type* into political party research. I trace the evolution of political party organization from cadre- to mass- and electoralist parties and argue why variances of *network parties* can – after all – be seen as a continuation of and possible answer to the crisis of representative democracy. Finally, it describes more closely relevant aspects of *network parties* and focuses on commonalities based on characteristics from the broad observation of five cases.

Chapter 4 briefly introduces methodological concerns, research questions, an argument for a qualitative approximation towards the questions and gives a brief overview of the three in-depth case studies. To facilitate comparability of the case studies, the empirical chapters are divided into three sections: democratic vision,

organization and (digital) practice. This chapter entails sections analysing the *Pirate Party Germany* and *Podemos* as typical instances of the *network party* type. Finally, *Barcelona en Comú* is described as local variance of the *network party* type and argues why this case might provide a viable nuance of how representative democracy can be reshaped.

Chapter 5 reflects the findings in the broader theoretical discussion about the future of democracy and the respective function of political parties.

Chapter II
Theoretical and Interpretative Framework

2.0 Structure of the chapter

In the introduction, I briefly commented on the different ways in which 'the crisis of democracy' has been perceived and analysed through the description of post-democracy (Crouch, 2007) and how dwindling public support for established democracies, its institutions and its political parties is one factor contributing to the rise of *networked parties*. In order to situate the emergence of the new type of *network parties* within the broader discussion on digital democracy, this chapter provides a theoretical framework, elaborating on the emerging conflicts between contemporary representative democracy and *networked democracy*.

The following chapter is divided in three sections. Section 1 addresses the impact of ICTs in the political realm and the concepts of the *network society, mass self-communication* and *technopolitics*. Section 2 maps the key transformations from representative democracy towards *networked democracy* where I will also address some philosophical considerations on the meaning of representation and participation. I continue to point out and recapitulate literature on three different areas of Liberal Modern polity and how they are transformed by new means of communication and information: a) social movements, b) government and the public sector and c) political parties. I thus will bring into conversation concepts from social movement theory and open government because they intersect and interact with the concept of *network parties* in the course of the empirical chapters. The rise of the Spanish 15M Indignados movement plays a significant role in the narratives and practices of *Podemos* and *Barcelona en Comú*. Additionally, how *Barcelona en Comú* impacted the common government approach of the city council needs to be placed within broader open government approaches. These considerations will be summarized in the third section in which I will highlight the main transformative elements from representative democracy to *networked democracy*.

2.1 The Digitization of Politics and the *Network Society*

The impact of the advent of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on the political realm has been vividly interpreted, discussed and operationalized over the last few decades. The discussion around digital technologies as drivers of political change has been conflated with concepts, becoming buzzwordy (Krause, 2017) and spurring a wide labels of studies and research, ranging from of e-democracy (Dunleavy and Margetts, 2006; Livermore, 2011), digital democracy (Dahlberg 2011), open democracy, digital activism and contentious politics (Earl & Kimport, 2012) to political parties and institutions (Chadwick, 2006; Margetts, 2007).

From a theoretical perspective, techno-optimists have analysed these transformations as the advent of a new age of direct democracy. Proponents of deliberative democracy have interpreted them as a new channel for rational discourse online (Shirky, 2008; Watson, 2009). Low communication costs, asynchronous communication and possibilities for self-organization and collaborative production are some of the reasons for this optimism. On the other hand, studies on digital populism, disinformation)hate speech and filter bubbles have pointed towards the negative effects of social media on political discourse (Morozov, 2012; Bennett & Livingston, 2018). In the course of this dissertation I will scrutinize the democratizing potential of digital technologies for political parties, however, the transformative effect of digital mediation on the two other pillars of Modern polity - social movements and government - will be synthesized in course of this chapter.

Digitization of politics and transformative potentials: As enablers and providers of location- and time-unbound communication possibilities, ICTs have provoked a re-thinking on representative institutions. Scholars and activists have explored the potential of "real-time governance" (Weyer, 2012) that is able to circumvent representative politics and to materialize direct democratic utopias through disintermediation (Ward & Gibson, 2009; Gerbaudo, 2018; Robles-Morales et al., 2019). Thus, first materializations of the intersection of democracy and digital technology were guided by a "cyber-libertarian" worldview, mainly inspired by libertarian stances of the early hacktivist culture (Thomas, 2003) which aimed to confront government structures with a new type of democratic "agency" (Hofmann, 2019)[9]. Inherent to the culture of free software around commons-based peer production (Benkler, 2006) is the role of digital technologies as a driving force of social and political change that can potentially challenge "existing institutions by eroding the institutional monopoly on large-scale coordination" (Shirky, 2008: 143).

Most importantly, digital technologies have brought new communication rep-

---

9   Other authors have pointed to the novel nature of 'affordances' provided by digital technologies. 'Affordances' are an explanatory concept of how 'values' and 'meanings' of the design of (technological) objects are linked to the action possibilities offered by them (Gibson, 1977; Norman, 1998).

ertoires for digital activism, claims for more transparency and freedom of speech in the digital age. The ability to mobilize via social networks has paved the way for important activist structures such as the hacktivist group *Anonymous* and the *Whistleblower* platforms, as well as the emergence of 'smart mobs' (Benkler, 2006). Enabled by the possibility of fragmented real-time communications, these actors have challenged and ruptured existing political power-structures and transferred protests and counter-power into the digital realm by publishing and disseminating information. [10]

Avoidance of technological determinism: When discussing the "impact" or "transformative effect" of digital technologies on politics, a mono-causal link has to be avoided. For avoiding senses of determinism, I am joining Derrida's analysis over two decades ago that "new technologies are more than just more efficient techniques or means to perform a certain function or task. Rather, they are effective profound transformations in the public sphere, changes that alter the dimensions of public space as well as the very structure of res publica" (Derrida, 1994: 89).

It is thus not my intention to frame the transformation of areas in the political sphere in a deterministic way. I thus agree with and others that a wide range of factors need to be taken into account for describing correlations and causations between the proliferation of digital media, profound changes in the social fabric and the post-modern state, new subjectivities, the transformation of political organizing, political participation and the hollowing out of democratic institutions (Calleja-López, 2017). Instead, these factors have to be taken into account in a holistic manner. Taking this into account, the following sections circle around the observation that not digital technologies *per se* but rather new forms of communication indeed have a transformative effect on current politics and democracies in particular.

The *network society* in a nutshell: With the publication of the series of books on the *network society*, Castells has marked this new paradigm of perceiving a new social fabric mediated by new means of communication in the Internet Age (Castells, 2004; 2013). The exploration of nodes and the intertwinement of physical and online spaces provides insightful results in activity metrics, linguistic behaviour (Monterde et al., 2015: 28) and "multi-layered" networks (Toret et al. 2013; Bennett et al., 2013; Boccaletti et. al, 2014). [11] As I briefly indicated, the crux of Castells'

---

10 Academic researchers have intensively scrutinized these actors through sociologist lenses (Gerbaudo, 2012; Graziano & Forno 2012; Sivitanides & Marcos, 2011). Despite these overreaching observations, another intriguing and widely recognized phenomenon within citizen-centric approaches has been low-threshold political engagement repertoires commonly acknowledged as practices of 'clicktivism'. By using social media as quick and easy ways to support organizations and causes, users engage as citizens in politics, whereas previously they may not have made the effort to write formal letters. Scholars have coined a derogatory term for this low-cost and low-effort activist practice, calling it "armchair activism" (Butler, 2011: 15).

11 However, as has been repeatedly stressed, one major weakness of the concept of networks in this context is its inability to consider actors that are not immediately integrated or already existent in observed networks. Reacting to this, a broader perspective has been adopted by Jeffrey Juris (2012) who introduced the logic of aggregation when

account is the idea of 'mass self-communication', that heralds new communication networks by means of social software tools. This network transforms the very foundations of social interaction "(...) because it reaches potentially a global audience through peer-to-peer networks. It is multimodal, as the digitization of content and advanced social software, often based on open source that can be downloaded free, allows the reformatting of almost any content in almost any form, increasingly distributed via wireless networks. And it is self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many that communicate with any" (Castells, 2007: 248).

According to other writings of Castells (2011; 2015), large hierarchical organizations are being challenged by informal and "weak ties" networks (Granovetter, 1973) that characterize an organizational "shift from vertical bureaucracies to horizontal corporation" (Castells, 2000b: 176), and decentralize operations and modes of control.[12] The concept of networks has also been used as a discursive concept in political sociology to refer to a multi-directional performativity of political topics and actors and to horizontal and decentralized organizational infrastructures. Most prominently, Yochai Benkler's work on the 'networked public sphere' and 'commons-based peer production' elucidates how the changing architecture of "hub-and-spoke" democracy (Benkler, 2006: 212) towards cost-effective communication creates alternate decentralized communication mechanisms that open the public stage for a larger number of actors and speakers.

As he importantly points out, these democratizing effects are not purely quantitative but by inducing a quantitative change, they induce a new quality in the public sphere.6 In this sense, digital networks are related to the mechanisation of the social relations in the political realm. As (non-)spatial theory, the notion of network provides the necessary means to elaborate on the question of how political party organization is affected by cultural, political and economic changes caused by the proliferation of digital communication and information technologies. Castells has applied the concept of networks in diverse realms, however, as mentioned before, he recently explored how the concept of networks can be observed in recent social movements and protests and political parties in the *Network Society*.

On the notion of *technopolitics*: The concept of technopolitics - despite its origins

---

observing Occupy Boston encampments. In his observation, virtual crowds were aggregated and then physically embodied on the street. This shifts the focus from self-generating networks as a fixed set of nodes to a dynamic process of adding and losing, aggregating, actors of protest-making practices.

12 These narratives on how NSM are being formed and shaped have been absorbed and modulated by multiple researchers: Bennett & Segerberg (2012) introduce the logic of connective action when observing social movements such as Occupy and the Spanish 15M Indignados movement. They manifest digitally mediated action networks that are fuelled by personalized content sharing via interpersonal communication networks. Information sources change from mainly private and public media providers such as newspapers and broadcast stations towards social media streams and blogs as media sources, providing an autonomous way for social movements to communicate to outside publics.

in various diverse fields[13] - can be perceived as elaboration on the effects of mass-self communication on the political realm. The notion received new attention in the Activist community around the 15M movement and the subsequent political cycles in Barcelona and Madrid (Alcazan et al., 2012; Toret, 2013; Toret et al., 2015; Treré & Barranquero, 2018). Predominantly prominent in the Spanish context, the eponym *technopolitics* emerged as an umbrella-term and buzzword that has inspired a whole movement of researchers to look into the intersection of activism and institutional bodies for their representation (Calleja-López, 2017, Peña-López, 2016, Monterde et al., 2017).

Interestingly, the *Decidim* community (see Chapter 4.4.4.) interpret *technopolitics* as a distinguished interpretation of their approximation towards digital democracy. If to follow activists Toret et al. (2013) by understanding *technopolitics* as "the tactical and strategic use of digital tools for organization, communication, and collective action [...] of connected communities (...) to create and change social movements" (Toret et al. 2013: 3), I appreciate that it is this second part of the definition *to change social movements* that supports this notion as the main reference for *network parties,* since it elucidates the very intersection, the in-between space of the institutionalization process of social movements organization and practices. However, at the same time, this notion reflects the dilemmatic potential of translating movement-practices into the institutional realm.

Plane	Relation	Mode
Political	Superstructure	Co-decision
Technopolitical	Structure	Co-design
Technical	Infrastructure	Co-production

Table 1. Basic framework of Decidim's understanding of the technopolitical plane (see Barandiaran et al, 2018).

As the table shows, the *technopolitical* plane can further be placed at the structural intersection between the political and the technical plane. In advancement, the holistic understanding of *technopolitics* is displayed by merging legal, political, institutional, practical, social and educational codes (Barandiaran et al., 2018) thus combining purely technical complexities with the respective socio-political context. Elsewhere I argued that components of technopolitical projects are therefore a) communicative, for information dissemination, b) legal, to set up legal frameworks for participatory practices, c) organizational, to establish and maintain decentralized organizational infrastructures, and d) institutional, informing state bodies and

---

13 Also see Kurban et al. (2015) and Edwards and Hecht (2012), Hughes (2006), Kellner (2001).

"co-producing" policymaking (Kurban et al., 2017).

Accordingly, authors on *technopolitics* have formulated the desideratum of a technopolitical infrastructure stating that "many governmental bodies will have to end up adapting to the requirements of the technology and the participatory processes – and not the other way around, as it is the norm" (Peña-López, 2016: 6). The endeavour of *technopolitics* as such provides an all-encompassing perspective on the specific implementation of digital technologies to integrate DDDPs as a core mechanism to translate participatory democracy into public institutions.

In a nutshell, *technopolitics* thus describes the critical interrogation between the political and the technical in the context of collective action and contentious politics through the use of digital media and communication technology. Douglas Kellner refers to the appropriation of digital media and social media platforms for political action as a gaining "new terrains of political struggle for voices and groups excluded from the mainstream media and thus increase potential for resistance and intervention by oppositional groups" (Kellner, 2001: 23).

This section introduced the umbrella discussion of how digital technologies have influenced the political realm and briefly touched on important concepts of the *network society* and technopolitics. In the following section, after having discussed some philosophical implications, I point towards the transformative potential of the new communication paradigm for Modern polity.

2.2 The Transformation of Representative Democracy

In this section I will change perspective from the transformative nature of digital communication potential to the current state of representative democracy. As such I add on authors that describe that democracy is in a state of flux and state that - with the advent of digital means for a new communicative paradigm - the very pillars of representative democracy are shoken (Manin 1997; Tormey & Feenstra, 2015). In this section, I briefly describe key confrontations in three areas of Modern political realms: Social movements, the State and governments including public services and political parties. These three essential elements in modern societies deserve joint attention since "one cannot understand the normal, institutionalized workings of courts, legislatures, executives, or parties without understanding their intimate and ongoing shaping by social movements" (Goldstone, 2003: 2). The rise of global social movements from 2011 against austerity prove the reverse effect. A number of movements have formed themselves to challenge the liberal imprint of current government policies and partly criticize representative mechanisms that lie at heart of party democracy tied to the "crisis of representation" (Manin, 1997: 195). "We are the 99%" and "Real democracy now" express a deep distrust in the concept of representation and the state of Modern democracies as such. Thus, the advent of digital technologies has brought forth a new communicative paradigm that might bring a

"transformation" of how social movements, governments and political parties operate. However, the notion of transformation needs to be used with caution since "(m)any agree that information and communication technologies (ICTs) are transforming politics. […] They disagree, however, about the significance and character of that transformation." (Fung et al, 2013: 30f.)

On "Transformation": In this chapter, I make the argument that there is a difference in using digital means for improving existing mechanisms of representative democracy (digital democracy in my terminology) and between a transformative use that implies key confrontations with the existing core institutions (digitally-mediated participatory democracy).

I want to distinguish between the digitization of politics and how politics are redefined by digital technologies. Whereas the former refers to making classical methods of representative and direct democracy more efficient (i.e. e-votings, referendums, e-petitioning), there might be a paradigm shift towards a "new political grammar" (Jurado, 2014). The notion of paradigm here refers to the concept of paradigm change (Kuhn, 1962) but needs to be interpreted in a weak sense and understood in "a useful way of thinking the present conjuncture: less a passing of representation, and more an incipient problematization that evinces dissatisfaction but without presupposing the acceptance of a clear break or alternative" (Tormey, 2015: 12). More precisely, Fung and others make the distinction between "revolutionary and transformative" (empowered public sphere, displacement of traditional organizations by newly digitally self-organized groups and digitally direct democracy) versus "incremental contributions" (truth-based advocacy, constituent mobilization, crowd-sourced social monitoring) (Fung et al., 2013). This points towards a distinction between internet-enabled communicative practices that point towards a creation of new organizations and repertoires and internet-enhanced practices that make existing practices more efficient.

In sum, the potential of transformation of representative democracy in light of the digital age can best be described as an interregnum in which old and new concepts do clash and are in fruitful dialogue and constant negotiation and lessons learnt influence the work of researchers and practitioners. Before I turn to the different transformative effects of digital technologies in social movements, government approaches and political parties, I briefly discuss how philosophical concepts on political representation and citizen participation retrieve new significance in the light of the proliferation of digital technologies.

2.2.1 Philosophical Considerations

Rethinking 'Representation' through digital technologies: From a historical and theoretical perspective, the democratic model of representative democracy and the accompanying conceptualization of 'representation' has witnessed a tremendous

attention in literature [14]. It goes beyond the scope to trace down the history of representative democracy and the concept of representation itself, it suffices to elaborate on how current democracies are in a state of "post-representation" (Keane, 2009; Rosanvallon, 2011), which - for some - is a useful concept to refer to whilst for others a notion "full of obvious disagreements" (Pitkin, 1967: 4). Instead of talking about "post-representation", I want to argue that digital technologies can bring transformative effects in authorization, accountability, descriptive representation, symbolic representation and receptivity.[15] These angles of representation are based on the classical and highly influential work of Hanna Pitkin (1976) in an analysis of the five different qualities, or senses, of representation.

In sum, the first, 'authorization' [16] or legal empowerment, speaks to mechanisms that authorize a representative to act on behalf of another person. In representative democracies, these consist of regular election mechanisms to give and withdraw authority to representatives. The digitization of this procedure is the concept of e-voting. However, pre-electoral digital mechanisms can influence this sense, for example, Francisco Jurado has pointed towards ad hoc participation, online primaries and e-petitioning (Jurado, 2017). Whereas this sense is an ex ante conception of representation, 'accountability' refers to ex post representation.

'Accountability' thus describes degrees of responsibility and mechanisms to control the actions of the representative. In representative democracies this refers to turning elections, also called "disappointment principle" (Keane, 2009) as *post-factum strategy*. The issue on how representatives are being accountable in between election periods has been topic to numerous studies (Wolinetz, 1991: 125). A related question emerging from this view centres around the division of the 'free-mandate' versus the 'imperative-mandate' principle or what Pitkin calls the "mandate-independence controversy" (Pitkin, 1967: 145) around whether the representative should make decisions independent of their base, as a delegate, or as "transmission-belt" (ibid:

---

14 Since the emergence and development of the concept of political representation particularly in early eighteenth century (Knights 2005) with the rise of parliamentarism, this concept has developed itself as indispensable in Western democracies and is, thus, of high importance for elaborating on main cornerstones of the crisis of representative democracies. In this manner, Tormey (2015) recently argued that the concept of representation is the key for understanding political developments of the past years. Despite being primarily connected to a political understanding, the idea of representation extends to philosophy, linguistics and legal application fields such as notary and accounting practices.

15 According to Hanna Pitkin, these different views of representation do not always feature in unison. While all views play a significant role within the electoral-representative paradigm, the process of authorizing political representatives through regular elections nowadays plays the lead in contemporary Western democracies. Likewise, the 'symbolic' view can also be observed, especially during electoral campaigns in which potential candidates seek to elicit sympathy and identification amongst the electorate. Interestingly, this sense also gains importance with the rise of 'neo-populist' movements and political parties. The dominance of these two views over representation of interests (substantive) and partly the gap between socio-cultural milieus of citizens and representatives (i.e. income level and educational background) constitutes the main qualities of the electoral-representative paradigm.

16 This 'formalistic' representation is legitimized by the fact that the represented subject agrees to the means of electing the representative. Consequently, the representative has the full capacity to speak, act and react on behalf of the represented subject.

33), as trustees. Digital innovations have brought a transformative potential of how accountability can be re-defined. In this regard, Coleman (2005) early describes how "normative claims for a more deliberative democracy where citizens' preferences are not simply calculated and aggregated, but exposed to public reason and the possibility of transformation, is enhanced (ibid.: 191). As a prominent example, the *Pirate Party Germany* has experimented with a variance of the "imperative-mandate" on their platform *Liquid Feedback* (see section 4.2), in which the party base should decide on relevant matters for the representatives in a synchronous manner.

The 'descriptive' sense of representation describes external similarities or common characteristics between the representative and the represented such as sex, ethnicity or race [17], closely connected to the widespread literature on identity politics (references). Whereas Jurado again refers to online primaries to make the process of electing representatives more just, this effect indeed is hard to measure. However, single issues and identity representation retrieved new significance in new social movements and networked social movements since the use of Twitter and Facebook allows new networks of representation.

Relatedly, 'symbolic' representation focuses - rather than pointing to the relationship between representative and represented - on the power of symbols that trigger sympathy or identification amongst people (i.e. flags). Here again, we can observe a new pattern on Twitter and Facebook to share content and disseminate information. Bennett & Segerberg (2013) speak of the logic of connective action of social movements and personalized content that build up identity frames. As example, they use the usage of memes to refer to the symbolic dimension of representation online.

Lastly, 'substantive' representation describes the 'acting for', the activities taken up by the representatives in the name of the represented, i.e. to what extent policy outcomes mirror the interests of the constituents. [18] Whereas the other senses provoke interesting questions on the transformative potential of digital technologies, this sense is of crucial importance since the new logics of communicating and information sharing severely challenge traditional ways of 'acting for'. The underlying question is that representatives need to represent the interests of their electorate and "act for and in favour" of their preferences in government processes. However, the rise of ICTs and in particular DDDPs herald a disintermediating potential especially regarding interest aggregation and personal preference expression. The example of *Liquid Feedback* and *Decidim Barcelona* strongly experiment with the question how

---

17 Within etymological approaches of 'representation', this relates to the meaning of representation as 'resemblance' and the question of which criteria lends legitimacy to the representational relationship, for example, speaker of single-issue parties.

18 Although the author assumes representation to be a manifold concept that runs through political systems, provides a heuristic instrument for analysing the relationship of representative patterns, emphasizes repeatedly the unity and variations on the understanding of representation and at the same time stresses its multidimensional character, she falls short of providing a tangible account of how the four dimensions complement or exclude each other.

online deliberation and decision-making can have a binding effect on policy-making in parties and local governments.

How do these considerations feed into the overall crisis of representative democracy? The deficits of the present-day representative democracy are vividly expressed by the slogan of the prominent 15M Spanish Indignados movement: *"they do not represent us"* which can be read as an expression of discontent towards the prevailing view of 'representation'. The interpretation of this slogan thus relates to the 'substantive' view of representation, pointing towards an increasing divergence of interests between electorate and representatives; citizen demands and outcomes. This goes hand in hand with the postulation of a post-democratic system, in which lobbyism overwrites the interests of common people. It furthermore alludes to the insufficiency of elections as the main mechanism for appointing representatives and the lack of check and balances in electoral processes. Electoral procedures are often criticised for lacking the structural conditions necessary for them to reflect 'the will of the *demos*' (van Reybrouk, 2016; Tormey, 2018). It also speaks to the 'descriptive' sense of representation in Pitkins' conceptualization, highlighting the increasing lack of shared characteristics between common people and representatives.

This section depicted the shifts of the concept of representation by digital technologies ranging from the digitization of existing mechanisms of authorization to more transformative potentials in respect to interest articulation and collaborative policy-making. In the course of the empirical chapters, I will recur to the re-iteration of the senses of representation in greater detail. Following this line of argumentation, the next section asks how the concept of participation has undergone a revival in the studies of digital democracy by analyzing another classic conceptualization, the ladder of citizen participation by Sherry Arnstein (1969).

Rethinking political participation through digital technologies: Similarly to the concept of representation, grasping citizen participation in politics is an overwhelmingly elaborated idea that has been placed in philosophical works on radical democracy and the redistribution of power in favour of citizens to rather "weak" methods, such as citizen consultation and surveys [19]. An exhaustive amount of literature on political participation has shed light on the various ways in which citizen power can be exercised and, more specifically, to what extent and in which ways citizens can influence and control democratic decision-making (Pateman, 1970; Barber, 1984, Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995).

In a positive notion, classical literature has mostly presumed that:

---

19 For analytical purposes, Van Deth (2014) has specified four categories that define political participation: It must be be (1) an active process (passive information retrieving is not being considered as participation), (2) the action must be be voluntary, the subjects are required to be (3) non-professionals and (4) the direction of the activity has to involve, governments, politics or the state.

"Where few take part in decisions there is little democracy; the more participation there is in decisions, the more democracy there is" (Verba & Nie, 1972: 1).

The very classical but fruitful operationalization of Sherry Arnstein - after over thirty years - still serves as a useful heuristic instrument to measure the influence of digital technologies on discourse and practices of citizen participation. In conceptualizing 'participation' [20], Sherry Arnstein's (1969) influential work presents a nuanced view, allowing us to identify participatory opportunities brought upon by digital technologies.
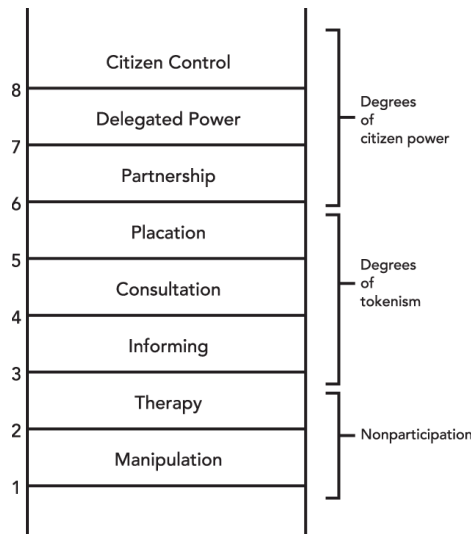
Figure 2. Ladder of Participation (Arnstein, 1969)

Using 'the ladder of participation' as an apt metaphor, she described eight steps of political participation, grouped into three categories: Bottom-up, which range from non-participation (manipulation and therapy), tokenism (informing, consulting, placation) and citizen power (partnership, delegated power, citizen control). [21] Arnstein's ladder has been further developed and discussed through the lenses of democratic theory and government practitioners. Important to the course of this dissertation is the question how the most crucial steps of this ladder have been influenced by the rise and implementation of digital media in the political realm.

---

20 Etymologically speaking, "taking part" (Latin "pars" and "capere") in the political sense potentially may reflect various spectrums of different actions – from voting to writing petitions to being politically active and involved. However, political participation can also be defined as individual participation in political decision-making, especially by direct action rather than through elected representatives (Font et al., 2015). Thus, I exclude 'voting representatives in regular elections' from our understanding of participatory democracy.

21 Whereas non-participation modes can be ascribed to autocratic states, tokenism is mostly connected to the existing state of representative democracy. The connotation of 'citizen power' in a partly naïve version refers to direct democracy as practiced in Ancient Athens, a city state in which citizens directly participated in public affairs.

Starting with information[22], digital means have brought up a novel way of informing citizens of government policies and decision-making. The novel branch of *govtech* and data-transparency from governments and the concept of open government received widespread attention on the international level (also see section 2.2.3.). Digital means also change mechanisms of 'plebiscitary democracy' (Green, 2009) and top-down legitimizing tools, typically referenda that give mostly binary options to complex questions without granting the electorate an opportunity to define the question itself. Ways of "consulting" citizens have digitally been altered by e-polling and e-surveying possibilities.

On online deliberation: Despite these "weak" mechanisms, digital technologies provide opportunities for online deliberation. Studies on how digital technologies might foster deliberative democracy has become one of the "most active" strands (Dryzek, 2007) within democratic theory. The key to deliberative democracy is an underlying normative assumption that authentic and "good" deliberation upholds democratic values, such as equality, inclusiveness, and fairness, and, as a consequence, leads to legitimate decision-making. The reason-giving requirement consists of the hypothesis that ordinary citizens can follow reasonable argumentation and decide upon it rationally, i.e. by considering and evaluating the information and perspectives received by their discourse-partners (Dahl, 1989; Habermas, 1989; Cohen, 1996). General definitions understand political deliberation as "codetermination or shared decision-making among equals (…) in the common decision which binds all the members in the group" (Gould, 1988: 85). Scholars argue that decisions obtained via a deliberative process have a more consensual grounding due to the direct input of its participants. Additionally, the process establishes communication between the participants, resulting in a vivid and lively political culture that keeps them educated and informed (Burkhalter et al, 2002).

With the possibilities of location- and time-unbound political communication and decision-making proliferated by DDDPs, participatory means open new opportunities for redefining representative relationships and form part of a "deliberative-participatory" democratic paradigm. The normative element shared across these platforms is linked with digitally-mediated participatory democracy in terms of appraising membership participation and input-legitimacy over a purely delegative and mediated logic of the representative paradigm. Thereby, optimists praise that DDDPs capacitate 'strong' political participation and political deliberation over 'weak' participatory mechanisms. Thus, when we take together placation and partnership as "collaboration", DDDPs as digital deliberative decision-making platforms are providing the opportunity for writing bottom-up citizen proposals that influence

---

22 For the sake of the argument, I leave out therapy and manipulation as elements of non-participation since a whole thesis could be dedicated to the poisonous effect of social media on the manipulation of elections (i.e. the case of the US elections and the involvement of Cambridge Analytics).

policy outcomes whereas delegated power and citizen control are being discussed in literature on digital democracy through digitally-mediated citizen assemblies (Parsons, 2019).

After having tackled philosophical underpinnings on how digital technology might alter senses of representation and participation, the following sections briefly touch on literature regarding the impact of ICTs on three pillars on Modern polity. I introduce common literature on how social movements and activism has shifted from collective to connective action. This section will inform the chapters of *Podemos* and *BComú*. Secondly, I briefly touch on the concept of open government and common government to highlight the distinction between efficiency and the transformative potential of ICTs to alter public services. This will be important for the analysis of the local government in Barcelona that has been influenced by the practices of *BComú*. Finally, the last section is dedicated to the distinction between digital and *network parties* as vehicles between civil society and government.

2.2.2 From New Social Movements (NSMs) to Networked Movements of the Squares

The rise of new parties that put DDDPs as core of their organization, practice and discourse has sparked a new discussion on the "movement party" (della Porta et al., 2018) since some of the cases mentioned throughout this thesis indeed partly originate from recent social movements. In the course of the empirical chapters, I will particularly draw on the Spanish Indignados movement from 2011 to explain the institutionalization processes of *Partido X, Podemos* and *BComú*. Amongst others, the *Spanish Indignados movement* has been interpreted as one of "networked social movements" which exhibits original features in action repertoires and organization, in how identities and unifying narratives are framed and how leadership and representation is created. Thus, this section briefly highlights the main transformations of the impact of ICTs on social movements and the distinction between the digitalization of action repertoires and the becoming "networked" of most recent social movements.

Building on a classic definition of social movement as "a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict, on the basis of a shared collective identity" (Diani 1992: 13), we can identify three elements that are of relevance to how to frame Modern contentious politics: forms of action repertoires and organizing (Juris, 2004; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Nunes, 2014), construction of unifying narratives and identities (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) and questions of representation and leadership (Toret et al., 2013; Nunez, 2014). From these elements, changes in communication mechanisms are one reason for changes in these elements from new social movements to networked social movements.

New Social Movements since the late 1960s: Within the main literature, of main

attention has been the study of so-called new social movements (NSMs) (Melucci, 1980) that sparked around the late 1960s. Opposed to previous movements that centered around demands for improvement of economic improvements and well-being (Arora, 2010), NSMs addressed issues such as feminism, LGTBQI rights, ecology and climate justice in general, such as anti-nuclear movements and identity politics. Whereas in movements in the industrial era, the subjective motivation for joining a movement was driven by the potential improvement of the own life, a puzzling question in literature is the framing of "collective identity" (Melucci, 1980) within NSMs as an explanatory concept to understand why people would unite outside established political organizations to protest for changes in of the social realm.

NSMs organizationally are not as stratified as their industrial predecessors, i.e. the working class movement, but they are based on "organizationally brokered collective action networks" (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013) and relatively well-established structure and brick-and-mortar organization. Furthermore, it has been argued that the success of a movement relies on the establishment of leaders (Olson, 1965) that are the drivers "collective action" and the coordinators of resources.

Digital contentious action since 1990s: With the emergence and popularity of the Internet in the 1990s, the wide range of new communication practices and information sharing possibilities also changed action repertoires, framing and unifying narratives and organization of social movements. Most popular, the Zapatistas movement from 1994 shows an early adoption of digital tools for disseminating information and harnessing new forms of time- and location-unbound communication. The indigineous movement in Mexico between the Guerilla movement and civil society (Krause, 2018) that has early made use of the Internet to leverage their fight and their communiqués (Huffschmid, 1995). The result was a global attention and sensibilization with emerging networks of support and solidarity for the movement and the Indigenous people in Chiapas against the national government. Manuel Castells categorized the Zapatista movement as the first informational movement (vgl. Castells 2004: 82) that achieved to upscale their prominence from the local to the global level.

With the turn of the century, the spread of digital technologies enabled a plethora of repertoires in contentious politics (George & Leidner, 2019). Especially the rise of Anonymous (McGoogan & Molloy, 2017), related hacktivist groups and Whistleblowers disruptured and influenced US foreign policy. This wide array of digital opportunity structures in contentious politics is well-described by Jordana George and Dorothy Leidner (2019) provide a holistic description of the new wave of digital activism that describe the disruptive potential of information-sharing possibilities fits well into the discourse on "cyber-activism" and softer forms of digital activism such as "clicktivism" and "slacktivism" (Morozov, 2009).

"Networked" movements of the squares from 2011-2016: The emergence of more recent movements, also called "movement of the squares" and "networked move-

ments" (Castells, 2012) since 2011 point towards a new quality of social movements. It is rightful to argue that the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement and the Spanish Indignados movement are based upon but go beyond purely "digitally networked activism" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) and digital action repertoires but are examples of a new hybridization and a new quality of digital and physical networks within social movements. Besides the changes in communication processes enabled by the heavy use of Twitter and social media, ICTs in these movements serve as enablers of 'mass self-communication' (Castells, 2004) that interact and intersect with the physical occupation of the Tahrir square in Egypt, the occupation of Zuccotti Park in New York and the occupation of Plaza de Sol in Madrid. In difference to purely digital action repertoires, these movements show new forms of actions, organizing and identity building throughout multiple action layers and highly democratic standards: Experiments with open, inclusive and deliberative assemblies as embodied by the massive participation in Occupy and the Spanish Indignados movement established values of inclusiveness and equality that were mirrored by practices to let anyone speak and be actively listened to (Micó & Casero-Ripollés, 2014). Its decision-making and deliberation processes were oriented to reach a consensus instead of majority vote (Taibo, 2013). Though the quality of the outcome ('outcome-legitimacy') of these long and extensive participation processes was contested, the centrality of assembly-practice resonates with the deliberative democratic understanding, ensuring 'input-legitimacy' (della Porta et al., 2018).

Underlying these movements were not masses nor mobs but a subject Calleja-López (2017) refers to as "networked multitudes" building on the fruitful notion of multitudes by Hardt and Negri (2004). Where networks have always been an explicit concept in social movement theory (Juris, 2004), the becoming networked of recent movements not only refers to organization and action potentials through and throughout networks but also makes explicit a new social subject. This novel form of identity-building has been elaborated in numerous writings on these movements. Whereas the labels have been different, the core observation remains the same: Instead of hierarchical organizations, these movements are hybrids between physical and digital networks and the identities shared across these movements are not based on single issues but on a joint disagreement with democratic institutions and a shared discourse for the empowerment of the "indignant citizen, that pits the self-organized citizenry against economic and political oligarchies, and pursues the reclamation and expansion of citizenship" (Gerbaudo & Screti, 2017: 3).

In this regard, Bennett & Segerberg (2013) have pointed to a new logic of "connective" action among these movements as a counterpart or evolution to the prevalent logic of "collective" action. "Connective" action is enabled not by means of establishing common narratives but rather on personal self-expression and the "self-motivated (…) sharing of already internalized or personalized ideas, plans, images, and resources with networks of others" (ibid.: 753). This essentially relational concept has been criticized for its inherent devaluation of a joint substantial identity of the

respective movements (Calleja-López, 2017: 105). However, to draw the transformational characteristics between NSMs and "networked movements", this concept is fruitful for pointing towards the essence of a hybrid movement that heavily relied on its novel relational character.

Apparently, these movements arrive at a way of "organizing without organizations" (Earl & Kimport, 2011) and experiment with novel ways of representation and distributed leadership (Toret et al. 203; Nunes, 2014). Whereas Diani depicts a radical dismissal of conventional organization (Diani, 2012), Simon Western challenges this understanding and draws an important distinction between non-leadership and modified leadership, following the assumption that in current social movements "leadership is enacted whilst being disavowed" (Western, 2014: 687). Drawing on the conceptual nuances of 'representation', this notion of leadership aligns with 'anti-elitist' rhetoric, confronting the 'formalistic' sense of representation characterized by typical leadership based on hierarchical set-ups. Instead, this formalistic domination is substituted by an emphasis on substantive representation and symbolic representation. Accordingly, interest-aggregation and identity-building appear under the surface of decentralized, seemingly "leaderless" organizations[23] and "leaderless movements as symptoms of a historical shift" (Hardt & Negri, 2017: 8).

Against this backdrop, I defend the notion of "networked movements of the squares" (Calleja-López, 2017) with the concept of "networks" implying a double understanding to both meanings as an organizational form and as a novel social subject constructed through the potentials of "connective action"[24]. This notion also takes into account the blurred line of distinguishing between the impact of digital technologies on established ways and the continuity of organizing and communication in social movements and the transformative potential of ICTs in creating novel ways of organizing and the creation of new identities and unifying narratives. Based on that, the following section analyses briefly the second area of Modern polity and briefly sheds light on the transformations brought by digital technologies in the area of governmental actions, public services and administration.

2.2.3 The Transformation of Governments

For a decade now the concept of open government has gained ground in common discourse (Lathrop & Ruma, 2010). Since then, most prominently, the Obama administration has dedicated its government policies towards transparency, participation and collaboration (Open Government Progress Report to the American People, 2009) but also the emergence of the international platform *The Government Partnership*

---

23 Gerbaudo (2012) in this context speaks of anti-leaders and "choreographers".

24 Albeit the first appearance of the conjunction between the network metaphor and social movements can be traced back to Jeffrey Juris (2004) who accounted "global justice movements" as being networked, it falls short on going beyond the organizational connotation and does not imply the existence of a subjectitiy.

(2014) and the European Commission (2016) [25] propagate a dedication and vision of "opening" up governments to scrutiny of the wider public. In a nutshell, the open government approach seeks to implement "(...) high levels of transparency and mechanisms for public scrutiny and oversight in place, with an emphasis on government accountability" [26] and thus "is expected to bring a broad variety of benefits such as efficiency, a reduction in corruption and increased government legitimacy" (Meijer et al. 2012: 11).

However, how digital technologies support the process "opening up" of government procedures is interpreted differs starkly (O'Reilly, 2005; Noveck, 2009; The White House, 2009). From e-government to government 2.0, a wide range of labels have been applied to describe how to make government practices more transparent by means of digital technologies. These labels partly overlap and often emphasize either aspects of transparency, improving public services or including citizens in government policy-making. It is useful to consult the scheme of Ismael Peña-López (2016) which highlights the main discourses and action fields in correspondence to the different labels.
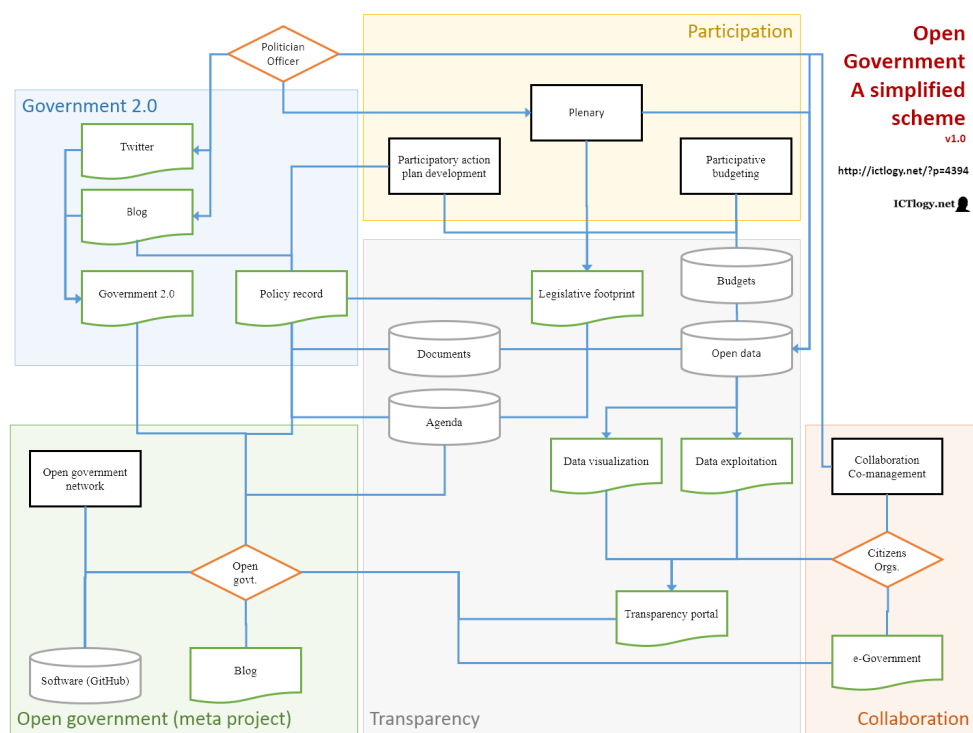

Figure 3. Open government. A simplified scheme (Peña-López, 2016)

Peña-López describes the open government label as meta-project that puts

---

open-source technology at the centre of an open government approach. Whereas government 2.0 refers to the digitization of existing communication strategies and the expansion on new social media, i.e. Twitter, participation refers to novel forms of including citizens in budgeting processes and strategy development. This approach, also overlapping with "e-government", (Dunleavy and Margetts, 2006; Livermore, 2011) aims to reduce bureaucracy and modernize public administration by increasing government transparency, improving e-voting-mechanisms and enhancing 'weak' participatory mechanisms such as e-petitioning and e-polling. This "government-centric" or centralized approach "refers to the ways in which the state or the government increases its power in new technologies" (Kurban et al., 2017) and facilitates state operations (Reddick, 2010, Piaggesi et al, 2010). Government-centric applications include "all processes of information processing, communication and transaction that pertain to the tasks of the government (the political and public administration) and that are realized by a particular application of ICT" (van Dijk, 2006: 104). Obviously, the main actors of this strand are governments and state institutions on the national, federal and local level as clients of tech firms.

In sum, most approaches opening up the public sector do primarily refer to increased transparency and efficient information sharing on different levels within governments. In the scheme, these elements are summarized in the main pillar "transparency", i.e. transparency of internal documents and agendas, data visualization and a "legislative" footprint are foremost features brought in concordance with an open government approach. This goes in line with the observation of Hansson et al. (2014) who observed that the actual focus of opening up government in the Obama administration and the European Commission was heavily focused on transparency and information exchange and public participation is merely seen as a "central means to gathering information" (ibid.: 4).

The participatory aspect of open government differs by the very intention of the measures implemented between crowdsourcing information and a citizen-to-government dialogue. Through the lenses of the imagery of Arnstein's ladder of participation it is possible again to draw a line between approaches of citizen information and consultation (tokenism) and partnership and citizen control. In this respect Hansson et al. (2014) distinguishes between approaches that are being focused on "improving government services, and for not looking at the transformation of the government as a whole toward a more participatory democracy" (ibid.: 2). Whereas the former concentrates on making governments more efficient and operate within a liberal representative democratic agenda, the second aspires to re-think the role of government towards a more radical understanding of participatory and deliberative democracy in which "democratic institutions and processes must be transformed in order to increase their level of transparency, participation, and horizontal networked collaboration, internally as well as in relation to the citizenry" (Lathrop & Ruma, 2010). Another distinction made in this regard is between "vision" as openness in informational terms and "voice" as openness in interactive terms (Meijer et

al. 2012). These conceptualizations may be useful to make sense of the differences between opening up governments for transparency and opening up government for citizen's influence, but they fall short on grasping the nature of the respective underlying democratic paradigm.

In this regard, Calleja-López most accurately has coined the label common government to point towards the crucial difference between "the standard, liberal open government" (2017: 266) and open government approaches that foster public-common political networks. In his work, he compares *Civiciti* as an example of the former which is sponsored and financed by a monopolist company and *Decidim* as an example of a digital platform that is based on a *technopolitical* understanding. He analyzes how the project *Decidim* looks behind the service of the platform and emphasizes the importance to democratize the various aspects of how the platform is built, managed and hosted. In his view, the crucial difference is the democratization project of the infrastructure as a whole – not only the participatory and deliberative opportunities provided. He aligns with Peña-López, in the statement that a "truly" open government project needs to take a holistic account on its basic infrastructure such as the publication of the code on github etc rather than a mere reforming of the liberal representative state. This very distinction plays an important role of looking behind the prominent rhetoric of changing the democratic system through the lenses of how this change is being achieved.

In the following section I briefly introduce how digital technologies have sparked a discourse on the reform of political parties. Again, I distinguish between the digitization of existing repertoires and the potential transformation via new communication logics. Since this argument will be unfolded throughout the following chapters, it will deserve only little attention here.

2.2.4 The From Digital to *Network Parties*

The difference between digitization of existing political repertoires and the transformative potential of a new communicative paradigm that is framed by the concepts of the *network society* and *technopolitics* described above also affected literature on political parties. This section briefly confronts the current literature to stand out the network party concept between concepts that have centered around the "cyber" and the "digital" party (for a more intensive study on the current literature on current party organization see section 3.2.)

The impact of digital technologies on political party organization and practice, has gained recognition in academic research. on new forms of political parties that implement DDDPs for internal and external democratization and organization, but only few have endeavoured to study the phenomenon from a more holistic perspective (della Porta et al., 2018; Gerbaudo, 2019; Deseriis, 2020). Helen Margetts (2006) was one of the first to analyse the effects of ICTs on political parties and suggested the concept of "cyber parties". In 2006, the promises of digital technology in revo-

lutionizing democratic institutions provided a reason to frame a "technological fix" (van Dijk, 2006) for democracy. Margetts´ contribution must be considered in this tradition which speaks of the potential of technological solutions in overcoming the democratic deficits of traditional politics. Similarly to the other pillars she does not forward the idea that the internet would transform the concept of the political party, but simply that it would give traditional parties a new virtual space to replicate internal organization and party practices, i.e campaigning and communication via social media. Evaluated over a decade after publication, it can be argued that Margetts puts limitations on her own theory by acknowledging that

> "(...) widespread Internet penetration is too new, its potential too unrealized for there to be substantive empirical evidence of its existence. Technological development will not inevitably lead to the formation of cyber parties (...) but much of what cyber parties do could take place via the Internet" (Margetts, 2006).

Subsequently, Margetts refers to a transition, a 'party reform' rather than a transformation in party organization brought about by the introduction of ICTs. What is important in her contribution is the recognition of new opportunities of participation within traditional parties since individual engagement becomes more flexible and dynamic through digital technologies, blurring the boundaries between voters, members and party affiliates. Hence, cyber parties are characterized by their main feature, which is to "use web-based technologies to strengthen the relationship between voters and party, rather than traditional notions of membership" (Margetts, 2001: 9). As a pioneer in this field, Margetts has pointed towards a crucial characteristic of future scenarios and observable developments, paving the way for further research.

A recent strand of the literature has coalesced around the notion of the "digital party" (Gerbaudo, 2018). The "digital party" in Gerbaudo's understanding is a "(...) 'platform party' that resembles the logic of companies such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, a party that does not just make use of social networks, but integrates social networks into its very structure and adopts enthusiastically all the services and forms of communication that have become synonymous with the 'social web', promising to use digital technology to create a new model of political participation, more open to society and to the active intervention of ordinary citizens" (Gerbaudo, 2018: 5). Important is the crucial shift in the interaction between the party and ordinary citizens by questioning the notion of formal membership. Whereas he successfully identifies key structural shifts in social relationships and connects them with emerging parties that aim to incorporate these developments in their organization, the term 'digital party' reproduces the discourse of 'party reform' and relies on a sense of technological determinism instead of asking how party form has been fundamentally transformed by these developments resulting in a main shortcoming and key flaw which lies in the disregard of the significance of intersecting the physical and digital realm.

As in the previous sections, we find a difference between the "digital" and the

"network" party in a sense that the former refers to making existing party practices more efficient while the latter refers to the democratizing effect of the *becoming networked* of political parties (Deseriis, 2020). I will elaborate on the notion of the *network party* in the third chapter and include further considerations about how digital technologies alter senses of representation; how they may renegotiate the concept of leadership and reformulate the idea of intra-party democracy. Before discussing the scholarly literature on party politics, the next section briefly summarizes the observations taken so far on the distinction between continuous and transformative potentials of digital technologies in the political realm.

2.3 Concluding Remarks

As I have pointed out and as literature is suggesting, ICTs and a novel logic of communication have brought about a renewal about participation and politics as such. The imagery of the *network democracy* thus provides a fruitful background in interpreting the transformative potential of digital technologies in the political realm. In this regard, the advent of digital technologies is challenging representative democracy and the primacy of regular elections and the free-mandate principle by providing new means of citizen deliberation and decision-making; it accelerates "weak" modes of participation into the potentials of citizen control and partnership. Furthermore, it prioritizes input-legitimacy over output legitimacy and provides new means of political accountability.

	Representative democracy	Network Democracy
Main characteristics	Elections and 'free-mandate'	Citizen influence through deliberative means
Participation	'weak' understanding (voting act, opinion polling, plebiscitary mechanisms)	'strong' understanding (partnership, delegated power and citizen control)
Focus of legitimacy	'output'-legitimacy	'input'-legitimacy
Accountability	'disappointment' principle	Binding deliberation and decision-making processes

This logic runs through the areas of Modern polity described in this chapter. Whereas social movements have manifested the principle of "connective" action

against "collective" action displayed by the current wave of global movements from the Arab Spring to the Spanish Indignados movement, governments have been challenged by digital technologies to open up and even receive novel forms of infrastructure regarding managing transparency and citizen data. As I briefly pointed out, the same applies to the shifts and changes in party organization. Thus, I defend the notion "network" party over the "digital" party which will be further fleshed out in the following chapter.

Chapter III
Conceptual Framework –
The *Network Party* Type

Network parties aim to translate the principles of deliberative and 'strong' participatory democracy into political party organization. This is based on the conviction that the political party structure is a necessary vehicle of the democratic system despite its failures to meaningfully represent citizens' interests in its current representative form (van Biezen, 2004). This paradoxical configuration arrives at a complex question: Is it possible to administer party organization in accordance with disruptive digital technologies as a potential remedy for the crisis of representation?

To recall the previous chapter, interpreted through the lens of representation (Pitkin, 1967), traditional contemporary political parties [27] fall short of adequately assuring (a) 'substantive representation', articulating and acting in the pursuit of citizens' interests, (b) 'descriptive' representation, representing the electorate on the basis of common features, and (c) 'formalistic' representation, providing necessary and adequate means for authorizing and holding the representative accountable.

3.0. Structure of the chapter

This section provides a historical excursus into the question of how party organization has evolved to the stratified and vertical organization prevalent in the 'electoralist' party type. While its first part presents a historical genealogy of political parties with a particular focus on intra-party democracy, the second part summarizes the main characteristics of the *network party* type and contrasts them with the 'electoralist' party to sharply outline the consequences and implications of the underlying tension between digital deliberative-participatory pretensions and institutional boundaries.

---

27 In the following labelled as 'electoralist party', the prevalent party type of Modern Western democracies which I will introduce in the course of this chapter.

3.1 Terminology and Definitions

This thesis asserts that network parties constitute a new *type* of political party. This term has been chosen for various reasons: There is a vast literature on party types (see Chapter 3.1) that explains shifting party organization in their respective historical context. The notion of 'type' has been used by many authors to depict various criteria, such as functional, organizational, programmatic and membership-oriented ones. These authors have also populated the literature with a wide range of labels for party types (for a more detailed discussion see chapter 3.1). Accordingly, this dissertation is placed within the tradition of identifying characteristics of party organization that constitute distinct 'types' of parties.

Secondly, in accordance with the 'typology' of Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond, I employ three criteria to determine party type [28]: 1) democratic vision (programmatic alignment); 2) organizational infrastructure and 3) political strategy. In the Weberian understanding of ideal-typical approximation (Weber, 1949), common forms can be 'constructed' by selecting the most essential components of any social phenomena. Whereas a 'model' entails a normative perspective of the phenomenon under study and a 'family' is too broad a term for my investigation, the 'type' moves on a descriptive level and allows to 'extract the essence' of the phenomena under study. By choosing the notion of 'type', this dissertation offers explanatory value by describing a generation of parties that employ a new democratic paradigm.

3.2 Between Citizens and the State: The Paradox of Political Parties

With rallying slogans such as "institutional assault"[29] and "ready for change" [30], *network parties* have grown into party organizations that see themselves as authentic mediators of citizens' interests instead of extra-institutional forces of 'movement of the squares' [31]. Promulgating a participatory alternative to increasing cartelization and catch-all tendencies of contemporary parties - summarized in the 'electoralist' party type (Panebianco, 1988; Epstein, 1967) – *network parties* consequently aim to

---

28 In brackets the original systematization by Gunther & Diamond (2003).

29 One of *Podemos* main slogans during their first campaign was the "asalto al cielo parliamentaro" (Engl. "the assault on parliamentary heaven") expressing the deep urgency to transcend practices and narratives from 15M movement into the parliamentary system.

30 The Pirate Parties slogan "Klarmachen zum Ändern" (Engl: „ready to board") is an onomatopoetic wordplay that describes in analogy to the Pirate's practice the claim to "board" the political institutions and hack them from inside.

31 Naturally, the strategy to turn into political parties has provoked ambiguous feelings among activists and militants: *Podemos* was criticised for co-opting with the "enemy" and to put to life the main demands of the 15M movement (see Chapter 4 and 6). Similarly, *BComú* was heavily attacked for "loosing" its most active members to the institutions (see Chapter 4 and 7).

solve a paradox that lies at the very heart of political parties' definition and history.

This contradictory inclination towards interest aggregation on the one hand and acting against successful electoral performance (van Biezen, 2004) on the other, runs like a thread in the discussion on the role of political parties within democratic states - of what the party ought to be and how the party is functioning. To illustrate this paradox, it is worth taking into consideration two famous definitions of political parties: Edmund Burke, in an early account, describes the political party as "a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavors the national interest upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed" (Burke, 1770: 110). According to him, the central function of the political party is articulation of national interests, canalization and representation of the electorate in the most efficient way possible to pursuing agreed-upon interests. In stark contrast, Schumpeter describes the function of political parties as "to prevail over the others in order to get into power or to stay in it" (Schumpeter, 1942: 278) and later, as "a group whose members act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power" (ibid: 283). This definition mainly portrays the political party's function as a competitor in the electoral arena.[32]

This intrinsic divergence in understanding the function of political parties relates back to different understandings of intra-party democracy, the aggregative approach and the deliberative one. In the following section I contend that aggregative intra-party democracy has evolved alongside the evolution of the mass-party due to the pressure of organizing large-scale democracies effectively, resulting in a reputation akin to Schumpeter's understanding of political parties. I argue that due to the subsequent alignment towards the State and the primacy of effective decision-making over qualitative deliberation of party members, the necessity for input-oriented intra-party democracy has lost its importance in the logics of the contemporary party system .

To understand the new aspects introduced by *network parties* from an organizational point of view, it is thus beneficial to take into consideration the evolutionary and historical context of political parties as intermediaries between the State and civil society, between interest aggregation and electoral pressures and subsequently between aggregative and deliberative intra-party democracy.

3.2.1 The Evolution of Party Organization and Intra-Party Democracy

Since the latter half of the 19th century, the predominant state of representative democracies has been the mode of 'party government'. Since then, political parties have been perceived as indispensable intermediaries between civil society and the State,

---

32 In the year 1984, scientist Huckshorn offered a similar definition. He perceived the party as "an autonomous group of citizens having the purpose of making nominations and contesting elections in hope of gaining control over governmental power through the capture of public offices and the organization of the government" (Huckshorn, 1984: 10).

as a *sine qua non* of democracy (van Biezen, 2004). In this vein, Schattschneider famously argued that "political parties created democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of the parties" (Schattschneider, 1942).

However, political parties are in fact a relatively recent component of democratic states that originated at the beginning of the 19th century to "organize large-scale democracy" (van Biezen, 2004: 6), evolving and adjusting to the nature, demands and technological means of likewise evolving societies.[33] Henceforth, when speaking of party types, it is necessary to consider political parties as contingent and fluid "products of that particular temporal and geographical context", which are "substantially affected by greatly different social and technological environments" (Gunther & Diamond, 2003: 167). [34] The following sections will look at the ways in which party organization has evolved over the past century in terms of intra-party organization.

Cadre-party as a party of notables: Interestingly, political parties in their earliest manifestation were not always perceived as essential pillars of democracy. Instead, they were seen – at least partly - as a "threat to the general interest or as overriding the interests of the individual" (van Biezen, 2004: 3). The earliest type of a political party is categorized as 'the cadre party' that emerged in the early 19th century under restricted suffrage. It was created by nobles and elites that united to secure their political power, forming homogeneous alliances. In their initial stage as "electoral machines" (Luther & Müller-Rommel, 2005), Cadre Parties were "internally created" (Duverger, 1964) with only a small number of elite literate experts (Daalder, 2011; Katz and Mair, 2002) included in their organizational set-up [35]. Party support and political campaigning were based on personal relationships and alliances, and therefore restricted the party's influence on small territories.[36] With industrialization, reforms in census mechanisms, mobilizations of the workers and the increasing

---

33 Most prominently, the taxonomy by Gunther and Diamond looks at programmatic commitments, organizational forms and internal dynamics of party decision-making and strategy and behavioural norms (2003: 167). The authors make use of a generic perspective in a Weberian sense of ideal type as a heuristic instrument to break down complexity but provide an instrument for the analysis of internal differences. For explorative purposes of *network parties*, it is strategically useful to perceive these types as party families in which sub-types share basic dimensions in contrast to any other genus but display strong idiosyncrasies due their distinctive socio-political conditions, political scope and goals. Indeed, most attempts to classify the new wave of parties lack this second perspective on the specimen of the different case studies.

34 Political theory and, especially, comparative political science have been (occupied) concerned with the analysis of political parties since the beginning of the past century (Ostrogorski, 1922; Michels, 1911; Duverger, 1964). Within the respective literature, three major areas of investigation have been differentiated; the more theoretical approach of the role and importance of parties within representative democracies or party sociology (Duverger, 1964), the more conceptual question on how parties behave in respective party systems (Blondel, 1968; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Sartori, 1965) and empirical studies that investigate party behaviour. These diverging approaches conceptually operate within a certain idea of the political party as a vehicle between civil society and the state.

35 French-conservative parties of the 18th and 19th centuries are commonly acknowledged as a manifestation of cadre parties. In these parties, voting was restricted to male citizens, party participation and office holding limited to well-educated notables equipped with a high level of socio-economic resources.

36 Accordingly, instead of providing for and guaranteeing political pluralism, the cadre party principally posed an obstacle to prevalent assumptions of radical democracy inspired by Rousseau (van Biezen, 2004).

geographical power of nation-states as main political actors, the party government model emerged as a tool for socially integrating the masses. Parties were created "externally" by under-represented social groups seeking to gain political influence and power that until then had been out of reach. The most famous and long-standing "mass- party" model emerged in Great Britain and the US as an ideal type of a membership-oriented bottom-up party.

Mass-parties and aggregative intra-party democracy: For some authors, the entanglement of representation and democracy is rooted in the emergence of the mass party type. The pragmatic challenge of representing the interests of 'the masses' had resulted in a flurry of bureaucratization and "structural aggregation" (Michels, 1915), providing efficient structures to guarantee a "party of mass integration" (Neumann, 1956). As a result, party organization was confronted with the establishment of a wider electorate and, consequently, the increase in active membership. [37] Due to the bureaucratic challenge of representing the lower strata of the party, members of the national party congress – the highest decision-making authority - were chosen through elections and delegation, creating the principle of free mandates. The election of executive organs to represent and coordinate the interests of different party branches thus created rigid delegative systems prevalent in 'electoralist' parties. This stratification of electing candidates within parties to 'send' them to parliament can be perceived as the foundation stone of how the electoralist-representative democratic paradigm manifested itself in the form of party organisation.

As an advocate of the mass party type, Duverger (1954) was convinced that the mass party would be the most legitimate party type, providing appropriate ways of representing citizens' interests and simultaneously prevailing in electoral terms. However, contrary to his prediction, the mass party as the "archetype" of political party organization has lost some of its relevance due to an outdated "ideal of social structure, neither of which is characteristic of post-industrial societies" (Katz & Mair, 1995: 6). Indeed, the friction inside contemporary network parties is manifested through this tension in which they still inhabit distinctive features of the mass-party, whilst simultaneously operating within the 'demand' side of the *network society,* i.e. mass-self communication that is not characteristic of traditional party types.

In line with Katz and Mair's observation, the current criticism of traditional party structures revolve around three topics: The supremacy of aggregative intra-party democracy, the increasing professionalization of politicians and the increasing focus on electoral competition. Additionally, a popular critique regarding the lack

---

37 Due to the upscale in the quantity of party members, an adaption of organizational strategies and tools resulted in widespread campaigning channels and the evolution of local branches and the strategies for mobilizing the base. These distinctive features can be observed in modern Socialist Parties, for example the SPD in Germany and PSOE in Spain have their organizational and ideological roots within mass parties, but also centre-right parties (e.g. CDU in Germany; Conservative Party in Britain) are born from the ideological stance and the organizational structure of the mass-party.

of democracy within political parties was delineated early by Robert Michels, who coined the famous phrase "iron law of oligarchy" (Michels, 1911), which epitomizes the unavoidable establishment of oligarchic tendencies during the institutionalization process of organizations due to the need to professionally manage and coordinate diverging interests and to organize political power effectively. Literally, the "iron law of oligarchy" states that

> *"(i)t is organization which gives birth to the domination of the elected over the electors, of the mandataries over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization says oligarchy" (Michels, 1962: 365).*

Michel had studied trade unions and socialist parties after the Second World War – organizations that initially proclaimed to be horizontally organized, decentralized but eventually developed a tendency towards vertical organization as soon as they entered the institutional realm. He argued that this was not a by-product of organizational processes that can be avoided, but rather that this was part of the "tactical and technical necessities" (Michels, 1915) of any organization. Therefore, every organization that aimed to be decentralized and participative would sooner or later end up with the opposite: a few representatives speaking for the majority.

The emergence of "aggregative intra-party democracy", namely primaries for selecting representatives and membership ballots (Wolkenstein, 2016) within mass-parties and subsequently, electoralist parties, further led to the differentiation of "three faces" of party organization (Katz & Mair, 1995) or 'spheres of sovereignty' within the party. Thus, when studying the performance of political parties and, especially, the institutionalization process of *network parties* in addition to common dichotomies of intra- and extra-party action fields, one cannot ignore the way in which members shape the party programme and structure.

Three faces of intra-party democracy: Katz and Mair (1995) argue that contemporary political parties are comprised of three different stratified organs: the party-on-the-ground, referring to party members and voters, the party-in-central-office, the central party organization, and the party-in-public-office, the party's agency in parliament and government.

The membership base or, in the terminology of Katz and Mair, the 'party-on-the-ground' consists of members and regular activists, affiliates and even loyal voters. [38] Main incentives of the party-on-the-ground are purposive, and loyalty as part of the individual political identity. This 'face' mostly provides volunteering work and thus prioritizes the ideological substance of the party over electoral success which can result in an opposition to the party-in-public-office, which prioritizes electoral suc-

---

38 This loose definition embracing both official members and activists as well as voters is a key advantage for the analysis of *network parties* as they blur definitions of regular members and affiliates (Chapter 4).

cess to keep its positions in the parliament. Thus, quintessential to the 'electoralist party' is the increasing "detriment" (Wauters, 2010) of the party-on-the-ground and the professionalization and detachment of representatives. The party-in-central-office consists of the national executive committees and the secretariat and serves the purpose of supporting the national staff. It centralizes and channels the various activities of the party. In addition to its function as a servant, it may aim at providing cohesion between the ideological and power-seeking strands of the other 'faces'. As I will develop in the next section, *network parties* generally strive for a high degree of member and citizen involvement Thus, the question of how these faces interrelate with each other gives useful insights into their performance. To add to the structural prerequisites, I now turn to the movement party and to normative arguments as to why a high degree of intra-party democracy is useful for parties and why deliberative-participatory mechanisms can enrich political party culture.

Movement parties and "deliberative intra-party democracy": The rich literature on the *movement party* describes a recent party family that has materialized out of post-materialist left-libertarian (Kitschelt, 1989) and post-industrial extreme-right movements (Ignazi, 1966)[39] as well as NSMs, for example *Syriza*, *M5S* and *Podemos* (della Porta et al., 2018). The movement party (Kitschelt, 2006) places emphasis on participation and horizontal organization. This party type often has roots in social movements, their narratives and practices, and provides only minimal investment in formal organizational party structures, abstaining from defining a specific membership role. It lacks a coherent and "institutionalized system of aggregating interests through designated organs and officers" (ibid: 280) either due to the existence of a charismatic leader who takes the lead on promulgating and deciding the political programme of the party; or because of unstructured grassroots democratic practices. In both cases, the movement party tends to create "a capricious, volatile and incomplete collective preference schedule" (ibid: 281).

Contrary to the logics of aggregative intra-party democracy found in mass parties, most movement parties envision a principle of 'deliberative intra-party democracy' (Wolkenstein, 2015). As their institutional outlook is rooted in social movements, movement parties are characterised by a "negative consensus" and open, assembly-based participation and an organization style consisting of "loose networks" (Kitschelt, 1989: 66).

Throughout the past decade, an increasingly influential strand of literature on this subject has connected deliberative accounts of democracy with intra-party

---

39 In ideological opposition, the extreme-right parties were born from extra-institutional movements aiming at more order and tradition. Whereas libertarian parties oppose leadership, extreme-right ones strongly embrace leadership figures and define themselves as hostile towards the "establishment" but not from a post-materialist standpoint but from a critical attitude towards social-welfare politics and in support of the xenophobic policy. Obviously, these two sub-types differ crucially in their ideology and programmatic preference. However, they share the same family through their inception from "anti-establishment" social movements.

affairs. To recapitulate, political deliberation is perceived here as "codetermination or shared decision-making among equals (…) in the common decision which binds all the members in the group" (Gould, 1988: 85). Following Habermas' (1984) theories on rational discourse, the deliberative model underscores the importance of the very process through which opinions are formed, ideally in favour of the better argument. Within a political party this approach could be highly desirable since "political parties would have to participate in the opinion- and will-formation from the public's own perspective, rather than patronizing the public sphere for the purposes of maintaining their own power" (Habermas, 1996: 379).

These accounts tend to remain largely normative since they present a strong argument for the autonomy of individuals and "leave(s) it up to autonomous legal subjects, whether, and if necessary, how, they want to make use of [their participatory] rights" (Habermas, 1996: 123). As I shall further elaborate in detail, it is obvious that this argument can be detected in the programmatic commitments and organizational infrastructures of *network parties*. Making the process of deliberation public is also supposed to foster "the quality of the opinion-forming process" (Teorell, 1999: 372), ensuring that deliberation is linked to "the representative bodies of government" (ibid.). In the 'strong' understanding of democratic, normative accounts of deliberative democracy implicitly show that internal accountability is a necessary feature, namely that representatives can be held responsible for their decisions when such decisions differ greatly from the outcome of the deliberative process. Therefore, the demand of "'an institutionalized possibility' to challenge those decisions one finds objectionable at a later time-point" (Warren, 1996: 55-57) often goes together with deliberative claims. This check-balance system and soft reading of an 'imperative mandate', differs from the representative approach that merely acknowledges removing representatives from office through elections as a valid accountability measure.

Despite the prominent arguments provided by the competitive model of democracy, namely, that a deliberative account of intra-party democracy suffers from lack of efficiency, unequal treatment of party-affiliated people and potential dissent within the party, two further criticisms of the deliberative model need to be considered. The first criticism is concerned with the impossibility of establishing a "truly" participatory democracy, namely, the statement that every decentralized organization sooner or later creates hierarchical structures. This again relates to the statement by Robert Michels (1911) that every organization becomes oligarchic, that is, that a few eventually come to rule over the majority. This opens a diachronic perspective on *network parties*, namely the question of whether decentralized organization in terms of intra-party democracy survives on a structural level. Throughout the empirical chapters, this issue will play a major role when comparing democratic vision with organizational practice in the evolution of *network parties*. The second criticism touches upon the question of how to implement deliberative processes within an institutionalized framework. According to scholar Simone Chambers, literature of deliberative democracy has "yet been either vague or silent about the organizational

or dispositional requirements needed to make the democratic machinery work along deliberative lines" (Chambers, 1996: 193-197). [40]

More recently, political scientist Fabio Wolkenstein (2016; 2018) has offered a new perspective on the study of intra-party democracy, taking a non-ideal approach towards deliberation within political parties. Although this account remains largely normative, his fourfold recommendations are aimed at improving party performance. These include: the empowerment of local party branches, a reform of the organizational structure of parties, the introduction of function-specific fora for intra-party deliberation and the use of new technologies (Invernizzi-Accetti & Wolkenstein, 2017). Clearly, these recommendations are grounded in the rhetoric of *network parties* that calls for opening the internal organs of political parties in favour of enhanced deliberation. Wolkenstein puts forward the argument that "intra-party deliberation can powerfully aid the empowerment of party members and strengthen the capacity of parties to link citizens and government" (Wolkenstein, 2016: 1) against purely aggregative intra-party democracy. This kind of intra-party democracy would be a manifestation of participatory-deliberative democracy. Whereas Wolkenstein builds on two conditions to investigate the deliberative potential within existing parties, namely, an active base and the connectedness of deliberations to political decisions, he limits his analysis to existing traditional 'membership parties' such as Socialist Democratic parties. In contrast, in the remainder of this thesis I will build on his contribution by connecting it to *network parties*.

After having sketched the historical transformation of political parties in terms of intra-party democracy, the next section elaborates on the characteristics of the "electoralist party" (Kirchheimer, 1966) as the counter-paradigm and counter-blueprint to *network parties*.

3.2.2 The 'Electoralist' Party

The recent emergence of the 'electoralist' party type as a continuation of the mass party is a crucial variable for explaining the increasing detachment of citizens from the State, and their growing distrust of both political parties and representative democracy in its entirety. Kirchheimer has described the modern 'electoralist' party as political organizations characterized by a weak ideological substance, and by a tendency to adapt catch-all strategies (Kirchheimer, 1966) in order to widen their appeal to the wider electorate (Katz & Mair, 1995). These tendencies, although different in focus, reveal the logical primacy of political parties to win elections and strive towards "effectiveness in depth for a wider audience and more immediate electoral success" (Kirchheimer, 1966: 184) instead of channelling and pursuing the interests of the

---

40 This can be partially explained through the lack of empirical studies on deliberative democratic mechanisms for intra-party democracy issues. Teorell similarly addresses this issue by saying: "we cannot rely solely on arguments pursued in the abstract forums of the public sphere" (Teorell, 1999: 373).

electorate. Shifts in structural and socio-political conditions, i.e. the dissolution of traditional milieus, correlate with historical transformations of party organization: According to Kirchheimer's analysis, the mass party type has been slowly hollowed out and replaced by the catch-all party type due to the dissolution of classic milieus, i.e. the 'typical' working class. Hence, catch-all mechanisms shift the party's focus away from representing a certain class or social group within society, towards winning elections by catering to a wide range of people across different social groups. The discourse behind these campaigns thus addresses not specific interests of a specific social group but instead aims at 'making it right' for everyone. [41] These tendencies have had a wide impact on internal party organization: The emphasis on single party individuals that represent the party have downgraded the role of the individual party member, the party-on-the-ground, whilst strengthening the party leadership. Political debates on TV typically exemplified during election campaigns in the US, and the popularity of speeches given by professional politicians via this medium have weakened the party's presence in local, territorial areas and have given rise to a strand of literature mainly preoccupied with political communication. [42]

This centralization of leadership has resulted in a "trade-off between internal democracy and electoral efficiency" (Saglie & Heidar, 2004: 387), the paradigm being to "maximize votes, win elections and govern" (Gunther & Diamond, 2003: 186) at the expense of the party's political content. As a result, intra-party affairs in the 'electoralist' party have become mainly a top-down process controlled by party elites. Using the language of Katz & Mair, the "stratification" of bodies of political parties emerges from an increasing segregation between the "party-on-the-ground", the "party-in-central office", and the "party-in-public-office" (Katz & Mair, 1995).

In addition to these transformations in ideological positioning and intra-party democracy, the 'electoralist' party is also criticized for converging with the state apparatus, moving further away from its grounding in civil society. Katz and Mair (1995) describe the cartelization of political parties as the transformative shift in the relational nature of state and civil society. The dependence on public economic resources and state subventions moves party organization away from civil society "towards an even closer symbiosis between parties and the state" (ibid., 1995: 6). Both tendencies impact the relationship between members and representatives. Thus, Mair observes "an almost universal trend among party organizations towards dependence on state rather than membership resources, both in personnel and financial terms" (Mair, 1994: 8-11). As a result, trends of declining membership weaken the party's

---

41 Interestingly, the role of communication technology is of central importance to this new type. Hence, Paolo Gerbaudo vividly describes the "catch-all" trend in what he labels "television" parties (Gerbaudo, 2018). The TV as a new communication medium rapidly not only affected the way information about the party was disseminated but also its internal organization. Through the effect of presenting political content via a mass medium, the role of representatives, their personalities, charisma and performance on TV became of focal interest.

42 A prominent trend that evolved out of the catch-all tendencies of political parties is the large body of campaigners, careerists, political strategists and professional staff that is involved in taking care of the party's image and in developing personalized election campaigns.

legitimacy, the role of party programs and political ideology and lends importance to the election period.

The degree and quality of intra-party democracy correlates with different party types from deliberative to more aggregative intra-party democracy standards. These characteristics can be read through a historical perspective since organizing large-scale democracies gradually gave rise to the idea that political parties required efficient intra-party infrastructures. This idea subordinated ideological content to electoral success. Furthermore, a lack of necessary means to organize parties along deliberative standards resulted in the stratification of internal organs. These considerations need to be considered in order to understand why mainstream 'electoralist' parties have become detached from civil society. From this historical perspective, network parties emerged as a counterparty to the 'electoralist' type.

In sum, when *network parties* address the shortcomings of the 'electoralist' party they concentrate on distinctive features:

- The top-down verticality of influence and intra-party decision-making;
- the primacy of the electoral campaign at the expense of political ideology;
- the weak interrelation between members and representatives (party-on-the-ground vs. party-in-central-office);
- a high dependence on state subventions and the increased role of lobbyist interest.

After having presented the overall argument that contemporary 'electoralist' parties fail to provide opportunities for large-scale citizen deliberation, the following section focuses on why I chose the term "network" to represent the party type under investigation.

3.3 The *Network Party* Type: State of the Art and Terminology

Network parties stand at the intersection of organized, large-scale, social movements (of "contentious politics"), and the digitization of democracy. They have gained recognition in the academic research on new forms of political parties that implement DDDPs for internal and external democratization and organization, but only few have endeavoured to study the phenomenon from a more holistic perspective. Related research has focused on explaining the case studies on outstanding characteristics, displaying particular aspects that can be broadly grouped into three clusters: Studies on the *technology-focused* nature of these parties (Margetts, 2006; Gerbaudo, 2018), on their *origin and practice*, (della Porta et al. 2017) and on their *infrastructure and organizational nature* (Bennett et al., 2017). However, these clusters are tentative and characteristics may overlap.

In this section, I defend the argument that a perspective on any single one of these partitioned levels fails to provide an apt description of the actual alterations that these groups of parties influence. Subsequently, I link this critique with the argument

for calling these phenomena 'network' parties, due to the integrative connotation associated with it.

Technology-focused approximation: Helen Margetts (2006) was one of the first to analyse the effects of ICTs on political parties and suggested the concept of "cyber parties". In 2006, the promises of digital technology in revolutionizing democratic institutions provided a reason to frame a "technological fix" (van Dijk, 2006) for democracy. Margetts´ contribution must be considered in this tradition which speaks of the potential of technological solutions in fixing the democratic deficits of traditional politics. Her understanding is limited to the historical depictions of the Internet. She does not forward the idea that the internet would transform the concept of the political party, but simply that it would give traditional parties a new virtual space to conduct their business. Indeed, Margetts puts limitations on her own theory by acknowledging that

> *"(...) widespread Internet penetration is too new, its potential too unrealized for there to be substantive empirical evidence of its existence. Technological development will not inevitably lead to the formation of cyber parties (...) but much of what cyber parties do could take place via the Internet (Margetts, 2006).*

Subsequently, Margetts refers to a transition, a 'party reform' rather than an innovation in party organization brought about by the introduction of ICTs. What is important in her contribution is the recognition of new opportunities of participation within traditional parties since individual engagement becomes more flexible and dynamic through digital technologies, blurring the boundaries between voters, members and party affiliates. Hence, cyber parties are characterized by their main feature, which is to "use web-based technologies to strengthen the relationship between voters and party, rather than traditional notions of membership" (Margetts, 2001: 9). As a pioneer in this field, Margetts has pointed towards a crucial characteristic of future scenarios and observable developments, paving the way for further research.

Although these predictions point towards *network parties'* decentralized, anti-elitist discourse, they are not radical enough in terms of alterations in the party form and do not grasp the entire picture of party evolution. Based on real empirical cases of "cyber" parties in the year 2006, it is comprehensible and justifiable that Margetts' account does not sufficiently include further considerations about how digital technologies alter senses of representation; how they may renegotiate the concept of leadership and reformulate the idea of intra-party democracy. For the analysis of the empirical chapters, I will thus concentrate on recently formed parties which have integrated ICTs as a core functioning feature from their very beginning, instead of focusing on how established pre-structured parties are using ICTs to reproduce and enhance their organization in the digital realm.

As an important advancement within the technology-focused cluster, a recent

strand of the literature has coalesced around the notion of the "digital party" (Gerbaudo, 2018). The "digital party" in Gerbaudo's understanding is a "(…) 'platform party' that resembles the logic of companies such as Facebook and Twitter, a party that does not just make use of social networks, but integrates social networks into its very structure and adopts enthusiastically all the services and forms of communication that have become synonymous with the 'social web', promising to use digital technology to create a new model of political participation, more open to society and to the active intervention of ordinary citizens" (Gerbaudo, 2018: 5).

Following on Margetts´ argumentation, Paolo Gerbaudo observes the crucial shift in the interaction between the party and ordinary citizens by questioning the notion of formal membership. Whereas he successfully identifies key structural shifts in social relationships and connects them with emerging parties that aim to incorporate these developments in their organization, the term 'digital party' reproduces the discourse of 'party reform' instead of asking how party form has been fundamentally challenged by these developments. This delineates much of the critique of technology-focused approaches since their main shortcoming and key flaw lies in their disregard of the significance of intersecting the physical and digital realm.

Origin- and practice-focused approximation: The second cluster is connected to the origin and the practices of these parties and seeks to rethink the *movement party* (Kitschelt, 2006) by considering the organizational and communicative potentials of digital technologies (della Porta et al., 2017). The *movement party* (Kitschelt, 2006;) places emphasis on participation, horizontal organization, roots in social movement narratives and describes a formation that provides only minimal investment in a formal organizational party structure without defining the specific membership role. This interpretation takes the shift in understanding party-membership as an antiquated concept that needs more fluidity, and that is in alignment with the technology-focused approximation.

According to della Porta et al. (2017), recent *movement parties* lack a coherent and "institutionalized system of aggregating interests through designated organs and officers" (ibid: 280).[43] The *movement party*'s origin leads to a "dual track" with regard to political strategies, activities within democratic competition coupled with extra-institutional activities. In terms of organization, recent movement parties rely on digitally enabled networked structures between decentralization and personalized leadership. And strategically, they employ protest repertoires within electoral spaces and frame themselves as new actors between "the people" (Laclau, 2005) and classical left-wing political leaders.[44] Whereas the core characteristics strongly resemble the

---

43 As will be argued later, this may either relate to the existence of a charismatic leader that purports programmatic decisions or unstructured and inefficient grassroots democratic practices. In both cases, decision-making mechanisms may lead to "a capricious, volatile and incomplete collective preference schedule" (p. 281).

44 The authors refer to *Syriza*, *Podemos* and *M5S* as empirical manifestations of emergent movement parties. As many parties of the new wave of political parties partly originate in social movements, most prominently the

network parties' characteristics, their portrayal as an extension of social movements does not adequately explain their distinctive nature because their institutional set-up is often unrecognisable from a social movement perspective.

Organization-focused approximation: Acknowledging this, the most recent notion of a "connective" party, a concept introduced by Bennett et al. (2017) approaches the different elements more cohesively and sheds light on their organizational nature. Connective parties are recognizable by their reliance on the technological platforms they place at the core of their organization and engagement with supporters, by means of what (in previous works) they defined as "connective action" (Bennett & Segerberg 2017: 12). They are also characterized by their discourse, which stresses the value of participation and rejects ideological positioning. The notion of "connective party" compared to the previous approximations seems to convey better the key characteristics of the new wave of parties while remaining conceptually accurate. Furthermore, it supports the argument that underlines their reliance on technological infrastructures and practices including online and offline spaces tied to the organization and the action logics of recent social movements.[45] However, as will be explained below, this concept too, ignores the institutional realm of what I refer to as network parties.

On the notion of networks: As mentioned before, networks have been used as a discursive concept in political sociology to refer to a multi-directional performativity of political topics and actors and to horizontal and decentralized organizational infrastructures. Most prominently, Yochai Benkler's work on the 'networked public sphere' and 'commons-based peer production' elucidates how the changing architecture of "hub-and-spoke" democracy (Benkler, 2006: 212) towards cost-effective communication creates alternate decentralized communication mechanisms that open the public stage for a larger number of actors and speakers. As he importantly points out, these democratizing effects are not purely quantitative but by inducing a quantitative change, they induce a new quality in the public sphere. In this sense, digital networks are related to the mechanisation of the social relations in the political realm. As (non-)spatial theory, the notion of network provides the necessary means to elaborate on the question of how political party organization is affected by cultural, political and economic changes caused by the proliferation of digital communication and information technologies. Castells has applied the concept of networks in diverse realms, however, as mentioned before, he recently explored how the concept of networks can be observed in recent social movements and protests and political

---

15M movement, this connection is not only justifiable but crucial for an understanding of the above-mentioned dilemma between *networked democracy* and institutional boundaries or between "the content: or what it is that parties are for; and the form, or what organization political parties are" (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016: 385).

45 Considering these three strands of conceptualizing new parties, we have observed a shortage of literature systematizing the new waves of parties from a *technopolitical* perspective (see Chapter 4.5) that easily shift between these three proximities.

parties in the *network society*.

Considering this, the notion of *network parties* can be defended in comparison to the notion of 'connective' parties as proposed in the most promising approach by Bennett et al. (2018). As has been pointed out earlier, 'connectiveness' describes the quality of organization in a new sense. 'Networks', however, describe a supplemental quantity; a novel form of political organization; a perception of political spaces "without territorial contiguities'' (Castells, 2000: 19) [46]. In sum, the main advantage of this terminology is its conceptual resonance and the inter-relatedness of the outlined three features - the technology-centred feature, an infrastructural feature and practice-oriented features.

3.4 Linking normativity with the empirical: A broad comparative perspective on network parties

In the second chapter, I discussed the *network party* in relation to contemporary macro-scale developments of the political landscape. This chapter has been preparing the discussion on party types by explaining why contemporary 'electoralist' parties fail to provide adequate means for representing the interests and needs of civil society. Accordingly, the following section will summarize the implications of these considerations on a meso-level for the *network party type* and provide the background for my second hypothesis that *network parties* try to navigate the fault lines between deliberative-participatory pretensions and institutional boundaries of representative democracy.

Departing from a thin definition of *network parties'* common characteristics: 1) a critical diagnosis of representative politics and its institutions; 2) a relationship to social movements, their narratives, mindsets and practices (in most cases); 3) and most relevantly, the fundamental use of digital technologies and associated emerging practices at the core of their organization, I will consult five case studies to provide a denser description of general characteristics before investigating in-depth the three paradigmatic case studies.

3.4.1 Deliberative-participatory democratic visions and commitments

As repeatedly mentioned, and contextualized in Chapter 2, *network parties* commonly share the vision, narratives and practices of digitally-mediated participatory democracy as a potential remedy against widespread political fatigue and dissatis-

---

46 More precisely, whereas the attribute 'connective' can be ascribed to traditional parties functioning on the nation-state level, 'network' implies their origin with decentralized movements and additionally suggests a technology-focused understanding of organization that challenges the focus on the national scale.

faction towards dominant representative democratic institutions. The historical account and theoretical context of the demands of "openness, horizontality, and decentralization" were given in Chapter 2, where I put forward the argument that there is a close alignment between *network parties'* strong participatory logic and the deliberative-participatory democratic model. Both are opposed to purely electoral or plebiscitary participation mechanisms both inside and outside the party system. As the following five case studies will show, certain themes are pervasive among the electoral programs, public documents, and public speeches by spokespersons and representatives of this party type - namely, the question of generating the means by which citizens could take part in democratic institutions and within the party infrastructure along the principles of *networked democracy*. Thus, *network parties* commonly propose the urgency of renewing and re-designing political parties and public institutions for enhanced citizen participation and intra-party democracy. But what kind of participatory mechanisms are being proposed by *network parties* and how are they reformative to participatory means of the electoralist party? I will depict in the next chapter the variances in how this vision is interpreted and how it is embodied by different network parties. [47]

At the core of *Partido X*'s participatory discourse stands the "real and permanent vote" [48], a principle that describes a new quality of participation through means of digital technologies, in which large-scale voting procedures are permanently integrated in legal issues (Partido X, 2014). [49] Similarly, the *Pirate Party Germany* states its main goal is to "(...) strive for the highest possible democratic equality of all people. Therefore, the goal is to increase direct and indirect democratic possibilities for the equal participation of each individual and to promote the participation of each individual citizen in democracy" (Pirate Party Germany, 2012: 9, *own translation*). Comparably, initial documents of *Podemos* put forth ideas on how to reform the parliamentary system by adding more traditional participatory mechanisms: The party proposes citizen councils, a committee on petitions and popular legislative initiatives but also suggests lowering participation thresholds in order to guarantee citizens to defend their own proposals (Podemos, 2012). Interestingly, *Podemos* proposes the symbolic creation of an extra -seat to implement citizens' petitions (Podemos, 2012: §210).

Beppe Grillo spoke of *M5S* as a promoter of "hyperdemocracy" which would implement direct-participatory mechanisms at the forefront of the party. M5S's pro-

---

47 The elaboration of a party type is confronted with the difficulty of moving on a meso-level of observation. A positive account is that common characteristics of disparate cases can be subsumed. However, this ideal-typical (Weber, 1949) approach contains the pitfalls of not taking into account the specific varieties of the single phenomena. Accordingly, I will use an abstracted language within this section to make sense of the network party type. The following chapter is dedicated to a more detailed description of three sub-types I developed and will make use of a more specific language.

48 In Jurado's (2014) words, this is the counter-sketch to "block politics" and combines the parliamentary system with direct citizen input.

49 Although their claims are more in line with plebiscitary democratic mechanisms and their programmatic commitments do not include the deliberative aspect, *Partido X* aims at reforming the whole democratic system .

grammatic commitment revolves around the idea of fostering direct participatory mechanisms by introducing citizen petitions without any quorum and simultaneously entrenching broad deliberation amongst citizens on legal policies before implementing them (M5S, 2009).

BComú articulates two components of their participatory mechanisms. Firstly, they consider "new instruments of social articulation and political intervention where both people (who are) already organized and those who are beginning to mobilize can meet" (BComú, 2014b). Interestingly, the focus lies on bottom-up assemblies to discuss and decide on district-wide local issues, a process - which at first glance – does not seem to rely on digital technology.

As such, from a perspective of including the wider citizenry into the political process, *network parties* serve as vehicles for generating deliberative-participatory democracy for a large body of citizens inside both – political parties and political state bodies, (institutions and administration), with a diversity of participatory mechanisms ranging from direct-plebiscitary and deliberative mechanisms.

In this 'strong' reading, the first and most important component is the inherent procedural character of prioritizing the act of participation over the substantive result of the decision taken. This clearly evinces the above-mentioned sense of input-legitimacy where the inclusion of the participants lends enhanced legitimacy to the outcome. As such, *network parties* inherently face a major challenge in participatory politics leading to two different but complementary interpretations of the political process: a procedural orientation of participation (participation as a target) and a substantive orientation (participation as a means). [50]

Importantly, where the procedural aspect is internalized in the party discourse, the distinction between the proceduralist and the substantive pole might become blurred. [51] The *Pirate Party Germany*, for instance, was covered by German media as an "Internet party" [52] for being a party that is dedicated to highlighting a new political substance of politics, namely a focus on digital copyright, digital open source infrastructures, transparency and digital infrastructures. In this sense, it had a substantive orientation. However, at the same time, their proceduralist account towards

---

50 The proceduralist understanding refers to the approximation that only right democratic procedures legitimate political authority. Based mainly on deliberative discourse theory (Habermas, 1984), this notion criticizes that established institutions and practices of political opinion-forming, decision-making and implementation are losing relevance due to changing societal and technological conditions and are not "responsive" to citizens anymore. Political actors appropriating this critique promote agendas that aim to reform rules of citizen discourse and forms of argumentation for legitimizing a democratic system through its structures rather than through its outcomes. The substantive pole, on the other hand, departs from the observation that there is a deficit on the political content level that is so far not being tackled by existing political actors and introduces a new political agenda.

51 A mitigated form of this trend can be observed in the emergence of the Green Parties in 1970 that pushed forward direct democratic principles in the spirit of the 1968 movement but it was the first party to place a substantive programmatic emphasis on sustainability and environmental issues.

52 See https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article13642557/Piraten-wollen-neues-Image-und-neuen-Politikstil.html [Last accessed: 06.09.2019].

open, deliberative and liquid processes for democratic decision-making until now is unique within contemporary participatory politics. This is mainly due to the connection between the cyberlibertarian worldview attached to the substantive claim that inherently translates into a procedural character.

Neo-populism and political antagonism: Most recently, a great amount of literature has been concerned with analysing how some of the *network parties'* cases – in particular *Podemos* and *M5S* - utilize a certain discursive strategy to address the whole citizenry as a homogenous entity, using narratives that follow a neo-populist imprint (Gerbaudo, 2018, Vittori, 2017, Garcia Augustin & Briziarelli., 2018). This body of literature is predominantly concerned with the question of how the antagonistic framing of the existing democratic system defines both the network parties´ narrative and discourse, continuously displayed and reinforced through their rhetorical stylization of "them" against "us".

When examining this neo-populist imprint, it must be considered that this tendency is chiefly apparent in *network parties* from Southern Europe, thus in countries with high levels of corruption, where European anti-austerity policies are felt and contested most strongly. In this vein, Kriesi and Pappas stress that "(s)outhern European populism is generally highly polarizing, often anti-systemic, and thriv(ing)es on the left as well as on the right of the political spectrum" (Kriesi and Pappas, 2015: 18). Again, the Spanish and Italian cases conform to this analysis. *Partido X* presents a perspicuous populist-antagonist discourse against the representative system. In its launch video, it suggested it would "enter the parliament" to "get *them* out" and "reset the system"[53]. *Podemos* builds its unifying momentum from a clear position against "la casta" in the tradition of 15M slogans against established political institutions and elitist and corrupt politicians. Both cases build up a strong narrative that presupposes a common identity of ordinary citizens as victims of an elitist group of politicians.

Unsurprisingly, the populist tendency is built on the above-mentioned distrust towards professional politicians: Instead of leaving political decisions to professional politicians, *network parties* signal the rise of the individual as an "indignant citizen (sic) that pits the self-organized citizenry against economic and political oligarchies, and pursues the reclamation and expansion of citizenship, seen as the necessary foundation of a true democracy" (Gerbaudo & Screti, 2017: 3). Common claims for more sovereignty, to "take back the institutions" and for "real democracy"[54] exhibit how the "need to resonate with large parts of society outweighs the development of a defined membership base" (Tormey, 2015: 121).

In this vein, political scholars have depicted the narratives of *M5S* as populist (Lanzone & Woods, 2015) as the party in its early consolidation period successfully linked substantive topics such as ecological sustainability and the necessary expand-

---

53 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90deuJiQfTw. [Last accessed: 04.09.2017.]
54 Both common 15M slogans, also see Partido X (2014).

ability of social services to the overall malfunctioning of the political elite. By formulating these ostensible correlations as a national problem (Bordignon & Ceccarini, 2012) *M5S* proposed to expedite political decision-making by 'the people' against the established decision-making mechanisms of the political 'establishment'. *M5S*'s claim to represent the whole citizenry of Italy aligns with the definition of neo-populism as a concept that refers "to the people and justifies its actions by appealing to and identifying with the people" (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007: 322). In the case of M5S [55], Gerbaudo stresses the merging of cyberlibertarian ideology and populist rhetoric into what he calls "cyber-populist imprint" (Gerbaudo, 2018, 61).

How do these strategies differ from 'electoralist' parties' catch-all strategies and why are they called "neo-populist"? For the South European cases, the notion of populism has had a revival in political literature with the rise of both right- and left-wing parties. The idea of populism therefore can be understood as a style of political communication pattern that amounts to "the effect of the mediatization of the political equating to a simplification of political discourse, it's the reduction to neat us-against-them antagonisms and sound-bite solutions" (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014: 7). This framing of a self-created socio-cultural reality seeks to win back consent (Diamanti, 2007) from socially marginalized and politically uninterested milieus.

Accordingly, the logic 'we, the people, against them, the elite' rests on a strong commitment to effective political communication that – in contrast to catch-all slogans - portrays the political elite as an antagonist. The neo-populist strategies of *Podemos* and *M5S* can thus be understood within Laclau and Mouffe's approach of antagonist democracy that perceives the demarcation in the political realm between "them" and "us" as a necessary condition for building identities (Laclau & Mouffe 2001). Drawing on the hegemony of discourse, Laclau elucidates that "an ensemble of equivalential demands articulated by an empty signifier is what constitutes a ‚People'" (Laclau, 2005: 171). The discursive strategy of *Podemos* can aptly be read through these lenses. As such, Íñigo Errejón - in a dialogue with Chantal Mouffe – succinctly describes the importance of this strategy in their joint publication:

> *"A bold anti-establishment discourse that unhesitatingly challenges the vocabularies and ways of thinking of the elite, and willingly accepts the possibility of being attacked for this, is crucial in times when traditional loyalties are breaking down. Audacity is crucial, even if it involves accepting that the adversary may hit you back all the harder. And if the democratic and progressive forces do not adopt a bold stance, we can be sure that the extreme right will do so" (Errejon & Mouffe, 2017: 67).*

It is precisely in this "anti-establishment" aspect that the neo-populist imprint

---

55 Treré and Barassi have claimed that "the digital rhetoric of horizontality, lack of leadership, and spontaneity of the party is used to mask, facilitate and reinforce the authority of Beppe Grillo as a political leader, thus forging a new type of authoritarianism that is supported and legitimated through the everyday construction of digital discourse." (Treré & Barassi: 2015: 287)

differs from the communicative strategies of the catch-all tendencies of the electoralist party and as a result aligns with the populist tradition. Confirming Kriesi and Pappas´ (2015) observation, the discourse of the *Pirate Party Germany* does not exhibit this tendency in the same fashion as in the case studies mentioned before. The discourse of this party attacks the general infrastructure of the institutionalized electoral system rather than political parties or individual politicians.

Within the discourse of the *Pirate Party Germany*, a general antagonism towards an enemy in the political realm is not evident. Neither a diagnosis of miscarriages of traditional political structures. In fact, drawing on the previous section and comparing the political discourse by the *Pirate Party Germany* with the discourse established by *Podemos* and *M5S,* we recognise two conflicting tonalities and discourses with the network party family: the antagonist-populist one in the case of *Podemos* and *M5S*, and the proceduralist-deliberative one in the case of the *Pirate Party Germany*. Yet again, *BComú* takes an intermediary path between these two poles. Although prevailing literature has been considered and *BComú* seen as populist by nature, meaning concentrating on the 'us and them' dichotomy as a central strategy or democratic belief system (Russell, 2019), this party discursively uses mainly "opposition criticism" as a side-element of their political communication (García-Carretero & Díaz-Noci, 2018: 528). Correspondingly, *BComú*'s political rhetoric focuses primarily on reforms in administrative bodies of the city council pushing citizen participation and substantive issues such as social inequalities, the housing crisis, etc. Placed in the wider context of political communicative strategy, this case places more emphasis on constructively and substantially building a common identity on common goals instead of the demarcation of existing institutional forces and 'the elite'.

In sum, the normative vision of 'ordinary-expert citizenship' that is both capable and willing to constantly participate in political discourse and viable decision-making rests on the belief that citizens ought to have to be core protagonists in the decisions of the political party. However, with respect to the descriptive sense of representation in Pitkin's understanding, it is important to examine the characteristics of network parties' main actors more closely by determining three different engagement levels. I want to differentiate between a) either founders and militant activists, b) active members and engaged party affiliates and c) the regular electorate.

If *network parties* are supposed to represent 'the people' and marginalized social milieus, the profile of the founders exhibits a severe lack of appropriate 'descriptive' representativity. [56] Drawing on the distinction between the profiles of the party-in-public-office and party-on-the-ground, we can observe that in most cases the party-on-the-ground exhibits a broad range of demographic characteristics. The

---

56 The most common characteristic of the initiators of *network parties* is age average. Throughout all case studies, the members and electorate were predominantly young, well-educated and of low income in both public office and on the ground. Gerbaudo interprets this trend as a new social cleavage that "involves the millennial generation that has been the most digitally connected, yet also the ones exposed to the greatest risks created by economic disruption" (2018: 120).

profiles of the party-in-public-office, however, differ tremendously. In the case of *Partido X*, founders and militant activists consisted of hackers and activists. Proactive members and the wider electorate were skewed towards a similar milieu. Similarly, the *Pirate Party Germany* in their early phase was composed of activists and participants interested in open-source politics and affiliated to digital politics. During its institutionalization process, however, the party managed to attract voters from diverse demographic backgrounds (Weisband, 2013). In the case of *Podemos*, main leading and prominent figures have an academic background[57], whereas the support structure and surrounding group of founders consists of activist-scholars previously involved in the *Global Justice movement* and anti-austerity campaigns that merged with a small group of the *Izquierda Anticapitalista (IA)*.

Thus, *Podemos* can aptly be described as a top-down endeavour that was initiated by the intellectual elite and not the 'common people' as their discourse proclaims. In contrast, the main actor-constellation of *M5S* was composed of a heterogeneous group that in the parliamentary elections represented the demographic diversity of the Italian population. As mentioned above, *BComú* inherently consists of diverse actors that were involved in la *PAH*, and in the other initiatives that formed and shaped the parties.[58] What was described as fragmentation in this case above simultaneously implies the amalgamation of a variety of topics, perspectives and political interests, and a stronger resilience in terms of descriptive representation.

3.4.2 The desideratum of openness and transparency

In an effort to create participatory mechanisms, *network parties* commonly place programmatic emphasis on making political procedures more transparent. Again, the interpretations and actual manifestations differ from case to case, however, this overall tendency lies at the core of *network parties*' criticism of representative democracy. Another commonality is the tendency of *network parties* to programmatically displace strategic secrecy in favour of a general openness and transparency of internal party affairs. It is widely accepted that a culture of secrecy persists in the world of *electoralist party system*. As it is the *electoralist party*'s aim to gain and maintain power, it tries to appear credible, competent and united along party lines by keeping internal conflicts secret from the wider public, and sometimes its own membership. Strategic secrecy also plays a major role concerning the hidden influence of professional lobbyists and the opaque flow of financial transactions between political parties and individual politicians and representatives of industries, companies, unions and issues interest groups.

---

57 The two prominent spokespersons, Pablo Iglesias Turrión and Inigo Errejón, but also Juan Carlos Monedero and Carolina Bescansa, received a good academic education before founding *Podemos*.

58 In the case of BComú, the parties *Podemos, Procés Constituent, Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds, Esquerra Unida I Alternativa and Equo* joined the electoral list. The diversity of parties and initiatives, values and political belief-systems represents the heterogeneity of political militants active within *BComú*.

The claim for transparency in internal party debates was most visible within the *Pirate Party Germany* which promoted the highest possible transparency in communication on digital channels. Whereas that principle had an adverse impact in terms of the party's credibility, it attracted numerous advocates, especially in the inception phase of the party. Similarly, *Partido X* stresses that absolute transparency "is a tool of control of the political class by the citizenry, and anonymity reinforces the capacity of society as a whole to exert it" (Partido X, 2014).

In the political context of the Southern European case studies, the claim for transparency goes hand in hand with a high level of distrust towards individual politicians due to history and the experience of high levels of corruption. In the Italian context, a country ranked high on the corruption-index, the M5S formulated as a significant claim the need to reinvigorate intra-party democracy as a feature for assuring resistance to internal corruption. Another significant characteristic is that members are required to have a clear criminal record (M5S, 2009), which is indicative of the acute fear of criminalized politicians and representatives. Thus, *M5S* defines high standards for the process of electing their own candidates as manifested in the so-called "Parlamentarie" in 2013:

> *"The identity of candidates for each elective office will be publicized on a dedicated website created within the framework of the blog; discussions regarding such candidatures will likewise be public, transparent and unmediated" (M5S, 2009).*

In order to understand the urgency in addressing transparency within the Spanish cases it is important to appreciate the fact that Spanish civil society has been witnessing long-standing corruption scandals in both dominant parties, PSOE and PP [59] - as a result, public polls on the perception of democracy in Spain predominantly detect a major loss of trust towards appointed politicians. Amongst the main causes such as the high rates of unemployment and public spending cuts, 15M activists addressed political corruption as one main failure of the present democratic system (Casero-Rípolles et al., 2016).

In this vein, *Partido X* addresses the dangerous implications of lobbyist control and corrupt politicians. Similarly, *Podemos* and the *Municipalist* parties placed increased emphasis on transparency towards corruption instead of transparency in internal political decision-making as pursued by the *Pirate Party Germany*. *Podemos* claims it will turn the law for access to information into a fundamental right, and furthermore improve accessibility to the Spanish Transparency Portal [60] where petitions regarding public spending can be submitted, and create and strengthen an

---

59 Only between 2015 and 2016, 1,378 public officials faced trial on corruption charges. Also see data retrieved from the website of the General Council for the Judiciary: https://www.politico.eu/article/spain-corruption-country-of-thieves-high-court-trial/ [Last accessed: 08.07.2018].
60 Original "Portal de Transparencia". Retrieved from https://transparencia.podemos.info/ [Last accessed: 09.09.2019]

autonomous organ for monitoring transparency: the *consejo de transparencia* (Podemos, 2016: §237). Fittingly, *Podemos'* ethical code results from the perceived necessity to control the behaviour of individual politicians and, subsequently, to avoid institutional fraud. Thus, *Podemos* suggests limiting the salaries of elected or appointed officials and prohibiting parallel employment in private companies (*Podemos*, 2015). The ethical code furthermore aims to prevent economic interests from overriding autonomous decision-making by politicians and guarantees representatives' loyalty towards ordinary citizens. As a successful blueprint, elements of this code were adapted by the *Municipalist* parties [61]: In their ethical code, *BComú* prescribes the transparent treatment of actions undertaken by public officials as well as the transparency of income sources and the prevention of accepting positions within companies that are placed within the territory of the active representative (BComú, 2014a).

However, this claim of transparency clashes with existing institutional logics: An outcry among *Podemos'* members occurred in 2018 when it was published that Pablo Iglesias and Irene Montero purchased a villa outside Madrid for 600.000 Euro, thus raising the question of their credibility as one of "the people" [62] who had previously attacked the luxurious lifestyles of other politicians who 'hid in their villas'. To speak in Pitkin's terminology, in this situation, the power of the descriptive representative sense of Pablo Iglesias' legitimacy as a spokesperson was attacked[63]. In the eyes of *Podemos'* members that behaviour was inconsistent with previous attacks on the political caste.

This example exhibits the fragile and partially underdeveloped nature of *network parties'* claim for transparency and private information shared publicly before and during the institutionalization process. Chapter 6 will elucidate further how the issue of transparency in various senses is a key aspect of *network parties'* performance, tailored to the developments that took place within the *Pirate Party Germany*.

Summarizing the last two sections, it becomes clear how issues of participation, representation and transparency overlap and absorb each other. Turning to the question of leadership, I have already elaborated on how *network parties* propose a counterexample to existing senses of representation and in particular challenge 'functionalist', ''descriptive' and ''substantive' senses of representation. How these senses are negotiated within the five case studies will be the subject of the following section.

---

61 Not only in Municipalist cases, but also in the German political context, this code received major attention from the niche party *Demokratie in Bewegung* that adapted the code accordingly: See: https://bewegung.jetzt/ethik-kodex/ [Last accessed: 09.10.2019].

62 Lavapíes is a neighbourhood in the center of Madrid, popular for its low-income population and a bohemian life-style. It was of symbolic importance that Pablo Iglesias decided to run for candidacy living in this neighbourhood, accordingly he had to defend himself after the scandal: https://elpais.com/ccaa/2019/05/01/madrid/1556734924_094685.html [Last accessed: 02.05.2019].

63 According to the ethical code, the salaries of both are tied to a certain amount so that both politicians would have needed 30 years in office to pay off the credit, a calculation that is more reminiscent of the logics of power-seeking and -maintaining priority over channelling interests of the electorate.

3.4.3 "Disintermediation" and revisions of political leadership

Network parties' conceptualize leadership and representation as imperative instead of free-mandate office-holding, incorporating strong claims of political account-ability and the responsiveness of representatives. Personality-centred leadership and symbolic representation are frequently renounced in favour of 'functionalist', 'descriptive' and 'substantive' representation. In this vein, rather than focusing on candidates, *Partido X* presented itself as a *method* to restore democratic institutions. In terms of candidate-selection and representatives, the party would be "(t)he only party that doesn't want to represent you. You won't vote parties. You will vote and make laws" (Partido X, 2014). *Partido X* even goes further by emphasizing a variation of non-personalized anti-leadership as follows:

> *"We want to depersonalize politics. We don't want to fall in (sic) the personalist log-ic of the parties, where only what the leader does and says matters. The important thing is facts, not names. They have made us believe that the system of leadership in parties is the only one, that there is no other possibility, but that is not the case." (Partido X, 2014)*

Similarly, the *Pirate Party Germany* shows an ambiguous relationship to how leadership and representatives is constructed within the party Although they pre-sented star candidates such as Marina Weisband and Christopher Lauer, their dis-course on an imperative versus free mandate caused major frictions within the party, which was especially visible in the discussions as to whether decisions made by the party-on-the-ground (through LQFB) should be binding for the-party-in-public-office and whether elected representatives are instead supposed to honor the imperative mandate (Weisband, 2013).

Crucially, *network parties* often exhibit a contradictory trend in the form of the "hyperleader" (Gerbaudo, 2018): a strong charismatic spokesperson that influences the parties' success. In some cases, the appearance and consolidation of a prominent leadership figure resulted in the collapse of decentralized structures into traditional representational logics. Most visible in the case of *Podemos* and *M5S,* this natural con-flict led to the realization of the "iron law of oligarchy" (Michels, 1911) and resulted in the paradox of proclaiming participatory democracy, at the same time promoting single candidates and personalized campaigning.

Accordingly, alongside repertoires of social movements and neo-populist nar-ratives, a key success factor of M5S was the prominent media presence of comedian Beppe Grillo, who became the public face of *M5S.* The persistence of Beppe Grillo's power within the *M5S* structure is apparent in numerous phenomena: He central-ized intra-party communication by channelling discussions on his personal blog, received personal ownership of the party's symbol and obtained the power to cancel memberships. This degree of power for a single individual within a political party is

redolent of autocratic structures and does not resemble the narratives of pertaining to the democratic nature of *network parties*.

Similarly, scholars investigating *Podemos* commonly assume that the party would not have succeeded in electoral terms without Pablo Iglesias Turrión. In his appearance alone the charismatic frontman appears relatable to a young electorate. However, by appearing on national television and through his popular appearances in mainstream media, Iglesias reached out not only to the younger population but also deployed 'catch-all' mechanisms to appeal to the wider electorate [64]. Both cases, *Podemos* and *M5S*, exhibit a structural friction between a narrative that is closely in line with *networked democracy* and an obvious relapse into traditional political leadership and hierarchical top-down decision-making.

Steering a middle course between non-representation and hyper-leadership, *BComú* promotes an intermediate approach to representation. Firstly, the party emerged as the confluence of existing initiatives and civil society projects located and deeply rooted in local and city-wide neighbourhood initiatives consisting of individuals from a variety of socio-cultural milieus. Thus, its organizational structure faced potential fragmentation when extra-institutional activists concerned with different issues joined the party. However, the party tried to unite the activists along a common democratic "infrastructure" that anyone – not just elites – could use to engage politically. This is symbolized in the slogan "en comú" (or plural: els Comuns – the commons)[65].

Secondly, their spokeswoman Ada Colau[66] provides a symbolic representation of the female gender as a generally underrepresented milieu within the political landscape. As an example of a new quality of political leadership, Ada Colau's image is defined by her emotionality as shown in the documentary "Alcadessa" in which she openly speaks about her motherhood and about combining family life with her political career (Faus, 2018). Her style of political leadership pivots on the skill of moderating between interest groups instead of pursuing block politics. On the other hand, this middle course also leads to obvious conflicts which emerged during the *BComú's* campaign, which was centred around the person of Ada Colau.[67]

Given these examples, we can define three approaches towards the representation and political leadership of *network parties*. Grounded in the vision that horizontality, decentralization and the imperative mandate are given priority, *Partido X*

---

64 In Chapter 4.2. I will further dwell on the question of how the discourse of *Podemos* relates to populist narratives and how – over the course of the past years – catch-all tendencies overrode the participatory vision.

65 The same pattern can be observed in *Ahora Madrid, which* also emerged from the same 'platform' logic, uniting various civic actors.

66 Together with Manuela Carmena, two female mayoresses in Spain first led the new wave of the Municipalist movement that received a great deal of attention on an international scale. See for instance: https://www.citylab.com/equity/2015/06/how-game-changing-mayors-spain-transformation/394763/ [Last accessed: 09.12.2018]

67 The imprint of her face, as a very personalized symbol – and after long internal debate - also appeared on the ballot boxes. Internally, this strategy following traditional personalized campaigning led to polemics about whether *BComú* was the party of Ada Colau or of the common people of Barcelona (Alcadessa, 2017).

and the *Pirate Party Germany* advocate a vision that accentuates the collective over the individual representative. These parties highlight functionalist and substantive representation over the other senses. Reverting to patterns of the 'electoralist party', *Podemos* and *M5S* expedite individual leaders as party symbols and accordingly give priority to the descriptive and symbolic sense of representation. Finally, *BComú* pursues a combination of 'soft' leadership based on resembling and moderating the party-base that is composed of a wide range of political actors.

As mentioned before, common to *network parties* is an understanding of the party as a vehicle created for and by the people, as a vehicle to channel and pursue the interests of unrepresented groups. Besides the restructuring of intra-party democracy in terms of leadership and the redefinition of party membership, *network parties* claim to empower ordinary citizens as experts on devising and managing their own political content and policymaking. Tailoring to this general perspective, the design of internal infrastructures and intra-party democracy exhibits diverging manifestations of 'disintermediation' on an organizational and structural level.

In Chapter 2, I sketched the historical emergence of 'aggregative intra-party democracy' and the stratification of party organization into three faces. To recall, the originally intended organizational structure of *network parties* was inspired by rationally-driven deliberative intra-party democracy standards as opposed to the rigid delegative system and the hierarchical stratification along the three faces of electoralist parties. The deliberative response to the plebiscitary mechanisms mentioned in Chapter 2 laid the blueprint for *network parties'* design aimed at making internal organs of the party more permeable to facilitate deliberative participation within the party, guarantee accountability mechanisms and to strengthen the decision-making power of a party-on-the-ground.

The deliberative democratic mechanisms vary in early statutes of *network parties*: The basic cells of the *Pirate Party Germany* consisted of 'squads' and 'crews', describing loosely dynamic thematic and territorial gatherings to openly discuss internal party issues. Coordinated via the platform *LQFB,* the *Pirate Party Germany's* structure exhibits most prominently the libertarian claim for decentralized, spontaneous, unfiltered decision-making based on premises of a rationally-driven and inclusive deliberation process.[68]

Podemos initially advocated for the radical implementation of *círculos*, autonomous local cells in which relevant matters could be discussed and resolved in the spirit of *Democracia Real Ya* (see Chapter 6). The *círculos* have been interpreted as mirroring the deliberative-participatory nature of political education and as seen in the 15M movement. Analogically, the *M5S* consolidated a fluid and hybrid organizational model set up after the emergence of so-called meetup groups: local gatherings that

---

68 The pitfalls of this perception can be vividly observed on their main communication channel, Twitter, on which emotional discussions and quarrels took place that later were claimed to be a crucial factor in the party's internal disintegration (Weisband, 2017).

aimed at addressing local issues, implementing campaigning and protest activities (Ceccarini & Bordignon, 2017) [69]. However, their role as vivid deliberative spaces hollowed out over time when *Podemos* introduced a leadership-focused and plebiscitary model of intra-party democracy.

With regard to intra-party democracy, here again *BComú* exhibits a middle course as regards participatory practices by implementing punctual, project- and issue-based deliberative mechanisms that supplement hierarchical decision-making. Aiming at strengthening civil society groups, *BComú* and other Municipalist parties promptly promoted the inception of territorial district groups and assemblies based on an open communication culture, consensus decision-making and - akin to the *círculos* in *Podemos*- strongly resembling the characteristics of 15M deliberative repertoires depicted in Chapter 2.

In sum, a general commitment towards deliberative democracy that promotes a priority of input- over output-legitimacy lies at the core of *network parties*, at least in the early phase of all cases. Exceptions are Podemos and M5S that – over the maturation process - favoured plebiscitary democratic measures over a dedication towards normative standards of deliberative democracy.

3.4.4 Digitally-mediated participatory democracy in party organization and practice

The above mentioned trends can be observed in the implementation of digital technology platforms that – in all cases – were introduced to provide autonomous space for discussion and decision-making in a time- and location-unbound manner. These platforms afford new forms of collective communication and organization that far outweigh the possibilities afforded by party and representative democracy structures and allow internal and external content sharing and decision-making in alignment with mass self-communication and thus materialize the logic of the *network society*.[70]

Taking into consideration the implementation of DDDPs from an abstract perspective, the deliberative reading of intra-party democracy forms and shapes how digital technologies were implemented by the parties. The *M5S* promised to foster "direct participation in any public meeting by the citizens via the web" (M5S, 2009). *Podemos* highlighted the significant role of *Plaza Podemos* by stressing that "particular relevance will be the implementation of digital democracy tools. The program also advocates the inclusion of groups that cannot access these instruments" (Podemos, 2012: §213). The *Pirate Party Germany's* LQFB aimed at providing a "virtual marketplace" (Weisband, 2017) thus being reminiscent of the Athenian model of democratic

---

69 Whereas the local branches are still mostly autonomous, the national group, the "staff" (della Porta, 2017: 86) decides on nation-wide issues and the appearance of the party.

70 The DDDPs Loomio, Participa.Podemos, Rousseau and Liquid Feedback were designed for this specification to facilitate the collective design of the political party but also to display crucial differences in their conceptual grounding, their design, and their implementation.

public space for political discourse. The platform *Decidim.Barcelona* does not serve the purpose of party-organization but to supplement the administration of the Barcelona City Council. Its practical implementation provides spaces for hybrid deliberation of physical and online spaces and "meta-deliberation", opportunities to discuss the very design of *Decidim.Barcelona.*

However, not all parties endorse the deliberative democratic sense in this direct understanding. *Partido X* on their website claims they renew political voting behaviour by introducing the direct and permanent vote:

> *"(T)he citizens reclaim the right to vote in a permanent fashion, to use it when we consider it fit."*

At the same time, they stress that the party is not a place for discussion (Partido X, 2014). Here, the deliberative stance is neglected in favour of "competence nodes". Thus, this democratic model favors technocratic procedures instead of including all members in political discussion and decision-making. This relates to the aforementioned friction that emerges during the evolution of network parties between the deliberative act of decision-making and the more reductionist sense of voting on top-down proposals by choosing between the binary options affirmative (yes) and non-affirmative (no) crystalizes the tension between the deliberative and plebiscitary tendencies of *network parties*. Hence, here again, it has been observed that some parties, such as *Podemos* and *M5S,* prioritized plebiscitary mechanisms over the course of time even though they strongly sympathised with deliberative mechanisms in their initial programs (Gerbaudo, 2019). On the other hand, parties such as *Partido X* and the *Pirate Party Germany* have prioritized deliberation, i.e. in the form of public discussions on Twitter, over effective decision-making.

An important feature regarding intra-party democracy within *network parties* is 1) the blurring definition of membership and non-membership and 2) an overall inclusive approach towards partisanship (Margetts, 2006). The way they involve citizens in policymaking redefines the pillars of traditional party membership. What I want to call "expert-citizen democracy" refers to the substitution and replacement of professional politicians by ordinary citizens as "new" political subjects and active players in the political process. Based on a critical diagnosis of the institutions, *network parties* attempt to dispense with intermediaries and involve new actors within representative democracies.

Secondly, *network parties* endorse 'permeable' membership by blurring the lines between formal party members and ordinary non-partisan citizens. Rather than insisting on formal membership inscription and strong party identification towards the party's programmatic demands, *network parties* function as a funnel for the wider citizenry. In this vein, *Podemos* states that "it is not possible to think of a distinction between activists and citizens, between an inside and an outside of politics" (Podemos, 2012). This is manifested within their organization and the design of Plaza.Podem-

os as well as in the *círculos* as physical participatory spaces, in which, theoretically, anyone can participate. Similarly, the squats and crews of the *Pirate Party Germany*, the essential cells of the party-on-the-ground, are in principle accessible to anyone who wants to join. [71] Likewise, the bottom-up assemblies of *BComú* are open to the public without requiring formal membership or prior registration (Haberer, 2016). [72]

Two theoretical assumptions are crucial in understanding this paradigm shift of political subjects: The first essential aspect is the normative belief that citizens are rational, educated experts on their own issues (see Chapter 2). Building on the normative side of deliberative accounts (Habermas, 1987) where the prevailing understanding of human communication rests on rationality, I have pointed out the importance of technological innovation and the empowerment of the connected public (Jenkins, 2006) within information dissemination processes that play a significant role in this paradigm shift.

How the electoral programs of *network parties* are created and developed is another indicator of the blurring distinction between members and citizens and the provision of necessary structural conditions for citizen deliberation. Within *Partido X,* the drafting of the program *Democracia y Punto* was set up on *co-ment* by a defined group of people and then opened to the wider public so that anyone could comment on and add proposals to the original document. Within *Podemos*, the participation platform allowed free access to the content and registered users could participate in the debate without giving proof of official membership in the party. Only registered people, however, were allowed to vote on internal issues. Following this philosophy, the electoral program in 2016 was co-written by initiatives emerging from the *circulos* and later edited and synthesized by the national campaigning group. The *M5S* allowed discussion on legislation with a combination of top-down initiatives by spokespersons that can be commented on by citizens over a 60-day period, and bottom-up initiatives that are developed from the members. Similarly, *BComú's* electoral program was co-written by initiatives and grassroot-activists in a co-productive manner (see Chapter 4.3.).

Shaping the programmatic orientation of the party in a joint effort, is the pictorialiation of how digitally-mediated participatory democracy manifests itself in the interface of political parties and civil society. This general, inclusive structure and design of DDPS, however, must be critically explored with regard to its actual implementation and use. Importantly, crucial questions pertaining to the quality of deliberation processes on DDDPs (Borge & Santamarina, 2016), the degree of participation rates, especially over the course of a certain period, and the demographic milieus dominant in large participation procedures need to be analysed in greater detail.

---

71 As strong symbolic gesture, the Pirate Party Germany (and International) allows membership in other parties, a criterion that commonly is understood as reason for membership neglect in contemporary 'electoralist' parties.
72 Likewise, in *Ahora Madrid,* the low threshold of elaborating and implementing bottom-up proposals structurally enables citizens to take part in policymaking in a hybrid sense which shows the development of a public transport policy in Madrid

Drawing on research on and the programmes of *network parties*, it is possible to develop a denser description of the commonalities of the case studies. Although this description detracts from the variety of visions, contexts, narratives and practices, certain commonalities account for an emerging party type that secedes from the 'electoralist' party type. Following this line of argument, Table 2 provides a summary of the main differences between the 'electoralist' and the n*etwork party.*

Dimensions	'Electoralist Party'	*Network Party*
Democratic Vision	Representative democracy	Networked democracy
Organizational Infrastructure	Vertical structure; stratification of three faces: party-on-the-ground; party-in-central-office; party-in-public-office	Networked organization, strong appeals towards permeability and mutual integration of party faces
Intra-party democracy	Aggregative intra-party democracy; one-man-one-vote	Deliberative intra-party democracy
Representation and Leadership	Free mandate; substantive view of electoral competition	Imperative mandate; Constituency representation; high degree of accountability and responsivity; facilitators and moderators
Transparency	Strategic secrecy	High degree of transparency (internal party affairs vs. private information)
Partisanship	Elitist; professionalization	"Ordinary citizen experts"
Campaigning	Catch-all mechanisms	Anti-establishment; neo-populist tendencies

Use of ICTs	Top-down: Information dissemination and campaigning through social media	Bottom-up: Implementation of DDDPs for inclusive and decentralized decision-making

Table 2. Differences between the electoralist party and the *network party* type

Throughout this section, I have elaborated on how *network parties* inherently create a dilemma by questioning the institutional logic of electoralist parties and touting deliberative mechanisms as the antidote to their democratic deficits on the one hand, and submitting to the mechanisms of representative mechanisms as legitimizing procedures, on the other.

Before turning to a detailed analysis of three empirical case studies, the next section summarizes the former observations to indicate three main species of *network parties* that gradually coalesced around three modes of party organization and performance: the procedural, the plebiscitary and the Municipalist species.

3.5 Proceduralist, Plebiscitary and Municipalist: Three sub-types of *network parties*

I have described *the network party* type in general terms as a party (partially) engendered by networked social movements, aiming to materialize *networked democracy* within the institutional realm (Juris, 2004). This paradigm shift has been exemplified by the novel vision of democracy, deliberative intra-party structures, a re-definition of political representation, the central role of transparency and a neo-populist imprint. Despite their decisive heterogeneity, certain tendencies in terms of their approach to intra-party democracy allow us to define three species of *network parties.* [73]

Proceduralist parties: The *Pirate Party Germany* and *Partido X* can be grouped into proceduralist parties since both exhibit a proceduralist (target) and substantive (means) interpretation of political participation and intra-party democracy. As such, *Partido X's* emphasis on the "real and permanent vote" [74] and the *Pirate Party Germany's* insistence on elected officials serving as vehicles of imperative mandates

---

[73] Whereby proceduralist and plebiscitary belong to one category, I chose the description 'municipalist' for the third species due to two reasons: Their decisive distinction to the others by operating on the local scale and putting the city level as main political reference system and secondly, by the established prominence of this notion to refer to the specific narrative and political repertoire endorsed by BComú and other cities (Fearless Cities, Cities of Change).

[74] If its self-definition as a "method" qualifies it as a proceduralist party, the definition of democracy.period (democracia y punto) legitimizes this qualification even further.

indicates a proceduralist approach towards party organization. Essentially, both prioritize input-legitimacy over output- legitimacy, attempting to redefine 'functionalist' representation and placing a strong emphasis on 'symbolic' representation, but they fail to consider other aspects of representation.[75] Partido X refrained from selecting individuals to represent the party, and the *Pirate Party Germany* considered using LQFB as a binding decision-making tool for ensuring that representatives of the Berlin parliament follow the imperative mandate.

Secondly, evidently situated within a cyber-libertarian perspective on digital technologies, they overlook the meaning of political affordances [76] created by the interplay of human actors and technological devices. Inspired by the ideology of technological determinism, both parties seek to solve the shortcomings of representative democracy by introducing an innovative technological 'method' or 'procedure' into party organization. As depicted above, both parties struggle with the integration of high standards of transparency, accountability and a certain lack of ideology in their programmatic positioning.

Reflected from a genealogical perspective, both parties entered the political realm at an early stage at a time when considering the possibilities, opportunities and pitfalls of intertwining digital technologies with democratic institutions were still in their infancy. Thus, their performance and organizational proposal display a "revolutionary" approach towards representative democracy. Despite their differences, both parties were grounded in the early utopian visions of the democracy's digital salvation, and therefore I situate both parties in the first phase of digitally-mediated participatory democracy in political parties.

Plebiscitary parties: In the past section, it was made evident that *Podemos* and *M5S* took on a special role within the broad *network party type*. Both parties are nation-wide parties built upon a thin network-like organization that aims to reach the whole citizenry. Initially in line with the deliberative-participatory discourse, their main characteristic was their steady transformation from decentralized towards strongly centralized patterns. Within the spectrum of recently formed *network parties*, P*odemos* and *M5S* are paradigmatic cases with respect to an antagonistic diagnosis of electoralist representative democracy, pitting "the people" against "the elite" (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016; Rodríguez-Aguilera de Prat, 2015). These cases vivdly exhibit the friction between a narrative aligned to deliberative-participatory democracy and organizational structures that over time came to depend on individual leaders and

---

75 As will be developed in Chapter 4.2, actors involved in these parties (especially the *Pirate Party Germany*) are rooted in the hacker's milieu and are thus tech-savvy, digital natives, thus not considering a 'descriptive' sense of participation.

76 I do not want to dwell on the theory of 'affordances'. In this context, however, it is worth noting a line of thought that has seen technological devices not from their functional perspective but from the perspective of the interplay between user and device and the opportunities provided by the interplay of 'object' and 'environment' (Gibson, 1966).

'elite' politicians. Thus, in both cases, the implementation and design of DDDPs displayed plebiscitary tendencies that primarily favoured policy preferences of the elite rather than deliberatively creating content from the bottom-up. I argue that these parties, in fact, relapsed into the logics of electoralist parties and thus materialized the "restorative" approach towards representative democracy, restoring traditional mechanisms disguised as a potential remedy for the very system they are submitting to.

Municipalist parties: *Municipalist parties* such as *BComú* and Ahora Madrid, place major emphasis on substantive social rights and experiment with different forms of punctual large-scale citizen participation (Borge & Santamarina, 2015; Aragon, 2016). The parties' distinctive feature is their focus on urban issues and development of relevant social programmes. Emerging from civil society organizations such as la PAH, *BComú* promotes hybrid citizen participation, making use of technological 'affordances' in conjunction with a strong leadership figure. Ada Colau, unlike Beppe Grillo or Pablo Iglesias, promotes 'soft' leadership, often prioritizing her personal over her professional performance, and fits more neatly in the 'descriptive' sense of representation. By establishing the 'in-common' narrative, *BComú* tackles 'functionalist' representation by transparently and openly selecting candidates. Moreover, it embodies the 'symbolic' sense of representation by imbuing the brand *BComú* with connotations of unity and openness in order to attract the wider citizenry.

In terms of the deliberative desideratum formulated above, BComú provides the unique opportunity of co-producing and co-designing the platform itself in collaboration with an interdisciplinary community that is dedicated to responding to the specific demands of users. Thus, it is the only case for which the very design of the platform is under constant negotiation, opening up the discussion to a 'meta-deliberation' on how to implement and improve digital democracy. As introduced above, this turns *BComú* into a technopolitical project contrasting cyber-libertarian and cyber-populist approaches and carefully pursues the "reformist" approach of slowly introducing novel mechanisms into the institutional framework without vehemently disrupting it (as happens in the proceduralist party species) nor by relapsing into established norms and settings (as in the plebiscitary party).

Finally, *BComú's* aim is not to scale-up into a nation-wide party, but to scale-out, replicating its method of focusing on diverse local contexts and actors. Thus, the network 'rebel cities', the conference 'fearless cities' and the network 'cities for change' were inspired and mainly driven by *BComú* spreading out to various other European cities.

3.6 Concluding Remarks

In the introductory chapter, I put forward the hypothesis that the contemporary state of political parties can be depicted by "the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born" and that in this time of "interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (Gramsci, 1999: 556). Departing from a critical diagnosis as to why representative democracy is under severe pressure, Part I provided the main links between the paradigm shift in Modern Western democracies and contemporary party organization and the broad changes in societal structures, means of communication and organizational logics depicted by the network society (Castells, 2009) and particularly digitally-mediated participatory democracy within democratic institutions. Here, my intention was to provide a theoretical and interpretative framework composed of a variety of theoretical contributions to make sense of the phenomenon of *network parties* on a macro-scale. Essentially, my argument rests on the observation that shifts in socio-economic structures and ruptures in the political landscape evoke a regeneration and profound re-thinking of democratic institutions which are accompanied by the constant evolution and amelioration of digital technologies and DDDPs. These provide new means for enabling citizen participation which are absent from traditional 'weak' participatory mechanisms.

Following this argumentation, *network parties* induce a new democratic model and vehemently challenge the elementary concepts of political representation and participation on a macro-scale: The 'functionalist' sense (Pitkin, 1967) of representation undergoes major revisions towards enhanced mechanisms of ensuring responsivity of representatives, moving away from granting free mandate authority towards holding representatives accountable against an imperative mandate authority. Furthermore, *network parties* inherently question whether the stratification of party organs – and as a result professionalization and political elitism - is still historically appropriate when the availability of digital technologies provides new necessary means to control and motivate elected officials. Accordingly, the outdated relevance of the 'descriptive' sense of representation gives priority to the 'substantive' sense and the procedural primacy of political participation results in stressing input-legitimacy over output-legitimacy (Scharpf, 2000). From a bottom-up perspective, these ruptures point towards the emergence of necessary means of enabling citizen power (Arnstein, 1969) instead of tokenism [77].

Secondly, *network parties* are triggered by impactful social movements, laying the foundation for a new party model that transmits these narratives, infrastructures and practices into the heart of party organization. From an ideal-typical perspective, their vision, organization and practice contrast the characteristics of the electoralist

---

[77] To recall, Arnstein (1968) defines tokenism as "informing, consulting, placation" and citizen control as partnership, delegated power, citizen control.

party type, the contemporarily prevalent type in Western democracies. The reason for the decline of electoralist parties can be attributed to their catch-all mechanisms as well as cartelization in pursuit of political power at the expense of 'substantive' representation of the electorate.

Organizationally, the electoralist party has evolved from the mass party that provided the fertile ground for separating party-on-the-ground and party-in-public-office (Katz & Mair, 1995). As a result, *network parties* implicitly endorse and favour bottom-up 'deliberative intra-party' over 'aggregative intra-party democracy' alongside normative implications of rational-driven discourse that aims to achieve a well-balanced outcome of will-forming and political preferences. These conceptual considerations form the base for elaborating the hypothesis that digital technologies induce a new party model that aims at realizing the visions of digitally-mediated participatory democracy as a remedy for the crisis of representative democracy.

I substantiated this hypothesis empirically by analysing five examples of *network parties* with respect to their democratic vision, organizational infrastructure, intra-party democracy, accounts to political leadership, transparency, partisanship and campaigning, contrasting these variables with commonly acknowledged characteristics of the electoralist party. Despite these commonalities, *network parties* elucidate critical disparities when examining their evolutionary process more intimately. Accordingly, three species of *network parties* can be identified that follow a genealogical trajectory:

a. proceduralist parties, that are founded with a cyber-libertarian worldview, and prioritize digital participation and deliberative decision-making over substantive policymaking;
b. plebiscitary parties, that over time exhibit stark top-down tendencies where sovereignty on intra-party issues is dependent on individual representatives' decisions;
c. Municipalist parties, which by establishing and promoting the urban scale as a main political frame of reference take an intermediate path, including the wider citizenry into detection of policy preferences.

Interpreted through an ideal-typical approach that disregards socio-political idiosyncrasies, these three species can be interpreted as sequential and synergistic phases of digitally-mediated participatery democracy. After having proposed an interpretative framework, Part II will consist of a systematic comparison of paradigmatic cases of the three species of *network parties* elaborated so far to identify main conflicts of *network parties* in greater detail.

Chapter IV
Sub-types of *Network Parties*

The trajectory of this thesis moves from a broader discussion on the actual state of political parties within political theory and conceptualization of the *network party model* towards an empirical approach comparing three main case studies and their strategies towards the enhancement of intra-party democracy. Accordingly, the following chapter is an attempt to descriptively color the hypothesis that the emergence of *network parties*[78] can be understood as an extension of the digitally-mediated participatery democracy; a response to the crisis of representative democracy.

4.0 Structure of the Chapter

After drawing an ideal-typical *network party type* based on the party constitutions and programs that form the first basic conceptual framework for comparing future party organization in the previous chapter, in this chapter I firstly briefly tackle methodological considerations and lay out my research rationale. After - subsumed under the *network party family* - the following sections aim to develop a nuanced understanding of the *narratives*, *organizational repertoires* and *practices* of the three in-depth case studies.

Three different strategies, the proceduralist, the plebiscitary and Municipalist strategy will be interpreted as sub-types that embody differing approaches to the question of how 'parties can be democratized' and how party organization needs to be altered in order to meet the requirements of the *network society*.

---

78   In the course of the following chapter I will shift the object of investigation from political parties as objects under investigation (Objective 1) to the individuals (party members, spokespersons, experts) that project their individual meaning and significance (Objective 2) onto the body of the party and provide insights into the internal functioning of the cases.

4.1 Methodological Considerations

Opting for a qualitative research design inspired by political sociology and the ethnographic method of interpreting and contextualizing the considerations undertaken so far, the following chapter discusses the overall question how the case studies endorse different strategies to 'balance out' ambiguities and conflicts between *networked democracy* and institutional boundaries. After revisiting the research questions and main objectives of the study, it is crucial to address the methodological paradigm this dissertation is embedded in, and the choices made regarding data selection and analysis.

4.1.1 Hypotheses and Research Questions

Recapitulating the working hypotheses provided in the introduction, this thesis assumes that the new communication logics provided by digital technologies enable a novel party model which incorporates and realizes the potential of participatory democracy as a possible solution for the crisis of representative democracy. Having elaborated on these theoretical hypotheses in the previous chapters and defining the the *network party type*, the following empirical analysis seeks to investigate the following main research questions in a descriptive manner:

1. Which democratic vision and narrative do the case studies propose and how do these models seem to respond to their respective socio-political background and societal shifts of the 21st century?
   a. How do existing studies and academic contributions frame and contextualize the case studies?
   b. Which narratives can be identified by programmatic commitments and media coverage on the case studies?
2. How is the internal structure of the parties being (re)configured and how does this structure affect party organization at large?
   a. What are the different strategies provided by the case studies with respect to intra-party democracy, that is, the relationship between party-on-the-ground and party-in-(central and public)-office?
   b. How are political participation spaces designed and how are they interrelated? How are these spaces used, and do they prove persistence over time?
   c. Does the degree of intra-party democracy change over time, that is, does the iron law of oligarchy apply?
3. How are the respective DDDPs designed and how is their implementation perceived by the party-on-the-ground?
   In investigating the research questions descriptively, this thesis aims to identify relevant parameters and findings that identify and discuss the 'lessons learnt' and the 'success factors' of *network parties* in recurrence to the three dimensions vision,

organizational infrastructure and (digital) practice displayed by the RQs.

4.1.2 Research Design and Rationale

Political research has often adopted quantitative approaches in investigating party performances instead of aiming for broader explanatory theory-building (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967, van der Eijk, 2000). However, for considering the broader socio-political changes and "political opportunity structures" (Tarrow, 1998) that facilitated the emergence of *networked parties*, I have adopted a qualitative research design within a political sociological framework that will facilitate the exploration of democratic narratives and practices developed and deployed by *network parties* within their respective contexts.

Political ethnography: Baiocchi & Connor (2008) distinguish three areas in which political ethnography as a heuristic methodological instrument can extend the boundaries of existing political research: They distinguish studying "ethnographies of political actors and institutions", "encounters with formal politics" or "lived experience of the political" (ibid. 140). This thesis touches on all three branches but is primarily embedded within the second sense, "encounters with formal politics". Therefore, I specify this strand as the "study of routine encounters between people and those institutions and actors normally invisible in non-ethnographic ways (e.g., the encounter between organized social movements and nonparticipants; or the encounters with state bureaucracies or welfare agencies)" (ibid.). Political ethnography furthermore enables researchers to carry out "social research based on the close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do" (Wacquant, 2003: 5) [79]. The advantage of appropriating this strand is that it facilitates an understanding of "grey zones" of political activity (Auyero & Joseph, 2007) and the intersection of informal politics and the institutional space. Taking this approach allows one to develop an understanding of "how state, national, or global actions play themselves out on local stages" (Burawoy, 2000: 2).

Bearing in mind the diverse nature of the case studies under investigation and their different strategies, contexts and times, a qualitative approach is suitable for expanding theory. As such, "political ethnography provides privileged access to its processes, causes, and effects of broader political processes" (Tilly 2006: 410). In this sense, undertaking research within the political ethnographic context implies adapting qualitative, interview-based methods that emphasize individual experiences and

---

79 Political ethnography also stresses a "phenomenological logic" (Asara, 2015) of the events investigated opposed to positivist approaches used in natural sciences that aim to explain causality between "objectively" observed events.

meaning and enables to take a microscopic look at reasons and ideals that guide the subject's actions. Thus, I aimed at identifying the "subjective meaning" (Flick, 2009: 16) of the participants' experiences to include a variety of perspectives on narratives, organizational infrastructure and practices of the case studies. Hereby, political ethnography is particularly suited "to identify(ing) the causes, processes, and outcomes that are part and parcel of political life" (Auyero & Joseph, 2007: 2).

The Comparative Case Study: This thesis aims to investigate three case studies, the *Pirate Party Germany*, *Podemos* and *BComú*, that have asserted themselves in the political arena during the past few years, combining and encompassing different cultural and political contexts, periods and scope in their attempt to "transform" the institutions from within. This comparative case-study intends to provide a comprehensive summary of their strategies with regards to intra-party democracy, drawing on media contributions, existing academic literature and internal documents from the parties. Secondly, also within the comparative case study design, the subjective meaning and individual interpretations of participants will be sketched out based on a qualitative research design including semi-structured interviews. I use a multiple case study approach to investigate common narratives and practices of networked parties. The rationale to develop the comparative case study design is based on contributions in anthropology and political science (Eckstein, 1975; George, 1979) and the constructivist approach towards empirical research (Yin, 2002). According to Yin, a case study is an empirical inquiry that "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (ibid.: 13). Especially in answering how and why questions, the case study approach provides adequate results. Furthermore, this thesis aims to convey the contextual conditions relevant to the study so the stories of political actors and their views on reality can be linked to the broader perception of democratic narratives. The case study approach allows us to profoundly explore a complex system. However, the point in time chosen for the investigation did not allow for a longitudinal study [80].

In view of the fact that the topic under investigation has remained as yet under-explored, this investigation has been conducted in three phases. The phases also represent the evolution of the research questions and the structure of the dissertation.

Research Phases: The first phase of the investigation consisted mainly of a desk-study coupled with attendance at conferences and meetings of Barcelona en Comú. Since the phenomenon of the *network party* had barely been tackled in academic litera-

---

80 In 2016, the Pirate Party Germany was already in decline, accordingly, present research was only able to grasp subjective impressions retrospectively.

ture at the beginning of this research project (see della Porta et al, 2018 and Gerbaudo, 2018 as pioneering publications on the topic under investigation), the initial phase of the research period consisted of a thorough exploration of relevant literature on social movement theory, party politics and democratic theory. This exploratory approach towards the research topic helped me engage with "new problems on which little or no previous research has been done" (Brown, 2006: 43).

Since desk study and literature review "can even help in determining the research design, sampling methodology and data collection method" (Singh, 2007: 64) one part of the analysis consisted of the interpretation and contextualization of empirical studies, guided by the questions: How do existing studies about current political parties that enhance participatory democracy with the support of ICTs approach this phenomenon theoretically and empirically? And how do they contribute to a new model or type of political parties? For this endeavour, I analysed respective visions and narratives on how to 'democratize democracy', their internal organization, as well as commonalities and differences in participatory and deliberative processes including a description of the nature and implementations of the DDDPs employed.

In the fieldwork period set between June 2016 and July 2018, I conducted interviews with members of the party-on-the-ground to grasp subjective impressions on how the parties perform and how they deal with civil society and institutional boundaries. This aspect is of special importance since it facilitates the "analysis of how various models of party can be located in terms of the relationship between civil society and the state" (Katz & Mair, 1995: 5) and thus enriches the understanding of how *network parties* provide real alternatives in terms of organization and institutional ties compared to the preceding mass- and catch-all party models. Inherently, a special focus was put on the examination of deliberative and participatory processes that these parties pursue – physically and via DDDPs.

Research Methods: Within these two periods, I consulted existing academic literature to identify the relevant criteria that the typology of *networked parties* is based upon. Here, I collected and summarized publications from German-, English- and Spanish-speaking countries and furthermore included primary sources such as documents and texts from discussion boards of the parties, relevant interviews, programs and manifestos and communications received from mailing lists and statutes (Dolezal et al., 2014). Hereby, I made use of the "various ways of counting words, images, analogies, and contexts" (Krippendorff & Bock 2009: 2) and focused on the systematization and overall interpretation of the content of written documents. Two features can be distinguished from this process (Babbie, 2010): where the basic feature looks at the frequency of most used keywords, the advanced feature takes an explanatory and evaluative perspective by carrying out an in-depth analysis of democratic discourses.

Analyzing the party statutes played a key role in designing the *network party* type. Although statutes do not guarantee their implementation, they are the usual objects of investigation in analysing programmatic commitments and potential political

strategies (Emminghaus, 2003; Katz and Mair, 1995; Karasimeonov, 2005). Further-more, they can have "a socializing effect on actors who are active within the respective institution" (March & Olsen 1984: 948). Commenting on the party's performance (discourse of journalists about politics) were analysed to help gain an understanding of the transformative relevance given to these parties (Fetzer & Lauerbach, 2007: 15). Touching on political discourse analysis, media discourse reflects the "existential linkage" (Sarcinelli, 1998: 218) between civil society and the political realm. While the content of interviews with political actors represents dialogical speech and of-fers an opportunity to "discover actor-specific interpretations of situations and of the motives that guide their actions" (Hopf, 2012: 350), the latter sheds light on the wider context of society and takes the voices of "ordinary citizens" into consideration (Fetzer & Lauerbach, 2007: 15).

The main contribution of this thesis is its in-depth analysis describing the var-ious strategies endorsed by the case studies to 'balance out' between digitally-me-diated participatory democracy and representative institutional boundaries. The data obtained for this part mainly consists of semi-structured qualitative interviews with organizers, spokespersons, participants, as well as interviews with politicians from other parties and experts (see Appendix A) coupled with close study of secondary sources. As a complementary source for the content analysis, the data retrieved via these interviews offers a deeper understanding of the reasons and strategy behind the organization, and elicits individual perspectives on events and experiences (Creswell, 2007) within the paradigm of political ethnography. In particular, the retrospective analysis of the *Pirate Party Germany* is dependent on the subjective memory of the respondents since – at the time of the investigation – this party witnessed a steady decline in membership numbers and was not able to maintain electoral persistence.

For conducting semi-structured interviews, key informants were identified based on coded results after a first round of discourse analysis of official documents and snowball sampling. All respondents were asked to assess all three of the following variables:

- the framing of democratic vision and responses to the crisis of representative democracy,
- a description and evaluation of organizational structure and the role of digital infrastructures,
- a description and evaluation of the party's digital participatory practices, that is, in evaluating the implementation of the respective DDDP.

I interviewed 16 people in connection with the case studies, following a uni-form questionnaire (Appendix A) whereas three expert interviews were conducted to contextualize the findings. The experts were chosen from within three major groups: the media, academia, and the non-governmental sector. The interviews (between 45 and 90 minutes, depending on the interviewee) were recorded with the permission

of the respondent and key outcomes were fed back to the interviewee shortly after the meeting.

Case selection: The cases were chosen due to their electoral significance and their impact on the respective political context. As such, the *Pirate Party Germany* as first "Internet Party" (Dorn, 2011) achieved impressive electoral success in the general elections in 2009 and Berlin parliament elections in 2011. *Podemos* established itself as the third most-voted party in the General Elections of 2017, breaking the long-standing Spanish two-party-system. In contrast, *BComú* managed to enter government in Barcelona approximately one year after its foundation and additionally managed to maintain power in electoral terms. It also attained global media recognition by pushing forward the 'Municipalist hypothesis' which inspired various European cities and politicians. Due to these reasons, these case studies were selected to highlight diverging strategies in a multi-faceted manner with respect to the commonalities and overarching rationale of the network party type outlined in the previous chapter.

4.1.3 Concluding Remarks

This section has provided a brief overview of how digital technologies have altered different terrains of political engagement from early shifts brought about in the governmental space, to the cyber-activist realm that is best demonstrated by practices, organization and narratives of NSMs and – most interestingly for this dissertation – towards alterations of political party organization.

   With this preliminary outline of the main democratic ontologies the *network party* model is situated in, the following section revisits how digital technology and DDDPs translate the deliberative-participatory democratic paradigm into party organization. Thus, the following sections move from democratic theory (macro-level) to party types and intra-party democracy (meso-level). The following sections will descriptively introduce and analyse the case studies in greater detail before contextualizing and discussing relevant findings in Chapter 5.

4.2 Re-inventing intra-party democracy: The *Pirate Party Germany*

> „*The digital revolution brings humanity the opportunity of advancing democracy*" *and* „*enables completely new and previously unthinkable solutions for the distribution of power within a state.*"

> *(Pirate Party Germany, 2012)*

> "*The Pirates are pioneers, pioneers of a new quality of democracy*"

(Thomas Oppermann (SPD))

A thorough analysis of the *Pirate Party Germany* is instrumental in mapping the ideological origins of *network parties* because it provides blueprints of narratives and practices that have strongly influenced many of its successors. Founded in 2006, *Pirate Party Germany* was one of the early conceptions of a network party. Its sudden and steady rise raised challenges that are paradigmatic of the idiosyncrasies that underlie *proceduralist* sub-species of *network parties*. Given that the supposed distinguishing principles of *network parties* are deliberative-participatory democratic vision, permeable intra-party democracy and subversive (digital) practices, these variables are in need of an appropriate analysis.

To support this analysis, I conducted six interviews in the time span between June and October 2016. As mentioned earlier, my investigations into the *Pirate Party Germany* were carried out retrospectively after the steady decline of the party was already clearly observable, crystallized by its performance in the NRW elections of 2017.

This chapter is structured as follows: Firstly, I will address the broader historical and socio-political conditions that led to the emergence of the *International Pirate Party* [81] - most notably, the free and open software solutions (FOSS) movement that forms the ideological backbone of *Pirate Party Germany's* programme and democratic vision. I will then analyze the party's democratic narratives and contextualize the vision of a *Liquid Democracy* model based on the tentative framework developed in Chapter 2. The third section will describe the organizational set-up of the *Pirate Party Germany* and highlight the friction between the party-on-the-ground and the party-in-central-office by looking at a local branch of the German Pirates. In the final section of the chapter, I will focus on the digital platform *Liquid Feedback* (LQFB) and critically discuss its design and implementation.

4.2.1 Historical Background: From The Pirate Bay (TPB) to the NRW elections 2017

The Pirate Party Germany's foundation in 2006 was preceded by global debates on intellectual property and digital copyright. The transnational movement on Free and Open Source Software Solutions (FOSS) [82] formulated ideas on democratic digital

---

81 In the course of this chapter, I will refer to the *International Pirate Party* as an umbrella term for the 64 national Pirate Party groups from which 18 registered formally as political parties. Dobusch and Gollatz (2012) observe a double transnationality in the context of these parties, the common and shared name and their shared frames. Furthermore, two national *Pirate Parties* are of special interest for the discussions in this chapter: the Swedish *Piratpartiet* - that was the vanguard of the *International Pirate Parties* - and the *Pirate Party Germany* that succeeded outstandingly in electoral terms. To observe the nature of intra-party democracy, I will analyse the Berlin branch of the *Pirate Party Germany*.

82 In contrast to proprietary software and its restrictive commercialized use of source codes, the narratives and practices of the FOSS movement are based on the idea that software is open and free for anyone to modify, share

practises, heavily influencing the *International Pirate Party* - which then pioneered political programs based on principles of deliberative democracy and radical libertarian ideas of the hacker culture (Thomas, 2003). Thus, the ideological origins of the *Pirate Party Germany* cannot be understood by simply observing local conditions, but rather, by perceiving the *International Pirate Party* as a transnational phenomenon that is "carried by virtual communities" (Dobusch & Gollatz, 2012: 26).

Foundation of The Pirate Bay	November 2003
Foundation of *Pirate Party Sweden*	January 2006
Foundation of *Pirate Party Germany*	September 2006
General Elections 2009	September 2009
Elections Berlin parliament	September 2011
Elections NRW	May 2017

Table 3. Historical trajectory of the *Pirate Party Germany*

The *Pirate Party Germany* owes its birth in large parts to the relatively significant gains made by the *International Pirate Party* which capitalized on a growing hunger for fresh perspectives on societal transformations and novel themes [83]. Its relevance was emphasized by the growing use of digital communication, the question of reforming copyright laws in the information and network society era (Niedermayer, 2011) and the emergence of similar demands and thematic novelties that were programmatically not covered by other mainstream parties at that time. Thus, as highlighted by Burkart (2014), the foundation of the *Pirate Party Sweden* in January 2006 (Anderson 2009) can be depicted as a predictable "political response to some of the most fundamental conflicts in contemporary information society" (Fredriksson, 2015: 911).

---

and look at as well as to openly access its source code. The FOSS movement is an umbrella term for dispersed but interrelated actors and practices. Most famously, it can be traced back to Richard Stallman and the UNIX affair: An attempt to secure the copyright protection for UNIX (Wayner, 2000) contrasting the practice of software developers and scientists to freely share and modify the source code, led to the rise of the Free Software Foundation and the alternative copyright license GNU. The increasing prominence of associated projects such as the branding „copyleft", the Linux kernel, Wikipedia, Mozilla Firefox and Thunderbird was followed by theoretical and philosophical underpinnings applying the FOSS ideas to new economic models. Most prominently, Yoachim Benkler employed a "commons-based peer production" (Benkler, 2006) as a new economic paradigm of the 21st century that entails transformations in terms of production from physical goods to information goods and in terms of communication from centralized to distributed and interconnected approaches.

83 The historical consolidation of the Green parties in the German political landscape, for instance, can be immediately traced back to a growing interest in environmental politics and peace mobilizations that were not represented by any of the political parties at that time.

Compared to other European countries [84], the availability of broadband and online based peer-to-peer file sharing sites was high in Sweden, which turned it into a battleground for the digital copyright debate (Bartels, 2012: 17ff). [85] Three major consequences of these public debates paved the way for the foundation of the *Pirate Party Sweden*. Firstly, the implementation of the EU enforcement directive 2004/48/ EC (IPRED) which strengthened the legislative framework against file-sharing in Sweden (Bartels, 2012: 18), leading to a wide range of conflicting views on this legislation. Secondly, the harsh prosecution of illegal up- and download as well as high penalties for sharing and exchanging protected material sparked and enlivened the 'free-copy culture' and concordant manifestations such as the think-tank *Piratbyran*.

Founded in 2003, this bureau was formed as a response to the perceived criminalization of citizens at the behest of the content industry. As an ideological and personnel predecessor of the *Pirate Party Sweden, Piratbyran* created a critical movement by uniting the Swedish hacker scene and the Internet Broadcasting community (Miaoran Li, 2009). As such, *Piratbyran* describes itself as followed:

> *"Piratbyrån is not an organization, at least not primarily. First and foremost, Piratbyrån has been since its beginning in 2003 an ongoing conversation. We are reflecting over questions regarding copying, information infrastructure and digital culture. Within the group, [we are] using our own different experiences and skills, as in our daily encounters with other people. These conversations often bring about different kinds of activities" (Miegel & Olsson, 2008: 207).*

Thirdly and subsequently, the online knowledge sharing platform *The Pirate Bay (TPB)* was founded. After police raids in May 2006 against TPB, massive street protests and international mobilizations broke out, sparking international media coverage on digital piracy. The conflicts around the take-down of the Swedish TPB in 2006 can indeed be perceived as a trigger moment for the emergence of the *International Pirate Parties*. After the raids, the Pirate Party Website went live. According to the liberal politician Rick Falkvinge, the website is commonly acknowledged as the *Swedish Pirate Party* manifesto. Accordingly, the *Swedish Pirate Party* was initially founded to "fundamentally reform copyright law, get rid of the patent system, and [ensure] that citizens' rights to privacy are respected." (*Piratpartiet*, 2009; from Li, 2009).

Despite their popularity and rapid growth, the *Pirate Party Sweden* was not able to immediately establish itself in institutional politics. Although membership numbers grew rapidly in the aftermath of the police raids of May 2006, this national mobilization did not congruously translate into electoral success. In the national elections

---

84 According to an estimation by GfK 8/2000, in the year 2000, already 40% of Sweden's population had Internet access. For comparative reasons, in Germany, at that time, only 18% of the population had access to the Internet.
85 In 2001, an anti-piracy bureau supported by the US Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) was founded to develop strategies for improving the legislation of the "weak" Swedish copyright law.

in 2006, the *Piratpartiet* obtained only 0.64% of the votes and was consequently not able to enter parliament. [86]

The agenda of the *International Pirate Party* was inherently limited to libertarian values of self-expression against any form of internet bans or filters,[87] but subsequently developed a transnational agenda that was able to change the image of the party from a single issue party focused on file-sharing to "a credible alternative in national politics" (Frederiksson, 2015: 912) that gave an electoral voice to the free culture movement (Jääsaari & Hilden, 2015). In line with this, Dobusch and Gollatz (2012) persuasively demonstrate the importance of understanding the *International Pirate Party* as an intersectional phenomenon between the transnational movement and local manifestations. Their study compares global narratives with the local operationalization processes of national branches (Dobusch & Gollatz, 2012) and observes that 64 national chapters shared certain core themes from copyright law, institutional transparency and civic participation, to promoting policies on individual liberty and civil rights whilst simultaneously tailoring political programmes to the respective national political context and socio-economic challenges.

The *Pirate Party Germany* emerged during this re-organization as a pioneer in adopting and translating the digitally-mediated participatory democracy into party organization - in both procedural and substantive terms. This was a response to the decisions and policy proposals emanating from debates on information policy, the proposal for a directive on the patentability of computer-implemented inventions and the reforms of copyright law and data security (Löblich & Wendelin, 2012). In 2009, the German government passed a controversial law on child-pornography that sparked public debates on privacy and security [88]. As an effect, the *Pirate Party Germany's* publicity rose rapidly, and membership numbers increased to 10,000 within one year. The party consequently gained 2% of the vote in the national elections the same year. 13% of the voters were first-time voters. By August 2012, the *Pirate Party Germany* had 34.322 members and was the seventh largest party at the time. The peak of their electoral success came in 2011, where the party's Berlin branch obtained 8.7% of the votes and entered the local government. From the 15 representatives elected, 14 were males and only one was female. The unexpected result received diverse reactions from members of the government who acknowledged the need to translate narratives and

86 The aggressive prosecution of copyright infringement culminated in a court case against four developers of TPB in 2009. Public discontent (50% against IPRED) towards the implementation of IPRED before its official verdict resulted in widespread public support for TPB and thus led to a revival of the Swedish Pirate Party, which obtained two seats in the European parliament the same year. This upsurge paved the way for the success of the transnational claims of the *International Pirate Party*. Accordingly, the concept and ideas of the Pirate Party spread among different countries leading to the foundation of 64 national branches.
87 From an ideological perspective, the *International Pirate Parties*, and the *Pirate Party Germany* in particular, and its claims for the reformation of copyright law are connected to the wider cultural "internet" movement entailing the FOSS movement and the sharing knowledge economy (Kron, 2012).
88 The so-called »Zensursula«-debate, initiated by Ursula von der Leyen, (former) Minister for Families (Federal Ministry for Families, Seniors, Women and the Youth), to facilitate the blocking of Websites.

practices of the network society into the institutional realm:

> *"We should not underestimate this particular situation: the Pirates are the first who acknowledged that the Internet is a revolution [...]. It is not so much about the Pirates, it is about the fundamental transformation in communication structures that will be brought about through the Internet and social media"* [89]

However, within the following five years, the *Pirate Party Germany* witnessed a steady decline in membership numbers, diminishing popularity and the resignations of popular figures such as prominent member Marina Weisband and Martin Delius, partly attributed to the disappointing outcome of the 2017 elections in Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW) [90]. The party hit rock bottom in the Berlin elections of 2017 in which the *Pirate Party Germany* only gained 1,7% of the vote share.

The history and lessons derived by the rise and fall of the *Pirate Party Germany* serve as a crucial point of reference in discussions about how cyber-libertarian values, innovations on digital deliberation and decision-making, and an "ideologically-free" approach challenge political party forms and organization. This case is remarkable due to the complexity of internal and external factors that hastened the party's decline, propelling it into its contemporary insignificance.

But what are the reasons for this development? What are the frictions between the nature of this party and the constraints of the institutional realm? In the course of this chapter I want to expound and substantiate how and why the *Pirate Party Germany* fell short on providing adequate solutions for 'balancing out' their radical visions and external politico-institutional demands.

4.2.2 Democratic Vision: Cyber-libertarian Imprint and Permanent Decision-making

As described in the previous section, the *Pirate Party Germany's* vision of democracy is embedded in the historical and ideological development of the FOSS movement which espoused political transparency, open access and equal share in the design and use of technological infrastructures. Furthermore, the democratic proposal of the *Pirate Party Germany* is deeply interwoven with the concept of *Liquid Democracy*, which represents not only a new democratic method but also a new democratic model, aimed at merging the deliberative-participatory paradigm with the representative one. In the following section, I will place these normatively laden implications in the overarching discourse on the deliberative-participatory democratic paradigm and digitally-mediated participatory democracy outlined in Chapter 2.

---

89 Peter Altmeier in the documentary "Alles Liquid?" Retrieved from https://netzpolitik.org/2012/alles-liquid-ein-jahr-unter-politik-piraten/ [Last accessed: 08.11.2020]
90 Nordrhein-Westfalen is the third most populated state and largest in size in Germany and thus crucial in predicting outcomes in the General elections.

Liquid Democracy: The *Pirate Party Germany's* democratic vision is best summarized as an attempt to exploit the Internet's potential to design political procedures centred around reforming intra-party democracy and enabling the permanent and collective co-creation of programmatic content (Miller, 1969). The promotion of *permanent citizen decision-making* is of utmost importance within *network parties*. It is manifested in the *Liquid Democracy* [91] model, which is implemented technically via the online platform *Liquid Feedback (LQFB)*.
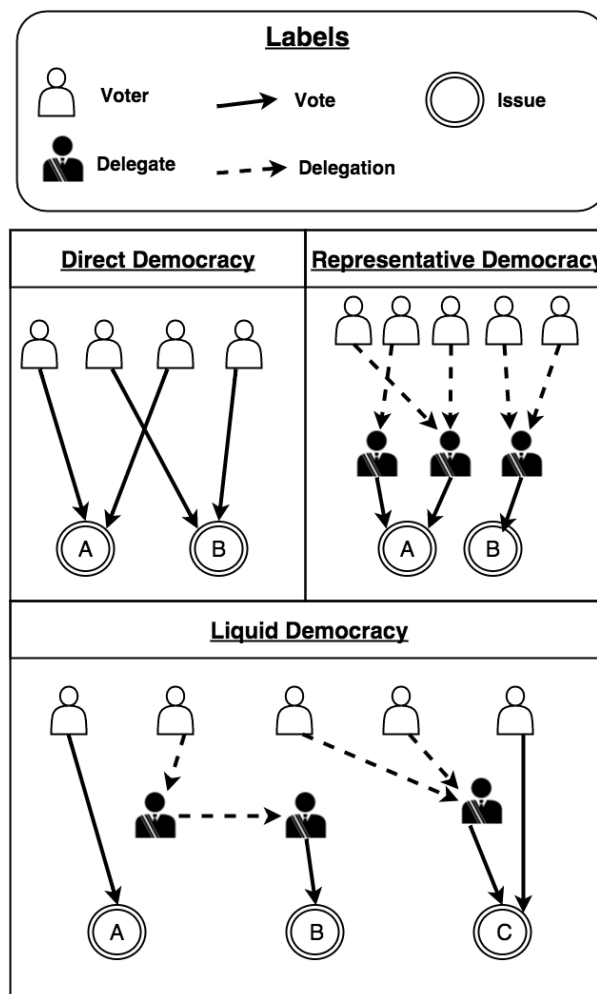
Figure 4. Basic Structure of Liquid Democracy

Liquid Democracy allows members [92] to a) propose an idea or topic and b) to vote

---

91 It is important to note that the very basics of *Liquid Democracy* reach back to the beginning of the 21st century, when the concept of proxy-voting coincided with the idea of delegative democracy (Buck, 2012: 627).

92 If I speak about participants, I refer to the members of the *Pirate Party Germany* in the course of this chapter, however, in the abstract version, Liquid Democracy does not have to be limited to party organization. Accordingly,

against or in favour of any topic or c) if they choose to delegate their vote to someone they trust [93] after having informed themselves on the issue at stake. How does this model relate to the two democratic ontologies outlined in Chapter 2?

The *Liquid Democracy* model can be interpreted as a hybrid between the deliberative-participatory and the representative model of democracy. It normatively presupposes the necessity of granting equal sovereignty to members so they may participate in the agenda-setting and decision-making activities of the party (Blum & Zuber, 2016).

The liquid model of political decision-making procedures principally derive its participatory legitimacy from allowing each member to assert their interests in an equal fashion. This approach of input-legitimacy (Scharpf, 2000) is a crucial transformative ingredient of *Liquid Democracy* against the dominance 'outcome-legitimacy' (appraising policies rather than constructing them) within representative democracy. The direct-participatory sense is explained by the fact that every member is given the opportunity to create proposals to vote on any one issue brought forward by fellow members. By giving members the opportunity to bring their own ideas to the community vote system, network parties have incorporated a rationality-driven method in the liquid model of democracy, presupposing an informed and reasoned choice by both, initiators and voters (in favour of or against). This raises the level of "control" (Arnstein, 1969) exercised by participants in this process. Consequently, since priority is given to the individual's freedom to choose amongst the options brought forward in the voting process, the *Pirate Party Germany* presents itself as a "hands-on party" in which any individual is encouraged to present their own ideas as 'expert citizens'.

Thus, the *Liquid Democracy* model implemented in the vision of the *Pirate Party Germany* is inherently aligned with the principles of deliberative democracy, because the discursive element with regards to the voting options available is prefigured in LQFB. To recall Chapter 2, over the last decade, the deliberative democratic model has witnessed increasing popularity within the academic discourse around participatory politics. While the normative discussion among deliberation scholars outweighs attempts to descriptively analyze deliberative procedures in an instrumental way (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004), a growing body of literature connects deliberative theory with online decision-making platforms (Borge & Santamaria, 2016). The implementation of the "deliberative element" is usually linked with two normative ground premises: The first premise entails the notion that deliberation aims to create rational debate outcomes through an exchange of arguments that are inter-subjectively comprehensive. The second premise rests on the idea that deliberation nurtures inclusion

---

participants can also include the wider citizenry and any members of a system that follows this democratic model.
93 Proxy-voting depicts the opportunity of the participants to freely choose if they propose and vote on any topic directly or to delegate their vote to someone they trust (to know more about the issue at stake). by encompassing four properties: direct democracy, flexible delegation, meta-delegation, and instant recall. Footnote: The values inherent to Liquid Democracy in its original formulation (Miller, 1969) are: Transitivity of the votes, no specific target groups, transparency of the votes, scalability, accessibility, anonymity in voting habits and easy usability

of party members in the decision-making process. Inclusion is to be understood as a necessary condition in establishing substantive political equality, enabling citizens to make use of their participation opportunities (see Buck, 2012: 632).

From the standpoint of *Liquid Democracy*, the power to influence the party's programme in an iterative and constant process; to create short-term representatives; and to intervene in decision-making processes of the party's representatives blurs the distinctions between representatives and members. *Liquid Democracy* thus questions 'descriptive' and reshapes 'substantive' representation anew. The ability to delegate the vote prioritizes content or the representation of interests over individual or 'resembling' characteristics of representatives and, as a result, gives power to the party-on-the-ground over the party-in-central. The aspect of "permanent" citizen decision-making also stresses the *Pirate Party Germany's* procedural character: The reform of the institutional system does not consist of a replacement of individuals but instead of novel procedures to create a new democratic quality.

Proponents of the model of *Liquid Democracy* furthermore argue that provisional trust might create responsibility and a sense of accountability for delegates, since (in the version of LQFB), delegates are aware of the votes they have amassed and are aware of the responsibility they carry. To maintain the trust shown, delegates would eventually opt for the best decision for the group to maintain their status instead of pursuing their own interest.

The ambiguous nature of transparency: A core narrative of "open source" politics relates to the matter of transparency (see section 3.3.3). In a member survey from 2011, Tobias Neumann observed that 58.4% of the members cited their desire for transparency in politics as the main reason for joining the party (Neumann, 2011: 124). As I showed in Chapter 2, the overall rationale of transparency is intertwined with the demand for citizen participation, the prevention of corruption in administration and the protection of 'whistleblowers' (*Pirate Party Germany*, 2015).

However, as has been pointed out, competing and poorly articulated interpretations of 'transparency' resulted in conceptual ambiguities, leading to "constant debates and misunderstanding among party members" (Marktanner, 2012: 8). Within the *Pirate Party Germany,* these interpretations produced discourses related to: 1) Transparent communication of intra-party affairs and political processes; 2) Transparency of subjective opinion-forming and individual voting behaviour; 3) Exo-transparency through open discussion about these issues on social media, in particular, Twitter.

The first - transparency of political processes – deals with issues of documenting meetings, as well as the question of whether live-streams or protocols of internal assemblies need to be made accessible to the public. This issue gained prominence when the first representatives of the *Pirate Party Germany* entered state parliaments. Pavel Mayer, the party representative in Berlin, stated that "(t)ransparency does not mean to publish political processes at a certain time but to provide constant access

to relevant information" (Brüning, 2011/Morgenpost). This point of view opposes the prevailing practices of keeping internal strategies and frictions secret (see section 3.3.3) based on the assumption that not every piece of information on meetings needs to be shared, nor controversies be discussed publicly. This has been retrospectively affirmed by other prominent figures of the *Pirate Party Germany* (Weisband, 2016; Interview, P7).

The second conception of transparency - the defence of the free-mandate over the imperative mandate - reflects the porous boundaries of the private and public realms: On the one hand, the Berlin branch urged their representatives to be "transparent parliamentarians" (Brüning, 2011/Morgenpost) that ought to share information about daily activities; to publish individual calendars and documents and confidential information [94]. However, representatives felt this blurred the line between transparency and privacy as their personal life came to be interpreted in political terms. Some participants thus criticized the "ideology" behind making everything public (Interview, P2) and pointed out that if the decisions of representatives were criticised by others, public shaming on Twitter and the punishment system of 'shitstorms' would render personal consequences for them:

> *"The shitstorm was our check-and-balance-system. There were no official measures. It was like that, you knew you would be screwed if you did not explain your decision" (Interview, P2).*

The emotional charge of these grievances is expressed by an interviewee who speaks of opening important debates to a "totally stupid, un-filtered public" (Interview, P1). These mixed conceptions of transparency within the *Pirate Party Germany's* discourse were rooted in a critical discussion of the notion of "openness" shaped by cyberlibertarian and hacker's ideology. Finally, the transparent discussion of these topics on open communication infrastructures – Twitter, in particular - is cited as a major reason for the party's decline.

The Anti-ideological Discourse of the *Pirate Party Germany*: Besides clear support for civil rights, citizen participation and transparency, there was little consensus within the party in terms of the general programmatic and ideological course of the *Pirate Party Germany*. Where Sebastian Nerz (Nerz, 2011) defines the party as a "social-liberal" party, others envisioned it as a left-libertarianism project. Lacking a predefined ideology and the blurring of boundaries between the left/right axis was seen by many as a major advantage in the early phases of Party's inception because it unified disparate groups, giving them the opportunity to "fill (ideological) empty spaces and define them slowly and over time" (Interview, P2). This was perceived as a

---

94 Also acknowledge the impact of initiatives such as abgeordnetenwatch.de that received popular attention at that time: https://www.abgeordnetenwatch.de/ [Last accessed: 03.11.2019]

better method of building a political program from the ground up rather than analysing political realities through the lens of the antiquated left/right dogmas. However, the lack of ideology turned out to be a dilemma as soon as the membership numbers increased to substantial levels. The need for an ideology was urgent and "(…) found a fertile ground but at the same time was initiated and guided by people who exactly knew what ideology means" (Interview, P1).

A clear rift took place between "kernies" (Interview, P2) who stipulated that the party converted Internet- and FOSS-related content and members who aimed to use the procedural rationale of *Liquid Democracy* to expand the party programme so it would fill policy gaps in health, education etc. As soon as topics such as the unconditional basic income [95] and gender politics were discussed, internal rifts emerged. [96] Regarding these substantial issues, the contradictions within non-ideological participatory models espoused by the party became most apparent. [97]

4.2.3 Organizational Architecture and Intra-party Democracy

Retrospectively, the intra-party democratic project of the *Pirate Party Germany* was seen as "revolutionary" (Pirate Party Germany, 2010) but equally criticized for embracing debilitative democratic positions in which it was not able "to see the party-base because of too much democracy" (Interview, P2). In its organization set-up, the mandate to avoid the creation of hierarchies laid down in the party structures is crucial to understanding the intra-party project the *Pirate Party Germany* aimed to establish. Recalling the dichotomies of Chapter 4, this party aimed to implement strategies that contrasted starkly with the vertical structure of the representative party. The following sections will elaborate on these characteristics.

Political Partisanship Reformulated: Helen Margetts described how the advent of digital party politics blurred the ontological lines between party members and affiliates (Margetts, 2001; 2006). This tension, she asserted, lay at the heart of cyber party organisation. Recalling her work, we observe that the adaptation of *Liquid De-*

---

95 Perspectives on the „Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen" (unconditional basic income) was a major topic in public debates during that time. *The Pirate Party Germany* was amongst the first parties that got to grips with that issue.

96 Interestingly, the programmatic commitments tried to follow a simple participation and low-threshold logic. All programmatic points developed in specific fields should increase participation and access to public services. The "free access" ideology was thus translated from a digital and copyright-based background to a political programme.

97 A peak of this paradox was the case of a Pirate member that denied the Holocaust from a revisionist perspective and declared it as a false state doctrine (Interview, P3). The subsequent discussion on how to engage with statements of this kind exhibited an ideological division between members between defenders of open unfiltered public debate versus defenders of anti-fascist worldviews (Interview P3). This situation vividly pictures the problematic consequences of undefined ideologies and hints on the impossibility of defining "openness" as an ideology itself within the politico-institutional context. The intended transformation of a niche-party or single-issue party centring on the main topic of digital politics towards a solid actor was thus not successful due to the very dilemma of "openness".

mocracy for intra-party decision-making within *Pirate Party Germany* adds credence to her work. Adapting *Liquid Democracy* to the logics of electoralist party government resulted in severe tensions as adjusting the model of *Liquid Democracy* automatically re-iterated and challenged the organizational model of the electoralist party. Within the democratic vision of the *Pirate Party Germany*, representatives and central party organs such as the committee and party board were perceived as an administrative body, as 'facilitators', rather than decision-making organs. Accordingly, members of the party-in-central-office, the party-in-public-office and the party-on-the-ground were not easily distinguishable (Zolleis et al. 2010: 22). This was illustrated by the party's ground rule that any member could participate and had the right to speak publicly and to present proposals in an equal fashion.

Secondly, the methods used to bolster inclusivity represent a widespread tendency towards decentralizing internal party affairs: The main channel for disseminating and retrieving relevant information was the *Pirate Party Germany*'s Wiki and the communication platform Twitter. Both platforms were meant to facilitate non-hierarchical discussion and collaboration. The primacy given to transparency made all communications and information available to decision-makers as well as ordinary party members. In this context, Birgit Rydlewski concludes that because of the public nature of most platforms "basically no 'internal communication' of the Pirate Party is guaranteed" (Rydlewski, 2012: 12). With regard to partisanship, the *Pirate Party Germany* thus strictly followed what I have depicted above as 'permeable' membership. Opening internal communication channels to society at large by including non-members was an invitation to the wider citizenry to participate in transparent decision-making processes. Furthermore, by placing great significance on DDDPs for organizing intra-party democracy, classical internal communication patterns were consequently altered to "many-to-many" - oriented communication patterns (Zolleis et al., 2010: 19).

This permeable paradigm follows the normative claim that "loose participants" (Boyd & Ellison, 2008: 170) are more dynamic and flexible in contributing to the party's development. According to this argument, they should be privy to party communications because they could contribute with their expertise, enrich discussions and improve the quality of decision-making processes. Thus, the two factors: the blurring of distinctions between party-on-the-ground and party-in-(central)and(public)-office and the inclusion of "loose participants", is an attempt to adjust the political party form to the communication logics of the Internet (Lewitzki, 2011) and decentralised and horizontal structures of mass-self communication (Castells, 2009).

Organs of the party-on-the-ground: As already shown, the *Pirate Party Germany* turned down a delegation system for general assemblies. Accordingly, every member was encouraged to directly participate in the general and local assemblies and to avail themselves of the opportunity to vote (online) directly on any issue. This was com-

plemented by the discussion on the "permanent assembly" [98], meaning a continuous participation process that allows for steady binding decisions through online voting. [99] Although the proposal of the "permanent assembly" missed the necessary two-third majority for effective implementation on the nation-wide level, it illustrates how the *Pirate Party Germany* as a proceduralist *network party,* gravitated to input-legitimacy as its main aim.

Organizationally, arranging the party-on-the-ground within the *Pirate Party Germany* was (despite LQFB) realized physically by the creation of two distinct main cells, so-called 'squads' and 'crews' that, compared to traditional party branches, are marked by low thresholds for participation. 'Squads' were loosely connected teams of individuals who convened to develop specific thematic topics. Loosely structured 'crews' stood for autonomous and self-organized "decentralized dynamic working groups", "substituting the rigid organization of district associations in established parties" (Pirate Party Germany (Berlin), 2009). 'Crews'[100] operated as physical interfaces between 'squads' as nationwide thematic groups and the local party-on-the-ground as facilitators of regular face-to-face meetings (Odenbach, 2012: 80). Organizationally, 'crews' were led by a "captain" and a coordinator to facilitate meetings and moderate the debates. However, they were expected to avoid the pitfalls of traditional decision-making power.

Particularly, the first interpretation of transparency plays a crucial role in the implementation of 'crews' since every crew generally claimed to be inclusive, inviting comments and proposals from the wider public (Interview, P2). Every 'crew' had to feed and maintain its own wiki where protocols were being published. Thus, the concept of 'squads' and 'crews' reflects both, the attempt to set up the party-on-the-ground on low-threshold, open and transparent principles, and a high degree of fragmentation and informational hierarchies. Regarding the latter, as has been observed of Berlin party members, the absence of a central communication channel

---

98 The „permanent assembly" is an idea proposed in 2012 as an expansion of the party statute to allow the party-on-the-ground to take decisions independent of the general assembly. In this procedure, topics should initially be debated in detail online. Voting will then take place either online, which should be the normal case for factual issues, or by secret ballot, which will be obligatory for elections of persons. The decisions taken are binding and are equal to those of federal party congresses. Only for decisions which the law expressly reserves to the party congress, e.g. amendments to the statutes and elections to the executive board, does the voting result of the basic survey only have a „recommending character" (resolution of the Pirate Party, see: https://wiki.piratenpartei.de/SN:St%C3%A4ndige_Mitgliederversammlung [Last accessed: 09.01.2020]). This recommendatory character also applies to resolutions that clearly contradict the valid party programme. Votes should be held every four weeks. However, there will be no binding online party conferences. The initiative for this form of „permanent online general meeting" just missed the required two-thirds majority.

99 For civic purposes, content was visible to the public. However, to participate, members need to create a personal account after receiving an invitation from the party to send proposals, discuss them and vote either directly or by delegation according to the Liquid Democracy model. Retrieved from: https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/staendige-mitgliederversammlung-piraten-draengen-auf-mitmach-revolution-a-887728.html [Last accessed: 03.09.2020].

100 The group size was commonly limited to five to nine members. In the case of a rapid growth in member numbers, the crew will be split up.

hindered a steady and equally distributed information flow, undermining the deliberative paradigm of guaranteeing informed decision-making.

The issue of scalability: The question of how to scale-up this organizational configuration has been decisive for the *Pirate Party Germany's* malfunctions regarding the implementation of LQFB, leading to its electoral collapse. Transparent and dynamic structures that operated successfully in the phase of incubation proved not to be sustainable over time. Accordingly, the rapid growth of membership numbers appeared to be a disadvantage to the established intra-party dynamics depicted above. On the small scale, establishing the systems of 'crews' and 'squads' was feasible but these structures collapsed as party membership grew and it entered parliamentary institutions in Berlin and NRW:

> *"There was suddenly a bunch of people that wanted to participate and do something. The rest of us were in the parliament or active on the national level. So, we asked ourselves how to channel that. We tried to give them something useful to do, otherwise we knew they would not come back. We were totally overwhelmed"* (Interview, P5).

Flat hierarchies and decentralized organisation – the main intention behind the establishment of 'crews' and 'squads' - attracted considerable numbers of active members as well as 'casual' non-members and ordinary citizens to participate. However, this set-up did not prioritize 'output-legitimacy' of deliberative spaces and was subsequently interpreted as "intended chaos" (Interview P4) that exhibited a cyber-libertarian imprint of combating any structures at any cost. As an active member observes:

> *"From the beginning, we actively fought against structures. We wanted to implement a loosely organized, diffuse network that would regulate itself."* (Interview, P4)

As described above, the 'crews' and 'squads' themselves did not follow a basic set-up, planned structure or even a formulated goal and suffered from anachronistic information flows between LQFB and information overload, which was one reason identified for the critical decline in the number of members participating in these spaces (Interview P1). Similarly, the absence of joint informational channels resulted in an information-overload and a rise in lethargy among the average members. Additionally, the lack of a solid communication structure fostered internal controversies and whole crews collapsed due to the hostile behaviour of some members (Interview P4). These controversies highlight the results of conceptual inconsistencies in issues of representation, participation, internal power-dynamics, competencies and decision-making structures (Hensel-Klecha, 2013).

On the other hand, the 'crews' and 'squads' provided a space for face-to-face interaction and the foundation for trust between the party members. When the physical meeting spaces slowly diminished, some criticised the lack of hybridity and the primacy of online participation. These structural disagreements were compounded by high thresholds for binding decisions within the groups:

> *"We tried to achieve consensus, but this was not possible. Mostly, we decided to vote according to the majority rule. But deciding based on majorities eliminates perspectives" (Interview, P1).*

As described in Chapter 2, these observations are not novel. They are prevalent in participatory governance criticism where discussions on the pitfalls of participatory democracy regularly touch upon the danger of excluding minorities.

Moreover, the issue of scalability – which manifested itself during the organization of the general assemblies - was also perceived to be highly controversial by members. At the second assembly around 30.000 party members filed roughly 700 requests - an overwhelming number of issues to tackle during a physical party assembly. As one member observes, the rapid rise in numbers spread suspicion and discord among groups:

> *"When we were suddenly 30.000 members, the whole infrastructure collapsed. What was working perfectly with 3000, was not manageable on this scale. It led to personal wars. Nobody knew who these members were, what kind of ideology they had, their values. Additional flaws in the communication flows made the whole system break down" (Interview, P2).*

In addition, the lack of clear communication and information dissemination channels facilitated the collapse of crews and squads:

> *We had pads, we had the wiki, email-lists and twitter, the communication was highly dispersed and chaotic. Everyone had their favourite tool where important decisions were made, and every day, dozens of parallel structures emerged. Which is not bad per se if we would have had a central interface, but we had none" (Interview, P2).*

This wide array of unsynchronized communication tools precluded a selective and un-channelled information flow between 'crews' and 'squads' and LQFB. Assembly participants were frustrated by the lack of feedback on how the content work of their group was progressing, and this complaint extended to the general communication culture within the *Pirate Party Germany*.

The rigid narrative of general openness prevented the implementation and adaptation of nuanced structures over existing ones and hindered the party from 'learning

from its mistakes'. The high standards of strong deliberative-participatory methods proved to be a stumbling-block. Members believed that the substitution of 'crews' and 'squads' would be a hazard to the ideal of equal citizen participation (Interview P4). Yet, it was the incompetency of these structures that many members found too off-putting to engage with.

The absence of filter-mechanisms: The permeable approach to membership admission and participation is retrospectively acknowledged by many as a crucial contributor to the decline of the *Pirate Party Germany*. As one member summarizes: "If you open the party to anyone, don't be surprised if idiots come" (Interview, P1). Since no controlling or penalty mechanisms were in place, the content of contributions could not be surveyed and directed, which led to "destructive, irritating elements" (ibid.). When scaling up in membership numbers, this negative trend became clearly visible:

> *"In less than one year, the membership numbers of the Pirate Party tripled. That led to problems: Everyone was expecting too much and something different from the programmatic content which first needed to be developed. Anyone could talk with either constructive and - as demonstrated in numerous twitter-wars – less constructive contributions" (Interview, P3).*

Additionally, because of the ideological vacuum within the *Pirate Party Germany,* paranoia seeped into the membership: "nobody knew who these new people were, if they were right-wing or left-wing, and what hidden agenda they pursued within the party" (Interview, P2). The mix of rising membership numbers, lack of ideological identity and the rigid fixation on openness and horizontality led to the implosion of structures and divorced discursive elements from actual experience of membership. Thus, one interviewee cynically recalls the friction between the rhetoric of openness and decentralization and the lack of existing structures:

> *"The biggest advantage of the Pirates were the low thresholds. Anyone could participate. At the same time, the biggest disadvantage of the Pirates were the low thresholds. ANYONE could participate." (Interview, P4)*

As I elaborated in Chapter 3, political communication in *electoralist* parties is traditionally channelled through selective procedures and feedback loops between local branches and federal or state levels (see Chapter 2). Contraposing this organizational infrastructure, the *Pirate Party Germany* intended to create loose bottom-up networks that were organized around topics or locations. These crews and squads were autonomously created nodes with their own goal and structure. A certain "whoever is doing it, is right" mentality (Interview, P2) aimed at favouring the autocracy of the individuals and supporting their own responsibility in creating political structures. However, this meant that anyone could participate anywhere about anything, leading

to factionalism and growing frustrations with the organizational structures of the party. This ultimately compromised the institutional success of the party.

The next section explores the perceptions of members on the use and implementation of the digital organizational heart of the *Pirate Party Germany*: the online decision-making platform *Liquid Feedback*.

4.2.4 (Digital) practices: Structure and implementation of LQFB

Academic and scientific literature on *Liquid Democracy* and LQFB has recently concentrated on selected areas and projects of application, mostly examining whether practical projects meet the normative requirements of deliberative standards (Adler, 2018: 77)[101]. Here, I want to focus on the implementation of LQFB in the *Pirate Party Germany* and Berlin guided by the questions of how LQFB a) managed to translate the desideratum of participatory-deliberative democracy into party organization and b) which dilemmas emerged in the course of the implementation process. After a thorough conceptual exploration and theoretical grounding on how to technically translate *Liquid Democracy*[102], LQFB was introduced in the Berlin branch in 2010 and was thereafter implemented in the other German counties during the following year. Predominantly, LQFB was conceived was designed to put the democratic model of *Liquid Democracy* into practice and support the internal decision-making process of the *Pirate Party Germany*[103].

Structure of LQFB: In its basic structure, LQFB displays classical features of DDDPs that allow for open debate on thematic issues and voting mechanisms. To give an impression of the design of LQFB, Figure 5 displays the arrangement of discussion threads on the BGE within the *Pirate Party Berlin*.

---

101 A wide range of case studies also tackle the use of LQFB in the Italian context (see Bertone et al., 2015).

102 The topic of translating deliberative and decision-making features into an online platform can be traced back through various working groups: In May 2009, the group "decentralized assembly" was founded. In the summer the same year, a Berlin squad, in July, the group "democracy" and in October a nation-wide "coordination group LD" followed. The foundation of the Liquid Democracy e.V. in summer 2009 aimed at developing a software that was intended to transcend the Pirate Party Germany as a generalized societal online platform. In September 2009, the Berlin branch decided to implement a system until 2011 with the support of Liquid Democracy e.V.

103 However, instead of a purely technological solution for improving civic participation, de Cindio and Stortone argue that the *Pirate Party Germany* thus induced a "political" platform whose aim is to reform democracy using technological means" (de Cindio & Stortone, 2013: 148).
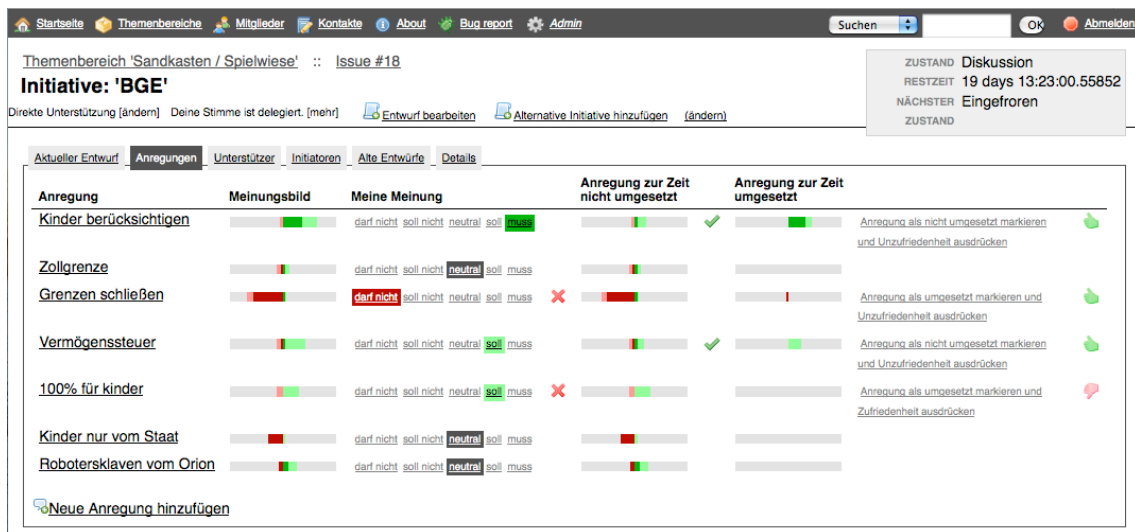
Figure 5. Discussion threads on LQFB (Retrieved online: https://slideplayer.org/slide/863025/) [Last accessed: 05.04.2018]

LQFB is built around themes oriented towards known political areas such as education, health, environment etc (right column). Each member can subscribe to a topic to write proposals; debate and discuss issues; and vote on them. Thus, LQFB is designed to facilitate the translation of specific causes into more generalized policies. Overall, these features aim to promote a diversity of opinions and the network-like mutual observation of other positions (second-order observation) for developing political content. To prioritize proposals with majority appeal, a quorum is chosen: a minimum of 10% of the discussers must support the proposal. This limitation is meant to prevent long untailored deliberation steer participants into making constructive contributions. Once the 10% approval is reached, the proposal is then entered into the discussion and decision-making phase.

However, as it has been observed, due to the establishment of topic-oriented clusters coupled with delegation rules, the discussion culture became dispersed in practise (Interview, P7). The theme-oriented clusters lowered the opportunities for general discourse and limited the visibility of various topics, hindering the input-legitimacy of this platform to an extent. Aiming to prevent chaos and confusion, LQFB inhibited the deliberative standards of democratic discussions.

Within this set-up, an individual could freely choose whether to vote directly, to delegate the vote on a topic or to guarantee a stable delegation on a whole thematic cluster. These options were a prominent and protruding feature of LQFB. Indeed, 'crowd-sourcing' political content could be facilitated by implementing LQFB. As one representative remembers:

> "*I was invited to a talk-show to discuss fiscal politics, a topic I am not knowledge-*

able on. However, that was not a problem. When I asked openly in a thread to prepare a document for me following the questions posed by the moderation, some engaged Pirates developed a proposal that, in the beginning was qualitatively messy but through the support of a wide-spread deliberative process on LQFB, achieved a satisfying result. In this case as in many others, working collaboratively was a success." (Interview, P2).

In this recollection, the democratic promise of time- and location-unbound communication to disseminate and channel expertise by 'ordinary citizens' was delivered, and the normative desideratum of participatory-deliberative democracy fulfilled. However, setting up the LQFB structure and the subsequent implementation process was accompanied by critical discussions and provoked crucial questions about how the platform should function. Between 2011 and 2013 several approaches were discussed that raised important issues concerning the opportunities and pitfalls of e-participation. Despite general controversies regarding its implementation [104], the most controversial debates around LQFB touched upon the issues a) whether it would be desirable to implement a 'permanent assembly' , b) how to ensure resilient and qualifiable results, and c) the problem of super-delegates.

The 'permanent assembly' and political accountability: In the early development stage, the debate between advocates in favour of an advisory discussion-forum for intra-party issues and those in favour of a binding voting tool in the form of permanent voting ballots hindered the smooth application of LQFB. The first fraction supported the vision of a permanent assembly based on LQFB to entirely replace physical meetings, to transfer all elements of the intra-party processes online and make representatives accountable for the decisions obtained. The other side supported the argument that physical meetings should only be supplemented by online voting procedures, either to enlarge the voting period or to include members who were unable to attend the meetings and participate in person. Others sympathised with the idea of using LQFB only as a tool to develop consensual documents, and to exclude the voting-mechanism from the platform.

Whereas the permanent online assembly reflected the revolutionary and proceduralist-oriented ambitions of deliberative-participatory democracy, the supplementary solution would have steered it towards a reformist project, representing enhancements of intra-party democracy in parallel to the more traditional understanding of party organization. However, the *Pirate Party Germany* decided to experiment with the first solution, aiming to mirror the internal organization on the platform in a binding way, in Berlin in 2015. As observers stated, through this mechanism "the

---

104 Resilient and qualifiable results, disturber resistance without moderation, avoidance of forced compromises, delegations and division of labour instead of „classic grassroots democracy", neutrality of the platform, traceability of all processes and guidance by comprehensive rules (Jabbusch, 2011: 53f.).

party achieved a unique and exceptional step towards the transformation of direct democracy within the information society" (Plateau, 2010: 54). On the district level in Berlin [105], the software was implemented complementarily in a rigorous manner.

> *"Every time, a parliamentary process started, we fed the system with an initiative which was automatically discussed at the fraction-plus meetings where it was critically discussed. After the meeting, we handed it in and waited for the approval or disapproval by the BVV" (Interview, P4).*

These aspirations collided with the free-mandate principle instituted in the *Act on the Legal Status of Members of the Bundestag* which protects the free exercise of an electoral mandate. Moreover, a range of challenges further hindered the smooth realization of the permanent assembly in the Berlin branch, raising practical issues on how to guarantee the imperative mandate. Firstly, maintaining a steady and meaningful information flow between representatives and the base via LQFB exposed severe issues of practicability. As such, an active member of the Berlin branch in the *Pirate Party Germany* explains:

> *"In the beginning, the representatives were eager to feed LQFB with their proposals. The first step was taken; however, the more complicated part was to convince the base to comment and react on the proposals." (Interview, P2).*

Thus, the reality of putting the high standard of the 'permanent assembly' into practice proved dysfunctional, creating a disconnect between representatives and the base, as another member confirms:

> *" Linking specific topics back to the base did not work at all. The process was way too fast and too specific for anyone to have been able to follow the process adequately" (Interview, P3).*

Besides the disappointing quality of the initiatives (Interview P3) and the lack of output-legitimacy, some representatives simply ignored the decisions from LQFB and "put their own ego over the mechanisms introduced by the party" (ibid.). Eventually, responsiveness was forced by asking representatives about decisions made; however, the tone of the criticism was so harsh that most representatives decided to no longer participate in the meetings (Interview P4). The lack of mechanisms to ensure

---

105 Members of the district Friedrichshain/Kreuzberg were interviewed to supplement the functioning of LQFB on the Berlin state level. From an organizational perspective, two novelties must be mentioned that prove the innovative character of the Pirate Party Berlin: The fractionplus consisted of an elected group of members of the Pirate Party that were supposed to advise and consult the fraction in the local parliament, the BVV (Bezirksvollversammlung). Secondly, they experimented with the 'three-headed-monkey' concept that allowed multiple individuals to share a position in the BVV.

accountability just worsened internal personal relationships and led to severe trust issues between the party-on-the-ground and the party-in-office. However, according to overall observations, the informational gap naturally increased between the representatives and "normal" members, leading to power dynamics and hierarchies unintended by the *Pirate Party Berlin*.

> *"There was no coupling between fraction and base. The representatives in parliament had the money, they had time to immerse themselves in the topics. They had assistants and access. When someone from base proposed something, it was mostly naïve and impossible to implement. And the representatives would have let him know that, mostly in a disrespectful manner. The idea to design the representative's work more transparently and open it up to proposals by the base was very convincing at the beginning. Its implementation was a catastrophe." (Interview, P4)*

Privacy versus Transparency: As mentioned earlier, the *Pirate Party Germany* struggled to ensure reliable and resilient voting results whilst allowing anonymous voting at the same time.[106] To avoid 'click-manipulation' and guarantee the principle of one person-one vote, the right to participate was gradually restricted to a certain number of people, whereas the developer of LQFB sent individual invitation links to registered members with a complete, visible identity for verifying the participants. However, after some members expressed the wish to participate anonymously, the 'clear-name-debate' arose and raised connected issues about privacy and data protection.

As a first compromise, the *Pirate Party Germany* introduced pseudonyms (Jabbusch 2011: 54) whereby every member could choose freely if they wanted to use their visible name or a pseudonym on the platform. The technical implementation consisted of a private invitation to the platform in form of an E-Mail entailing a "token" and an anonymous invitation code.[107] After the successful registration, the token would be blocked to ensure that it could only be used for a single account. However, the administrator could discover the identity of the member by matching the token within the databank with the E-Mail the token was sent to. Accordingly, further privacy mechanisms were implemented, and information access was divided between three authorities: the general secretary, a "clearing commission" and the system administrator. Through the encryption process the information about the identity was dispersed in a way that all three actors would need to corrupt the system to reveal the identity of the pseudonym bearer. This system was approved by the Berlin data

---

106 This issue applies to any electronic voting process aiming at avoiding ballot manipulation through multiple registrations by one individual or 'click-manipulation'. It is not possible to guarantee anonymous voting without creating a "black box" that impedes the traceability of the results by testing if the votes are correct or not and, accordingly, ensures reliable results.

107 With this code, the member could register themselves by choosing a pseudonym and an E-Mail address. Both could be freely chosen to guarantee pseudonymise towards the administrators.

protection officer and received widespread recognition.[108]

These issues exhibit the practical difficulties of maintaining an open and inclusive access to citizen's participation in LQFB and the necessary thresholds for guaranteeing verifiable and reliable online voting results. Similarly, the unintended creation of hierarchies on LQFB automatically contradicted the cyber-libertarian visions and strong deliberative-participatory aspirations formulated by the *Pirate Party Germany*.

The debate around 'super-delegates': Having the opportunity to vote directly or to delegate the vote to another participant plays an outstanding role within LQFB and combines the deliberative-participatory paradigm with the electoralist-representative one. However, the subsequent creation of unintended hierarchies sparked a heated debate about the phenomenon of so-called 'super-delegates'. Per definitionem, a super-delegate is an individual within LQFB who accumulates a large number of other people's stable delegations. To give an example from practice, in LQFB one of the super-delegates received a number of 300 delegated votes, which was perceived as a very high number in relation to the membership numbers. Although this phenomenon is embedded in the very idea of *Liquid Democracy*, some members argued against accumulated stable delegation, even calling super-delegates "liquid fascists" (Haase, 2018).

Critics argued that Super-Delegates accumulated too much power and this could potentially undermine the grassroots-approach of the deliberative model. On the other hand, refutations that were fairly reminiscent of the electoralist-representative paradigm were offered to allay such anxieties: Firstly, super-delegates did not force people to delegate their votes to them, but rather their delegation was based on trust (Interview, P2). Furthermore, the check-balance system based on the possibility to reverse the delegation regulated the process since super-delegates were motivated to explain their decisions in public statements. It was anticipated that the lack of institutionalized power would thus be substituted by transparency measures to ensure the legitimacy of the delegation (Interview, P1).

However, some argued that this regulative system relied too heavily on the presumptive notion of the "ordinary expert citizen" as an active and informed participant and thus, failed to address the vulnerability produced by the lack of a half-life period of delegated votes. Combined with generally low participation numbers, this phenomenon was accompanied by major doubts about the democratic potential of LQFB:

> *"LQFB was highly elite. Just a few people had access compared to the whole partisanship numbers. Additionally, a few of them had a high number of votes. That led to asymmetrical power-relations within the party" (Interview, P1)*

---

108 Relatedly, problems concerning privacy issues were tackled, first and foremost issues around the time limit for data storage and deletion on demand.

Thus, the phenomenon of 'sleeping members', participants who did not contribute regularly and thus did not constantly observe and administer their delegated votes had undermined this check-and-balance system. Some participants, accordingly, proposed the temporal and quantitative limitation of delegated votes (Interview, P3). As a result, the branch in Bavaria introduced the 'pirate feedback' system that would permit only one-order delegations without the option of transferring accumulated delegations to a third person, so as to avoid chain delegation. This 'pirate feedback' approach was highly controversial among the rest of the German branches, and therefore only implemented in Bavaria. A member of the Berlin *Pirate Party* reflects these debates as follows:

> *"On the other side, you had a high representative share within the system. There was a highly sceptical attitude towards delegation. And a lack of trust. That led to the attitude that it was better not vote at all instead of letting the wrong person vote." (Interview, P3)*

In evaluating the success of LQFB in quantitative terms, it can be aptly argued that the number of online inscriptions are comparably high for online registrations in DDDPs[109]. However, despite the exceptional rush during the inception phase of LQFB, the level of participation rates fell sharply between 2011 and 2014, especially in the local branches, where only 0,6 to 5,1% of members participated regularly in online-voting processes (Bullwinkel & Probst, 2014). Furthermore, these evaluations do not consider the 'black box' of 'sleeping members', a crucial factor when evaluating participation rates quantitatively.

Interim Summary: From a qualitative perspective, the issues raised in the previous section exhibit the controversies and pragmatic challenges of putting a proceduralist vision of deliberative-participatory democracy into practice. As such, the aspiration of implementing LQFB in such a way that it substituted intra-party democracy discussions was frustrated by the lack of time resources representatives had to feed in information flows or maintain effective connections between the party-on-the-ground and the party-in-central-office. Additionally, the low quality of the contributions did not provide satisfactory output-legitimacy for district level results to be given any serious weight. However, LQFB did prove useful for 'crowd-sourcing' collective knowledge and expertise on a certain topic for representatives. Secondly, despite conceptual ambiguities regarding the notion of transparency within the *Pirate Party Germany* (see section 4.2.2.), the contradiction between secret balloting and the verifiability of the voting process posed another crucial hurdle for the party. Finally, the phenomenon

---

109 In September 2012, 10.807 users were inscribed. However, given the whole number of members of the Pirate Party Germany at that time (34.043), this number was proportionately low. Retrieved from: https://www.kas.de/de/einzeltitel/-/content/liquidfeedback-verfehlt-demokratietest1 [Last accessed: 3.10.2019].

of creating uncontrollable hierarchies and 'super-delegates' within the party raises the question whether LQFB managed to translate the high standards of proceduralist deliberative-participatory democracy into party organization.

Placed into the wider discussion on the democratic dilemma brought upon by *network parties*, the next section will chart the main issues that emerged from the problems of implementation, structural deficits and undefined ideology, putting the *Pirate Party Germany* in a steady decline.

4.2.5 Summary: The Proceduralist Sub-species of Network Parties

"Even though the Pirate Party did not find the right answers, they indeed posed the right questions"

(Thomas Oppermann (SPD))

It can be reasonably argued that the experimental project of the *Pirate Party Germany* was 'ahead of its time' when coming into existence in 2011. At first glance, the *Pirate Party Germany* can claim to be a first significant instance of *network parties* and an experimental 'melting pot' of theories and practices related to the democratic potential of digital technologies. In such a way, the *Pirate Party Germany* was a "political response to some of the most fundamental conflicts in contemporary information society" (Fredriksson, 2015: 911); an attempt to 'democratize political parties' as we know them. Whereas German chancellor Angela Merkel in 2013 described the Internet as "unexplored terrain" [110], the *Pirate Party Germany* undertook a quantum leap in harvesting the democratic potentials of digital technologies (Burkart, 2014).

How can we contextualize these observations on the aggregate level? Ideologically rooted in narratives and the democratic values of the FOSS movement and bearing cyber-libertarian imprints, the *International Pirate Parties'* initially aimed to make common knowledge accessible, transparent and adaptable for the wider citizenry (Cammaerts, 2015). Therefore, it is a crucial historical node in the genealogy of the *Pirate Party Germany* that sparked discussions on copyright law and the potential of digital technologies in re-inventing democracies. As the first electorally successful case of *network parties*, the *Pirate Party Germany* surprisingly adopts elements of the electoralist-representative paradigm of democracy by introducing *Liquid Democracy* as the 'best of two worlds', by directly voting and delegating votes based on 'substantive' representation.

Drawing on theoretical considerations discussed in the first part of this dissertation, the political participation model endorsed by the *Pirate Party Germany* strongly leans towards a proceduralist interpretation - prioritizing input-legitimacy

---

110   The metaphor and hashtag "Neuland" was coined by Angela Merkel in a public speech on 19.06.2013 when former US president Obama visited Berlin to speak about the surveillance scandals of NSA and Prism.

over output-legitimacy, focucing on the substance of participation (Scharpf, 2000). Recalling the idiosyncrasies of *network parties* in contrast to the electoralist party type, it can be pointed out that the *Pirate Party Germany* incorporates a fairly naïve and rigid interpretation of deliberative-participatory democracy shaped by a technologically-deterministic vision exhibited by the controversies around the significance and superiority of LQFB above physical infrastructures.

From an organizational perspective, the *Pirate Party Germany* did not manage to successfully unify both spheres - the party-on-the-ground and party-in-public-office - as observable in the controversies around 'permanent assembly', 'super-delegates' and relationship between representatives with the party base. The high deliberative standards embodied by LQFB and the communicative platform *Twitter* turned the principle of "one man – one vote" into "one man – one opinion – one vote" which, lacking a coherent and efficient form of channelization, contributed to an "organizational chaos" (Interview, P4) that could not be resolved smoothly. This was partly due to a sudden and overwhelming spike in the public pressure on the Party's performance.

The desire for transparency in internal communications and the choice of using *Twitter* for opinion-sharing and accountability demonstrates the underwhelming overreach of the Party's strategy for democratic deliberation. Additionally, the fuzzy nature of party organs such as 'squads' and 'crews' prevented moderation of intra-party information flows and communication (Weisband, 2013). Any fair attempt at adapting or adjusting the party to the 'lessons learnt' was hindered and dedicated efforts to alter the party's structure collapsed as a result. More importantly, the avenues for political accountability and responsivity provided by the democratic tools could not be translated into practicality despite the intermittent retrieval of expertise on specific issues. This insight is certainly reflective for discussions on permanent and permeable intra-party democracy since it reminds us of the fact that ordinary citizens perhaps lack the ability and knowledge to permanently inform themselves and participate in the workflows of professional politicians on a regular basis. While the *Pirate Party Germany* certainly espoused loyalty to the imperative mandate and prioritized functionalist and substantive representation, the 'party of the nerds' [111] failed to descriptively represent its electorate (Siri & Villa, 2012). Instead, it became embroiled in accusations of elitism as members who could afford to follow and participate in the regular procedures of local parliaments gained prominence.

A clear trend towards attaching more importance to structure and democratic procedures instead of ideological positions resulted in a hollow and value-free discourse of the *Pirate Party Germany* (Cammaerts, 2015) which over the course of time turned out to be the main obstacle in developing substantive policies. In general, fostering a positive approach towards high standards of input-legitimacy accompanied

---

111 This label has been coined due to the 'hacker' image it provided at the time of its inception https://archiv.berliner-zeitung.de/berlin/wahl/piraten-in-berlin--fuer-eine-partei-von-nerds-haben-wir-doch-ziemlich-viel-gerissen--24751518

by permanent deliberation and decision-making through time- and location-unbound communication remains questionable when channelled into party organization.

While this study does not lend itself to any deterministic claims about the decline of the *Pirate Party Germany*, it can be argued that the party fell afoul of its own ambitions and was overwhelmed by the aspiration to translate procedural visions into the institutional realm. Despite the crucial experimental character in providing nuances and alternating existing structures at the district level, the party functioned poorly when it came to 'balancing out' their deliberative-participatory standards with ordinary, day-to-day party organization.

4.3 The End of Spanish Bi-partidism: The Case of *Podemos*

"It's not a crisis, it's fraud"

(15M slogan)

This chapter revisits the ideas introduced at the end of Chapter 3, analysing *Podemos* as a paradigmatic case of a plebiscitary [112] party. In order to understand how *Podemos* became the third biggest party in Spain in 2016, forming a minority coalition with PSOE, IU, *PSC* and *CatComú* in 2020, it is necessary to understand the social-political and historical context in Spain from the 1970s to the *15M movement* in 2011. This historical background will be provided in this chapter, along with a thorough analysis of the period following the rise of the *15M movement, as v*arious actors emerged from the political and social tapestry of this time - *Podemos* being one institutionalized variety.

Podemos has evolved over two phases: a) the antagonist phase as a 'movement' party (della Porta et al., 2018) in its strategic alignment with neo-populist discourse theory as well as the concept of antagonist democracy by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and b) the agonist phase that emerged after Vistalegre I, the first General Assembly, when the party took on a more traditional countenance.

The time frame chosen for analysing *Podemos* is set between January 2014 and July 2016. The primary data obtained for this study came from six interviews that were held between May and July 2016. The interviewees were – at the point of investigation - regular and active members of the *circulo* of Lavapiés and Carabanchel, two districts near the centre of Madrid and two Andalusian strategists of *Podemos* that had participated in Podemos since its inception and participated actively in the party's first general assembly, *Vistalegre I.* Additionally, three follow-up interviews

---

112 To recall, we oppose deliberative participation with plebiscitary participation, the first being focused on input-legitimacy providing an opportunity for large-scale citizen involvement and decision-making, the latter referring to a voting-mechanism that is used to confirm and legitimize the leader's authority. Also see https://ictlogy.net/bibliography/reports/projects.php?idp=2480

were conducted with experts in 2017 that complement the perspectives represented by the regular members.

As in the previous one, this chapter begins by providing the historical background from which Podemos emerged. This is an overview rather than a thorough evaluation of the complex socio-political history of modern Spain, as such an extensive description would be beyond the purposes of this chapter. It then provides an analysis of the party's evolution in which I particularly focus on the tensions produced by the agonist build-up of a hierarchy in the party and the antagonist demands towards a deliberative understanding of intra-party democracy after the general assembly, *Vistalegre I*. Subsequently, I continue by explaining in-depth how the bottom-up spaces within Podemos' organization and the online tool Plaza.Podemos were hollowed out over time. Then, I discuss the authoritarian stance *Podemos* takes against this backdrop, critically questioning the concept of the movement-party introduced in Chapter 3.

4.3.1 Historical Background: From the Transición to the foundation of Podemos

Podemos's road to electoral success is closely tied up with the rising tide of demands for 'real' democracy that peaked in May 2011, culminating in the formation of the 15M anti-austerity movement. Founded in 2014, as a confluence of 15M militants, members of the *Izquierda Anticapitalista*[113] and professors from the *Universitat Complutense de Madrid*, Podemos started as an institutional assault, advocating for grassroot democratic practices and participatory narratives at a time of economic, political and social discontent resulting from the economic crisis that struck Spain hard in 2010.

Podemos broke through Spain's rigid two-party-landscape that had been dominated by PSOE and PP since 1982. It advocated for grassroot practices that reflected its origins and strong ties within civil society but also maintained an institutional approach that was intent on gaining and maintaining electoral power.[114] To understand why *Podemos* was able to consolidate itself in the institutional realm by obtaining five seats in the European elections only seven months after its inception, subsequently winning 20% of the vote share in the National Elections in December 2015, it is necessary to contextualize its rapid rise by explaining the aftermath of the

---

113 The *Izquierda Anticapitalista* is a powerful branch of *Podemos* that evolved from a confederal organization founded in 1995. The IA contains political strands surrounding the anti-globalist movement, the labour movement inspired by Marxist ideology.

114 Agustín and Briziarelli (2018) similarly credit *Podemos* with provoking a dual level of consciousness. a practical and potential side, the common sense and the dreaming. The tensions between these two sides are inherent to network parties but Podemos is a paradigmatic case that vividly exhibits the immediate consequences social movement logics clashing with the the competitive logic of party politics.

deep economic crisis in the year 2008 that is commonly perceived as - at least – a necessary if not adequate factor in accounting for *Podemos'* success. Thus, the following section provides a general overview of the socio-economic origins and impact of the mortgage crisis in Spain as a fertile breeding-ground for the deeper analysis of the 15M mobilizations, the contentious cycles that paved the way for the consolidation of *Podemos*. In addition, I include a brief historical sketch of the genealogy of *Podemos*.

From the *transición* to the 15M movement: After the end of the Franco military dictatorship, the first democratic elections in Spain took place in 1977 in which Adolfo Suárez (UCD) gained the highest share of votes. The Spanish transition to democracy lasted until the year 1982, when the Socialist Party *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) won the elections with Felipe González as the main candidate. [115] Political scholar Javier Franzé characterises the transition process as a fractious amalgam of 4 main issues: domination of elitist politics, the debate over the welfare state, the ambivalence towards autonomous regions (such as the Basque country and Catalonia), and the denial of the Francoist past (Franzé, 2018: 52) [116].

Highly simplified, it can be argued that the democratic consolidation of the post-Franco Spanish state is marked by two factors that led to birth of the 15M movement: the adoption of neoliberal economic policies mostly directed by EU regulations, and the *bipartidism* of the political system as power changed hands between the conservative *PP* and Socialist Party *PSOE* over the past decades.

An analysis of the Spanish neoliberal turn[117] reveals the interplay of factors underlying the collapse of representative politics in Spain. To recapitulate, prominent authors on the democratic crisis (Crouch, 2004; della Porta et al., 2018; Offe, 2011), have emphasised that a crucial reason behind modern distrust in political institutions is the fusion of neoliberal globalization tendencies and the hollowing out of representative democracies. Thus, the weakened legitimacy of political parties, the dominant role of lobbyist control over policy-making and the emptying out of the nation-state in favour of nurturing power towards international organizations such as the World Bank, IMF and EU paved the way for *network parties* to enter a niche and fill a gap in regards to citizen involvement and transparency within the institutional system. The case of Spain mirrors this development in a sharpened way as the political system - as it was in 2010 - can be perceived as a "pioneering example of the social-democratic path to neoliberalism" (Rendueles & Sola, 2018). But how and for which reasons did Spain adopt this "pioneering" role?

From the early 1990s to the year 2000, PP and PSOE traded places in government, but their economic policies began to increasingly resemble each other's. While spain underwent rapid economic growth and grew to become the fourth strongest economic

---

115 Spain's acceptance into the European Union four years later can also be identified as an accomplishment of the democratization process in Spain and end of the transition period.

116 I will focus on the first two factors that appear as the most determining factors for the upsurge of the 15M movement. For a historical analysis of the Franco regime and its effects see García Agustín & Briziarelli (2018).

117 See López and Rodríguez (2010).

force in Europe, it also saw deregulation of the labour market, the growing irrelevance of trade unions and the rise of temporary working contracts. The adoption of the Euro as the national currency facilitated international investment and national borrowing, which in turn had a long-term effect on social welfare as public debt grew. These neoliberal developments also affected social issues, most significantly the housing market.[118] The disproportionate growth in housing prices and the real estate sector in general aggravated severe socio-economic ruptures in Spain.[119] The crash of the mortgage bubble in the year 2008 laid the foundation for a severe economic crisis between the years 2008 and 2011 as an extension of the international financial crisis. Resulting in a deep recession, GDP rates fell due to austerity policies, the collapse of the property market and the EU wide banking crisis. In this period, the social and economic condition of the Spanish population was severely affected. Statistics show that unemployment rates increased from 7,93% in 2007 to 20,64% in 2011 with youth unemployment peaking at over 4.9 million in 2011, mostly affecting young people under the age of 25.[120]

Economic instability and a lack of trust in representative institutions created an environment that paved the way for grassroots mobilizations to emerge, most famously la PAH, a nation-wide community support system that was successful in blocking evictions and occupying buildings to support citizens who were unable to meet their mortgage payments.[121] Thus, the political failures of the PSOE government to react adequately to the increasing precarity of its citizens, widespread dissatisfaction and indignation served as fertile ground for the 15M mobilizations in 2011.

As mentioned before, the second historical factor that sparked the 15M movement was the longstanding bipartidism and the connected perception of democratic flaws in the Spanish political system.[122] This alternation became unstable when the Socialist government with Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (2004 – 2011) and later Conservative Mariano Rajoy (2011-2018) adopted Keynesian measures to tackle economic growth.[123] At the same time, corruption scandals were revealed on both sides, by PP and PSOE, across local, regional and State level. According to

---

118 The role of international banks in property boom and housing over-valuation (Lopéz & Rodriguez, 2010) as well as public-driven deregulations gave rise to a dynamic real-estate market that through investment and speculation led to a saturation of demand in 2007.

119 Carballo-Cruz (2011) highlights three factors that facilitated its emergence: Monetary policy by ECB, Spanish fiscal policies favouring acquisition of housing instead of renting and a model of economic growth based on construction and property development activities.

120 Trading Economics (2018). Retrievable online: https://tradingeconomics.com/spain/unemployment-rate

121 La PAH will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 8.

122 After the Franco dictatorship the electoral game between centre-left PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrera Espanol), and centre-right PP (Partido Popular) took turns in governing Spain, dominating the political area for many years starting from 1975. After 1982, fascist elites managed a transition to the new democratic state, but "many elements were maintained (...) neither a cleansing of the state apparatus nor recognition of the victims occurred" (Rendueles & Sola, 2018: 30).

123 In the course of the economic crisis, the hegemonic narrative in traditional media blamed citizens for living beyond their means and thus placed the responsibility for the crisis on their shoulders (Interview, P8).

Transparency International, Spain has been one of the worst performing countries with respect to fighting corruption: In the year 2011 corruption was perceived as the second biggest cause for concern after unemployment (CIS, 2011). The revelations of corruption cases between January 2014 and May 2015 subsequently affected all political parties.

Here, too, Spain serves as a paradigmatic case for the erosion of trust in institutions as a way of understanding the crisis of democracy discussed in Chapter 2. Statistics from 2011 (CIS, 2011) indicate that "politicians, political parties and politics" were one of the three most important immediate social and political problems perceived by the Spanish population. The combination of these factors - the economic malaise, the Francoist imprint of both *PP* and *PSOE*, the irresponsibility of politicians and the severe corruption scandals - paved the way for the economic, political and social crisis to culminate as nation-wide mobilizations in 2011.

Political cycles of the 15M movement: Chapter 2 illustrated the significance of the 15M movement in terms of how the growing network of social movements blend hybrid technopolitical practices and decentralized organizational structural features. Here, I want to focus on this movement from a historical perspective to track down the main actors, narratives and organizational blueprints that emerged out of these contentious political cycles in Spain, ultimately nurturing the discourse, organization and practices of *Podemos*.[124]

The birth of the 15M movement is commonly marked as the 15th of May 2011, the date on which the central square in Madrid, the "Puerta de Sol" was occupied by social activists, militants and citizens led by the demand "Real Democracy Now!"[125]. Five weeks before the municipal elections, 130,000 people united on this day to 'take to the streets' and demonstrate their opposition to welfare cuts and corrupt elites which – as depicted above - had dominated the political landscape in Spain over the past years. These demonstrations were followed by camping in the square and other cities in Spain. These camps transformed into a political ecosystem, experimenting with ad hoc citizen assemblies, territorial and thematic working groups and horizontal decision-making. In developing practices of extra-representational counter-power to the established political sphere found its diagnostic meta-narrative in the slogan, 'they do not represent us'. The various conceptual dimensions of this short sentence were discussed in Chapter 2[126], but to understand the gravity and significance of the 15M movement it is worth taking an actor-focused perspective on claims of non-representation.

The actors involved in the rise of the 15M movement can be divided into two

---

124 Numerous publications deal with a historical analysis of the 15M movement, i.e. Toret (2015), Tormey (2015), Jurado (2017), Gerbaudo (2016). In the following we summarize this literature and focus more on the discursive and organizational patterns that run through the emerging political cycles.

125 Original (esp): Democracia real ya!

126 The manifold interpretations refer to descriptive representation, substantive representation and functionalist representation (Pitkin, 1967).

sub-groups, a core group and a supporter base.[127] The core, which consisted of militant non-partisan activists was shuffled together via the simple Twitter Hashtag #Don'tVoteForThem[128] at end of January 2011. This hashtag was launched before the Municipal elections to express discontent towards the institutional quality of the Spanish political system, as well as the corruption carried out by its politicians. Interestingly, similar to the inception of the *International Pirate Party*, the law implemented against copyright infringement is widely perceived as a second trigger moment for wider mobilizations.[129] The digital-democratic nature as described in Chapter 2 and 3 becomes visible when considering this entanglement of cyberlibertarian values culminating in a broader political reformist project. In this sense, the 15M movement is a materialization of the technopolitical paradigm similar to the foundation context of the *Pirate Party Germany*, constitutive of networked democratic practices.

Shortly after, on March 16th, the core team DRY tweeted a call for mobilization: "Real Democracy now! We are not commodities in the hands of politicians and bankers!"[130] Reportedly, during the following months, a variety of dispersed and multi-layered practices emerged, all connected with DRY and social media presences. So-called "nodes" were created that represented nation-wide cells that developed political, social and economic themes. These were connected, organizationally, through Twitter and other digital communication channels. One node that deserves special attention was the project *Demo 4.0,* initiated by a few activists that aimed to establish a widespread digital census to subvert representational structures. *Demo 4.0* attempted to create a counter-power that would enable a new public participation system via a digital census system that was already part of the Spanish administration systems.[131]

In sum, *Podemos* adapted the practices and discourses of the 15M movement within its own discourse and practices in a genealogical 'kinship' with the 15M assemblies. Similar to the 15M movement, *Podemos* identified pre-existing deficiencies of representation in three categories: functionalist representation (as the means for electing representatives is not sufficient), descriptive representation (as they do not share characteristics with their electoral base) and substantive representation (as they do not translate interests of the electorate into the institutional realm)[132] . Before we turn to a deeper analysis of these three characteristics alongside *Podemos'* development, we need to briefly contextualize the party's evolution between March

---

127 On the emergence of "para-institutions" during the 15M movement see: https://ictlogy.net/bibliography/reports/projects.php?idp=2598 [Last accessed: 12.12.2028]

128 Originial (esp): #Nolesvotes

129 The so-called "Sinde Law", an anti-internet piracy law adopted by the Spanish government in the year 2012.

130 #RealDemocracyNow (see:https://twitter.com/_realdemocracy [Last accessed: 10.12.2018)

131 This proposal was introduced to Catalan activists to advise on actions concerning the referendum debate. The question posed was how to make an extra-institutional, non-binding public consultation that mirrors the dominant public opinion regarding this highly contested endeavour (Interview, P9). One solution that was provided by Demo 4.0 was to reform the regulations for the Catalan parliament to obtain competence in the field of general voting systems.

132 Also see the concept of anti-representation and alter-democracy (Calleja-López, 2017)

2014 and February 2017.

A genealogy of *Podemos*: *Podemos* appeared as a catalyst for the values and demands of the 15M movement and channelled them into the institutional realm. The following table provides an overview of the relevant dates that mark important turning points within the development of the party towards its present form as a plebiscitary type of the *network party* family.

15 Movement	May 2011
Foundation of Podemos	March 2014
European Elections	May 2014
Vistalegre I	October 2014
Municipal Elections	May 2015
General Elections 2015	December 2015
General Elections 2016	June 2016
Vistalegre II	February 2017

Table 4: Historical trajectory of Podemos

The first phase of *Podemos* can be set between March 2014 and October 2014, concluding with the general assembly *Vistalegre I*, after which *Podemos* decided to launch its 'electoral assault', taking a different discursive and strategic position to the political ethos of 15M movement, which favoured deliberative structures of democracy rather than electoral. This ambivalence is prevalent throughout the development of *Podemos* and inherent to 'movement parties' who strive for electoral power. The relationship between *Podemos* and the 15M movement is succinctly outlined by an interviewee who describes his motivation of joining the party after having been highly active in the 15M movement[133]:

> "*Suddenly there are people who think that everything has to change radically. Everything. Not a little, everything. For me, 15M is foremost this recognition, a critical sensitivity that was very strong among the movement. But it was never articulated as a decisive political tool. During the uprising, I did not consider this as a problem, but after 15M, I understood that it was necessary that all this force that had lived on the streets had to reach a point of political effectiveness.*" (Interview, P6)

---

133 Calleja-López (2017) criticizes this "ideal reconstruction" of a causal relationship between 15M movement and *Podemos*. He argues that some aspects of the mutations and structural reasons for the emergence of parties such as the „crystal ceiling" of the movement, and the role of the Partido X X in such transition, must be acknowledged.

After the public launch in January 2014, *Podemos* was founded in March the same year by political scientist Pablo Iglesias Turrión and academic colleagues from the *Complutense University of Madrid*, including Juan Carlos Monedero, Iñigo Errejón and other popular figures.[134] Initiated to gain "popular unity" (Errejón, 2014), these scholar-activists joined forces with *the IA*, a stream that would persist in the later development of the party. The launch was accompanied by the collection of 50.000 signatures to approve the political manifesto written by the founders. Shortly after, *Podemos* had a key electoral success in gaining 7.98% of the vote share in the European Elections, merely two months after its foundation. It's momentum was aided by the charismatic public presence of spokesman Pablo Iglesias, as well as a wide-spread citizen participation initiative that took a collaborative approach to drafting the party's programme (della Porta et al., 2018). The emergence of 400-500 *círculos*, physical local branches, led to a structural manifestation of their participatory claims. The rapid rise of popularity within civil society in the following months is illustrated by the number of people that supported the party online. On Facebook, the number of followers increased from 200,000 to 610,000 in one week after the European elections and the number of Twitter followers from 60,000 to 200,000 (della Porta et al. 2017: 51).

In October 2014, the constituent process and first general assembly of *Podemos*, Vistalegre I, initiated a key process that was crucial for the subsequent development of *Podemos*. Posing the central question of how to pursue a stable organisation model, the General Assembly decided on a long-term strategy and elected party officers on national and regional levels. The decision came after a vote on five different proposals, including one by Pablo Iglesias himself, Pablo Echenique and three others (della Porta et al., 2018), which eventually won the vote. With the victory of Iglesias' proposal, *Podemos* turned into an 'electoral machine' with a more rigid and vertical structure, making increased use of voting mechanisms at the expense of large-scale deliberation. As a crucial turning point in the long-term strategy of *Podemos*, this shift was heavily disputed among members as one interviewee retrospectively affirms:

> *"Vistalegre I was the creation of the electoral machine with the sole aim of gaining votes in elections. Now we are facing the consequences and the subsequent effects. We failed to strengthen Podemos as a popular movement with a strong and active base. I would have really welcomed this direction, and because of Vistalegre I we are now confronted with irreversible problems regarding our organization" (Interview, P8).*

After *Vistalegre I*, *Podemos's strategy* aimed at channelling resources to mobilize for the upcoming Municipal and General Elections in which Podemos entered into a

---

134 Carolina Bescansa, Jaime Pastor, Bibiana Medialdea, and Pablo Iglesias, as well as long-standing activists in social movements, trade unions and radical left parties, Miguel Urbán, Teresa Rodríguez and Sergio Pascual.

coalition with local parties and platforms (see Chapter 4.4).[135] After the General elections in December 2015, a political deadlock resulted in a hung parliament. Repeat elections took place in June 2016, resulting in a strengthened PP , despite the corruption scandals around them. *Podemos* suffered major internal disputes and personnel conflicts due to its decision to unite with *Izquierda Unida* (IU), a traditional left-wing party. For many of its members, the decision to form a coalition with IU meant an even stronger shift towards institutionalized politics that would compromise a long-term strategy in favour of short-term election goals. The internal crisis led to resignations from several members of *Podemos* and severe criticism of the party's leadership. Regarding the tactical electoral alliance with IU - a party of militants - the ambivalence of entering the 'electoral game' was prominently visible during the research period. Addressing this issue illustratively, one member states:

> *"We were playing within the game of change. Citizens wanted things to be different but needed a serious addressee. Podemos had to conform with the profile of general people to appeal to them. At that point, it seemed logical to unite with IU because both parties share the vision of a "real" change and reached the fundamental agreement to make real process at the cost of uniting with a partner that is inside the game" (Interview, P10).*

The complexity of the issue is summarized by another interviewee:

> *"IU and Podemos have made it very clear in the pact that both will not grow together organically. It is supposed not to be the same organization, but to function as a conjunctive alliance for the elections. Militants of Podemos are sceptical that this alliance will turn the party into an even more vertical organization. This may happen or it may not. The important question is if Podemos can generate an open, horizontal culture within the alliance and change the logics of IU and the Spanish political system in general" (Interview, P6).*

After becoming the third-biggest party in Spanish politics, *Podemos* became the main opposition force in the parliament. It followed the second General Assembly in February 2017 called *Vistalegre II* that produced internal conflicts between Pablo Iglesias and Íñigo Errejón as a proxy war arose between the traditional left-wing (Iglesias) and the populists (Errejón). Shortly before *Vistalegre II*, one respondent resumed:

> *"Vistalegre II is the attempt to regulate a political organization more generated from below in terms of plurality, a new direction, a solid direction more plural with different streams within the party and with different mechanisms for the*

---

135   Ranked third party with an unexpected 21% of the vote share in 2015, *Podemos* established itself as a serious challenge to the two-party system with a heavy loss of votes of both established parties, PP and PSOE.

círculos to really take part in the political part. This is an attempt and I think we will generate a better political party after this mess. One thing is electoral success. But what really matters is creating a real democratic organization that we will probably achieve after Vistalegre II." (Interview, P8).

This brief genealogy explains how *Podemos* turned into a centralized, top-down party that over time started to lean on plebiscitary participatory mechanisms rather than the participatory-deliberative ones it adhered to during its inception. This also paves the way to understanding its neo-populist tactics in communicating with members and the electorate. The following section is now dedicated to the neo-populist nature of *Podemos'* discourse and the question as to how the party's democratic vision navigates between antagonist and agonist approaches towards institutionalized politics.

4.3.2 Democratic Vision: The Political between Antagonism to Agonism

After sketching the historical background of the socio-political conditions and giving a brief genealogy of *Podemos*, this section tackles the democratic vision of *Podemos,* which is not reflected through a structural change - compared to the *Pirate Party Germany* - but through discursive tactics commonly connected with the neo-populist theory of hegemonic discourses, as fleshed out by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985). In contrast to the case of the *Pirate Party Germany*, *Podemos'* democratic vision is divided into two temporal phases, the antagonist and the agonist – of which the former is devoted to the common and shared narratives of *network parties* outlined in Chapter 3, whereas the latter depicts the collapse into the traditional *electoralist* party type.

Javier Franzé in his recent publication adeptly summarises how *Podemos'* discourse shifted from being an antagonistic to an agonistic one. *Podemos*[136] initially translated the 'democracy versus Francoist dictatorship' into a narrative of the new (democracy) versus old (oligarchy) (Podemos, 2014a).[137] During this initial phase, *Podemos* played with classical elements of dichotomous divisions and tried to construct 'the people' as a united body of citizens against 'the elite' as corrupted politicians, with the 'general will' being a legitimizing reference point for its discourse.[138] After *Vistalegre I*, this narrative changed into an agonist framing where the empowerment of 'the people' was substituted with an achievement of 'change' within political in-

---

136 As Franzé (2018) observes, even the name po"demos" suggests the creation of the demos as constituting a contingent self-referential class and separates the interests between we/the people and them/the elite.

137 The purple circle, for example, the emblem of *Podemos*, stands for the creation of a collective identity without hierarchy or centre but representing the unity of all citizens as 'the people'.

138 It is in the ascribing of meaning to certain (buzz-)words, such as 'la casta', 'la gente' and 'la patria' that it aligns with the populist hypothesis.

stitutions to create an 'electoral machine'.

However, the early phases of the party were characterized by an emphasis on open political culture that would re-energize the political sphere. As interviews show, militants consistently confirmed that their political culture changed with their involvement in Podemos' inception. So did their wider social life (Interview, P7,9): Friends, colleagues and affiliates that had never been interested in politics before, suddenly became involved and participated in assemblies in a regular manner. Indeed, the speakers of *Podemos* furthermore managed to blur the lines between leadership and militancy, and the idea of a new citizenship model envisioned by *Podemos* consequently fostered the image of an 'ordinary-expert citizen' challenging the three faces of party organization (see Chapter 3). In line with *Podemos'* democratic vision, the militant received the same privileges as the most active leaders. One interviewee recalls Podemos' democratic vision of decentralized organization in its antagonist phase:

> *"There is no inside nor outside of Podemos. It has purposely sought to emphasize that Podemos does not lock themselves in. A militant is not considered to have greater privilege or ability to make decisions than a person who simply supports Podemos and does not have resources to go to the assemblies"* (Interview, P7).

Such initial stances resemble those of other 'movement parties' (della Porta et al., 2018), such as *Syriza* from Greece. *Podemos,* in its first phase, exhibited a tendency to ally with left and progressive content in conjunction with novel structural democratic promises. Within this narrative and similar to the 'value-free' discourse of the *Pirate Party Germany,* the left/right axis appeared to be less significant than the old/new divide that saw its discursive materialization. Compared to right-wing populism, *Podemos'* discourse did not address immigration as a political issue. Instead, it took on political and economic elites, framing corruption in Spain as one of its primary problems and establishing itself as a party for everyone connected by common values such as "commitment to human rights" (Interview, P10)[139]. As such, one of the main projects of *Podemos'* discourse was to overcome the vocabulary and classical ideas of the left-progressive tradition in order to engage with the politics of "common sense" (Interview, P 06). From that point on, Podemos broke apart from the traditional Left, including the unions deeply interwoven with socialist and anarchist tradition, in order to transcend ideological dogmas. Affirming this finding, a respondent states:

> *"It does not matter if you are on the right or left or centre. It does not depend on that. It depends on what the majority determines in this way. We agree on that, we agree on human rights, I do not care what label you have. Well, that's the way it*

---

[139] In a nutshell, Inigo Errejón summarized three triggers for *Podemos'* success: the 15M movement, the media(tic) presence of Pablo Iglesias, and *Podemos'* resonance with the Latin American national-populist movement.

is. Adding people, having an ever-greater organization, a greater mobilization. Podemos transforms all this" (Interview, P10).

Javier Franzé does not offer details on the participatory nature of *Podemos'* antagonist discourse, but its development towards more authoritarian structures is the key to understanding its transformation from antagonist to agonist: Within this framework two structural paths of political organization are highlighted: the top-down versus bottom-up intra-party project. In this first antagonist phase, *Podemos'* discourse is keen on stressing the party's participatory nature and their target to empower the 'ordinary' people within the political realm (see Chapter 3). Thus, the creation of the 'elites' was not solely addressed to the behavioural flaws of people in positions of power, but the institutional logic of the out-dated institutional design of the "old democratic system". In contrast, *Podemos* claimed to generate a new "consensus"; a new social contract between citizens and their governments.

Vistalegre I furthermore represents a turning point in how *Podemos* perceived the role of institutions. In contrast to depicting institutions as 'la casta', their interpretation changed in preference of promoting the notion that "the institutions themselves are neutral and that their political meaning depends on their use, whereas in the first phase they were seen as extremely favourable to the elites" (Franzé, 2018: 59). As soon as it had been visible that *Podemos* shifted its main aim from "empowering the people" to "winning elections", its position towards the institutional design was reviewed accordingly. It was now the behaviour of the elite that was targeted in speeches, not the political institutions *per se*. In fact, in the Municipal Electoral Programme 2015, *Podemos* for the first time acknowledged the legitimacy of the institutions that had previously been the main target of its political criticisms:

> *"We have institutions that we view with pride; we have come a long way. We have the pieces in place, but we need to organize them, adjust them, balance them. Even though we have good quality material, it has fallen into the hands of inept, short- sighted, spendthrift governments" (Podemos 2015a: 11 (own translation)).*

In this transitory phase, *Podemos* presented itself as the only viable socialist-democratic alternative that sought to find a solution to a different dichotomy, that of 'efficiency' and 'horizontality'. At this juncture, catch-all strategies were put in service of the 'electoral machine'. Organizationally, this resulted in the 'inevitable and necessary' creation of a selected 'core team' that took the main strategic decisions, leading *Podemos* through this phase. From the perception of the party's militants, the narratives that were posed publicly during this transitory phase did not ultimately affect the party's internal, long-term strategy but rather were seen as a necessary tactic to appeal to and persuade non-militants and citizens who the

party's antagonist narrative did not reach[140], as one interviewee vividly summarizes:

> *"I hope that at some point we will stop a little bit and take time to think what there is, what corresponds, and how we go ahead. But we must organize all this in a next phase. You cannot end up organized, you must finish the phase and then take one more step. And I believe that this is the way it is done, objectives, stages, an effective way of doing things without removing the democratic part. and so that is the logic necessary to keep moving forward" (Interview, P10)*

In line with this, a new strategy was followed to present *Podemos* as a viable and credible political competitor.[141] The scope of the following section lies at the juncture of *Podemos'* discourse from antagonism to agonism between October 2014 and July 2016. This period describes how *Podemos* metamorphosized into a *plebiscitary* party comprising populist discursive and catch-all campaigning strategies. The next chapter will describe how this discursive shift in the party's political vision impacted *Podemos'* internal structure, leading to a rift between the party-on-the-ground and party-in-(central and public)-office..

4.3.3 Organizational Architecture and Intra-Party Democracy

> *"Participation is Organization"*

> *(Podemos, 2015: 6).*

As *Podemos'* shifted its discourse from an antagonistic to an agonistic position, it adopted a stance that was contradictory to the ideals of deliberative-participation it espoused. This section provides an in-depth discussion on the consequences of *Vistalegre I* with respect to the relationship between the party-on-the-ground and the party-in-public-office. The diminishing role of the *círculos* - the main physical spaces of participation in Podemos's organizational structures – will be critically analysed as a manifestation of *Podemos'* evolution into a plebiscitary party, illustrating the dubious procedural practices during the primaries in 2015.[142]

---

140 Before this date until now, these two opposing strategies have been controversially debated to determine the strategy and punctual tactics of *Podemos*. One strategy would be to approach social movements in Spain as necessary alliances and form their parliamentary arm. That includes staying in the opposition, taking distance to the imagery of the electoral machine and aggregating the existing demands of social movement actors. The other strategy proclaims the creation of new political identities dissolving existing demands and formulating counter-hegemonic narratives aligned to Leftist concepts (citation look up newspaper).

141 Coalitions were discussed with PSOE, IU that were intended to manifest a new consensualist approach (Franzé, p.63) and that ended in the alliance with IU for the 21J elections in 2017.

142 In many articles on intra-party democracy, the question on primaries are signallers for the degree of intra-

Definition and Function of Podemos' Organizational Model: The core organizational novelty introduced by *Podemos* at the time of its foundation (see Podemos, 2015; Principios Organizativos (OPP)), consisted of the *círculos* - a development of the spontaneous 15M organizational practices in terms of DRY nodes, and the latter participation spaces within Partido X. The *círculos* were intended as an organizational manifestation for a "new" political culture based on the deliberative-participatory democratic paradigm initially envisaged by Podemos. Analogous to the 'squads' and 'crews' of the *Pirate Party Germany,* the *círculos* were defined as a basic unit and core cell; as main participation spaces of the party-on-the-ground; as the first contact point for interested citizens; and as vehicles for channelling the demands of the party base. In contrast to local branches in traditional parties, the *círculos* were autonomous spaces that could be created by anyone without the obligation of prior registration. This displays similarities to the nodes of DRY, where "anyone had absolute freedom to create nodes that could be territorial or thematic" (Interview, P9)[143]. Over the course of a few months, more than 400 *círculos* were created. Their purpose, however, changed after *Vistalegre I*.

Following the approval of the organizational models proposed by Pablo Iglesias at *Vistalegre I*, the party created stratified organs within the internal structure and formal offices such as the General Secretary[144], individually elected by the General Assembly, the Coordination Council, the Citizen Council[145] and the Committee of Guarantees.[146] It is important to consider how in both phases the General Assembly functioned as the ultimate decision-making authority on long-term strategies within *Podemos*. Every member of *Podemos* was invited to attend the General Assemblies in person. Compared to traditional parties in which general assemblies are mostly only open for delegates to attend, *network parties* in general tend to open their general meetings to all their members. This resonates with the concept of input-legitimacy that perceives the number of people involved in a decision as the main criterion for the legitimacy of the decision (see Chapter 2).

The hollowing out of the *círculos*: To investigate the changing nature of the *círculos* as the physical link between the party-on-the-ground and the party-in-(public and

---

party democracy.

143 Within DRY, a multi-lateral online recognition system was used for communication between the nodes. Basically, a Facebook or Twitter profile was needed to communicate with the rest of the nodes on a state level. Accordingly, besides the territorial groups, several thematic nodes were created consisting of topics such as technology, campaigning, graphics, content, international, and coordination.

144 Since 2017 Pablo Iglesias Turrión has held this office. The diverging model proposed a collective body as general secretary instead of an individual person to show more alignment with social movements opposed to personalized leadership (della Porta et al. 2017: 80).

145 The Citizen Council consists of 81 members from which 62 are directly elected by the General Assembly.

146 The Committee of Guarantees is an independent moderation team, the commission that ensures the rights of the members of *Podemos*. Consisting of ten people, 70% of them with a background in law, the committee protects the fundamental rights and ethical values of *Podemos*.

central)-office, I listened to voices from the district circle of Lavapies in Madrid,[147] in June 2016. The *circulo* as a basic unit of *Podemos* and a vital organ of the party-on-the-ground lost its significance in the aftermath of *Vistalegre I*.

Without direct strategic considerations in *Podemos'* inception phase about what the nature and function of the *círculos* were, their role was perceived with ambivalence: On the one hand, the *círculos* were a necessary element in implementing the central strategy in the territories – as a catalyst of the party's antagonist narrative. In terms of internal decision-making, however, it soon became apparent that this dispersed organizational nature of the basic cells was inadequate in providing stable and long-term opportunities for citizen participation and deliberation. This can partly be explained by the professionalization of the *círculos* as active militants moved into higher positions within the organic structure of *Podemos*, leaving their previous positions empty (Interview, P3).

The *círculos* had another problematic tendency. Militants from the *Izquierda Anticapitalista* prominently led the *círculo* in Lavapies and mobilized people under topics related to their agenda. According to the impressions of some interviewees, the influence of these groups was positive in terms of sensitizing "normal" citizens with anti-capitalist world views and mobilizing them into political action. However, after *Vistalegre I*, as outlined above, the organizational proposal of IA was not accepted by the General Assembly, which led to disappointment amongst party members. Some militants from IA reacted by withdrawing from the party's activities whereas others aimed at confrontation within the *círculos,* doubting the legitimacy of the decision made, which in turn led to an internal boycott (Interview, P7).

Many observers have described the subsequent erosion of *circulos* as a general phenomenon that can be clearly traced back to the Lavapies *círculo*. The contradictions between antagonist and agonist strategies and the weakening of the party-on-the-ground paved the way for *Podemos* to become a centralized party. Again, Vistalegre I can be interpreted as a crucial moment that exposed the inherent contradictions of the party's discourse and strategy:

> "*After Vistalegre I, certain contradictions appeared between the framing of the party's identity as an antagonist actor and mediatic strategy as an agonist due to upcoming elections. The main contradiction has to do with the fact that the political scenario that Podemos was facing when it was launched was of a very short and very intense period electorally speaking*" (Interview, P8)

The differing visions of the role and the responsibilities of the *círculos* created conflict within *Podemos*. Alongside the controversies between Errejonistas and Ig-

---

147 At the time of its foundation, this *círculo* consisted of 42 members, around 20 of whom participated regularly. At the time of the investigation, the *círculos* consisted only of a few active members that reflected upon the main direction of *Podemos* and the ambivalent logic between the antagonist and agonist stance with criticism.

lesistas, the main divide within *Podemos* consisted of a faction that envisioned the *círculos* as central decision-making spaces and a faction that wanted to renounce a decentralized party structure in favour of an 'efficient' organizational structure capable of winning elections[148]. The winning organizational document of Vistalegre I – OPP - replaced the deliberative potential of *circulos* with a top-down structure. As a result, the role *círculos* members ended up with was "mainly to participate by sticking posters or circulating material" (Interview, P9). In Lavapiés this included campaigning before the respective elections with typical activities of a party branch such as distributing information materials and organizing information events[149] instead of shaping and co-creating the party's political content. Accordingly, the main role of the *círculo* was perceived as disseminating and amplifying the centralized message in the local area (territory) (Interview, P7).

Once thought of as critical and core spaces for binding deliberation and decision-making, the *círculos* turned into hollowed-out campaigning organs. The limited role of the *círculos* to diffuse the central message of the party-in-public-office left participants of Lavapiés disappointed. As a member affirms:

> *"Trying to establish political work in the círculos has been difficult. The only sense of the círculo was following the indication from above in terms of discourse and elections. Until now we have been basically involved in the dynamics of doing campaigns and events" (Interview, P8)*

With the decision to turn the *círculos* into proliferation action spaces, the gap between physical participatory spaces of the party-on-the-ground and the decision-making power of the party-in-central-office grew bigger. The next section goes in some depth explaining the central role of Pablo Iglesias Turrión and highlights the frictions that *network parties* face in determining the issue of political leadership.

> *"One of mine[150]"- The role of Pablo Iglesias in the primaries 2015: Podemos started out with academic Pablo Iglesias providing charismatic leadership for the party, steering it into the political limelight. As Chapter 3 showed, network parties often struggle navigating functionalist, descriptive or substantive forms of representation (Pitkin, 1967) as a result of institutionalising socio-technical practices of an idealistic view of networked movements (Juris, 2008).*

Thus, the leadership question inherently poses ambiguities since on the one hand, a leadership figure "could have a mobilizing and dynamic role and serve as

---

148 A third approach consisted of the development of a ‚platformist' approach, direct-action plans in the neighbourhood, to support other social movements and create links with activists, political organizations and neighbourhood groups.

149 For example, at the time of investigation, this *círculo* launched a campaign against TTIP.

150 "De los míos" (Orig. Spanish)

catalyst" (Interview, P6) and fulfil certain rules in the mediatic game (Errejón, 2014). On the other, networked parties try to transcend the very idea of representational leadership to construct a party of 'the people'.

The advantage of having Pablo Iglesias as a charismatic spokesman for *Podemos* rested on his frequent appearances on political talk shows such as *La Tuerka* and *Las Tertulias* and the reputation he established as an excellent speaker and engaging politician. Accordingly, a member of *Podemos* affirms:

> *"We need a leadership figure who works a bit as a catalyst, Pablo Iglesias who is at the gatherings and people like him (…) He stands for the demands of the left although they are ideas of the left to be able to connect with the whole idea of transversality, with the normality of the people." (Interview, P8)*

The above comment summarizes how Pablo Iglesias navigated issues of representation by functioning as a catalyst, addressing the wider citizenry but simultaneously promoting a leftist programmatic approach. Yet, as a party, *Podemos* held an anti-representational discourse towards traditional forms of representation, in particular through the "they don't represent us" discourse. This contradiction, as a focal point of Podemos´ the backslide towards the 'electoralist' party type outlined in Chapter 3, describes the main feature that turned this party into a plebiscitary party.

The short-term antagonist strategy of using signifiers of "the people" against "the caste" was openly repeated in his public appearances in which he descriptively represented the young, educated section of Spanish society. Thus, he helped *Podemos* establish a counter-hegemonic identity that became embodied in his person. Importantly, the populist strategy of challenging hegemonic signifiers to reach the wider citizenry and potential voters was later re-directed within the party, at the militants of Podemos after Vistalegre I:

> *"The speeches to excite people were important in allowing ordinary citizens to build a strong identity with Podemos . There was a tendency among militants, the people that were already part of Podemos, to feel detached from Pablo Iglesias after he used this strategy on them that was previously projected outwards" (Interview, P7).*

As mentioned previously, the primaries in the 2015 general elections led to internal competition, a sense of inequality among the party-on-the-ground, as well as a backlash against *Podemos*' shift towards a traditional party structure exhibiting strong plebiscitary tendencies. Regarding the primaries, the documents of *Podemos* state that the general assembly ought to "elaborate, through a process of open primaries, the electoral lists for public offices (from the first to the last candidate of the list) for the institutions of national representation" (Podemos 2015a, Article 13/a/2).

The procedure implemented in *Vistalegre I* of voting for the distinct documents

presented by the two party-strands is indicative of the plebiscitary tension within *Podemos*. Indeed, instead of 'open' primaries, members had to choose their candidates by voting on pre-drafted lists which for numerous members spelled out a turning point away from the deliberative standards proposed by *Podemos* earlier. As one interviewee confirms:

> *"I would have preferred a list that represents the different sectors more proportionally, like this, the assembly's methodology would have been more effective. (…) Some decisions should at least be open to consultation and critique from the members" (Interview, P6)*

Subsequently, the members of the Citizen Council consisted of a list of affiliates of Pablo Iglesias, leading to accusations of excessive control and centralization by the party elite (Interview, P 8). According to a member from Madrid:

> *"Through the primaries, we created some sort of inequality. There were certain people who directly interacted with the representatives who were more probable later running for a position because they could get to know the important people in the party" (Interview, P10).*

Eventually these tensions tipped over, making critical organs of *Podemos*' organisational structure feel unrecognized and irrelevant (Interview, P7). The erosion of the General Assembly and the *círculos* as "physical" participation spaces went hand in hand with the diminished significance of digital participation spaces, i.e. Plaza Podemos as online decision-making tools of the party. This will be addressed in the following section.

4.3.4 (Digital) Practices: Online Decision-Making within *Podemos*

Initially, *Podemos* used various online tools to "encourage participation and deliberation in the creation and development" of party agenda and "in some ways reproduce essential values and practices of the movement, thus facilitating the identification between the 15M activists and the parties" (Romanos & Sádaba, 2016: 4). Indeed, *Podemos*' programme stresses that "the implementation of digital democracy tools will be of particular relevance", and advocates for "the inclusion of groups that cannot access these instruments" (Podemos, 2012: §213). This significance of digital tools to organize internal party affairs was affirmed by most interviewees:

> *"Of course, the digital issue has been fundamental. The platforms allow Podemos to reach a lot of people who maybe work full-time, who have children, who cannot participate in assemblies." (Interview, P10)*

Despite their use of *Facebook* and *Twitter* for campaigning and information dissemination, the *círculos* were coordinated via *Loomio* and *Appgree* and in addition *Agora Voting* for online decision-making. The main digital backbone of Podemos was *Plaza.Podemos*, a Reddit channel where party members could discuss issues and exchange arguments. The participation space *Participa.Podemos* served as a voting system in which the primaries before the European elections and the General Assembly in 2014 were organized. The following section describes *Plaza.Podemos' structure* and offers a critical analysis on the implementation of digital technologies within Podemos.

Structure of Plaza.Podemos: Plaza.Podemos was the technological backbone of Podemos' online infrastructure. Updated in 2016, this "deliberative muscle" (Ardanuy Pizarro & Labuske, 2015) allowed the building of structural ties among the members to discuss and debate on internal issues on a nation-wide scale, thus inhibiting classical features of DDDPs (see Chapter 3). Plaza.Podemos was generally perceived as very user-friendly by members. As Figure 6 shows, the main discussion threads are placed visibly in the centre of the page and different functions allow prioritizing comments to classify information and structure the debate. Participants can vote on topics they find important to discuss which permits greater visibility of the discussion.

Figure 6: Set-up of Plaza Podemos 2.0. Retrieved from: https://www.reddit.com/r/podemos/search?q=flair:debate&restrict_sr=1&sort=new&t=week [Last accessed: 08.09.2020]

Additionally, in 2016, Plaza.Podemos was used in the joint production of the programme allowing party members to propose themes and policy ideas that had received more than 100 votes on the portal. The "Citizen Initiatives" (orig. "Iniciativas Ciudadanas Podemos) was a key participatory mechanism within the Plaza.Podemos set up, introduced to facilitate bottom-up initiatives and proposals, providing a path

for them to become binding legislative policies. Proposals would require an approval rating of 0.2% or above by party members to appear in Participa.Podemos. If it then received a 2% approval, it would be discussed further, followed by a polling period of three months. During this phase, if the proposal received 10% of all the members vote or 20% of the territorial *círculos* votes, a working group would further develop the proposal to be formulated as a referendum for all party members in order to become binding legislation. This deliberative, discussion-oriented forum was accompanied by plebiscitary referenda, i.e. the coalition with IU in the 2016 elections[151], which were held on Participa.Podemos.

Like LQFB, the implementation of Plaza.Podemos resulted in certain difficulties and controversies regarding intra-party democracy, which I will elaborate in the following section.

Challenges and Controversial Issues around Plaza Podemos: When analysing the implementation of Plaza.Podemos, two main critiques emerge. Besides the general flaws of online political deliberation, and the inhibited growth of Plaza.Podemos due to lack of resources, the platform became less deliberative over time, adopting plebiscitary, top-down mechanisms.

Regarding the general critique, similar doubts about the implementation of permanent discussion fora need to be acknowledged. Although the general design of Plaza.Podemos was appreciated for its user-friendliness - and the high penetration rate and vibrant activity affirms this statement - the deliberative mechanisms of *Podemos'* online participation were criticised for unmoderated discussions that failed to produce efficient results. As one respondent observes:

> *"Direct democracy via the Internet in Podemos did not offer spaces to build a common discourse. To build political will Podemos needs more spaces for consultation. Online referenda have been working but are limited in their power as (being) spaces of decision-making" (Interview, P6).*

In line with prevailing literature on the pitfalls of political online deliberation and decision-making (Bullwinkel, B. & Probst, L., 2014) interviewees identified the lack of educational and time resources as the main issue with such procedures. Here, challenges surrounding the digital divide and digital literacy were given major importance. One member of the *círculo* in Lavapiés summarizes both of these aspects:

> *"The older members of Podemos are not so engaged with these kinds of tools and young people don't have enough time to take part in meetings. You create some sort of inequality. Only the more trained people, pro-digital people, who have more resources, more knowledge, only these people can access information. And*

---

151 This referendum attracted 98% of the members and resulted in the alliance with IU.

information is power in terms of being able to interact directly with representa-
tives." (Interview, P8)

The inclusion of elderly people in online discussions was a crucial issue within the *círculo* of Lavapiés. One assembly formulated the idea of offering workshops for elderly people to empower them in their digital literacy skills. This detail resonates with authors who stress upon the issue of digital divisions within online participation endeavours (Belanger & Carter, 2008). In this vein, another statement shows how the regular use of digital technologies such as *Telegram* channels and *WhatsApp* were important for pursuing a political career and the emerging spirit of "one of mine" within *Podemos*:

> *"The people being in touch with people from above are more probable candidates*
> *in running for a position later because they get to know the important people in*
> *the party. But people that are totally unaware of these mechanisms are placed in*
> *a secondary position and this generates inequality. (...) Digital participation is not*
> *positive per se, it depends on how to distribute power and sometimes it does not*
> *work." (Interview, P8)*

This quote also relates to the observation that, over time, Plaza.Podemos turned into a tool for exerting the will of representatives instead of channelling demands of the party's base. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that - despite problems intrinsic to the use of digital media - the democratic framework of Plaza.Podemos became more plebiscitary over the course of time. The issue of closed ties to leadership figures proves the prevailing perception of creeping hierarchy within *Podemos* encapsulated by the phrase "one of mine". *Podemos* began to backtrack on promises of decentralization and generation of citizen initiatives. In an interview, a member of *Podemos*' participation team Miguel Ardanuy, observed that

> *"(...) very suddenly the leaders of Podemos feared that if they really opened deci-*
> *sion channels from the bottom, they would lose control of the party and that was*
> *not going to let the party win the elections and produce changes. They were really*
> *afraid of this kind of new mechanism. So, when they saw that the mechanism was*
> *growing and there were proposals to really let the mechanism take the important*
> *decisions, they stopped it." (Deseriis, 2019).*

In this vein, it has been argued that Plaza.Podemos and the use of other online tools for collective decision-making "might favour participation but are not inherently democratic" (della Porta et al. 2017: 83). Since its inception, for instance, not a single Citizen Initiative has been implemented on Plaza.Podemos, and only one referendum was held to decide upon potential coalitions between *Podemos*, PSOE and IU.

Podemos' mediatic practice: *Podemos* did not only proliferate its neo-populist agenda via social media and digital technologies but also utilized traditional media. This two-pronged technopopulist[152] approach is relatively unique within *network parties* and is commonly perceived as a crucial factor in *Podemos'* success:

> *"I believe that without internet and digital technology we could not have had success but also without giving the battle on television or in the most classic media." (Interview, P7)*

Indeed, *Podemos'* strategy of embracing both traditional media and social media, opened a scholarly discourse (Rivero, 2014; Postill, 2015; Sampedro, 2014; Della Porta et al., 2017). In mediatization theory in particular, Podemos' strategy is labelled as a "two-way street mediatization of politics" (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2016) that overcomes the unilateral relationship between traditional and new media. Pablo Iglesias and other representatives have used traditional media as a platform for reaching an audience that may not be reached via social media. Within the context of the fragmentation of modern media systems (Chadwick, 2013), *Podemos'* political mediatization repertoire is a paradigmatic instance of pursuing a populist strategy by simplifying central messages and spreading them amongst diverse channels.

Thus, the use of traditional media goes hand in hand with the *Podemos'* populist tinge, in the sense that it utilizes media as a catalyst for fostering a hegemonic discourse and disseminating slogans. Against this backdrop, an interviewee derisively labels *Podemos* as "circus-media-party" (Interview, P7) that adapted itself to the political media-game and as a result reproduced the institutional dynamics it initially opposed. Thus, "entering the enemy's battle-field" (ibid.) in terms of the logics of traditional media came at the expense of internal democracy because traditional media requires a "quick and agile response" (ibid.). Decisions regarding dissemination of political content were taken individually or in accordance with only a few spokesmen. This negative side-effect of relying on traditional mass media coverage led to criticisms from within the party. As one interviewee states:

> *"We have generated dynamics based on media that we cannot control and that hinders us from redesigning the party. The appearance on traditional media has*

---

152 *Podemos* has often been categorized as a political party that uses a technopopulist approach. The term "technopopulist" can be defined as a "discursive formation" (Deseriis, 2017) rooted in populism and technolibertarianism that either describes an emerging discourse or embraces a set of practices and materialized ideas (ibid.). *Podemos'* strategy falls under both definitions since the party centres its public discourse around the extreme use of technology and media to facilitate a participatory project pursuing the implementation of "new politics". In this sense, it is technopopulist since it nurtures the discourse around the opportunities of technolibertarian methodologies. At the same time, it endorses a technopopulist imprint by adopting a novel strategy for campaigning and communicating operating with a public discourse based on the identification of "(…) a social sensibility that struggles with the established order but that has no political articulation and at a moment of organizational destabilization of the movements" (Interview, P6).

become more important for Podemos. Media outlets were following and reporting on the emergence of Podemos spreading all the information and influencing the public image. Because this has been of more importance than internal democracy, we now have problems generating a grassroot-party or a movement party or a party that really develops initiatives from below." (Interview, P8).

Another side-effect of this strategy was the development and consolidation of the "Pablo Iglesias" brand , nurtured by his casual appearance that subsequently became symbolic of *Podemos* to the point that his face was printed on the ballot boxes in the National Elections in 2015. His cult of personality was met with ambiguous feelings by the party-on-the-ground. Accordingly, the neo-populist nature of *Podemos'* discourse elaborated above was materialized and channelled through the hybridization of mediatic strategies that provoked a centralizing effect and the emergence of the "Pablo Iglesias" brand. The following section critically questions the definition of Podemos as a "movement party" and sheds light on the ambiguities of the party's ideology.

The previous sections have shown how *Podemos* emerged out of a sense of political urgency and upsurge, becoming the third most elected party in Spain within a relatively short period of time. The socio-political circumstances in Spain permitted its meteoric rise but the party navigated a tumultuous discursive terrain. Initially, its rhetoric and programmes mimicked the network party family, namely a commitment towards the deliberative-participatory paradigm, and a high standard of bottom-up binding citizen involvement. However, in the course of its institutionalization, *Podemos* never sought to "legitimize its democratic structure" (Interview, P8) as demonstrated by the decisions made at Vistalegre I, and failed to build a new concept of citizenship for the participation processes of direct policy-development.

The general trend from deliberative-participatory towards plebiscitary mechanisms are retraceable in *Podemos'* discourse, in the development of their organization, the procedure of their general assembly and within their use of online technology and traditional media. It can aptly be said that *Podemos*, over time, lost confidence in the *círculos* and their bottom-up structures, namely, their own members and party affiliates.

Referring to recent literature (della Porta et al., 2017; Bickerton & Accetti, 2018), Chapter 3 has argued that the similarities between *M5S* and *Podemos* suffice to group them within the family of *network parties*. In line with this, Treré and Barassi (2015) have claimed that within *M5S*, "the digital rhetoric of horizontality, lack of leadership, and spontaneity of the party is used to mask, facilitate and reinforce the authority of Beppe Grillo as a political leader, thus forging a new type of authoritarianism that is supported and legitimated through the everyday construction of digital discourse" (p. 287). What applies here mainly to the construction of digital discourse can aptly be used to describe the role of Pablo Iglesias within *Podemos*.

In conclusion, the overall trajectory from its participation-aligned rhetoric

towards authoritarian tendencies is a key characteristic of the *plebiscitary* party type that operates with catch-all mechanisms, reducing citizen participation to legitimize the leader's decision; sacrificing collective creation of political content in favour of electoral efficiency.

The leadership of *M5S* and *Podemos* shared certain features in terms of the cult of personality around the figures of Beppe Grillo and Pablo Iglesias Turrión, as well as their strategy of re-presenting a homogenous entity "the people" against the political elite. However, most importantly, the promotion of plebiscitary participation patterns and the desire for electoral power came at the expense of open, assembly participation spaces, reducing them to campaigning machines. Given this trajectory, the label "movement" party is inadequate in describing these parties.

4.3.5 Summary: The Plebiscitary Sub-Type of Network Parties.

Throughout relevant literature, *Podemos* is categorized as 'movement party' (della Porta et al. 2017) that was born out of the 15M movement, pursuing an institutionalization process. As discussed previously, the relationship between 'political party' and 'social movement' is highly ambiguous. However, it can be argued that while political parties seek electoral power and maximization of votes (see Schattschneider, 1942), social movements operate with extra-institutional repertoires to channel unfulfilled collective interests, often targeting political institutions themselves.

To recapitulate, the original concept of the 'movement party' goes back to Kitschelt (2006), who defines this type of party in two ways: either in terms of their emergence out of social movements or the implemented grassroot repertoires. Instead of having highly structured formal organizations, the 'movement party' relies on fragmented internal organs that lack an "institutionalized system of aggregating interests through designated organs and officers" (p. 280). Internal contradictions and inefficient participatory coordination often lead to fragmentation and unsustainable electoral performance. Calling in mind Robert Michels' (1015) classical argument of the "iron law of oligarchy" which states that a functioning democracy requires the creation of formal organizations to be successful. The institutionalization of movement parties often creates fragilities and dilemmas that such parties struggle to navigate (Kruszewska, 2014).

However, with the rise of digital tools for deliberation and decision-making, "movement and electoral scholars are close to pooling their resources to examine how the Internet may be erasing the boundary between movement activism and electoral politics" (McAdam & Tarrow, 2001: 29). *Podemos* serves as an excellent case for examining this statement since the reasons why literature agrees on defining *Podemos* as a movement party range from its origins in the 15M movement to the grassroots repertoire they employed after successful elections. One respondent summarises the initial reason behind *Podemos'* inception as a vehicle between movement demands and the institutions:

"Probably in an ideal society the figure of a political party would be questionable, but now it is essential to put the battle back in the enemy's field with the tools of the enemy. This is part of the initial philosophy of Podemos. Not to give up those spaces but to occupy them and win that battle. The alternative would be to stay in the marginality which is usually the case for critical positions in Spain." (Interview, P7)

Opposed to this view, another interviewee analyses the institutionalization process as follows:

"From the beginning, I observed Podemos with suspicion, since Podemos presented us to the elections as if we were fighting inside the system instead of fighting against it." (Interview, P8)

These remarks represent the underlying tensions within Podemos in terms of representative politics. Regarding the verticalization of its organization and the coalition with IU, *Podemos* can rightfully be categorized as embracing catch-all mechanisms instead of pursuing the agenda of 'movement parties'. Regarding their protest repertoires, *Podemos* sought to embrace movement logics within the institutional realm. In 2015, *Podemos* initiated the "marchas de cambio"[153], adopting contentious political actions usually applied within social movements. The contradictory nature of this phenomenon was led to contests inside *Podemos* between members who prioritized working within established institutional frameworks and members who sought to ally with protest movements to transform institutions[154].

If we reiterate the characteristics of 'movement parties', it can be argued that *Podemos* splintered away from this definition in the process of its institutionalization. Whereas 'movement parties' commonly lack a formal organization and employ fragmented participatory grassroots politics, *Podemos* hollowed out its *círculos* and turned into a vertical structure with expanded power afforded to leadership figures. During its inception, *Podemos* aimed to provide an extensive infrastructure for citizen participation with low-threshold physical spaces and large-scale online participation through Plaza.Podemos, combining strong leadership with deliberative-participatory practices. However, although Plaza.Podemos provides an open, horizontal space for discussion and deliberation, the implementation of binding bottom-up policies (Initiativas Ciudadanas) has been abandoned due to the interests of individual leaders.

---

153 "Walks for change" in English.

154 "The debate that has tensed *Podemos* for weeks revolves around the opportunity to focus its activity on institutions or encourage the next social mobilizations. All the leaders of the formation deny that there is a contradiction between these two tasks. But the sectors headed by the secretary general and his number two have different ways of approaching their work in the opposition during the second term of Rajoy. Iglesias insists on multiplying its presence in the street, while Errejón recalls that the mandate that on June 26 obtained with five million votes obliges them to „be useful". (Excerpt from Manetto (2015))

This tendency adds up to the observation that *Podemos* moved from movement logics towards traditional catch-all mechanisms. The same applies for the democratic narrative of *Podemos*: The antagonist discourse followed in the early days of *Podemos'* formation deployed dichotomous signifiers such as "la casta/" against "the people" but later moved its target, focusing on its own members and activists who challenged the legitimacy of top-down decision-making processes within the party.

As depicted above, *Vistalegre I* can be perceived as a turning point within this shift from 'movement party' to 'plebiscitary' practices'[155]. Thus, although *Podemos'* origin is evidently tied up with the 15M movement and recent repertoires have been open to protest actions on the street, its key participation repertoire is characterized by output-, rather input-legitimacy. Whereas the 15M movement consisted precisely of large-scale deliberation and grassroots politics, *Podemos'* overall tendency marks a turn to authoritarianism that legitimizes a plebiscitary label within the *network party type*.

4.4 *Democratizing Local Government: The Case of Barcelona en Comú*

"Democracy doesn't mean putting power some place other than where people are"

(Lummis, 1997: 18).

"(M)unicipalism is not an end in itself. It's a means by which to achieve [our] vital goals"

(BComú, 2017: 1)

This chapter reviews Barcelona en Comú (*BComú*) as the most recent variation of the *network party* family. Whilst the *Pirate Party Germany* and *Podemos* struggle with the challenge to provide a nation-wide proposal for institutionalizing digitally-mediated participatory democracy, *BComú* has influenced the Barcelona city government pushing the agenda of a 'Municipalist hypothesis'. Originating from the powerful movement la PAH (Blanco et al., 2019), this party inherits a commons-based democracy with punctual citizen participation making use of *Decidim* as DDDP, an open source digital infrastructure. As such, *BComú* initiated the debate about a global "new" Municipalism, a political project understood as a network of platforms of social and political movements enacted by citizen initiatives that are reshaping local governments.

---

155 After the structural issue of voting for the candidacies en bloc, the value of deliberation and opinion-forming was replaced by plebiscitary tendencies. The "de los míos" philosophy is one example of this tendency.

The seven interviews conducted for this chapter took place between May 2015 and June 2018 since I had observed the electoral success of the party in the 2015 elections. The interviewees were militants from two neighbourhood groups in Barcelona, as well as active members of the party and a representative from *BComú* global, a working group dedicated to establishing a worldwide network of Municipalist cities. After the re-election of Ada Colau as mayor, I decided to conduct two follow-up interviews in 2019 on the development of *BComú* and the institutionalization process.

As in the previous cases, this chapter begins with providing an overview of the socio-political contexts that enabled the rise of *BComú* and introduces its democratic vision and rhetoric as well as its organizational infrastructure. It briefly introduces the project Decidim, a participatory multi-purpose governance platform and sheds light on the development of PAM, the *Plan for Municipal Action* (Cat: Pla de Accio Municipal), as an example of a technopolitical practice. The analysis of *BComú* is set against the background of the most recent wave of *network parties* in the context of a global narrative on local "governments of change".

4.4.1 Historical Background: From la *PAH* to the electoral confluence

What conditions led to the rapid rise of *BComú*? How has it come about that the wave of Municipal parties including *BComú* has shaped the contemporary Spanish landscape? While this section cannot cover in full depth the historical facets that should be considered for a holistic understanding of the matter, it provides some general insights that set the framework for its relevance. [156]

The socio-political conditions that led to the rise of *BComú* are closely interrelated with the economic and political crisis that hit Spain in the year 2008 and that peaked in the 15M movement in 2011 (Borge & Santamarina, 2015) which was extensively tackled in the formative context of *Podemos*. The context that paved the way for *BComú* to enter local government were three factors that describe the peculiar situation of Barcelona (Eizaguirre et al, 2017). The first that must be mentioned is its longstanding tradition in grassroot-politics, ranging from anarchistic to syndicalist initiatives and secondly, the success of the initiative la *PAH* (Plataforma de los Afectados por la Hipoteca) that directly tackled Barcelona's housing problems, and the negative impacts of large-scale privatization of public sectors.

Barcelona draws on a history of civil society´s strong engagement in local governance. The city council from the 1970s onwards collaborated strongly with social movements in favour of "co-optation of leaders and their transformation into members of the political elite" (ibid., 2017: 430). The "Barcelona Model" (Capel Sáez,

---

156 It goes beyond the scope of this thesis to provide an account of the Catalan independence movement although this motif has been a prevalent theme that has dominated Catalan politics. (See: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/14/catalan-independence-what-is-the-story-what-happens-next) [Last accessed: 09.08.2020]
In the course of 2018, Ada Colau's neutral position on the independence has been identified by some interviewees as the main reason for the rise of the party ERC, a left-wing independentist party.

2007) thus conveys a practice of how the "city council promoted local welfare with the involvement of civil society in the provision of services, such as active advocacy groups and third sector organizations" (Eizaguirre et al, 2017: 430). However, like in the case of *Podemos*, the most immediate socio-political factor in understanding the rapid success of *BComú* is related to the mortgage crisis. During this crisis Barcelona witnessed 20,117 evictions between 2008 and 2011 since poperty owners were no longer able to repay their credits. The economic crisis (2008-2011) and the bursting of the housing bubble led to unemployment and "worsening of social conditions" throughout the Spanish population. Additionally, the malfunctioning of the Spanish housing system (Ferrera, 2005) in the tradition of "privatized Keynesianism" (Crouch, 2009) served as fertile ground for the upsurge of civil society involvement culminating in the 15M movement that served as a catalyst for different subsequent initiatives. One of them, la *PAH*, particularly addressed housing evictions after 2008 (De Weerdt & Garcia, 2015) and successfully reframed "the issue of housing as a collective instead of an individual debt problem" (Eizaguirre et al., 2017: 428). La *PAH* defines itself as "a horizontal, assembly-based, non-party-affiliated movement denouncing the mortgage-scam and political-economic machine that drove it" (García-Lamarca, 2017: 9) to push forward "the creation of new mechanisms for collectively negotiating housing debts with financial institutions" (Eizaguirre et al., 2017: 428).

A genealogy of *BComú*: With its roots in narratives and practices from *la PAH*, the citizen platform *Guanyem* held its first public presentation on 16.09.2014 to announce its participation in the Municipal elections for the upcoming year. *Guanyem* was initiated by the idea of creating a political space where people can try to do politics "differently" and overcome the fragmented left in Barcelona by proposing the "confluence" form as a possible way to organize heterogeneous progressive organizations and civic actors. Ada Colau, the current mayor of Barcelona for *BComú*, had been long-term spokesperson for the *PAH*.[157]

Foundation Guanyem	August 2014
Municipal Elections 2015	May 2015
Participation Process PAM	November 2015 – June 2016
Fearless City Summit	9-11th of June 2017

Table 5: Historical trajectory of *BComú*

---

157 Ada Colau became well-known to the wider public with her famous intervention at the congress against Sáenz, after his foundation of the Fondo Social de Vivienda on TV in 2013 "Es un criminal": See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkl8TyJRlpQ [Last accessed: 09.03.2019]

The core team of *Guanyem* consisted of long-time activists, academics and lawyers who promoted a change in the governmental system by creating a platform intended to coordinate with as many citizen initiatives as possible to legitimize an electoral alternative to existing parties. As one activist and member remembers:

> *"Very early, we talked to many people and activists of the city to ask if they liked the idea of creating a platform. We arrived at different conclusions, some were fascinated and participated at an early stage, others were interested but decided not to join in. And a very small number of people who did not show interest" (Interview, P14).*

The emphasis on creating an identity as a citizen confluence and hive-like platform, *Guanyem* proclaimed its internal logic as non-competitive and goal-oriented thereby counterposing itself to the financially dependent, competitive-driven entity embodied by traditional political parties. The platform had strong links with the anti-austerity movement and *Podemos,* as Pablo Iglesias articulated in his support of *Guanyem* in October 2014 when emphasising the shared identities of *Podemos* and *BComú* as new actors of political change:

> *"We are here to turn the game of politics on its head and to ensure that a majority of citizens vote for change whatever their background is"*[158].

This perception both as a "new" actor relating to the 15M movement and in conjunction with the narratives of an inherently new way of doing politics set the scene for the formation of *BComú*[159]. Prior to the Municipal Elections, the party presented its Emergency Plan[160] that encompassed a restructuring of the city's 2.5 billion budget and 12.000 public officials and cutting public wages of elected politicians down to 2200 Euro. The Ethical code – written in the same period – set the basic conditions of the new actor to guarantee certain ground rules for anti-corruption, transparency and political accountability.[161]

In the elections on 24th of May 2015 *BComú* was able to lead by obtaining 25,2% of the vote and accordingly 11 out of 41 seats. This result had placed *BComú* at the forefront of Municipal politics but at the same time forced the party to constantly seek majorities for implementing policies. As we will explore later, this constellation

---

158 Pablo Iglesias Turrión, 2016 in Faus, 2016.

159 After a scandal regarding the rights on the label "Guanyem", *BComú* was founded and consisted of previously involved actors, Inicitativa per Catalunya, Esquerra Unida i Alternativa, Podemos and Procés Constituent.

160 See the "Plan de Choque", presented on 18.02.2015. Retrieved from: https://barcelonaencomu.cat/es/plan-de-choque-para-los-primeros-meses-de-mandato [Last accessed: 28.12.2019]

161 Although various authors have criticised the logical trajectory from 15M movement to *BComú* (see for example Raunig, 2016), the publication of these documents can aptly be interpreted as the intention to frame and institutionalize the values transported by the 15M movement.

led to contradictions between the character of *BComú's* initial movement and their performance in the institutional realm since they were pressured by the power-led logics of seeking majorities and traditional means of governing[162]. In February 2016, the new government used the online multi-purpose platform *Decidim.Barcelona* to co-write the PAM process that exhibit interesting features concerning the discussion on digital democracy (Barandiaran et al., 2017).

In terms of success, *BComú* not only achieved re-election in 2019 but moreover astonishingly created a successful branding for progressive, social, participatory politics for city governments that gained popularity throughout Europe. As one major event that had widespread political impact, the *Fearless City Summit* proposed the idea of a global Municipalist network conveying „a hypothesis that seeks to put the international context in the centre of municipal debates and municipalism in the centre of global debates" (Baird, 2016). What I will coin as the 'Municipalist hypothesis' discussed in the following section incorporates the vision of "prefiguring post-national networks of urban solidarity and cooperation" (Russell & Reyes, 2017) at scaling out a joint narrative to other cities instead of scaling it up on the national level.

4.4.2 Democratic Vision: The 'Municipalist Hypothesis'

This section examines relevant discursive patterns and programmatic alignments of *BComú* to tentatively draw a democratic vision of this variation of a *network party*. The discourse of *BComú* circles around the important notion of Muncipalism as a novel perception of understanding the relationship between public administration and civil society. Relatedly, the democratic vision of *BComú* is connected to the concept of "urban commons" and co-production as modus operandi of citizen participation. In contrast to the *Pirate Party Germany,* which directly proposed new democratic procedures and *Podemos,* which re-defined the political subject between antagonist and agonist discourse, *BComú* operates with narratives that bring upon new qualities of urban politics as a democratic scale and simultaneously as a "global" project: Leading a political vision in (mostly European) cities such as Naples and Amsterdam, Municipalism as a political narrative goes hand in hand with the rebel city movement, fearless cities, sanctuary cities and other anti-gentrification movements (see Kubaczek & Raunig, 2017).

Within the global narrative surrounding *BComú*, the notion o**f** 'Municipalism' often appears in the same breath. The resurrection of this prominent notion associated with and proliferated by *BComú* requires special attention since it has been utilized as a buzzword characterising the specific nature of a new generation of city governments and parties and institutionalizing practices (Nowotny & Raunig, 2016)

---

162 It can be argued that other *network parties* escaped their 'translative ambiguities' more easily since they either formed part of the opposition in government or, as in the case of Partido X, never actually entered government structures.

that appeared during the Municipal elections 2015 in Spain and kicked off a Europe-wide debate on the importance of local politics as an antidote to the supremacy of the nation-state as the dominant political scale (Peck, 2012). But what are the core elements proposed by the Municipalist agenda and how does *BComú* make sense of them?

Although nowadays perceived as a novel concept, the recent use of the notion of 'Municipalism' draws on famous and influential historical antecedents, each of them providing its own nuance of a political image.[163] Prominently, anarchist author Murray Bookchin bases his ideas on the intersection of urban spaces with ecological sustainability and gender equality[164], whereas from the viewpoint of urban studies, Henri Lefebvre (1968) is rooted in an anti-capitalist reading calling for a co-creation of urban life by multiple actors against the neoliberalization trend on the urban scale. In line with this rejection of neoliberal tendencies, David Harvey (2012) adapts this fundamental claim against the commodification of urban lives and calls for an urban revolution rising "up from the streets, out from the neighbourhoods, as a cry for help and sustenance by oppressed peoples in desperate times" (ibid.: xiii). Necessarily, these authors have adapted rhetoric that is in concordance with the rebel city movements and depicts an action-focused rebellious approach towards rigid power structures (Dogliani, 2002). Taken all together, these early approximations have created a well acknowledged anti-neoliberalist, progressive and left-oriented framework that is widely used in the narratives of actors referring to the 'Municipalist hypothesis'.

Despite this historical embedding of Municipalism, a growing body of literature tackles the resurrection of this concept in attempting to contextualize and understand its contemporary prominence with special focus on the Spanish political context (Observatorio Metropolitano, 2014; Collado & Sáez, 2015; Fundación de los Comunes, 2016; Brunner et al., 2017; Fearless Cities, 2019). Despite the enlightening composition of collective essays on Municipalisms[165] by Christoph Brunner et al

---

163 Etymologically rooted in the political system of Antique Rome, the word 'municipio' describes an accumulation of ordinary citizens (vgl. Bishpam, 2007: 21) that perform civic duties without necessarily belonging to the census (Galsterer, 1976: 81). Additionally, the term implies that citizens are subordinated in a super-ordinated political system thus being situated within the institutional boundaries on the one hand but operating within autonomous rights of the city. In the European medieval epoch, the political autonomy of cities was extended and thus came to function as potential "liberation from subjugation" (Gaccia, 2016: 70). In the 11th century, a shift in the organizational nature of cities took place through the emergence of communal movements and growing identities of bourgeois communities (see Schwarz, 2008; Isenmann, 2014). Despite these early antecedents, contemporary Municipalism is commonly traced back to the industrialization of cities in the 19th and 20th century. As such, authors have argued that the Paris Commune is central point of reference for the 'new' municipal-socialism (Dogliani, 2002) which aims at communalizing central utilities and public infrastructure. As important source of reference the *Fabian Society,* founded in the year 1884, and the Fabian Municipal Program were disseminated throughout Europe claiming to turn cities into "experimental laboratories for the design of a future society" (ibid.: 576).

164 The most famous adoption of his writings was his influence on Abdullah Öcalan, the pro-Kurdish activist and head of PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê), whose theoretical writings on the societal structure of Rojava assimilates most of the Municipalist ideas developed by Murray Bookchin and further developed by his wife Debbie Bookchin (see BComú, 2019) who has visited and documented Rojava since 2014.

165 The most famous adoption of his writings was his influence on Abdullah Öcalan, the pro-Kurdish activist and head of PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê), whose theoretical writings on the societal structure of Rojava

(2017), recent contributions vary widely on their substantive scope and provide instead a loose "nexus of propositions" (Russell, 2019: 3): Whereas Rubio-Pueyo argues that joint practices of Municipalist parties revolve around the concepts of confluence and new leaderships (Rubio-Pueyo, 2017: 7), others stress the "fundamental change in the relationship between movements and administration" (Alagna, 2018) as the centrepiece of the new 'Municipalist hypothesis'. Further interrelated topics are the proliferation of pro-migration policies, the feminization of politics (Pérez, 2019: 21), and the scaling-out of local politics as a counterproposal to the national political decision-making scale.

Against this backdrop, Municipalism in this connotation can be understood as a constant negotiation process on the notion itself of being "defined enough so as not to be appropriated by anyone but at same time open enough to provide the space needed in order to develop an own interpretation" (Interview, P14). In a similar vein, Kubaczek and Raunig state that the "dispersed composition of Municipalism is doubly necessary – as an antidote against the centripetal forces of the party and the state, against the institutionalization of movements, but also as a timely form of counter-power in machinic capitalism: Dispersion in its inner organization, multiplicity, manifoldness, and simultaneously dispersion beyond the country, as a molecular multitude of cities" (Kubaczek & Raunig, 2017). *BComú's* democratic vision develops and concentrates on the 'Municipalist hypothesis' as an "open concept that exhibits constant negotiation and refinement" (Interview, P14) and directs this process to citizens which are not only receivers of but actors of policy-making but within the reading of deliberative-participatory democracy.

Whereas 'Municipalism' describes an umbrella narrative on the urban scale situated between social movements and party organization, *BComú's* main *modus operandi* fits well into the concept of "co-production" or creating the "common good" (Zelinka, 2018) operating within the deliberative-participatory paradigm. Urban commons are a contemporary popular concept referring to the "locus where digital knowledge and culture, and the material re-organization of a post-capitalist mode of exchange and production, converge into new ways of organizing provisioning systems where citizens are 'commonifying' the infrastructure needed for this transition" (Bauwens & Niaros, 2017: 6). Congruent to the idea of 'co-production', elements of practices used by social movements apply in channelling and establishing collective demands to overcome the interests of the individual citizen. As in the case of the *Pirate Party Germany* and *Podemos*, political ideologies play an underhand role with regard to the aim of *BComú* to transcend the left/right wing axis of traditional parties and to "(p)romote and seek synergies with social movements, while respecting their independence" (BComú, 2015: 3). Thus, *BComú's* democratic discourse particularly targets the creation of "new" politics and a "long-term political vision" (Rubio-Pueyo, 2017: 4).

---

assimilates most of the Municipalist ideas developed by Murray Bookchin and further developed by his wife Debbie Bookchin (see BComú, 2019) who has visited and documented Rojava since 2014.

4.4.3 Organizational Architecture and Intra-Party Democracy

As 'confluence'[166], a conglomeration of diverse actors united by the aim of transforming government by the means of creating an electoral platform, *BComú* managed to connect existing nodes of activist structures and aimed at creating responsive administrative bodies establishing an "ecosystem of community cooperation" (Observatorio Metropolitano, 2014: 42). Uniting the forces of citizen initiatives and political parties to create an electoral list was coined as a "confluence" (Junqué et al., 2019) due to two characteristics: A *structural* openness for a variety of organizations to participate, from political parties to organizations and ordinary citizens; and as an *ideological* confluence that transcends the typical right-left axis of political ideologies (Rubio-Pueyo, 2017). In the second reading, *BComú* as a confluence can be interpreted as a transversal cluster of interests that need constant negotiation and conflict management. The attempt of orchestrating a plurality of civic actors has the decisive benefit of forcing a creative dialogue between diverging interests. *BComú*, in this vein, initially claimed to invite and necessitate a discursive and relativist element that allows civic movements and other political parties to unite within one platform as a counter-model to traditional monolithic parties.[167]

On a critical note, the structural shortcomings of drawing together a heterogenous political confluence in collaboration with established political organizations were early seen with high suspicion as to how these unregulated structures would provoke unintended power dynamics between actors - acting in their own – interests. This was the case of the relationship with the established force ICV later on labelled as an "awkward friend" (Interview, P12) that proved to be a strong asset in the campaigning phase[168] but which hindered the democratizing process of *BComú* due to its inherent hierarchical structure. As such,

> *"(BComú) created a very democratic vehicle that is aligned to the citizenry but depends on a certain structure to enter the institutions that have provoked dependencies and internal contradictions." (Interview, P12).*

---

166 In rather flowery wording, Raunig describes the confluence as follows: "'Somos enjambre,' says Málaga Ahora, therefore no bee-people, but a swarm. And when the swarm swarms out, it can also rot. The municipalist swarm is not rotten because it lazily perches on the beehive, but also not because it does not sufficiently develop itself towards the idea of a uniform, subservient, hardworking bee community. The swarm is rotten because of the fraying, uncontrollable effect of its desire-production. Flowing in and from the local, neighborhood context, flowing together in *confluencias*, overflowing its limits, the swarm, in swarming-out, produces over-swarming." (Raunig, 2016).

167 In the case of *BComú*, different political sectors were merged in constructing the confluence: la PAH, the *Initiativa per Catalunya Verds*, *Podem* and the Proces *Constituent* that more than creating a party founded a political "space of negotiation" (Interview, P11).

168 During the Municipal elections, the quantity of public appearance of a political party is related to the percentage of their previous vote share (D'Houndt measure). By providing their time as a presented party in the former elections ICV paved the way for Ada Colau to present herself on public television.

In setting up the equivalent organizational infrastructure and organs that reflect its confluential nature, *BComú's* programme has raised hopes that it will be able "to radically change the way decisions are being made", to "promote direct elections of the district councillors", to "guarantee citizen participation in the stable organs" and "develop an organ to evaluate public policies" (*BComú*, 2014a). Guaranteeing stable participation within decision-making processes in particular expresses a strong dedication towards a democratic promise that – by contrast with the rhetoric of 'assault' and "march through the institutions" of *Podemos* – promotes the alternative of internal transformation and reformation of political institutions and administrative bodies. But how have these convictions translated into party organization?

Organizational Infrastructure: As in the previous case studies, the organizational model of *BComú* is another variety of an attempt to translate the decentralized organization and 'horizontal' decision-making of a party to manifest and represent the confluence within party organization (BComú, 2014b). The official document providing the organizational set-up after the elections (BComú, 2015) lays out the phases of the institutionalization process.[169] So-called "mini-townhalls" (Interview, P12) in the ten different districts were held to introduce and provide necessary information about the institutionalization process and future steps for *BComú* directly after the elections. Thus, following the electoral success, detailed information about the city government and respective mechanisms as well as administration processes was delivered to the district assemblies in lengthy assemblies.

---

169 The document Phase D sheds light on the most central organs that materialize the mission of *BComú* to connect citizens to the institutions, thus, transporting the direct needs of citizens into the higher scale of decision-making.
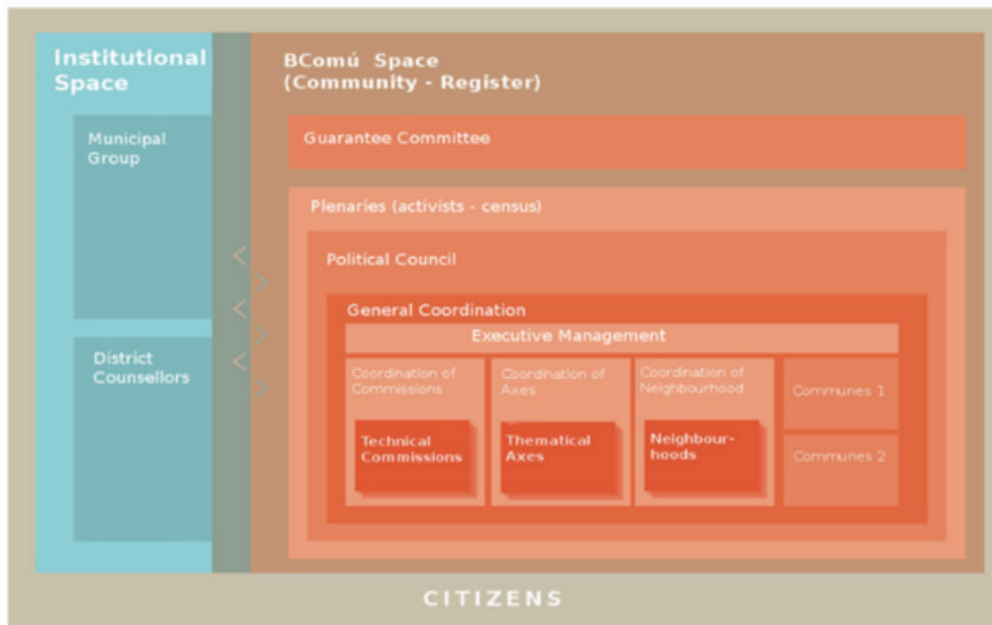
Figure 7: Organization chart of *BComú* (see BComú, 2015)

These "mini-townhalls" were intertwined with the creation and consolidation of neighbourhood groups as central decision-making cells of the party-on-the-ground to "value the collective intelligence of the people in the neighbourhood districts" (*BComú*, 2015b) and "to help channel the concerns, opinions and demands of the neighbourhoods to the institution and to facilitate the knowledge, monitoring and evaluation of institutional action by citizens" (BarrioEnComú, 2015).

The neighbourhood groups in principle are organs that are ideologically and organizationally related to the assemblies in the 15M movement. These unregulated but dynamic cells of the party-on the-ground ensured that "within the assembly everything was discussed, the organization in commissions to identity the problems that were in the neighbourhoods, too much trash, transport issues, infrastructures, schools, security etc." (*Interview, P12)*. The neighbourhood groups were designed as the essential juncture at which *BComú* later attempted to educate citizens on the institutional framework of the municipal government and to shed light on the mechanisms of political decision-making and possible influence. During the development of the electoral programmes, thematic areas and working groups discussed and developed programmatic proposals.

At the higher structural level above the neighbourhood groups, the district councillors coordinate the institutional activity according to the political goals and define the respective policies in the district to link them to the Municipal district group that reflects the neighbourhood's representation within institutional space and serve as a linkage function.

The Plenary consists of activists who are involved in a working group (directors, councillors, members of *BComú* census). It is supposed to be the area where the "organizations' strategic decisions are made and is also the main area for accountability and internal transparency" (*BComú*, 2015: 8). In order to give coherence to the different bodies, the coordination team is placed between the thematic and territorial committees of the district (Municipal District Group; General Coordinator of *BComú*) and nine to eleven individuals that have been elected in the assembly.

Lastly, the 'commission of guarantees' ensures that the ethical code is applied throughout the party. Thus, it can be described as a surveillant position, as

> *"an organ, a kind of court in case there are internal conflicts. Also, the commission has the active function of observing if a political position is fulfilling the ethical code" (Interview, P11).*

By creating this organ, *BComú* structurally intends to defend the values of transparency and commitments towards political accountability organized and verified by an 'objective' external organ. Similar to the neighbourhood groups, the party henceforth adapts to the demands of the 15M movement of preventing internal corruption and political 'misbehaviour'.

In sum, *BComú* aims at establishing a mixed model of centralized decision-making on the urban scale and decentralized determination of relevant issues through district councillors and neighbourhood groups. Thus, this following section investigates in-depth emerging contradictions that are partly paradigmatic for *BComú* to institutionalize digitally-mediated participatory democracy.

The ambiguous role of Ada Colau: Comparable to the role of Pablo Iglesias in *Podemos*, a highly disputed and controversial topic within *BComú* surrounded the role of Ada Colau, spokesperson of *BComú* and current mayor of Barcelona.[170] The ambiguities that were created by having a strong leadership figure based on 'symbolic' representation and parallel to that of a figure who was campaigning for the concepts of commons and 'sovereignty' as substantive input, appeared multiple times within the first months. Illustratively and in striking parallelism to the depicted tensions within *Podemos*, a crucial question during the campaigning phase consisted of whether to put Ada Colau's face on the ballot box. For some activists this symbol per se contradicted the narrative of the confluence and collective identity proclaimed against the "old" way of symbolically pushing the personality of a distinctive candidate. As one activist states:

---

170 Interestingly, the first neighbourhood group meetings concentrated primarily on the topic of which identity the representatives of *BComú* had and thus led to media labelling the activists as anarchist squatters that occupied the town hall.

"To me it screams personality cult, hierarchy and it does not reflect our discourse of working together and collectively." (Faus, 2016)

Similarly, an activist points towards the interpretation of this gesture as supporting "Ada Colau and her fans'" (ibid.)[171] instead of promoting a common progressive project envisioned by the 'confluence'. Distinctively other members expressed their view on Ada Colau as the personification of values that are paradigmatic for "new politics"[172] to the extent that they "only want to vote Ada Colau" (Interview, P13). As we saw in the previous chapter, questioning traditional mandates and the role of leadership as such inherently provokes ambiguities within *network parties* either by aiming for radical non-leadership or for tuning spokespersons into 'hyperleaders' (Gerbaudo, 2019). Within *BComú*, however, this symptom is more complex since the image of Ada Colau transports values that are counterposed to traditional leaders. She represents proximity to the citizens and the identification with the "common" project. Thus, with Ada Colau, an array of adjectives is associated, from "empathy" to "communicative capacities" and "capacity to learn" (Interviews, P 13 – 15). Additionally, another quality that cannot be underestimated is the degree of trust Ada Colau could create. For many, she turned *BComú* into a space in which citizens could express their concerns and experiences in every-day life in a safe space. This is outlined by an interviewee who states:

"What she has done is actually to talk to the people. To set up events in "La Verneda", that the neighbours come and tell us what they are worried about, what they want in a non-systematic way, to collect the direct opinion from the street. This is an act that is new." (Interview, P11)

Ada Colau embodies this trust as "a candidacy capable of inspiring, and of being present in neighbourhoods, (…) and which can allow us to transform an institution for the people's own good." (BComú, 2015). Relatedly, in terms of the representational character manifested through network parties (Chapter 2.4), Ada Colau serves the function of a "trustee", a person that can represent their constituents on the level of integrity. Instead of a "delegate", who is supposed to represent and defend the interests of the electorate, Ada Colau rather occupies a role as mediator. In contrast to the delegate role of Pablo Iglesias in *Podemos* who distanced himself from the base, Ada Colau managed to maintain her proximity to the citizens

Another factor that is often emphasized is the Feminization of Spanish politics expressed by Manuela Carmena in Madrid and Ada Colau in *BComú*. This entails more than the demand for gender equality and the representation and participation of

---

171 In the documentary Alcadessa (2018), Alberto Fernando Diaz (PP) expresses this tension as follows : "You criticised the personality cult of traditional parties but it seems to contradict what we read yesterday about your photo appearing on the ballet (…). Now you are taking part in it"

172 "She is not only a person. She is a symbol that encompasses values that lead us to victory" (Javier Toret, (ibid.)).

women but rather instigates a different practice for social interaction built on cooperation as a feminine code instead of competition as a masculine code (Zscharnack, 2019).

Participation Thresholds and Accountability: Within *BComú*, the hierarchization of the party was witnessed with ambiguous feelings. From the beginning on, a closed group of activists functioned as the "engine" (Interview, P13) of *Bcomú,* leading to thresholds in participation at an earlier stage when "not everyone was able to enter the party" (*ibid.*).[173]

As an explanation, activists of the party pointed towards the pressure in "situations in which in order to develop policies, you have to make quick decisions" (Interview, P11). These decisions were taken at the expense of the deliberative and participatory nature that characterized *BComú* before participating in the elections when the party "was still a confluence and tremendously deliberative space" (ibid.). Nevertheless, the trend to a hierarchization of the party in the predictions of Michels „iron law of oligarchy" is clearly visible.

Secondly, as indicated elsewhere (Haberer & Peña-López, 2017), the responsibilities and competencies directed to the neighbourhood groups often failed to synchronize with the regulations given at the legislative and political level. In our analysis of a neighbourhood group in Barcelona, four thematic axes were challenging the implementation of intra-party democratic measures. First and foremost, accessibility and transparency following the incentive of including "all" citizens and providing them with the required information to participate forms one important factor. With regard to accessibility, a necessary resource for participation in the neighbourhood groups were temporal resources. Thus, the problem of the absence of young people arose who due to concurrent working hours were not able to attend. Hitherto the age average in the neighbourhood meetings in the observed neighbourhood was over 40 years.

As we pointed out, the discussion around the criteria for making information public or keeping it secret for strategic reasons was a key topic that manifested the battle *network parties* had in navigating between their discourse and structural limitations. For *BComú*, this meant that on "one hand, the ideology of the party is to be open to all citizens and transparent in their operations and on the other hand, some sensitive information requires privacy" (Haberer & Peña-Lopez, 2017: 489) in the sense of political confidentiality.

The question of outcome and accountability of citizen participation as a key factor for effective participation was perceived as critical within the neighbourhood group. As an interviewee observes:

---

173 In the election party, the next steps of the institutionalization process were discussed, a highly interesting moment for any researcher on *BComú*. However, the access to the event was denied for unknown reasons. Similarly, militants who accompanied the rise of *BComú*, were denied access to this event.

> *"They say that important decisions should be made in the general assembly. And that anyone can take their proposals directly to the neighbourhood groups. However, Barcelona en Comú is a game under construction, we have to see if these measures work on a practical level" (Interview, P13).*

Within the neighbourhood group I observed in 2015, people criticized the lack of accountability in the outcomes retrieved in the assemblies and the lack of transparency on how the decisions had been processed. After the attendance of councillors within the meetings, no mechanism was described to ensure the responsiveness of the councillor beyond the meeting. For effective deliberation, however, the participatory process itself "must have some bearing on the formulation of public policy. This may involve playing an advisory role relative to elected officials or public administrators. Alternatively, the deliberation body may be more directly involved in the formulation of law or policy" (Rosenberg, 2007: 9). From then on, from an infrastructural point of view, the promise of the deliberative-participatory paradigm was structurally not exhaustively provided. The apparatus of *BComú* to a large part reminds one of classic parties, the decision-making opportunities for permanent neighbourhood involvement are not given:

> *"We cannot say that is a party with a new internal democracy that has changed the rules. That is not true. But the communication with militants has changed, with the voters. We can say that this has refreshed how politicians act within their parties" (Interview, P13)*

Given the rapid success of *BComú* shortly after its foundation, the tensions created through the institutionalization process are to some extent more visible and – given the past as activists – more accessible than in the previous case studies. As the same interviewee states:

> *"The values that were expressed in 15M, because they are linked to the realm outside the institution are difficult to translate into the institution. It never happened before that a Municipalist movement had access to the city hall in the same way as now. Never has a municipalist movement gone so far." (Interview, P13)*

In a similar vein, a spokesperson for *BComú* observes the peculiarity of the situation and the inherent tension of translating the horizontal philosophy of the 15M movement into the governmental space as follows:

> *"None of us had never created an organization like this, these sorts of goals, maintaining an activist soul, behaviour and rules but at the same time remaining related to the government." (Interview, P14)*

Henceforth, although perceived as an electoral platform rather than a political party, *BComú* can be grouped as a sub-species of *network parties* since the party profoundly seeks to revise the relationship between traditional parties and social movements and transform institutional politics through a bottom-up democratization process and a reiteration of the Municipalist institutional framework through the confluence as its organizational model. However, the democratic significance of the cells of the party-on-the-ground by *BComú*'s (*Barrios en Comú*) diminished after forming government and subsequently rather served as linkage-function between government and civil society instead of forming the party's programme (Interview, P15).

Turning into the enemy? The exemplary case of the metro strike in the year 2016 shows vividly how *BComú* was pressured to decide between identifying either with its history in anti-systemic and anarchist grassroot-movements logic or identifying with the reformist logic of the party-in-central-office.

Exhibiting these contradictions, Raul Zelik impressively interprets the outcomes of the natural conflict and 'translative ambiguities' between the 15M movement rhetoric and institutional boundaries when observing the metro strikes in 2016 and 2017 (Zelik, 2018). He depicts how during the metro strikes in 2016 and 2017 the CGT demanded a rise in the workers' wages as well as fixed employment contracts for employees. These demands were rejected by the city councillor for mobility, Mercedes Vidal and mayor Ada Colau, who argued that the stability of public traffic tariffs should not conflict with TMB, the transportation company.[174] *BComú* did not confront this grievance and preferred to avoid the conflict with TMB. Additionally, the former-in-office party Convergencia utilized this occurrence to mobilize the press against *BComú* so that Ada Colau was isolated by the other parties.

This mini-scandal affected the relationships between the party-in-office and the party-on-the-ground, since for many, this behaviour was perceived as betrayal. As an activist and long-term member of *BComú* depicts: "I remember that at this moment you are with the workers defending their rights and being against corruption or you are with your party that wants to reform the system step by step. It was very hard." (Interview, P14) Therefore, the central phenomenon that is paradigmatic of a contradiction in the perception of *BComú* was the intended plan to undertake a 'escrache', a public protest against councillor Mercedes Vidal in front of her house (Interview, P 14).[175]

---

174 Additionally, CGT also accused TMB of providing consultant jobs to previous politicians in a non-transparent, clandestine way. As opposition in parliament, CUP discovered that around 2,5 Mio Euro per annum were spent on 21 consultant employees for TMB. Retrieved from: https://www.elnacional.cat/ca/societat/sous-directius-tmb_107499_102.html. [Last accessed:08.01.2019].
175 This gesture entails this very strong imagery since 'escraches' were a protest type by la PAH against house owners or politicians to publicly expose them. This protest form is perceived as a last means for movements since it implies a personal attack. In that sense, it turns the political into a personal gesture.

In sum, *a*lthough not changing the definition of intra-party democracy, militants observed that *BComú* managed to give more reliability to existing mechanisms and to soften the barriers for citizen participation. Thus, the commission for guarantees and the efforts of creating trust between institutions and the citizenry are important measures that improved the perception of *BComú's* intra-party democracy instead of instigating radical new strategies. Furthermore, complementary procedures through punctual decision-making strategies using the platform *Decidim* provided a sense of legitimacy different to permanent direct democratic measures as in the case of the *Pirate Party Germany*.

4.4.4 (Digital) practices: Structure and implementation of *Decidim*

The digital practice of *BComú* needs to be distinguished between a) the use of *Decidim* for internal party affairs of *BComú*[176] and b) the use of *Decidim* in the city council for participatory projects of the administration.

Despite their participatory character in introducing neighbourhood councils, in 2016, the city council proved its commitment to digital participatory democracy by profiting from the city-wide participation platform *Decidim.Barcelona*[177] which used a free and open source online platform for territorially and thematically structured participatory processes including city planning and budgeting and internal organization of communities.[178] From the viewpoint of current *Chief Technology and Digital Innovation Officer* Francesca Bria, the implementation of *Decidim.Barcelona* is erroneously embedded in a wider imperative of a technocratic approach to digital government (Morozov & Bria, 2018). In her view, the paradigm of 'technological sovereignty' implies posing the normative question on how to move from technocratic data-governance to commons-oriented digital infrastructures and services that serve the needs of citizens and that radically place the inhabitants of the city at the core of policy formulations instead of pushing forward neo-liberal agendas in favour of large technology firms. As globally acknowledged advocate of 'technological sovereignty', she follows an emancipatory project in providing access to and the administration of data retrieved for the citizens.

Basic Features: It is a core function of *Decidim* to be organized in specific processes that are designed for a specific purpose. In general, *Decidim* provides functionalities

---

176 Prominently, the decision if to form a coalition with the Socialist Party in 2019 was made by consulting the party members via *Decidim*.

177 From Catalan "We decide Barcelona" . Since its inception, Decidim has been replicated in more than 20 instances in both cities and regions. The most popular implementation, however, is Barcelona, where Decidim. Barcelona had 28,000 registered individuals, 290,520 visitors, 19 participatory processes, 821 public meetings and 12,173 proposals (Barandiaran et al, 2018).

178 It must be mentioned that despite the subjective impressions that were collected via interviews, the main contribution that elicits the details of Decidim.Barcelona is the White Paper, published in 2018, on which we will focus in particular.

ranging from components, such as initiatives, processes, assemblies and consultations with sub-mechanisms such as meetings, proposals, blogs etc. (Barandiaran et al, 2018). These functions allow a very dynamic and adaptable way of organizing different decision-making procedures where any actor can incept a process and design it according to their needs. Within *Decidim*, different processes and internal organizations make use of these compounds to either structure an actor or a process online. Any process can combine diverse components according to the specific needs. As such, a participatory budget plan could include an initial phase with a survey about the different proposals that in a later phase enter a deliberation process with a commenting function. After a voting phase, the best results might be chosen for the budgeting plan as a compound of necessary elements.

The "ethical inscription": What is depicted as "the ethical inscription" is the unique immersion of technological participation opportunities with ethical guidance on how to design a participatory process with *Decidim*. Any organization or policymaker who wants to use *Decidim* for their own project, thus, needs to confirm this contract to ensure the ethical use of the platform written down in the Social Contract[179] that encompasses the following dimensions:

- Free software and open content: *Decidim* utilizes licences that permit the platform and the transparency of the code to be appropriated, i.e. the Open Access Database Licence.
- Transparency, traceability and integrity: All the content created on *Decidim* must be traceable and accessible to the participants, the development of the proposal must be transparent and the implementation traceable to the participants.
- Equal opportunities: Avoiding inequalities by design meaning that any proposal or contribution will be treated equally.
- Privacy with verification: Participants have to register with their personal data in order to guarantee their verification. These data, however, are not to be shared or sold and remain private.
- Democratic quality and guarantees: Proposals and individuals are to be treated equally and respectfully.
- Inclusiveness and multi-layered-ness: The platform intends to lower participation barriers and thresholds for people that are usually prevented from participating online, i.e. senior citizens and illiterates, and it promotes the integral use of offline and online participation.

These dimensions taken together as a social contract of *Decidim* are unique in

---

179 It must be mentioned that despite the subjective impressions that were collected via interviews, the main contribution that elicits the details of Decidim.Barcelona is the White Paper, published in 2018, on which we will focus in particular. .

dealing with and implying the ethical stance of the technological innovation of digitization of governance. Later, we will shed light on how this characteristic differs from other online participation platforms. It highlights the ethical code of conduct that is required by the developers and users of *Decidim*. Also, here, *BComú* seeks to develop trust and inclusiveness between the participants of a participatory process and the institutional side who executes them. But over and above this ethical code of conduct, the meta-level design of *Decidim* is also the key to understanding the inclusive design of the *Decidim* process. The next section goes into detail in exploring the implementation of the most popular participatory process in Barcelona, the PAM and evaluates the process according to the subjective impressions provided by participants.

The Municipal Action Plan (PAM): In Barcelona, the main participatory process that was undertaken by Barcelona's government between 2015-2016, was the "Municipal Action Plan" (PAM) that attracted over 42,000 participants (Peña-López, 2017). The PAM process is a strategic plan for the municipalities and the districts to identify main development goals for the upcoming legislative term[180]. The results of the PAM process in quantitative terms show that out of 12,173 proposals, 8,923 have already become public policies clustered into 5,339 results whose implementation level can be monitored by citizens (Decidim, 2019: 10).
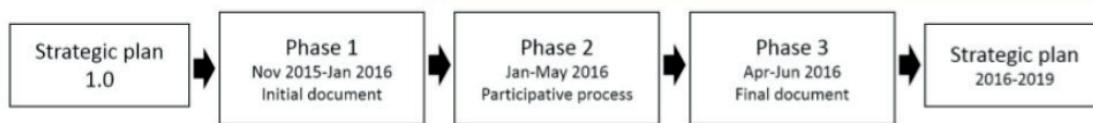

Figure 8. Phases of the PAM process (Retrieved from: https://ictlogy.net/bibliography/reports/projects.php?idp=3491 [Last accessed: 09.01.2019]

Using *Decidim* for the PAM development has been perceived with contradictory feelings. The most pressing concern was the usability of the platform and the question:

"(…) if they were very viable, the platform was filled and filled with comments and I do not know to what extent it can be compiled but there was no apparent order in the structure" (Interview, P13).

On a related matter, although meetings in person were held to include citizens that were not able to participate online, some participants felt that the thresholds on *Decidim* were too high. This finding was shared among the respondents.[181] This observation is somehow surprising given that the process explicitly sought to intertwine

---

180 The PAM/PAD 2012-2015 already made use of electronic participation tools, their impact, however, is still under- estimated (Peña-López, 2017)

181 "It was very complicated to use. Many neighbours do not register on the platform even though they wanted to participate. If they did, most of them had no continuous activity" (Interview, P12).

presental and online decisions and gave space to people with low digital literacy and lack of the necessary resources to use *Decidim*. However, as pointed out in Chapter 2, any digital participatory system faces automatic criticism to be focused on the digital space. A key obstacle for effective online deliberation and decision-making consists in the focus of technological solutionism (Morozov, 2013) instead of the hybrid provision of participation opportunities.

Hybridity of participation opportunities: From the governance point of view, a more complex critique towards the PAM process lays in the practicability and efficiency of combining offline and online participation. Thus, a member of *BComú* also highlighted the complexity of governing a process that included not only offline but also online results.

> *"I think that at the level of the number of proposals it was a success, although difficult to manage, because it also used face-to-face with online processes. It is difficult because many people that came to the presental debates did not participate online and vice versa. There were people who participated online and did not participate in the presental debates. There was a lot of repetition of the proposals. During those two months, the number of proposals at the presence level in some districts worked much better than in others" (Interview, P11).*

However, within the PAM process, the intended accountability and traceability of the implementation process of the proposals was perceived as the most significant feature that created trust between the participants and the creators of the platform. It is important to note that the community of *Decidim* does not understand the platform as a technological solution for participatory democracy but rather as a holistic project and the materialization of the technopolitical paradigm. In *BComú*, digitally-mediated participatory democracy is understood as punctual decision-making with an elaborated platform that proposes multiple functions ranging from "consultation" to "citizen power and influence" and "citizen power based on discourse rationality".

By that, *Decidim* claims to be more than a technological platform, being rather a "technopolitical project" that combines different social and political layers, offline and online spaces and thus avoids "digital reductionism" (Calleja-López, 2017) in which "clicktivism" is the main modus operandi. Reflected on by one interviewee:

> *"Barcelona en Comú does not believe too much in pure democracy online, a technological democracy. They believe that the cohesion of neighbourhoods at the physical level is more important than online participation." (Interview, P13)*

The embodiment of meta-deliberation: Apart from the inclusive design of the platform and the social contract, the installation of a "board" surrounding the evolution of *Decidim* as a "reflexive infrastructure that uses the very infrastructure to

democratize itself" (Barandiaran et al., 2018) is central to this platform. Approximately 17 collaborating initiatives and individual participants form a community that meets regularly[182], and discusses roadmap and software design. This community additionally improves the platform and provides training and administration. This "board" comes close to what in deliberative theory has been labelled "meta-deliberation" (Thompson, 2008), where the place of deliberation is open for deliberation to the participants and users. *Decidim* accordingly provides a variety of functions that are auditable to the needs of diverging participation processes. Indeed, the platform is not focused on the facilitation of top-down processes nor on reducing its functioning to single processes for providing a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Rather, it aims at being adaptable to a variety of organizations and bodies that taken together represent modular political processes. Departing from this interpretation of *technopolitics* in Chapter 2, *Decidim* Barcelona can be conveyed as a practice that incorporates, transcends and intersects the use of digital technologies in government- and citizen-centred applications into the representative space, in order to create a dialogue between institutions and citizens. As such, the interpretation of *technopolitics* also embraces the materialization of the contradictory and dilemmatic use of digital technologies by *network parties*. Embedded in the institutional realm they aim at translating practices of 'contentious politics' and cyber-activism by employing digital deliberation and decision-making platforms (DDDPs).

As the previous sections show, the agenda of *BComú* targets a structural transformation of administrative structures to open city governance to citizens and decentralizing decision-making mechanisms towards a model of co-production regarding the creation and management of public policies and public services. In this respect, the political discourse of *BComú* is interrelated with the commons-movement and (technological) sovereignty. From an organizational point of view, the nature of "confluences" proposes a novel way of negotiating the political subject and the "ordinary citizen" (see section 3.3.3). Despite this intended dispersion of political actors and political identities, the creation of hierarchies and the professionalization of politicians was witnessed with ambiguous feelings, thus presenting a further challenge of how to redefine senses of representation (see section 2.3.4). Furthermore, Decidim seeks to provide the appropriate infrastructure by displaying a variety of organizational and processual features adaptable to the needs and requirements of groups and individual users. The installation in Barcelona includes the ethical inscription as novel element in DDDPs. To conclude, the next section interprets how the Municipalist narrative provides a novel approach within the generation of *network parties*.

---

182 According to the White Paper, until 7th of August 2018 it hosted 126 public meetings and eight assemblies/ working groups (Barandarian et al., 2018]

4.4.5 Conclusion: The Municipalist Sub-species of *Network Parties*

Let's never forget, where we come from and why we are here.

(Inscription in the Barcelona townhall, 2017)

Within the trajectory of *network parties*, *BComú* and other Municipalist parties are the most recent ones and seem to provide a synthesis of the experiences and learning processes of proceduralist and plebiscitary tactics. As elaborated on in the previous sections, *BComú* programmatically advocates citizen participation as an inherent procedure to achieving social policies on housing, tourism and migration polity, whereas the focus on the common good understood as the generation and management of public goods and services provokes a novel understanding of citizenship and civic (digital) sovereignty (Morozov & Bria, 2018). In alignment with the previous case studies, *BComú* discursively takes distance from political programs with an ideological zeal, creating instead spaces of negotiation and iterative discussions:

> *"We arrive at a context of opportunity for new political organizations, not so much ideologies but new ways of doing things." (Interview, P11)*

Interestingly, the concept and narrative of Municipalism and the transgression of power towards the local and urban scale may not seem novel from a historical perspective (Dogliani, 2002). However, the political campaign and narrative surrounding the 'Municipalist hypothesis' has received a great deal of attention and gained popularity and has been perceived as a 'winning formula' amongst other European cities. As such, *BComú* developed and proliferated the potential of the 'Municipalist hypothesis' by not scaling-up their organization into a nation-wide programme but by scaling-out and replicating its democratic vision amongst diverse local contexts and actors, thus "prefiguring post-national networks of urban solidarity and cooperation" (Russell & Reyes, 2017).[183] As the working group Barcelona Global so aptly summarises in an article:

> „(O)ur experience had become a model of political transformation (...), many of the struggles of the city hall and social movements in Barcelona are also taking place in other cities. For example, controlling mass tourism, guaranteeing the right to housing, and remunicipalizing basic services. The municipalist movement that

---

183 As mentioned above, the Fearless City Summit 2017 is one instance of this endeavour. Under the main slogans "work as a global municipalist network", "feminize politics" and "stop the far right", global speakers united to participate in conferences and workshops surrounding the Municipalist agenda. After 2017, this summit was repeated in 2018 with four hosting cities in four different countries.

emerged in 2014 represents, for many people, the possibility of a real alternative"
(Shea Baird et al., 2016).

Altogether, *BComú* reflects the previously mentioned focus on the local level as a promising alternative to the national political scale and confronts electoralist-representative democracy by modulating the deliberative-participatory paradigm on an urban scale. How this recipe feeds into the broader context of party organization in the digital age and how the case studies 'balance out' between digitally-mediated participatory democracy and institutional boundaries will be discussed in the next chapter, which summarizes the findings of the descriptive analyses of the case studies in the context of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

Chapter V
Conclusion

The starting point of this dissertation was a diagnosis: Representative democracy is weakening and political parties as vehicles between citizen interests and the State seem unable to mediate between the 'demand' side of citizens and the 'supply' side of adapting to political party structures and democratic institutions from within. The question asked is whether *network parties* as a new wave of political parties emerging in the period between the foundation of the *Pirate Party Germany* in 2011 and the re-election of *BComú* in 2019 provide viable answers on how political parties undergo a process of re-invention and reform in the critical juxtaposition between a crisis of representation in all senses as described by Pitkin (1969) and the rise of *network society*. Focusing on the broad impact of this phenomenon, this thesis has analysed three case studies asking for the novelties brought by the parties in democratizing party organization and their sustainability.

In Chapter 2, I ranked *network parties* as the third wave of digitally-mediated participatory democracy in politics in response to the consolidation of the Internet and 'mass-self communication' (Castells, 2011) in political communication flows. I defined the 'starting point' of the *network party* type through its strong alignment with the preconditions of participatory democracy that could be translated into party organization and that to some extend generated from and are intertwined with narratives and practices of global social movements, such as the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street and the Green revolution.

First, I outlined how this socio-political texture triggered the genesis of this party type, creating a counter-narrative to institutional politics to empower citizens and revise concepts of participation and representation. Although different in its genesis, this general backdrop plays a decisive role in the political and social 'framing' (Benford & Snow, 2000) for all three case studies. In chronological order, the *Pirate Party Germany* embraced and continued the combat against legal restrictions on the Internet inspired by a cyber-libertarian worldview and hackers' ethics and equivalent moral and ethical narratives. As has been pointed out in numerous ways before, *Podemos* can be cautiously interpreted and located as the continuity of the Spanish Indignados movement that genealogically evolved and inspired other social

movements worldwide. As a variation of the party type, *BComú* is re-interpreting Municipalism and translates visions, practices and organization of *network parties* into the local government of Barcelona.

In other words, the timespan of ten years chosen for the analysis of the case studies witnessed a disruption in commonly acknowledged political orders and norms, traditional means of communication and strategies of collective organisation. The evidence shows that in spite of all the variance in the necessary conditions, the implications of the *network society* paradigm can be appropriately seen as a fertilizing backdrop of the genesis and evolution of the parties discussed in this dissertation.

5.0 Structure of the Chapter

This chapter is structured as follows: In the first section I draw a comparison between the three in-depth case studies alongside the four variables a) socio-political context, b) democratic vision; c) organizational infrastructure; and d) digital strategy and practice. After providing an ideal-typical approach of the network party family placing it in the academic tradition of party types and introducing the main coordinates for comparison, we analysed three cases alongside the axes discourse, organization and digital strategy and practice. This chapter summarizes the previous ones by highlighting the main commonalities and differences of the three parties. Firstly, we will devote some considerations on the three materializations of *network party:* the early reflection of cyber-libertarian worldview embodied through the *Pirate Party Germany*, the relapse to plebiscitary mechanisms as manifested in *Podemos* and *BComú* as fundamental shift to the city as key player for political manoeuvre. In line with this argument, we compare the respective structural conditions in the time of the emergence of the parties. We then compare the recurring discourse on the parties and their democratic narrative. Thirdly, I reassess the approaches towards intra-party democracy and compare key aspects between the relationship party-in-office and party-on-the-ground. Here, aspects of leadership, representation and the concept of "permeable intra-party democracy" receive attention.

In the second section I bring these findings into a broader discussion with the theoretical framework pointing towards the formulation of the *network society*. Finally, I briefly identify and suggest further research areas on the analysis of political parties, intra-party democracy and DDDPs.

5.1 Findings: Comparing the In-Depth Case Studies

By building on the considerations undertaken in Chapter 3, this section intends to 'extract the essence' of the reasons why *Podemos* and the *Pirate Party Germany* failed to 'balance out' the demands of the digitally-mediated participatory democracy par-

adigm with the boundaries and requisites of how party organization and practice function within democratic institutions.

This chapter summarizes and evaluates the respective institutionalizing practices (Nowotny & Raunig, 2016) and constitutionalizing processes along the parameters collected in Chapter 3.4. It will first examine the socio-political circumstances that paved the way for the foundation and successful consolidation of the respective parties. It will summarize their participatory narratives, offering nuanced answers to the research question "which democratic vision and narrative do the case studies propose and how do these models seem to respond to their respective socio-political background and societal shifts of the 21st century?" Further, the chapter will highlight the main nuances on the question of how the internal structure of the parties is being reconfigured and how this structure affects party organization and political administration. The final considerations are devoted to the 'learning patterns' concerning the use of DDDPs for disintermediating party organization and administration. By extrapolating these findings, I add nuances to the descriptions and overview of the *network party type* introduced in Chapter 3.3.

5.1.1 Socio-political contexts and historical backgrounds

While the historical background and genealogy of the *Pirate Party Germany* does indeed correlate strongly with the FOSS-movement and the corresponding debates on the role of web-based communication in politics, its relationship to 'movement parties' (Kitschelt, 2016) rests on the attempt to *procedurally* translate decentralized collective intelligence and commons-based peer production (Benkler, 2006) into the institutional realm. Activists and militants of *Podemos*, on the other hand, had a direct experience of the Spanish Indignados 15M movement that for many marked a turning point in the institutional set-up of Spain, when high rates of unemployment and political corruption cumulated with novel ways of 'connective action' (Bennet & Segerberg, 2013). The creation and consolidation of *Podemos*, thus, was continuously inspired and carried by the narratives of 'change' and the 'institutional assault' aimed at 'democratizing democracy'.

These diverse backgrounds and conditions nonetheless provoked a joint vision amongst these parties of how the institutional practices of democratic countries need to be altered. Thus, the following section answers the research question on "which democratic vision and narrative do the case studies propose and how do these models seem to respond to their respective socio-political background and societal shifts of the 21st century?"

5.1.2 Democratic Visions

In the theoretical section, I differentiated the democratic vision of *network parties* from *electoralist parties* in terms of their socio-political frames and democratic nar-

ratives. I have pointed out that the most interesting findings of *network parties* are a general support of a) a conviction to "expert-citizen democracy" and the deliberative-participatory democratic approach towards party organization and institutions; b) transparency of political decision-making and intra-party affairs and c) rethinking of representation towards disintermediation. Starting from these general commonalities, we can observe some notable differences along these dimensions between the cases on how participation and "expert-citizen democracy" can be perceived.

"Expert-citizen democracy" and 'strong' participation: As discussed throughout the thesis, the democratic discourse of *network parties* proposes a vision of an "expert-citizen democracy", rooted in the notion that 'citizens know best' - thus, imagining the citizen as a political subject as well as an expert. This expertise can only be channeled through strong participation mechanisms embedded in party organization and the practices of political institutions. The narrative of the *network party* presupposes a rational, motivated political subject at the core of its democratic vision. This perception contrasts the depiction of the passive citizen within a 'post-democratic' state (Crouch, 2004) of current Western democracies in which democratic participation is 'weak' and reduced to taking part by voting in elections.

Against this backdrop, protagonists, militants and activists of the case studies perceive the dismantling of party bureaucracy and as an antidote to the dejection felt by the disappointed citizenry. In providing alternatives to 'weak' participation mechanisms such as simple elections or plebiscites, all case studies seem committed to opening up opportunities to include citizens' voices and opinion, and their criticisms of representative democracy. Thus, a crucial similarity can be found between the symbolic power of the *Pirate Party Germany* as an initiative for `hacking the (institutional) system. Likewise, *Podemos*'s use of the 'win back' rhetoric used by feeds into a narrative in favour of citizen power (Arnstein, 1969).

However, the venues and democratic visions of the case studies also exhibit notable differences: The *Pirate Party Germany* follows the conviction that participatory mechanisms are in need of radical transformation in order to incorporate citizens in the political decision-making process. Despite minor proposals on how to change representative institutions, (i.e. FraktionPlus), their focus landed mainly on the issue of party organization. I have previously assessed the *Pirate Party Germany*'s theoretical grounding as aligned to a cyber-libertarian philosophy from which a proceduralist and techno-determinist vision of democracy can be discerned.

On the other hand, *Podemos* deploys "expert-citizen democracy" as its populist hypothesis. Their vision is built around the clear dichotomy of 'la cata (the elite) vs. the popular will (the 'people')' (Franzé, 2018). The people - as expert-citizens - were depicted as its main political subjects during the agonist phase. However, channelling and representing their interests changed the party from a bottom-up deliberative structure (*círculos*) into a top-down plebiscitary electoral machinery.

The trap of the ideological void: Relatedly, it has been argued that within representative democracies, "citizens often lose interest because they no longer feel affected, which in turn prevents them from taking the reins of their own collective life into their own hands" (Huguet, 2017: 37 (own translation)). The shared goals of many early *network parties* was to involve citizens as experts in decisions that affect them instead of binding the electorate to preformed political identities placed around the right/left-wing dichotomy. Instead, the conviction of these parties was to provide a deliberative space to discursively identify timely strategies for specific problems at stake.

Accordingly, an ideological-free discourse emerged as a political strategy among some network parties, a trait also shared by two of the case studies. Inherently, the political affiliation of citizens in terms of 'acknowledged ideologies' came to be replaced by a 'politics of common sense', largely advocating for a politically neutral worldview and referring to 'affectedness' as the main adhesive for members of *network parties*. Departing from this narrative and vision, the long-term effects of the intended ideological void exhibits diverging developments.

Whereas the *Pirate Party Germany* maintained their conviction of providing a non-ideological political space and enacting their techno-determinist version of democracy, their value-free political discourse was hollowed out (Cammaerts, 2015), leading to frictions that over time triggered the party's disintegration. In contrast, *Podemos* commonly has been located within anti-austerity movement-parties influenced by a left-progressive ideological stance (della Porta et al. 2016). However, their initial appeal to the wider Spanish population can aptly be interpreted as compliant towards a non-ideological rooting. The idea of 'transversality' – bridging left, progressive ideas and integrating them into the everyday-lives of citizens – was soon replaced by a strong left-populist identity that turned *Podemos* into a left-progressive alternative in the electoral political landscape in Spain.

Importantly, whereas the shared narrative of the three case studies leans towards avoiding fixed political identities, two conflicting observations can be made. Firstly, the profiles of main actors and voters were mostly skewed towards left and progressive-oriented political alignment. Drawing from that, the strategic momentum of providing a politically 'empty signifier' that transcends rigid political ideologies, at first glance seems to fall back into typical catch-all mechanisms.

The problematic nature of transparency: Thirdly, the claim towards more transparency and openness runs continuously through the *network party* type. However, the case studies explored in this chapter exhibit crucially different ontological readings of transparency. The *Pirate Party Germany* reported not only on internal debates but also how individual voting-behaviour on certain issues was tracked. The notion of the "transparent parliamentarian" - a representative that reports on relevant political activities (Brüning, 2011) - was accompanied by constant publication of personal opinions via Twitter. As has been stressed throughout these analyses on the *Pirate Party Germany*, this radical reading of transparency, inspired by a cyber-libertarian

worldview, entered the private realm of politicians and subsequently caused frictions within the party. This led some members to criticise real-time transparency and speak about 'accessibility' instead: „(t)ransparency does not mean to publish political processes at a certain time but to provide constant access to relevant information" (Brüning, 2011). On issues of openness and transparency of political institutions, the *Pirate Party Germany* took a revolutionist approach not only through its discussion on the clear-name-debate on LQFB regarding internal decision-making but also on internal party communication in their prominent use of Twitter, and on the personal opinions of political representatives.

In a more attenuated form, *Podemos* introduced mechanisms to facilitate greater transparency in intra-party matters, particularly focusing on preventing corruption. In this regard, *Podemos* seemed to approach transparency as a necessary condition for judging the quality of political decision-making and monitoring the actions of politicians. For *Podemos*, transparency seemed to be a means to an end (legitimacy, prevention of corruption) rather than an end itself.

In sum, the claim for greater transparency of *networked parties* can be interpreted to in three ways: as prevention of corruption (transparency of financial income and benefits of politicians), as securing legitimacy of democratic decision-making through transparent intra-party communication (against anonymity in voting-procedures, see clear-name-debate) and as transparency regarding the private life of professional politicians. While the first two readings of transparency seemed to provide fruitful and sustainable innovations in party organization and practice, the third reading led to personal confrontations that harmed the *Pirate Party Germany* as such.

The suspension of "descriptive" representation: In narrative as well as organization, *network parties* pose a challenge to the 'senses of representation' outlined by Hanna Pitkin (1967). As mentioned in Chapter 3.4, the common narrative of this party type is built around a non- or anti-representational spirit as expressed in the concept of "disintermediation" (Gerbaudo, 2018), to connect the wider electorate and citizens at large. But how do network parties answer questions on "who does one represent?" and "what does it mean to be a representative?" within the age of digitalized political communication opportunities in which theoretically anyone could express their opinion?

To recall, *network parties* seem to re-negotiate all four senses of representation posited by Hanna Pitkin. By calling for 'strong' participation, *network parties* indicate the limits of 'formalistic' representation, revising processes of legitimizing and creating measures of accountability. In their common narrative to overcome mediation and traditional representative patterns, the three case studies exhibit crucial differences in their specific reading of representation.

The *Pirate Party Germany's* strong sense of disintermediation and non-leadership - expressed in the endeavour of implementing a 'permanent assembly' – is perhaps most critical towards traditional forms of representation. However, it didn't seem

to coagulate into effective accountability and responsiveness institutions. Furthermore, the *Pirate Party Germany* introduced the *Liquid Democracy* model and combined mechanisms interlinking representative and a deliberative-participatory momentum in an attempt to resolve the dichotomy of free and imperative mandate (see district level of Berlin: FraktionPlus).

On the other hand, by proclaiming the 'march through the institutions', *Podemos* claimed to restore the meaning of institutions formerly drained of their value. In this version, representatives in office should display a strong 'descriptive' and 'substantive' sense of representation, originating from similar socio-political and cultural milieu or prevail and stand for the interests of the electorate.

In the case of *Podemos*, we paradoxically observe the successful emergence of "hyperleaders, that by allying [themselves] with the superbase of digitally connected supporters, claim autonomy from the party apparatus, in which [they] see a possible enemy, a machinery that is constantly on the edge of encumbering [their] moves, and lessening [their] pace" (Gerbaudo, 2018: 160). Against the initial idea of disintermediation and soft representation, the leadership figure of Pablo Iglesias Turrión not only gained a strong presence and dominance within party decisions, bestowing his influence to the advantage of preferred representatives („de los mios") in the general outline of the party and the primaries in 2015 in particular.

Similarly, the role of Ada Colau as face of the Municipalist confluence in Barcelona was perceived with ambiguous feelings. The reliance on one person as political leader stood in some contrast to the democratic horizontal network surrounding the consolidation of the local government. However, this dilemma was partly accepted as a double strategy when entering the electoral space.

5.1.3 Organizational Infrastructure: Translative Ambiguities and Contradictions

Against this socio-political backdrop, a question arises: how to re-think democratic institutions that are put under pressure by the emergence of organized and mediated ways of communication and organization? Thus, an essential question throughout the thesis was how *network parties* translate the desiderata of the deliberative-participatory understanding of democracy into party organization.

Permeable intra-party democracy: In the theoretical framework, I described how *network parties* attempt to translate the vision of deliberative-participatory democracy into party organization. Distinguishing aggregative and deliberative intra-party democracy (Wolkenstein, 2018) served as a useful starting point for clarifying the normative differences in party organization within the representative and the digitally-mediated participatory democratic paradigm. Additionally, the difference in party faces between party-on-the-ground, party-in-central-office and party-in-public-office (Katz & Mair, 1995) served as useful lenses to investigate the participatory

relationships within party organization. Drawing on the case studies, we can observe three nuances of how intra-party democracy was enacted, a) structural intra-party democracy; b) lowering external thresholds for participating in internal issues and c) programmatic intra-party democracy.

Firstly, *network parties* share a common understanding of internal democracy, defined by the relationship of different party faces and provision of participatory organs that serve for deliberation and bottom-up decision-making (squads/crews and *círculos*). Instead of party branches, all case studies preferred the establishment of node-like cells arranged either territorially or thematically to mirror horizontal network-like structures.

Drawing on the previous chapters, however, it is apt to say that these structures over time collapsed due to various reasons. While the rhetoric of fostering ties between the member base and the elected officials to improve accountability and responsivity persisted, these ties weakened over time. In this regard, the squads and crews of the *Pirate Party Germany* collapsed due to the rapid rise of members and did not meet the raised demands imposed on their inherent democratic yet inefficient structure. *Podemos* initially promoted the *círculos* as core participatory spaces but after turning into a national project - an electoral machine - prioritized hierarchical decision-making at the expense of the power of the party-on-the-ground. Instead, Podemos substantially pushed forward a re-appropriation of public spaces and the "re-politicization of the masses" (Briziarelli, 2018).

Investigating the connection and responsivity between party-on-the-ground and party-in-office of the case studies also exhibit notable differences. The *Pirate Party Germany* put effort into proliferating the imperative mandate, permanent assembly and experiments such as *FraktionPlus* that were developed as intermediate caucuses. In some local branches further discussions took place on to ensure ae a higher level of accountability for the decisions made on *LQFB*. In *Podemos*, accountability by the party elite was only enacted through plebiscitary logics, decisions made by the elite were legitimized instead of shaping them from the bottom-up. Instead of pushing through an imperative mandate principle, *Podemos* thus introduced stricter mechanisms for the free mandate principle.

Secondly, we can observe the issue of external permeability emerging from the decisions to lower the thresholds for party membership. An outstanding similarity of the case studies is the position of the political subject 'beyond membership' of political organizations and parties. The case studies thus push forward an understanding of partisanship of "loose participants" (Boyd & Ellisson, 2008: 170). This phenomenon appears in a primordial form in Helen Margetts' work on the cyber party, namely on how availability, accessibility and mass-self communication could change the nature of "classical" membership and partisanship into a more fluid concept (Margetts, 2007). In a similar way, party membership is re-negotiated in the *network party* type.

And thirdly, we can observe programmatic permeability deriving from the role of citizen participation on the party program and policy. Dynamics of internal partic-

ipation also nuance the distinction between aggregative and deliberative intra-party democracy (Wolkenstein, 2018).

Translated within its organizational infrastructure, the participatory mechanism of *BComú* attempts to include direct citizen involvement at different scales of policy creation endorsed by neighbourhood assemblies and accountability meetings (Rubio-Pueyo, 2018: 11) harnessing offline and online participation methods in a technopolitical philosophy. With regard to the relationship between party on the ground and party-in-public and central-office (Mair, 1994) subjective impressions relayed by party members suggest a hierarchization trend and a bias of descriptive representation instead of substantive representation similar to the case of *Podemos*. These tendencies, the stratification of party organs and the prominent role of Ada Colau can aptly be interpreted as confirming the predicting 'law of oligarchy' by Robert Michels (1911), however, with a lived proximity to the neighbourhoods and citizen demands.

5.1.4 Digital strategy and practice: DDDPs in party organization and institutional practice

How do digital technologies deliver the participatory promise of transforming party organization and institutional practice? The *Pirate Party Germany* experienced a tremendous setback in its attempt to locate and discuss its intra-party issues on the platform *Twitter*, an unregulated deliberative platform per se and failed to efficiently regulate the communication in the respective DDDPs. Lack of communicative regulation and mediation is commonly perceived as a crucial factor in the party's popularity slump. Meanwhile, *Podemos's strategy* to stratify and to turn into an efficient party organization after *Vistalegre I* sacrificed spaces and forms of discussion and opinion-forming at the altar of speed and efficiency. Departing from these considerations we naturally ask which success factors can be identified in terms of the design and implement civic participation and deliberation and particularly deliberation delivered by DDDPs?

The actual implementation of DDDPs throughout the case studies paint a conflicting picture: They demonstrate how democratic online spaces of discussion, voting and collaborative content-creation not only dissipated over time but also harmed party organization. Clearly, DDDPs share a hidden normativity linked to the promises of *networked democracy* appraising 'strong' participation over a purely delegative and mediated logic of the representative democratic paradigm. Put simply, DDDPs prioritize 'strong' political participation and political deliberation over 'weak' participatory mechanisms.

However, the experiences documented with respect to all three case studies shed a rather negative light on the assumption that deliberation per se can contribute to a vibrant political culture. Internal disagreements and decreasing participation rates in physical and digital spaces testify to the hesitations of sceptics who foresaw the

"iron law of oligarchy" (Michels, 1911). Additional lack of informational, educational and time resources also played a central role in how participation was enacted in all case studies. The phenomenon of "super-delegates" in the *Pirate Party Germany* is of particular interest in this regard. Whereas often the freedom to directly participate in issues and relevant topics was easily available, a wide range of participants decided to leave it to whom they perceived to be more knowledgeable or trustworthy to decide on their behalf. In a way, this early phenomenon of intended 'citizen control' over the programme and policies of the party backslid into a system of traditional representation and 'weak' participatory mechanisms of the representative paradigm of democracy.

We can draw stark contrasts between the implementation of the digital participation processes enabled through DDDPs among different *network parties*. Whilst in the *Pirate Party Germany*, participation was envisioned to be 'permanent', tackling most of the decisions made by the party-in-public-office (see debate around Permanent Assembly), *Podemos* used its DDDP foremostly to legitimize top-down decisions in a plebiscitary manner to enable its members to contribute to the development of political content.

Unsurprisingly, common criticisms of online participation methods can be observed in the case studies as well: Lack of educational resources hindered effective participatory processes and lack of time got in the way of constant participation. The digital divide between members with Internet access and those without (Belanger & Carter, 2008) and especially between elderly and "digital natives" also contradicted the catch-all populist hypothesis used by *Podemos*. Similar experiences were observed in the Pirate Party Germany. Although LQFB provided a low threshold for participants, this DDDP was faced with criticisms regarding the usability of the platform. This leads us to the unsurprising observation that the design and structure of DDDPs correlates with how effectively the platform was used.

Turning to the evaluation of *Decidim.Barcelona* as DDDP utilized by the city council, several instances stand out in comparison with other digital participatory platforms: Decidim provides a variety of functions that allow for adapting and tailoring and representing specific needs and requirements of organizations (Barandiaran et al. 2018) ranging from integrated functions such as voting, discussing and organizing events. Accordingly, it may be argued that *Decidim* inhibits the fallacies of previous DDDPs by concentrating on punctual participation processes and provides a nuanced view of digital democracy and creates opportunities that transcend cyber-libertarian and e-governmental implementations. Instead it deploys a variety of functions instrumental in organizing civil society groups. Furthermore, the ethical inscription and the growing Metadecidim community provide the necessary prerequisites for a discursive debate and confrontation on the platform and the meaning of 'technopolitics' itself.

5.2 Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis tackled the question of the future of political party organization and whether digital participation can renew democratic standards within party organization and beyond.

In this it aligns to the other areas of Modern polity in which the new communication logic brought upon by digital technology not only had a reformist but a transformative effect. After having defended the notion of the network party, the table below thus highlights the main shifts in Modern democratic pillars from representative to a *networked democracy* touched upon in Chapter 2 and situates the *network party* type accordingly.

Area of Modern Polity	"Representative" Democracy	"Digital" Democracy	"Networked" Democracy
Social movements and contentious action repertoires	collective action	digital collective action	connective action
Government practice and public service	traditional government	open government	common government
Political party	electoral party	digital party	*network party*

Table 6. Trajectory from representative to *networked democracy*

This simplified scheme points towards a reiteration of Modern polity that harnesses digital technologies in a transformative manner towards higher standards of transparency and collaboration "climbing up the ladder of participation" (Arnstein, 1969). Whereas I argued that the implications of the *network society* on political institutions are under-conceptualized in political scientific literature, a range of authors have dedicated their work to the transformation of political parties through the lenses of the democratic potentials of digital technologies for campaigning, organizing and decision-making (Gerbaudo, 2019; Deseriis, 2020).

The *network party* type generates a proposal on how best to redesign party organization based on "strong" participation, transparency, and cooperation at the core of their democratic vision, organization, and practice as a 'counter-proposal' to the prevalent electoralist party type (Panebianco, 1988). I argued that *network parties* challenge the mechanisms of how political representatives are elected in the 'functionalist sense' of representation and emphasises and likewise revise other senses of representation (Pitkin, 1967) and how political organizing has been influenced by mass-self communication (Castells, 2009).

Drawing on material collected in interviews with members of parties and experts, I asked about the continuity and sustainability of the democratic promise of three *network parties*. I proposed three labels to refer to three sub-types of network parties, namely the proceduralist, the plebiscitary and the Municipalist type. In the comparison, I introduced novel concepts to describe the innovations in party organization and political organizing by *network parties*. Thus, the concept of "expert-citizen democracy" refers to the idea of perceiving citizens as main actors that are inspired to take part in decisions that immediately affect them. Furthermore, I described the idea of "permeable intra-democracy" as practice to receive party membership as a dynamic concept. As such, some of the parties under study invited not only party members but also citizens without membership to participate in the development of their programs and documents.

Whereas other authors have argued that it is too early to draw final conclusions (della Porta et al., 2017), after analysing three *network parties* - the *Pirate Party Germany*, *Podemos and BComú* - I can tentatively argue that the picture that has emerged from the analysis of *Podemos* and the *Pirate Party Germany* has led me to conclude that the initial democratic vision of the *network parties* have not gained momentum for two different reasons since they move within "the *network party* dilemma": Either they fell short on meeting the requirements from the "institutional side" and were unable to cope with the political mechanisms of the representative paradigm, or they disappointed the electorate by not fulfilling the expectations of the "citizen side" in turning deliberative-participatory spaces into plebiscitary tools. In both cases that are stuck in this dilemma, we can observe patterns of what I want to introduce as "participation-washing" (Sloane, 2020) which means appraising deliberative-participatory democracy without having any actual effect.

Concluding, I want to ask about the "lessons learnt" and the impact of *network parties*. In analogy to the dilemma of the *network party type* in moving between two reference systems, of representative democracy on the one hand and *networked democracy* on the other, the question of success depends on the perspective taken. Through the lenses of the representative paradigm, the key factor to the success of political parties consists of successful performance in elections and entrance to government. All three, the *Pirate Party Germany, Podemos and BComú*, received a high share of the votes and entered parliament in their first year. As I have depicted, despite entering the various governments, two of the parties as examples of democratizing intents were not able to maintain their democratic momentum because of the ambiguities posed by deliberative-participatory standards and institutional boundaries.

This leads us to the second perspective: There is also a non-deterministic way of perceiving the impact of the *network party* type. Firstly, it must be acknowledged that they provided a democratic narrative and organizational blueprint that inspired the emergence of other European parties. A list of minor and niche parties appeared within the past years that are to be interpreted as offshoots of *network parties*: *Razem* in Poland, *Demokratie in Bewegung* (DIB) in Germany, and *DIEM25* that participated in

either national or European elections. But not only do *network parties* serve as a role model for recent party formations, they also triggered discourses and experiments on how to reform the organization within established parties. Prominently, the debate on how to revive the *Socialist Party Germany* (SPD) in 2017 was inspired by the Ethical Code of *Podemos* and proposals on complementing intra-party democracy by making use of a digital platform. In this regard, *network parties* inspired and influenced discourse on how existing political parties can be renewed from within according to deliberative-participatory norms (Wolkenstein, 2017).

Avoiding "participation-washing": I use the notion 'participation-washing' (Sloane, 2020) in reference to the phenomenon of 'green-washing' referring to PR methods and marketing strategies used by organizations and companies to persuade the public of their ecologically friendly orientation even though their actual practices may not live up to the eco-friendly image they project. The implementation of *LQFB* and *Participa. Podemos* point to that idea since - despite promising elements – the actual practice led to disappointment among party members due to the lack of accountability measures and/or the responsivity of the mandate-holder. As such, the high rate of 'sleeping members' (Interview, P3) and low online response rates and diminished participation in LQFB (Bullwinkel & Probst, 2014), the *Pirate Party Germany* and other platforms indicate a growing fatigue and lack of dedication on the side of the participants.

Is it possible to talk of a "digital betrayal" (Gerbaudo, 2018) when evaluating the implementation of DDDPs? Such a term is perhaps a bit too strong to capture nuances, especially when observing the impact of *Decidim* on the participatory nature of the city government in Barcelona and the hybrid participation process of the development of the PAM. However, increased quantity of participants in decision-making processes does not make the output of the decision more democratic.3 That reminds us of the two normative criteria of legitimacy described through input- and output-legitimacy (Scharpf, 2000). Either citizens have a strong preference for meaningful participation (Strebel, 2018) or prefer to be receivers of the substance of decisions made for them in a technocratic reading. *Network parties* fall into the trap of not dedicating too much attention to the process and components of participation itself. As shown in the instance of *LQFB* and the failed attempt to turn the outcome of bottom-up participation processes not only into binding decisions made by elected officials but also in the case of the *círculos* that became a shadow of their former self, both nation-wide parties fell into the trap of participation-washing.

To prevent 'participation-washing', the issue of accountability and responsiveness has proven crucial for the success of any participatory project. This finding is obviously not surprising and has been tackled widely in common literature (references), however, the case of the *Pirate Party Germany* and *Podemos* vividly shows how participatory projects suffer from an undefined outcome of the participatory process itself. When undirected participation or simple plebiscitary voting processes were installed, the process lost credibility and support by the base.

Connected to this observation on a macro-scale is the prevalent tendency to form unintended hierarchies – informational, time-resource or skill-dependent – as another snare that undermines the naive vision of "more participation equals more democracy" (Verba & Nie, 1972). As such, the observation of the case studies has shown that members participating regularly might have more insights into actual debates, more knowledge and expertise on certain issues and more time to dedicate to the participation process itself. This observation has some thwarting effect on the concept of "expert-citizen democracy" since they express that the ideal citizen does not exist.

The observation of *BComú* leads to the question if the success of *networked parties* is interconnected with the question of scale. As regards party organization, we have observed that extending the party to a national level led to a structural collapse of the *Pirate Party Germany*4 and to the establishment of a new political actor on the national scale as *Podemos* led to a hollowing-out of the participatory spaces. Whereas these parties aimed at *scaling-up* their political project, *BComú* and the city government aimed at *scaling-out*, replicating their Municipalist concept in other cities and adapting them to the specific local context as exemplified by the *Fearless Cities* conferences that have contributed to a nexus of Muncipalist projects. Understood in this manner, the Municipalist agenda provides a counter-narrative to the established democratic order:

> *"We decided to start at the local level because the politics of austerity and corruption had destroyed the credibility of public institutions. We needed to provide real and concrete solutions through actions that change people's lives. Because the local level is the best way to improve democracy. It's where we live our daily lives and it's where the government is closest to the people." (Ada Colau, in Faus, 2016).*

The local scale not only provides the advantage of easier organization compared to the national level, but, as Ada Colau states, it also allows more effectiveness in the bilateral relationship between institutions and the citizenry. On the one hand it allows more proximity to impact on the actual lives of the citizens, while on the other, the local scale offers a concentrated territory to experiment with innovative democratic measures to extract and further develop local expertise. Thus, in a wider frame, *BComú* as a Municipalist project perceives the city as a "strategic scale through which to exercise prefigurative and transformative politics" (Russell, 2019: 12).

In this vein, political theorists have acknowledged that Modern politics is strategically shifting from focusing on the nation-state to city governments and regions. Benjamin Barber, the proponent of 'strong' democracy has asked in one of his latest books what would happen "if mayors ruled the world" (2013). He argues that the city inherently manifests the plural facets of the *Networked Society*. Different cultures and socio-political contexts are constantly negotiating over public goods and spaces. As such, the Municipalist hypothesis is a novel approach to counteracting the "post-dem-

ocratic city" against the prevalent trend of privatization and commodification currently taking place in Modern cities. His diagnosis of the failing of the nation-state is congruent to the considerations put forward in the introduction of this thesis. He points out that the nation-state "(...) was the perfect political recipe for the liberty and independence of autonomous peoples and nations". However, he continues by highlighting that "(i)t is utterly unsuited to interdependence" (Barber 2013: 20). Additionally, negotiating power on the national scale is irreconcilable with 'strong' participation that – in his view - is dependent on proximity and personal affectedness. Therefore, "(t)he city, always the human habitat of first resort, has in today's globalizing world once again become democracy's best hope" (Barber 2013: 20).

As such, Barber claims: "(L)et cities, the most networked and interconnected of our political associations, defined above all by collaboration and pragmatism, by creativity and multiculture, do what states cannot. Let mayors rule the world" (Barber, 2013: 22). Questioning the concept of the political party itself, *BComú* internally is primarily understood as a democratic citizen platform and as a "confluence" which aims to break with traditional party politics. A set of questions arises from observing *BComú*: In view of their electoral success and sustainability as well as their influence on European framings of a new "Municipalist hypothesis", it is thus justifiable to ask whether local citizen platforms may take on the role of the political party form in the 21st century? Are political parties just to be acknowledged as an 'inevitable evil' in hacking institutions?

Epilogue:
Potentials of Municipalist movements

At the end of this dissertation, I want to provide an outlook on how far the discourse in Berlin has developed since the entry of the Pirate Party in Berlin parliament in 2011. Nowadays, the Municipalist hypothesis is influencing democratic visions of organized civic initiatives on housing policies in Berlin where I have sought to pursue my research interests and to connect it with Activist work. The city of Berlin is characterized by a vibrant constellation of local neighbourhood initiatives and Activist networks. Especially in the fight and struggle against the increasing trend of gentrification, "(a) network of projects and new forms of cooperation between city administration, politics and 'common good' oriented initiatives provide for a new radius of action and create counterbalances to the excesses of financialized actors in the real-estate market"[184].

Since 2016, the political set-up in Berlin[185] has provided the necessary political support in establishing a sustainable infrastructure that challenges top-down policymaking and develops a counter-narrative to the established participatory infrastructures[186]. The idea of Municipalism has found fertile ground in Berlin, a city with a high level of organized civil society. Especially in housing politics, the city is filled with a lively, creative, and well-organized basis of activists.

Following the genealogy of la PAH to BComú, many activists have asked if there is potential in combining existing experience and expertise to develop an electoral platform for the local elections in 2021 as a counterproposal to the prevailing post-democratic city as a manifestation of the shortcomings of Modern democracy. As such, the question of replicability and adaption to the context of Berlin has been accompanying the academic and public discourse in the city. Florian Schmidt, city councillor of the district Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg and former Activist visiting Barcelona at the time of inception of BComú states:

---

184 CMMM, Retrieved from https://labor-k.org/critical-mapping-in-municipalist-movements/ [Last accessed: 09.02.2021]

185 The government is led by a coalition of the German Socialist Party (SPD), the Green Party (Bündnis 90/die GRÜNEN) and the Left Party (die Linke).

186 The administration of Berlin has implemented the platform meinberlin.de as participatory tool to foster city participation. The participation rates, however, are insignificant (Gennburg, 2019)

"What we can learn from Barcelona is the implementation of efficient and reliable working structures between civil society, politics and administration. Not in terms of traditional understandings of citizen participation but in terms of co-producing the city." (Florian Schmidt) [187]

Although not as influential and successful as in Barcelona, these buds of a Municipalist hypothesis might pave the way for a subtle and continuous revision of the relationship between civil society, administration and political agendas and force a re-interpretation of the functions of political parties within this triangle. Even from an academic perspective, the number of current interdisciplinary research projects sheds light on the increasing importance of identifying the potential of the Municipalist hypothesis for other cities. [188] *However, most importantly, the outreach of the Decidim community and according implementation to other cities such as Helsinki and Nancy* [189] *mirrors the wish of a participatory Municipalist policy-development in accordance with the role model of Barcelona. The developments of this project deserve to be observed with special attention since they might lay the foundations for a new democratic agenda for urban government.*

In sum, further research on Municipalist potentials in other European cities could thus continue to explore how political parties as vehicles between State and civil society are adapting to the shifting nature of our Modern societies and take a thorough look at the impact these shoots have on public institutions. In undertaking this endeavour, one has to bear in mind that the concepts of participation, deliberation – and democracy itself – are contingent. Any approach towards their definition must remain in constant negotiation with the history of political theory, a thorough assessment of their normative implications and take into account their shifting nature.

---

187 One of the projects implemented by Florian Schmidt is the „AKS Gemeinwohl", a project „that is intended to support both the cooperation of initiatives and the administration in the Berlin district of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg (and beyond) and the self-organisation of urban initiatives in general. See https://aks.gemeinwohl.berlin/ [Last accessed: 09.02.2021]

188 Examples are the project „Municipalism in practice" funded by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (until 2019) and the project „Critical Mapping in Municipalist Movements". See: https://labor-k.org/critical-mapping-in-municipalist-movements/ [Last accessed: 09.02.2021]

189 Also see https://decidim.org/usedby/ [Last retrieved: 04.03.2020]

Appendix A - List of Interviewees

PID	Date	Case Study	Occupation	Topics
P1	23.02.2017	Pirate Party Germany	Student, member of Berlin branch	Transparency, IPD, values
P2	04.03.2017	Pirate Party Germany	Psychologist, ex-spokesperson of the German party	IPD, democratic values, transparency
P3	16.03.2017	Pirate Party Germany	IT Developer, member of the Berlin branch	Liquid Feedback; Liquid Democracy
P4	10.04.2017	Pirate Party Germany	Student, member of the Berlin branch	IPD, Liquid Feedback, democratic values
P5	24.04.2017	Pirate Party Germany	Professor, member of the Germany party	History of the Pirate Party, IPD
P6	05.05.2016	Podemos	Ecological Activist, member of Podemos Madrid	Organization of círculos, IPD
P7	08.05.2016	Podemos	Pensioner, member of Podemos	Organization of círculos, IPD
P8	14.09.2018	Podemos	Member of Podemos International	History of Podemos, democratic values
P9	13.05.2017	Podemos	Lawyer, member of Podemos Andalucia	History of Podemos, IPD
P10	27.06.2018	Podemos	Scientist, member of Podemos Andalucia	History of Podemos, IPD

P11	12.05.2016	BComú	Activist at La PAH	IPD
P12	13.11.2015	BComú	Pensioneer and member	Organization of neighbourhood group, IPD
P13	13.03.2016	BComú	Web-designer and member	Organization of neighbourhood group; Decision-making processes and implementation
P14	15.04.2016	BComú	Member of Barcelona Activa	Decision-making processes and implementation
P15	17.03.2016	BComú	Journalist	IPD, democratic values
P16	03.02.2019	BComú	Member of Barcelona en Comú Global	Municipalism
P17	22.04.2019	BComú	Political Scientist and member	IPD, Decidim, Municipalism

Appendix B - Questionnaire for semi-structured interviews

Organisation: Structure, function and intra-party democracy
- What is the organisational structure of your party?
- What are the different spaces for participation?
- What are the functions and structures of these spaces?
- Which topics are dealt with in which spaces?
- Who has built up this participation structure?
- Have there been any changes with regard to the topic of organisation during the last few years? Which ones?
- What problems have there been with this structure? Could anything have been done differently in terms of organisation?
- Access and coordination
- What criteria are used to decide who is allowed to participate in the different locations?
- How are these criteria decided?

Transparency
- How is sensitive information handled, are there issues that are not dealt with publicly?
- How would you describe the exchange of information between the different organisational bodies?
- How would you describe the exchange of information between grassroots and MPs?
- Have there been any changes in terms of access and coordination during the last years? Which ones?
- What problems/challenges do you see?

Citizen participation and influence
- How are decisions made?
- Consensus or majority? What is meant by consensus?
- What mechanisms are in place to ensure that decisions are taken into account?
- What is the responsibility of the government to articulate the positions taken

to the grassroots?
- Is there a difference compared to established parties?
- What problems/challenges do you see on the issue of citizen participation?
- Have there been any changes in the issue of civic participation over the last few years? Which ones?

Representation
- What is the party's understanding of representation?
- What are the tasks of a representative, direct candidate?
- How are they elected?
- Is there a difference compared to established parties?
- Are there control mechanisms to demand accountability from the representatives?
- What problems/challenges do you see regarding the understanding of representation?
- Have there been any changes in the issue of representation over the last few years? Which ones?

Implementation and use DDDP
- In general, what is the position of information and communication technologies in the party?
- How would you rate the success of the DDDP? Why?
- Where do you see problems/challenges?
- Where do you see opportunities? What is needed for electronic democracy?

Political context
- How do you interpret the rise (and fall) of your party in terms of the political situation in the respective country/Europe?
- Do you believe in the change of institutions from within, in a new politics?
- How does your party differ from the established parties? Are there similarities to other single-issue parties?
- Overall, have you noticed a change in narratives within your party since the elections?
- In your opinion: What are the challenges in the ideology of your party? Is it possible to unite horizontal decision-making processes and vertical institutions?

Bibliography

Adler, A. (2018). *Liquid Democracy in Deutschland Zur Zukunft digitaler politischer Entscheidungsfindung nach dem Niedergang der Piratenpartei*. transcript Verlag: Bielefeld.

Ajuntament de Barcelona (2019). *Barcelona digital city. Putting technology at the service of people. Barcelona Digital City Plan (2015–2019)*. Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona. Retrieved from: https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/digital/sites/default/files/pla_barcelona_digital_city_in.pdf [Last accessed: 27.07.2019]

Alagna, F. (2018). Messina: Municipalism beyond the Municipio. *Political Critique*. Retrieved from: http://politicalcritique.org/world/eu/2018/messina-municipalism/ [Last accessed: 06.07.2020]

Alonso, S., Keane, J. & Merkel, W. (2011). *The Future of Representative Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Anderson, N. (2009). Political pirates: A history of Sweden's Piratpartiet. *Ars Technica*. Retrieved from: http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2009/02/rick-falkvinge- is-the-face/ [Last accessed: 27.08.2013]

Ankersmit, F. R. (2002). On the origin, nature and future of representative democracy. In *Political Representation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Arquilla, J. & Ronfeldt, D. (2001). *Networks and netwars: the future of terror, crime, and militancy*. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation.

Aragón, P., Volkovich, Y., Laniado, D., & Kaltenbrunner, A. (2016). When a Movement Becomes a Party: Computational Assessment of New Forms of Political Organization in Social Media. *ICWSM 2016 – The International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media, Cologne, Germany*.

Ardanuy Pizarro, M. y Labuske ,E. (2015). El músculo deliberativo del algoritmo de-

mocrático: Podemos y la participación ciudadana. *Revista Teknokultura*, 12(1), 93–1.

Armingeon; K. and Guthmann, K. (2014). Democracy in crisis? The declining support for national democracy in European countries, 2007–2011. *European Journal of Political Research,* 53(3), 423–442.

Arnstein, S.R. (1969). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Planning Association,* 35 (4), 216–224.

Agustín, G. O. and Briziarelli, M. (eds) (2018): *Podemos and the New Political Cycle. Left-Wing Populism and Anti-Establishment Politics*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Babbie, E. (2010). *The practice of social research*. Wadsworth: Belmont.

Baiocchi, G. & Connor, B.T. (2008). The *Ethnos* in the *Polis*: Political Ethnography as a Mode of Inquiry. *Sociology Compass*, 2(1), 139–155.

Baird, K. S. (2016). How to build a movement-party: Lessons from Rosario's Future City. *Open Democracy.* Retrieved from: https://www.opendemocracy.net/democraciaabierta/kate-shea-baird/how-to-build-movement-party-lessons-from-rosario-s-future-city [Last accessed: 8.1.2019]

Barandiaran, X., Calleja-López, A. & Monterde, A. (2018). *Decidim: political and technopolitical networks for participatory democracy*. Decidim's project White Paper. Retrieved from: https://metadecidim.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/decidim/attachment/file/2005/White_Paper.pdf [Last accessed on: 12.12.2020]

Barber, B. (1984). *Strong democracy: participatory politics for a new age*. University of California Press.

Barber, B. (2013). *If Mayors Ruled The World*. New Haven: Yale University Press

BComú (Barcelona En Comú/ Guanyem Barcelona) (2014a). *Let's win back Barcelona*. Retrieved from: https://guanyembarcelona.cat/lets-win-barcelona/ [Last accessed 21.11.2020]

BComú (Barcelona en Comú) (2014b) *Propuesta organizativa* [Organizational Proposal] Retrieved from: https://guanyembarcelona.cat/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/propuesta_organizativa_cast.pdf [Last accessed: 17.05.2018]

BComú (Barcelona En Comú) (2015). *Organisational Structure of Barcelona En Comú. Phase D: After the Municipal Elections*. Retrieved from: https://barcelonaencomu.cat/

es/organigrama [Last accessed: 30.11.2020]

BComú (Barcelona en Comú) (2016). *How to win back the city en comú*. Retrieved from: https://barcelonaencomu.cat/sites/default/files/win-the-city-guide.pdf [Last accessed: 03.11.2020]

BComú (Barcelona en Comú) (2017). *About Fearless Cities: International Municipalist Summit*. Retrieved from: http://2017.fearlesscities.com/about-fearless-cities/ [Last accessed: 03.11. 2019]

BComú (Barcelona En Comú BComú) (2019): *Fearless Cities: A Guide to the Global Municipalist Movement*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

BarrioEnComú (2015). *BComú Neighbourhood Group Organization.* Retrieved from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B9B4EppI_PcCNE9iUjMze-jhGUmM/view [Last accessed: 02.11.2015]

Bartels, H (2012). Die Vorgeschichte: die Urheberrechtsdebatte und die Schwedische Piratpartiet. In: Niedermayer, O (ed.) *Die Piratenpartei*. Springer: Berlin.

Bauwens, M. & Niaros, V. (2017). Value in the commons economy: Developments in open and contributory value accounting. Heinrich Böll Foundation. Retrieved from: https://tinyurl.com/yc9zhqtw. [Last accessed: 03.11.2018]

Belanger, F. & Carter, L. (2008). Trust and risk in e-government adoption. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems.* (17), 165–176.

Benford, R. D. & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: an overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology,* 26(1), 611–639.

Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks: how social production transforms markets and freedom*. Yale University Press.

Bennett, W. L. & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society, 15*(5), 739–768.

Bennett, W.L.; Segerberg, A. & Knüpfer, C.B. (2017): The democratic interface: technology, political organization, and diverging patterns of electoral representation. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1(11), 1655–1680.

Bertone, G.; de Cindio, F. & Stortone, S. (2015). LiquidFeedback in Large-scale Civic

Contexts: Framing Multiple Styles of Online Participation. *Social Media for Organizations*, 2(1), 1–26.

Bickerton, B.J. & Accetti, C.I. (2018). Techno-populism' as a new party family: the case of the Five Star Movement and Podemos. *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 10(2), 132–150.

Blondel, J. (1968). Party Systems and Patterns of Government in Western Democracies. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 1(2), 180–203.

Blum, C. & Zuber, C.I. (2016). Liquid Democracy: Potentials, Problems, and Perspectives. *The Journal of Political Philosophy,* 24(2), 162–182.

Boccaletti, S.; Bianconi, B.; Criado, R.; del Genio, C.I.; Gómez-Gardeñes, J.; Romance, M.; Sendiña-Nadal, M.I.; Wang, Z. & Zanin, M. (2014). The structure and dynamics of multilayer networks. *Physics Reports*, 544 (1), 1–122.

Bordignon, F. & Ceccarini, L. (2012). The 5 star people and the unconventional parliament'. Studia Politica. *Romanian Political Science Review*, 4, 675–92.

Borge, R.; Colombo, C.; & Welp, Y. (2009). Online and Offline Participation at the Local Level. *Information, Communication & Society,* (12)6, 1–30.

Borge, R. & Santamarina, E. (2015). From Protest to Political Parties. Online Deliberation in the New Parties Arising in Spain. *Paper presented at the IPSA Conference Communication, Democracy and Digital Technology*. Rovinj, Croatia, 2–3 October.

Boyd, D., & Ellison, N. (*2008*). Social Network Sites Definition, History, and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13, 210–230.

Brown, T.A. (2006). *Confirmatory factor analysis for applied research. Methodology in the social sciences.* New York: Guilford Press.

Brunner, C.; Kubaczek, N.; Mulvaney, K.; Raunig, G. (2017). *Die neuen Munizipalismen. Soziale Bewegungen und die Regierung der Städte*. Wien: transversal texts.

Buchanan, J.M. & Tullock, G. (1962). *The Calculus of Consent Logical Foundations for Constitutional Democracy*. The University of Michigan Press, Michigan.

Buck, S. (2012). Liquid Democracy – Eine Realisierung Deliberativer Hoffnungen? Zum Selbstverständnis der Piratenpartei. *Zeitschrift Für Parlamentsfragen,* 43(3), 626–635.

Bullwinkel, B. & Probst, L. (2014). Innerparteiliche Willensbildung und Entschei-

dungsprozesse durch digitale Partizipation. Ein Praxistest des Konzepts der Liquid Democracy. *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 45(2), 382– 402.

Burawoy, M. (2000). Introduction: Reaching for the global. In Burawoy, M., Blum, J. A., George, S., Gille, Z., Gowan, T., Haney, L., Klawiter, M., Lopez, S. H., Ó Riain, S. and Thayer, M. (eds.) *Ethnography unbound: Power and resistance in the modern metropoliss.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Burkart, P. (2014). *Pirate Politics. (The Information Society Series)*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Burke, E. (1770). *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*, in *Works,* ii (82).

Burkhalter, S.; Gastil, J.; Kelshaw, T. (2002). A Conceptual Definition and Theoretical Model of Public Deliberation in Small Face-to-Face Groups. *Communication Theory*, 12(4), 398–422.

Butler, M. (2011). Clicktivism, Slacktivism, or Real Activism. Cultural Codes of American Activism in the Internet Era. *A thesis for the Master of Communication from the Department of Communication of the University of Colorado*. Retrieved from: http:// individual.utoronto.ca/christine/sources/clicktivism.pdf [Last accessed: 04.12.2019]

Cabeza, M. & Weerdt, J. (2015). Housing crisis: the Platform of Mortgage Victims (PAH) movement in Barcelona and innovations in governance. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 30, 1–23.

Calleja-López, A. (2017). Since 15M: the technopolitical reassembling of democracy in Spain. *A thesis for the Doctor of Philosophy from the Department of Sociology of the University of Exeter*.

Cammaerts, B. (2015). Pirates on the Liquid Shores of Liberal Democracy: Movement Frames of European Pirate Parties. *Javnost – The Public*, 22(09), 19–36.

Capel Sáez, Horacio (2007): El debate sobre la construcción de la ciudad y el llamado 'Modelo Barcelona'. *Revista Electrónica de Geografía y Ciencias Sociales,* XI/233, 229–255.

Carballo-Cruz, F. (2011). Causes and Consequences of the Spanish Economic Crisis: Why the Recovery is Taken so Long?, In *Panoeconomicus,* 58(3), 309–328.

Caruso, L. (2016). Il Movimiento 5 Stelle e la fine della politica'. *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, LVI(2), pp. 315–40.

Casero-Ripollés, A.; Feenstra, R. A. & Tormey, S. (2016). Old and New Media Logics in an Electoral Campaign : The Case of Podemos and the Two-Way Street Mediatization of Politics. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 21(3), 378–397.

Castells, M. (1996). *The rise of the network society. The information age: economy, society, and culture* (Vol. 1). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Castells, M. (2009). *Communication Power*. Oxford University Press.

Castells, M. (2010). *The rise of the network society*. 2nd Edition. UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Castells, M. (2012). *Networks of outrage and hope: social movements in the internet age*. Oxford, UK: Polity Press.

Ceccarini, L. & Bordignon, F. (2017). The five stars continue to shine: The consolidation of Grillo's 'movement party' in Italy. *Contemporary Italian Politics,* 8(2), 131–159.

Chadwick, A. (2006). *Internet politics, States, citizens, and new communication technologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chadwick, A. (2013). *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Chambers S. (1996). *Reasonable Democracy: Jürgen Habermas and the Politics of Discourse*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

CIS (Centro Superior de Investigaciones Científicas) (2011). *Notas sobre el problema "La clase política, los partidos políticos"*. Retrieved from: http://www.cis.es/opencms/-Archivos/NotasdeInvestigacion/NI001_ProblemaClasePolitica_Informe.pdf [Last accessed: 07.09.2019]

Cohen, J. (1997). Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy. In Bohmann, J. & Rehg, W. (eds) *Deliberative Democracy. Essays on Reason and Politics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 67–92.

Coleman, S. (2005). New mediation and direct representation: reconceptualizing representation in the digital age. *New Media & Society,* 7(2), 177–198.

Collado, A.C. & Sáez, R.V. (2015). *Territorios en democracia. El municipalismo a debate*. Barcelona: Icaria.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crouch, C. (2004). *Post-Democracy*. Oxford, UK: Polity Press.

Crouch, C. (2009). Privatised Keynesianism : An Unacknowledged Policy Regime. *British Journal of Politics & International Relations,* 11(3), 382–399.

Daalder, H. (2011). *State formation*, *parties and democracy*: Studies in comparative European politics. Colchester: ECPR Press

Dahl, R.A. (1989). *Democracy and its Critics.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dahl, R.A. (1997). On Deliberative Democracy, *Dissent*, 44, 54–58.

Dahl, R.A. (1998). *On Democracy.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dahlberg, L. (2011). Re-constructing digital democracy: an outline of four 'positions'. *New Media & Society*, 13, 855–872.

de Cindio, F. & Stortone, S. (2013). Experimenting LiquidFeedback for Online Deliberation in Civic Contexts. *International Conference on Electronic Participation. ePart 2013: Electronic Participation*, 147–158.

Deseriis, M (2017). Technopopulism: the emergence of a discursive formation. *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique,* 15(2): 441–458.

Deseriis, M. V. (2019). The impact of online participation platforms on the internal democracy of two Southern European parties: Podemos and the Five-Star Movement. *International Journal of Communication*, 13, 5696–5714.

Deseriis, M.V. (2020). Digital movement parties: a comparative analysis of the technopolitical cultures and the participation platforms of the Movimento 5 Stelle and the Piratenpartei. *Information, Communication & Society*, 23 (12), 1770–1786.

Diamanti, I. (2007). La democrazia degli interstizi. Società e partiti in Europa dopo la caduta del Muro. *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, 3, 387–412.

Diani, M. (2012) Interest organizations in social movements: An empirical exploration. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 1(1), 26–47.

Dobusch, L. & Gollatz, K. (2012). Piraten zwischen transnationaler Bewegung und

lokalem Phänomen. In Bieber, C. & Leggewie, C. C (eds). *Unter Piraten*. Transcript: Bielefeld; 25–40.

Dogliani, P. (2002). European Municipalism in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: The Socialist Network. *Contemporary European History,* 11(4), 573–596.

Dolezal, M.; Ennser-Jedenastik, L;. Müller, W.C. & Winkler, A.K. (2014). How parties compete for votes: A test of saliency theory. *European Journal of Political Research*, 53(1), 57–76.

Dorn, G. (2013). Aufstieg der Internetpartei. Piraten in der Pubertät. *FOCUS ONLINE.* Retrieved from: https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/wahlen-2011/berlin/tid-23605/aufstieg-der-internetpartei-piraten-in-der-pubertaet_aid_664531.html [Last accessed: 09.03.2018]

Dryzek, J.S. (2000). *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Duverger, M. (1954). *Political Parties*. London: Methuen.

Duverger, M. (1964). *Political parties. Their organization and activity in the modern state*. London: Methuen.

Eckstein, H. (1975). Case studies and theory in political science. In Greenstein, F., and N. Polsby, (eds.). *Handbook of political science*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 79–138.

Eizaguirre, S.; Pradel-Miquel, M. & García, M. (2017). Citizenship practices and democratic governance: 'Barcelona en Comú' as an urban citizenship confluence promoting a new policy agenda. *Citizenship Studies,* 21(4), 425–439.

Epstein, L.D. (1967). *Political parties in Western democracies*. New York: Praeger.

Emminghaus, C. (2003). *Politische Parteien im Demokratisierungsprozess*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.

Errejón, Í. & Mouffe, C. (2016). *Podemos. In the Name of the People*. London: Lawrence Wishart.

Errejón, Í. (2011). El 15-M como discurso contrahegemónico. *Encrucijadas-Revista Crítica de Ciencias Sociales*, 2, 120–145.

Faus, P. (2018). *Alcadessa, Ada for Mayor – A political revolution in Barcelona*. Nanouk

Films.

Ferrera, M. (2005). *The boundaries of welfare. European integration and the new spatial politics of social protection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fetzer, A., & Lauerbach, G. E. (2007). *Political Discourse in the Media*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Fishkin, J. (1993). *Democracy and Deliberation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Fishkin, J. (1995). *The Voice of the People*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Flick, U. (2009). *Sozialforschung – Methoden und Anwendungen: Ein Überblick für die BA-Studiengänge*. Reinbek: Rowohlt.

Font, J,; Wojcieszak, M. & Navarro, C.J. (2015). Participation, Representation and Expertise: Citizen Preferences for Political Decision-Making Processes. *Political Studies*, 63(1), 153–172.

Franzé, J. (2018). The Podemos Discourse: A Journey from Antagonism to Agonism. In Augustín, G. & Briziarelli, M. (eds.). *Podemos and the New Political Cycle*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 49–147.

Fredriksson, M. (2015). Pirates, librarians and open source capitalists: New alliances in the copyright wars." In Porsdam, H. (ed). *Copyrighting Creativity: Creative Values, Cultural Heritage Institutions and Systems of Intellectual Property*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Fundación de los Comunes (ed) (2016). *Hacia nuevas instituciones democráticas*. Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños.

Fung, A. (2006). Varieties of participation in complex governance. *Public administration review, 66*(1), 66–75.

Fung, A., Russon Gilman, H. & Shkabatur, J. (2013). Six models for the internet + politics. *International Studies Review*, *15*(1), 30–47.

Fuster-Morell, M. (July 4th 2013). The political meaning of the power's law: Wikileaks, 15M, SOPA. Talk delivered at the meeting *15Mp2p*, Barcelona, Spain.

García-Carretero, L. & Díaz Noci, J. (2018). From social movements to political parties.

Barcelona en Comú's electoral message, uses and limitations on Twitter during 2015 city council election. *OBETS. Revista de Ciencias Sociales,* 13(2), 515–545.

García-Lamarca, M. (2017) Creating political subjects: collective knowledge and action to enact housing rights in Spain, *Community Development Journal*, 52(3), 421–435.

Gastil, J., & Levine, P. (eds.) (2005). *The deliberative democracy handbook: Strategies for effective civic engagement in the twenty-first century*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

George, A. (1979). Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison, in Lauren, P.G. (ed). *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy*. New York: Free Press, 43–68

Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the streets: Social media and contemporary activism*. London: Pluto Press.

Gerbaudo, P. (2016). *The mask and the flag. The rise of anarchopopulism in global protest.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gerbaudo, P. & Screti, F. (2017). Reclaiming popular sovereignty: The vision of the state in the discourse of Podemos and the Movimento 5 Stelle, *Javnost The Public*, 24(4), 320–335.

Gerbaudo, P. (2018). *The Digital Party: Political Organisation and Online Democracy*. London. Pluto Press.

Gibson, J. J. (1966). *The senses considered as perceptual systems*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Gibson, J. J. (1977). The theory of affordances. In R. Shaw & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Perceiving, acting, and knowing: Toward an ecological psychology*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 67–82.

Goldstone, J.A. (2013) Introduction: Bridging Institutionalized and Noninstitutionalized Politics. In: Goldstone, J.A. (ed). *State, Parties, and Social Movements*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Gould, Carol (1988). *Rethinking Democracy: Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economy, and Society*.Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Granovetter, M.S. (1973). The Strength of Weak Ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360–1380.

Graziano, P. & Forno, F. (2012). Political Consumerism and New Forms of Political Participation The Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale in Italy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science,* 644(1), 121–133.

Green, J. (2009). *The eyes of the People. Democracy in an Age of Spectatorship*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Gunther, R. & Diamond, L. (2003). Species of Political Parties: A new typology. *Party Politics,* 9(2): 167–99.

Gutmann, A. & Thompson, D. (2004). *Why deliberative democracy?*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Haase, M. (June 8 2018). Speech at The Direct Parliament, The Impact of Digital Democracy on Political Representation. *Organized by Scuola Normale Superiore, Humanities and Social Sciences.* Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOI-5gWBtKTM [Last accessed: 09.06.2018]

Haberer, M., & Peña-López, I. (2016). Structural conditions for citizen deliberation: A conceptual scheme for the assessment of 'new' parties. In J. Balcells (Ed.), *Building a European digital space*. Barcelona: UOC-Huygens Editorial. Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Internet, Law & Politics. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona, 7–8 July, 2016.

Habermas, J. (1984) *The theory of communicative action*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Habermas, J. (1994). Three normative models of democracy. *Constellations*, 1(1), 1–10.

Habermas, J. (1996). *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Hardt, M. & Negri, A. (2004). *Multitude: war and democracy in the age of empire*. London, UK: Penguin Books.

Hartleb, F. (2013). Anti-elitist cyber parties? *Journal of Public Affairs*, *15*(1), 14–21.

Harvey, D. (2012). *Rebel cities. From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution.* London: Verso

Hazan, R., & Rahat, G. (2010). *Democracy within parties: Candidate selection methods and their political consequences*. Oxford: Oxford University

Hecht, G. (1998). *The radiance of France: nuclear power and national identity after World War II*. Cambridge, MA: MIT press.
Hensel, A. & Klecha, S. (2013). *Zwischen digitalem Aufbruch und analogem Absturz: Die Piratenpartei*. Leverkusen: Barbara Budrich.

Hibbing, J. R., & Theiss-Morse, E. (2002). *Stealth democracy: Americans' beliefs about how government should work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Hofmann, J. (2019). Mediated democracy – Linking digital technology to political agency. *Internet Policy Review*, *8*(2), 1–18.

Hopf, C. (2012). Qualitative Interviews – ein Überblick. In Flick, U.; von Kardorff, E. & Steinke, I. (eds.). *Qualitative Forschung. Ein Handbuch*. Reinbek: Rowohlt, 349–360.

Huckshorn, R.J. (1984). *Political parties in America*. California, US: Duxbury Press.

Hughes, J.J. (2006). Human Enhancement and the emergent technopolitics of the 21st century. In: W. S.Bainbridge and M.C. Roco, (eds.). *Managing Nano-Bio-Info-Cogno Innovations: Converging Technologies in Society*, 285–307.

Ignazi, P. (1996). The intellectual basis of right-wing anti-partysm. *European Journal of Political Research*, 29, 279–296.

Invernizzi-Accetti, C. & Wolkenstein, F. (2017). The Crisis of Party Democracy, Cognitive Mobilization, and the Case for Making Parties More Deliberative. *American Political Science Review*, 111(2017), 97–109.

Jabbusch, S. (2011). *Liquid Democracy in der Piratenpartei. Eine neue Chance für innerparteiliche Demokratie im 21. Jahrhundert?* Unveröffentlichte Magisterarbeit an der Universität Greifswald.

Jagers, J. & Walgrave, S. (2007). Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties' discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research,* 46(3), 319–345.

Jääsaari, J. & Hilden, J. (2006). Piracy & Social Change. From File Sharing to Free Culture: The Evolving Agenda of European Pirate Parties. I*nternational Journal of Communication*, 9, 870–889.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York University Press.

Joseph, L. & Auyero, J. (2007). Introduction: Politics under the ethnographic microscope. InJoseph, L. & Ayuero, J. (eds). *New Perspectives in Political Ethnography*. New York: Springer, 1–13.

Junqué, M.; Tepp, C. and Fernández, M. (2019). Organizing a municipalist platform: structure and confluence. In. Colau, A. & Bookchin, D. (eds). *Fearless Cities. Guide to the Global Municipalist Movement*, Oxford: Oxford Press.

Jurado, F. (2014). *Nueva gramática política. De la revolución en las comunicaciones al cambio de paradigma*. Madrid: Icaria.

Jurado, F. (2017). *Political representation in the age of Internet. The case of Spain.* Dissertation for the Doctoral Degree from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

Juris, J. S. (2004). Networked social movements: global movements for global justice. In Castells, M. (ed.) *The network society: A cross-cultural perspective*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Juris, J. S. (2008). *Networking futures: The movements against corporate globalization*. Duke University Press.

Juris, J. S. (2012). Reflections on #occupy everywhere: social media, public space, and emerging logics of aggregation. *American Ethnologist*, 39(2), 259–279.

Karasimeonov, G. (2005). *Organizational Structures and Internal Party Democracy in South Eastern Europe*. Sofia: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

Katz, R. & Mair, P. (1995). Changing models of party organization and party democracy. *Party Politics*, I, 5–28.

Katz, R. & Mair, P (2002). The ascendancy of the party in public office: Party organizational change in twentieth-century democracies. In Gunther, R, Montero, JR, Linz, J (eds). *Political Parties. Old Concepts and New Challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 113–135.

Keane, J. (2009). *The life and death of democracy*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Kellner, D. (1997). Intellectuals, the new public spheres, and techno-politics. *New Political Science*, 169–188.

Kirchheimer, O. (1966). The transformation of the Western European party system. In J. LaPalombara and M. Weiner (eds.). *Political Parties and Political development*. Prince-

ton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 177–200.

Kitschelt, H. (1989). The Internal Politics of Parties: The Law of Curvilinear Disparity Revisited. *Political Studies*, 37(3), 400–421.

Kitschelt H. (2000). Linkages between citizens and politi- cians in democratic polities. *Comparative Political Studies*, 33(6–7): 845–879.

Kitschelt, H. (2006). Movement Parties. In Katz, R. S., & Crotty, W. (eds). *Handbook of party politics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 278–290.

Kriesi, H. (2005). *Direct Democratic Choice: The Swiss Experience*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Kriesi, H. & Pappas, T.S. (2015). *European populism in the shadow of the Great Recession. Studies in European political Science*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Krippendorff, K. & Bock, M. (2009). *The Content Analysis Reader*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Kron, J. (2012 September 21). Open Source Politics: The Radical Promise of Germany's Pirate Party. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/09/open-source-politics-the-radical-promise-of-germanys-pirate-party/262646/ [Last accessed: 06.05.2019]

Kruszewska, D. (2014). From the Streets to the Party Lists: Challenges Faced by Movement Parties. *Perspectives on Europe*, 46(1), 101–105.

Kuhn, T.S. (1962). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kurban, C.; Peña-López, I. & Haberer, M. (2015). What Is Technopolitics? A Conceptual Scheme For Under- standing Politics In The Digital Age. *In Building a European Digital Space. Proceedings of the 12th International Conference on Internet, Law & Politics*. Barcelona: Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Huygens Editorial.

Laclau, E. (2005). *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.

Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (2001). *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.

Lanzone, L. & Woods, D. (2015). Riding the Populist Web: Contextualizing the Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy. *Politics and Governance*, 3, 54–64.

Lefebvre, H. (1968). *La droit on ville.* Paris: Édition Anthropos.

Leggewie, C. & Maar, C. (1998). *Internet & Politik. Von der Zuschauer- zur Beteiligungs-demokratie?* Köln: Bollmann-Verlag.

Lewitzki, M. (2011). Das Internet in Parteiform: Wie segelt die Piratenpartei?, Student Paper. Retrieved from https://regierungsforschung.de/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/070111_regierungsforschung.de_lewitzki_piraten.pdf [Last accessed: 07.05. 2017]

Li, M. (2009). The Pirate Party and the Pirate Bay: How the Pirate Bay Influences Sweden and International Copyright Relations. *Pace International Law Review*, 21(1), 281–307.

Lipset, S. M. & Rokkan, S. (1967). Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments. An Introduction. In Lipset, S. M./ Rokkan, S. (eds.). *Party Systems and Voter Alignments. Cross-National Perspectives*. New York: Free Press, 1–64.

Livermore, C. R. (ed.) (2011). *E-Politics and Organizational Implications of the Internet: Power, Influence and Social Change*. Hershey: IGI Global.

López, I. & Rodríguez, E. (2010). The Spanish Model. *New Left Review*. Retrieved from https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii69/articles/isidro-lopez-emmanuel-rodriguez-the-spanish-model. [Last accessed: 07.08. 2018]

Lummis, C.D. (1996). *Radical Democracy*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Luther, K.R. & Müller-Rommel, F. (2005). *Political Parties in the New Europe. Political and Analytical Challenges*. London: Oxford University Press.

M5S (Five Star Movement) (2016). *Non Statuto*. Versione del 26/9/2016. Retrieved from http://www.movimento5stelle.it [Last accessed: 18.06.2017]

M5S (Five Star Movement) (2017a). *Regolamento*. Retrieved from http://www. movimento5stelle.it/regolamento/index.html [Last accessed: 18.06.2017]

M5S (Five Star Movement) (2017b). *Codice di comportamento eletti MoVimento 5 Stelle in Parlamento*. Retrieved from http://www.beppegrillo.it/movimento/codice_comportamento_ parlamentare.php [Last accessed: 20.06.2017]

Mair, P. (1994). Party Organizations: From Civil Society to the State, in Katz, R. & Mair, P. (eds). *How Parties Organize: Change and Adaptation in PartyOrganizations in Western Democracies*. London: Sage, 1–22.

Mair, P. (2013). *Ruling the void: The hollowing of western democracy.* London: Verso Books.

Mair, P. & Van Biezen I. (2001). Party membership in twenty European democracies, 1980–2000. *Party Politics, 7*(1), 5–21.

Manetto, F. (2014 December 20). *Podemos*, en el corazón de "la casta". Retrieved from https://elpais.com/politica/2014/07/19/actualidad/1405790322_686076.html [Last accessed: 14.10.2019]

Manin, B. (1997). *The principles of representative government*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

March, J.G.& Olsen, J. P. (1984). The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life. *American Political Science Review*, 78, 734–749.

Margetts, H. & Dunleavy, P. (2013). The second wave of digital-era governance: a quasi-paradigm for government on the Web. Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, 371(1987), 1–17.

Margetts, H. (2006). Cyber parties. In Katz, R.S. & Crotty, W. (eds). *Handbook of Party Politics.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 528–35.

Marktanner, A. (2012). Transparency as a Challenge: The German Pirate Party. *Thesis for Bachelor of Arts*. University of Maastricht, The Netherlands.

McAdam, D., Tarrow, S. & Tilly, C. (2001). *Dynamics of contention*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Michels, R. (1911). *Political parties: a sociological study of the oligarchical tendencies of modern democracy*. Hearst's International Library Company.

Micó, J. & Casero-Ripollés, A. (2014). Political activism online: organization and media relations in the case of 15M in Spain. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(7), 858–871.

Miegel, F. & Olsson, T. (2008). Civic Passion: A Cultural Approach to the "Political". *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies,* 26(3), 487–499.

Miller, G. A. (1969). Psychology as a means of promoting human welfare. *American Psychologist, 24*(12), 1063–1075.

Moffitt, B. & Tormey, S. (2014). Rethinking Populism. *Political Studies*, 62, 381–397

Monterde, A., Calleja-López, A., Aguilera, M., Barandiaran, X. E., & Postill, J. (2015). Multitudinous identities: a qualitative and network analysis of the 15M collective identity. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(8), 930–950.

Monterde, A., Calleja-Lopez, A., Blanche, D. & Fernández-Ardévol, M. (2017). 15M: the movement in its third anniversary. *IN3 Working Paper Series.* Barcelona: UOC. Morozov, E. (2012). *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. New York: PublicAffairs.

Morozov, E. & Bria, F. (2018). *Rethinking the Smart City: Democratizing Urban Technology.* New York: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung.

Neumann, S. (1956). *Modern Political Parties: Approaches to Comparative Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Neumann, T. (2011). *Die Piratenpartei Deutschland. Entwicklung und Selbstverständnis.* Berlin: Contumax-Verlag.

Nerz, S. (September 22, 2011). Piraten zwischen Öko und Liberalismus. ZEIT ONLINE. Retrieved from https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2011–09/piraten-gruene-liberale/seite-2?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F [Last accessed: 03.09.2018]

Nie, N. H., Hillygus, D.S. & Erbring, L. (2002). Internet use, inter-personal relations, and sociability. In Wellman B. & Haythornthwaite C (eds.). *The Internet in everyday life*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 215–243

Niedermayer, O. (ed). (2013). *Die Piratenpartei*. Springer: Wiesbaden.

Nowotny, S. & Raunig, G. (2016). *Instituierende Praxen: Die Wiederaneignung der Institutionskritik*. Wien: Turia + Kant.

Nunes, R. G. (2014). *The organisation of the organizationless*. Berlin: Mute books.

Odenbach, J. (2012). *Partei, Netz, Netzpartei: Meinungs- und Willensbildung in der Piratenpartei*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Offe, C. (2011). Crisis and Innovation of Liberal Democracy: Can Deliberation Be Institutionalized? *Czech Sociological Review* 47(3), 447–472.

Ostrogorski, M. (1922). *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*. New York: Macmillan.

Panebianco, A. (1988). *Political Parties: Organization and Power*. New York: Cambridge University Press,

Partido X (2014). FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions). Retrieved from https://partidox.org/faqs/ [Last accessed: 08.10.2019]

Pateman, C. (1970). *Participation and democratic theory*. Cambridge University Press.

Peña-López, I. (2016). Open Government: A simplified scheme. Retrieved from https://ictlogy.net/review/?p=4394 [Last accessed: 03.09.2020]

Peña-López, I. (2017). *Decidim.barcelona, Spain. A case study*. Barcelona: IT for Change.

Pérez, L. (2019). Feminizing Politics through Municipalism. In BComú (Barcelona En Comú): *Fearless Cities: A Guide to the Global Municipalist Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pharr, S. J. & Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Disaffected democracies: what's troubling the trilateral countries?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Piaggesi, D. & Sund, K.J. & Castelnovo, W. (2011). *Global Strategy and Practice of E-Governance: Examples from Around the World*. Hershey: IGI global.

Pirate Party Germany (2012). Manifesto of the pirate party of Germany: English version. (A translation of the Grundsatzprogramm der PiratenparteiDeutschland, 2006). Retrieved from: http://wiki.piratenpartei.de/Parteiprogramm/en.[Last accessed: 23.05.2019]

Pirate Party Germany (Berlin) 2010. Founding principles. Satzung. Retrieved from: https://wiki.piratenpartei.de/BE:Satzung [Last accessed: 10.03.2020]

Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The concept of representation*. University of California Press.

Podemos. (2015). El Programa del Cambio. Elecciones autonómicas de 2015. Retrieved from http://podemos.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/programa_marco_podemos.pdf. [Last accessed: 01.03.2019]

Podemos (2016). Organisational principles. Retrieved from https://podemos. info/ wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Organisational_Principles.pdf. [Last accessed: 07.03.2019]

Podemos (2017). Mandar Obedeciendo. Documento Organizativo. Retrieved from http://podemos.info [Last accessed: 03.03.2019]

Peck, J. (2012). Austerity urbanism. *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy*, 16(6), 626–655.

Postill, J. (2015). *The Rise of Nerd Politics. Digital Activism and Political Change*. London: Pluto Press.

Rancière, J. (2006). *Hatred of democracy*. London: Verso Books.

Reddick, C.G. (2010). *Politics, Democracy and E-Government: Participation and Service Delivery*. Hershey: IGI global.

Rendueles, C. & Sola, J. (2018). The rise of Podemos: Promises, constraints, and dilemmas. In: García Agustín, O. and Briziarelli, M. (eds) (2018): *Podemos and the New Political Cycle. Left-Wing Populism and Anti-Establishment Politics*. Chalm: Palgrave MacMillan, 25–47.

Riker, W.H. (1982). *Liberalism Against Populism: A Confrontation Between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice*. San Francisco, CA: W.H. Freeman.

Rivero, J. (2014). *Conversaciones con Pablo Iglesias*. Madrid: Turpial.

Rodotà, S. (1997). *Tecnopolitica. La democrazia e le nuove tecnologie della comunicazione*. Rome: Laterza.

Rodríguez-Aguilera de Prat, C. (2015). Semejanzas y diferencias entre el Movimento 5 Stelle y Podemos, *Societá Mutamento Politica*, 6(11): 51–7.

Romanos, E. & I. Sádaba, I. (2016). From the Street to Institutions through the App: Digitally Enabled Political Outcomes of the Spanish Indignados Movement. *Revista Internacional de Sociología*, 74 (4), 1–14.

Rosanvallon, P. (2011). Monitory democracy? In S. Alonso, J. Keane and W. Merkel(eds) *The Future of Representative Democracy*. Cambridge University Press.

Rosenberg, S.W. (ed). (2007). *Deliberation, Participation and Democracy. Can the People*

Govern? London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rubio-Pueyo, V. (2017). *Municipalismo en España: Barcelona, Madrid, y las ciudades del cambio*. New York: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

Russel, B. (2019), Beyond the Local Trap: New Municipalism and the Rise of the Fearless Cities. *Antipode,* 51(3), 989–1010.

Russell, B. & Reyes, O. (2017). Eight Lessons from Barceona en Comú on how to Take Back Control. *OpenDemocracy.* Retrieved from https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/eight-lessons-from-barcelona-en-com-on-how-to-take-bac/ [Last accessed: 18.10.2020]

Saglie, J. & Heidar, K. (2004). Democracy within Norwegian Political Parties: Complacency or Pressure for Change? *Party Politics*, 10(4), 385–405.

Sampedro, V. & Lobera, J. (2014) The Spanish 15-M Movement: a Consensual Dissent? *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 15 (1–2), 61–80.

Sarcinelli, U. (1998). Parteien und Politikvermittlung: Von der Parteien-zur Mediendemokratie? In Sarcinelli U. (ed.): *Politikvermittlung und Demokratie in der Mediengesellschaft. Beiträge zur politischen Kommunikationskultur*. Bonn: Springer VS, 273–296.

Sartori, G. (1965). *Democratic Theory.* Praeger: University of Virginia.

Scharpf, F. W. (2000). Interdependence and Democratic Legitimation. In Susan J. Pharr/Robert D. Putnam (eds.). *Disaffected Democracies. What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 101–120.

Schattschneider, E.E. (1942). Party Government. New York: Farrar and Rinehart.

Schöne, H. (2005). Die teilnehmende Beobachtung als Datenerhebungsmethode in der Politikwissenschaft. Methodologische Reflexion und Werkstattbericht. *Historical Social Research*, 30,168–199.

Schumpeter, J.A. (1942). *Capitalism, Socialism, Democracy.* New York/London: HarperCollins.

Shea Baird, K; Bárcena, E.; Ferrer, X. & Roth. L. (2016). Why the municipal movement must be internationalist. Retrieved from https://medium.com/@BComuGlobal/why-the-municipal-movement-must-be-internationalist-fc290bf779f3 [Last accessed 19.03.2019]

Shirky, C. (2008). *Here comes everybody: The power of organizing without organizations*. London: Penguin UK.

Singh, K. (2007). *Quantitative Social Research Method.* New Delhi: SAGE Publication.

Siri, J. (2012). *Parteien. Zur Soziologie einer politischen Form*. Heidelberg: Springer Verlag.

Sivitanides, M., & Shah, V. (*2011*). The Era of Digital Activism. *Conference for Information Systems Applied Research* (4), 1–8.

Sloane, M. (August 25, 2020). Participation-washing could be the next dangerous fad in machine learning. *MIT Technology Review*. Retrieved from https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/08/25/1007589/participation-washing-ai-trends-opinion-machine-learning/ [Last accessed: 05.01.2021]

Taibo, C. (2013). The Spanish indignados: A movement with two souls. *European Urban and Regional Studies,* (20), 155–158.

Tarrow, S. (1998). *Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics.* Cambridge US: Cambridge University Press.

Teorell, J. (1999). A deliberative defence of intra-party democracy. *Party Politics*, 5 (3), 363–382.

Thomas, D. (2003). *Hacker Culture.* Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Thompson, D. F. (2008). Deliberative democratic theory and empirical political science. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11(1), 497–520.

Thompson, M. (2020): What's so new about New Municipalism? *Progress in Human Geography*, 45(2), 317–342.

Tilly, C. & Tarrow, S. (2006). *Contentious politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Toret, J. (2014). Límites y potencias de prácticas tecnopolíticas del 15M a #Occupy-Central. Nuevos experimentos tecnopoliticos en la fase constituyente 2013–2015. Talk at the meeting: *"Democracia en red y tecnopolítica. Transformaciones del espacio electoral y nuevos prototipos post-15M"*. Retrievable from http://tecnopolitica.net/content/jornadas14 [Last accessed: 09.01.2020]

Toret. J. (2015). Una mirada tecnopolítica al primer año de Podemos. Seis hipótesis. *Teknokultura*, *12*(1), 121–135.

Toret, J.; Aragón, P. & Calleja-López, A. (2014, December 14). D-CENT piloting in Spain: improving participatory democracy. [Web blog post]. Retrieved from: http://dcentproject.eu/d-cent-piloting-in-spain-improving-participatory-democracy [Last accessed: 09.12.2017]

Toret, J.; Aguilera, M.; Aragón, P.; Calleja-López, A.; Lumbreras, A.; Marín-Miró, O.; Monterde, A. & Barandiaran, X. (2015). *Tecnopolítica: la potencia de las multitudes conectadas. El sistema red 15M, un nuevo paradigma de la política distribuida. IN3 Working Paper Series*. Barcelona: UOC.

Tormey, S. (2015). *The end of representative politics*. Oxford UK: Polity Press.
Tormey, S. & Feenstra, Ramón. (2015). Reinventing the political party in Spain: the case of 15M and the Spanish mobilisations. *Policy Studies,* 36, 590–606.

Treré, E. & Barassi, V. (2015). Net-authoritarianism? How web ideologies reinforce political hierarchies in the Italian 5 Star Movement. *Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies*, 3(3), 287–303.

van Beyne, K. (2013). *From Post-Democracy to Neo-Democracy*. Heidelberg: Springer.

van Biezen, I. (2004) Political parties as public utilities. *Party Politics* 10(6), 701–22.

van Biezen, I., Mair, P., & Poguntke, T. (2012). Going , going , … gone ? The decline of party membership. European Journal of Political Research, 51(1), 24–56.

van Biezen, I. & Poguntke T. (2014). The decline of membership-based politics. *Party Politics,* 20(2), 205–216.

van Dijk, J. (2006). Digital divide research, achievements and shortcomings. *Poetics*, 34(4–5), 221–235.

van der Eijk, C. (2000). Why some people vote and others do not. In Agne, H.; van der Eijk, C., Laffan, B., Lejoon, B., Norris, P. Schmitt, H. & Sinnott, R. (eds.): *Citizen Participation in European Politics*. Stockholm: Statenens Offentliga Utredningar, 13–55.

van Reybrouck, D. (2013). *Against Elections: The Case for Democracy*. Vintage: Vintage Publishing.

Verba, S. & Nie, N.H. (1972). *Participation in America – Political and Social Equality*.

New York: Harper & RowVerge.

Vittori, D. (2017). Podemos and the Five-star Movement: populist, nationalist or what? *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 9(2), 142–161.

Vollmer, L. (2017). Keine Angst vor Alternativen. Ein neuer Munizipalismus. über den Kongress „FearlessCities", Barcelona 10./11. Juni 2017. *Sub/urban Zeitschrift für Kritische Stadtforschung*, 5(3), 147–156.

Ward, S. & Gibson, R. (2009). European political organizations and the internet: mobilization, participation, and change. In Chadwick, A. & Howard, P. (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*. New York: Routledge, 25–39.

Wacquant, L. (2003). Ethnografeast: A Progress Report on the Practice and Promise of Ethnography. *Ethnography*, 4(1), 5–14.

Warren M. (1996). What Should we Expect from More Democracy?: Radically Democratic Responses to Politics. *Political Theory*, 24(2), 241–270.

Wauters, B. (2010). Explaining Participation in Intra-Party Elections: Evidence from Belgian Political Parties. *Party Politics*, 16(2), 237–259.

Wayner, P. (2000). *Free for All: How Linux and the Free Software Movement Undercut the High-Tech Titans*. Palatine: HarperInformation.

Weber M. (1949). *Science and politics. Essays in Sociology*. Routledge: London.

Wendelin, M. & Löblich, M. (2013). *Netzpolitik-Aktivismus in Deutschland. Deutungen, Erwartungen und Konstellationen zivilgesellschaftlicher Akteure in der Internetpolitik*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 58–75.

Weisband, M. (2013). *Wir nennen es Politik. Ideen für eine zeitgemäße Demokratie*. Stuttgart: Tropen Verlag.

Western, S. (2014). Autonomist leadership in leaderless movements: anarchists leading the way. *Ephemera. Theory & Politics in Organizaions*, 14(4), 673–698.

Weyer, J. (2012). *Soziale Netzwerke: Konzepte und Methoden der sozialwissenschaftlichen Netzwerkforschung*. München: Oldenbourg Verlag.

Wolkenstein, F. (2016). A Deliberative Model of Intra-Party Democracy. *Journal of Political Philosophy,* 24(3), 297–320.

Wolkenstein, F. (2018). Intra-party democracy beyond aggregation. *Party Politics*, 24(4), 323–334.

Wolkenstein, F. (2019). *Rethinking party reform*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zelik, R. (2018). *Spanien. Eine politische Geschichte der Gegenwar*t. Berlin: Bertz + Fischer Verlag.

Zelinka, A. (2018). Alternative Zukünfte erfinden. Die munizipalistische Bewegung in Spanien. *Engagée*, 6(7), 115–120.

Zolleis, U. , Prokopf, S. , & Strauch, F. (2010). *Die Piratenpartei. Hype oder herausforderung für die deutsche Parteienlandschaft?* München: Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung.

Zscharnack, K. (2019). Der neue Munizipalismus. Regieren für ein Recht auf Stadt. In Común. *Magazin für stadtpolitische Interventionen*, 1/2019, 20–22.