



The Imagination and Public Participation

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The Imagination and Public Participation: A Deweyan Perspective on the Potential of Design Innovation and Participatory Design in Policy-Making

Democratic practices remain an ongoing concern in Participatory Design (PD), with an increasing focus being directed towards citizens' roles in formal decision-making processes. Linking to such concerns, this article explores the potential of John Dewey's democratic vision as a political frame for PD. As a means of pursuing this, we reference an ongoing Design Innovation research programme, which has, over the last decade, investigated the potential of PD methods in community contexts in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. Next to the programme, we also explore an emerging public participation agenda in Scottish policy-making. Noting some challenges in relation to the agenda's implementation, we propose that design can play a role in helping to realise the potential which it affords. To illustrate this, we present an exemplar case drawn from our research programme and, in doing so, demonstrate how Dewey's vision allows us to both rationalise past action and prospect future activity in relation to policy-making concerns. To conclude, we outline what we see

to be the key value of adopting the Deweyan democratic vision as a political frame within PD in general.

Keywords: Design Innovation, Participatory Design, Democracy, Policy-Making, John Dewey

1. The ‘Political’ Aspect of PD’s Democratic Commitment

If there is a consistent thread running through the history of Participatory Design (PD) it is perhaps to be found in its commitment to democratic action (Telier 2011, 163). This may be a relatively uncontroversial idea in and of itself. However, the question of how *political* such a commitment should be has been the subject of regular questioning.

Looking back over the decades, we observe several key moments of ‘inflection’ where individuals have challenged PD’s then dominant political direction. In the early 1990s, the slow decoupling from trade unionism led to a tension between visions of an apolitical path (Kyng 2010) and calls for a more focused politicisation (Beck 2002). From the mid-2000s, the claiming of the civic arena as a legitimate space for inquiry saw a further, revised notion of the democratic and political aspects of practice coming into play.

Examples include: Design Things (Telier 2011) where concern is directed towards civic work with a view to ‘infrastructuring’, i.e., setting in

place a means by which groups might be enabled to continue collaborating beyond a project's lifespan (Bjögvinsson et al. 2012); DiSalvo's Adversarial Design (DiSalvo 2012), wherein conflict becomes a central focus for productive democratic exchange; and the Labs proposals of Binder and colleagues (2015), where ongoing 'democratic experiments' are pursued across a range of contexts simultaneously.

Such democratic questioning has been directed not only by reorientations in practice, but also in relation to the particular alignments that are being drawn to existing strands of political and social theory. While we may note the Marxist leanings in the early discourse surrounding the workplace (Ehn 2017), contemporary literature has tended to draw links to Bruno Latour's issue-based approach (Latour 2005) and Chantelle Mouffe's (2000) presentation of agnostic democracy. Such theoretical alignments point to particular framings of the democratic and, with it, the political. These affect not only the design process but also—in the case of Latour—who and what are invited to participate (e.g., non-humans as well as humans). Ultimately, by drawing a particular alignment, we are afforded distinct ways of approaching PD's democratic commitment.

In contributing to this discussion within this present article, we aim to explore the potential of drawing a further, as yet, under-considered theoretical alignment by connecting to the work of the late classical pragmatist philosopher John Dewey and, in particular, to his democratic

vision. In doing so, we examine its potential as a political frame for our own democratic commitment by reflecting on the extent to which it allows us to rationalise and prospect activity within an ongoing Design Innovation research programme based at The Glasgow School of Art in Scotland. As a means of further situating our work, we also reference the current Scottish political context and consider the trend towards enhanced public participation in policy-making herein.

It is important to note that, in exploring this alignment, we do not reject other political perspectives in PD; whether it be the all-encompassing Design Things (Telier 2011), the open-ended, flexible Labs approach (Binder et al. 2015) or the agonistic perspective of Adversarial Design (DiSalvo) as previously outlined. Rather, our exploration is best understood as the opening up of another, additional route within politically-motivated, community-based PD and, as such, amounts to a widening of horizons.

As we will demonstrate, drawing an alignment to Dewey's work foregrounds the *community* as a democratic centre. Alongside this, it becomes possible to conceptually link community deliberation and dialogue to the institutions of governance, opening up paths for future, citizen-led institutional reform. Here, importantly, Dewey offers an essential role for the imagination as a force for driving ethically-bound, political change. Accordingly, we are able to position PD methods as a means by which the community centring and linking may occur.

The article proceeds as follows. In the next section, we provide an overview of a number of core concepts and principles underlying Dewey's democratic vision. Then we introduce our Design Innovation research programme and, from this, move to examine the trend towards enhanced public participation within the current Scottish political context. Here, we look in particular at the potential afforded by a specific recent legislative act (i.e., the Community Empowerment Act 2015) and a related series of policy initiatives. Noting some emerging challenges in relation to their implementation, we propose that design can play a role in helping to realise the potential they afford. Following on, as a means of illustrating this, we turn to present an exemplar case, drawn from our research programme. In doing so, we move to interweave the concepts of the Deweyan democratic vision by applying them in a process of rationalising and prospecting (i.e., looking back and looking ahead). Leading on from this rationalising and prospecting, we conclude by outlining what we see to be the key value of adopting the Deweyan democratic vision as a political frame within PD in general.

2. Dewey's Democratic Vision

Dewey's work has long received attention in design, most especially in relation to his presentation of reflective inquiry and aesthetic experience (Dixon 2020a). His 'democratic vision' presents a further, frequent point of

reference. Here, since the mid-2000s, drawing on science and technology studies literature (e.g., Latour 2005; Marres 2012), PD theorists have focused in particular on his concept of *publics* (Le Dantec 2016; DiSalvo 2009). This concept marks out a crucial feature of Dewey’s democratic vision—the core idea is that if citizens are to contribute to the democratic process they must be able to coalesce around key matters of concern, gaining an explicit identity and representation (Dewey LW2, 257).¹ This has afforded PD an important way of positioning participant engagement and ‘political agency’ (e.g., Le Dantec 2016).

Connecting to the publics concept and its role in PD, recent work (Dixon 2020b) has drawn attention to the potential applicability of a series of further concepts within the Deweyan democratic vision, namely: positive freedom; creative democracy; and social intelligence.

2.1 Positive Freedom

Positive freedom refers to a form of freedom, which not only defines a set of ‘rights’, (e.g., the right to free speech) but also *enables*. Dewey envisages that through education citizens might be equipped with the ability to evaluate possible courses of action, as well as judge which

¹ LW in the reference refers to the ‘later works’ of John Dewey, the number to the specific volume being referenced.

action(s) would likely result in the most desirable consequences (Dewey LW 13, 41). Such abilities are essential to achieving ‘creative democracy’.

2.2 Creative Democracy

Creative democracy refers to a community-based understanding of democratic discourse. Dewey seeks to overturn the idea that democracy relies on the *institutions* of government (e.g., parliament) and instead underscores the essential role of what might be termed ‘hyperlocal’ day-to-day interactions, built up of person-to-person and group-to-group communication. In his view, these form the core of democracy and in an ideal scenario (‘creative democracy’) paths would be mapped between these day-to-day forms of communication (as well as the issues that arise) and institutions of government (see e.g., Dewey LW 14, 224-230; also see Narayan 2016, 37-38).

To give this a context at a local level, we might imagine a community having concerns, for example, regarding the future of a particular public building. In a conventional scenario, this might be discussed in an uncoordinated fashion but such discussions would likely remain unrepresented unless a local councillor or public official was directly petitioned on the issue as a matter of urgency. In contrast, in a ‘creative democracy’, there would be no need to urgently petition representatives because regular programmes of consultation or social

inquiry would reveal such concerns at the same time as seek to devise solutions to the problems identified. The form and function of such programmes are outlined through the concept of ‘social intelligence’.

2.3 Social Intelligence

Within the context of his democratic vision, Dewey framed social intelligence as a specific process of sustained experimental research aimed at social policy-making. *Enabled* via positive freedom and *grounded* within the creative democracy of the community, citizens would act as core contributors. In this way, governments and institutions would, in turn, remain alert to the emergence of new needs at both a local and national level, as well as any demands for institutional reform (see e.g. Dewey LW 2 and LW 11).

Extending beyond the democratic vision, social intelligence can also be seen to carry further meaning for Dewey, pointing to the progressive evolution of a shared, practical knowledge base. This knowledge base relies on society’s ability to coordinate opportunities—whether formal or informal—for past insights to inspire novel responses to contemporary needs, e.g., with one technology inspiring and leading to the development of another (Dewey LW 9, 33-34).

We may understand social intelligence, then, as representing two separate but related capacities. First, there is the formal government-

sanctioned experimental programme—social inquiry for creative democracy through positive freedom. Alongside this, there is the more organic, gradual development of a society’s ability to innovate and transform communities for the better.

2.4 Two Undergirding Principles

These three concepts are undergirded by two further principles. The first is that, extending beyond the creative democracy concept, Dewey draws an inherent link between democracy and the community. As far as he is concerned the community *is* a democratic entity. At its best, it functions such that decisions affecting all are worked out together *in* communication. Importantly, however, the community is also seen as a fluid entity with many overlappings and interlinkings. In this view, the individual is never an individual in isolation but rather should be understood to form an ‘association’ (LW2, 353) that embodies many connections.

The second key principle is that Dewey also directly links democracy and ethics (Pappas 2008). This link is to be found in the activity of *deliberation*. He believes that general ethical norms—what we do and don’t find acceptable—emerge through ongoing societal deliberation, whereby we are collectively testing what works and what doesn’t. Democracy, in particular the community-based democracy he espoused, is seen to mirror this. For him, communities are constantly involved in a

process of working out desirable courses of action. In keeping with design, the imagination plays a key role by allowing for a ‘rehearsal of various courses of conduct’ (LW 7, 275) and the de-risked trialling of various consequences.² Indeed, this has been identified as the distinguishing feature of Dewey’s understanding of deliberation when set beside more conventional understandings (e.g., Habermas 1984). As Gregory Pappas puts it, because Dewey’s understanding of democratic deliberation foregrounds ‘qualitative process and transaction that includes emotional and imaginative elements’, it points to a view of ‘*democracy as experience*’ (Pappas 2008, 252, italics in original).

We find that these concepts and principles resonate with both the concerns of our Design Innovation research as well as its political context in Scotland. To begin to explore this, we turn first to introduce the former, which is based at the Innovation School (IS), within the Glasgow School of Art (GSA).

² For a consideration of Dewey’s ethics in the context of co-design, see Steen (2015).

3. Design Innovation, the Scottish Political Context and Dewey

Inaugurated in 2017, IS emerged from the synthesis of various elements of GSA's School of Design. The School oversees a research programme, which addresses challenges, relating to areas such as sustainable economic development and community empowerment within the geographically dispersed communities of Scotland's Highlands & Islands (H&I) region. Methodologically, comparisons may be drawn with other similar research centres internationally, e.g., the Codesign Research Centre at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture, Design and Conservation in Denmark or the Design Innovation Research Centre at the University of Sydney in Australia. The former explored the 'how', 'what' and 'why' of co-design processes in community settings (Halse et. al 2010); while the latter has, to date, focused on how design can support 'problem reframing' in public sector contexts (Tonkinwise 2019).

The IS's distinct methodological orientation can be found in its deployment of PD methods within a particular approach to Design Innovation. For the IS, 'innovation' is an outcome that may take the form of a practice, a process or a product. Distinct from technological *invention*, this vision of innovation emerges through design-led inquiry, whereby social and cultural concerns are explored creatively

with communities in context with a view to reimagining ‘what is’.

Although the IS does not hold an explicit political agenda per se, its community-based research does carry relevance for emergent concerns relating to public participation in the Scottish political context.

3.1 The Question of Public Participation in the Scottish Political Context

The establishment of a devolved Scottish parliament (2000) has led to the emergence of what has been termed a ‘Scottish style’ of policymaking (Cairney, 2017). The approach is grounded in consensus-seeking that relies on consultation (Cairney and St Dennis 2020). While it has been claimed that the Scottish policy-making style is largely comparable to that of the UK’s in general (Cairney 2021), a series of efforts have been made to explore the potential of democratic innovations such as ‘mini-publics’, i.e., small-scale randomised assembly of citizens whom might be systematically consulted on key issues (Escobar and Elstub 2017). Looking ahead, further innovation may be afforded through the recent passing of a series of legislative acts, which point to the possibility of a fundamental reorientation Scotland’s local, community-level politics.

The most salient of these is the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (CEA). This act aims to support community participation in planning, public services and asset development. Equally, it

also includes the broader aim of enhancing community collaborations with decision-makers to address local issues (Scottish Government 2015; 2017a). Beyond this, the act has recently been strengthened by the publication of an Open Government Action Plan 2018-2020, which committed the government to public involvement in policy-making and service delivery (Scottish Government, 2019).

While such an agenda is undoubtedly progressive within the Scottish context, it is difficult to draw comparisons to developments elsewhere. This is in part due to the challenge of defining the concept of ‘empowerment’ in a policy context (Lawson and Kearns 2010). Nonetheless, links have been drawn between the CEA, the Tuscany Law of Participation in Italy and the Sustainable Communities Act in England and Wales on the basis of their promotion of participation (Bua and Escobar 2018). It must also be noted that collaborative approaches to policy-making have been trialled in European contexts for several decades (Healey 2003). What does appear to distinguish the CEA and the associated Open Government Action Plan, is the potential it holds for enhancing the level and scope of public participation across planning, public services and development (Eliot et al. 2019). Achieving this potential however is not without its challenges.

A particular challenge has emerged relation to the *ideal* of conferring political agency and its *realisation*. The stated public participation

objectives often exist without suggested methods for implementation. This has tended to accentuate rather than mitigate pre-existing inequalities; with a divide opening up between those communities that have been able to mobilise in response to particular local concerns, and those that have not. For example, evaluations of the CEA have underlined a tendency for community engagement approaches to *reproduce* the participation of high-capacity communities over those who have not yet established such a capacity (McMillan et al., 2020).

This is further exemplified in the case of Participatory Requests (PRs)—a mechanism within the CEA, which allows communities to actively ‘enter into dialogue with public authorities about local issues/services on their terms’ and request an ‘outcome improvement process’ (The Scottish Government 2017a, 8). Here, evaluation has highlighted a need to: improve access for marginalised groups; enhance transparency and understanding in PR guidance to combat scepticism and ambiguity; and build peoples’ capacity and confidence to play an active role in their communities (McMillan et al. 2020).

We take the view that in seeking to respond to issues such as these, there is a clear and definite role for design. In particular, we believe that our work in Design Innovation offers a methodological and contextual reference point that, when linked to Dewey’s democratic vision, can help to

furnish a strategy for enabling enhanced public participation in the context of policy-making in Scotland. We propose that PD *methods* could be profitably applied to ‘innovate’ formal deliberation processes to better align to the new public participation agenda we see emerging in Scotland. Specifically, in relation to *advancing* political agency, we believe that its emphasis on empowerment through creative deliberation and dialogue (Simonsen and Robertson 2013) holds the potential to enhance capacity-building at the *hyperlocal* levels posited in Dewey’s concept of creative democracy (e.g., person-to-person and group-to-group interactions taking place in shared contexts).

The proposal is not without precedent. Design has recently gained a foothold in policy-making, with the development of a dedicated policy design approach within the field (Bason 2016). However, at present, such work tends to focus on the potential of co-design or design thinking to support ‘prototyping’ initiatives (e.g., Kimbell and Bailey 2017) and, as yet, PD remains under-represented within the design for policy space (Dixon 2020b).

Dewey’s vision helps us ‘think’ this through, both retrospectively and prospectively. In other words, we can understand the ways in which our work is relevant to the challenge at hand and, equally, see the potential

to enhance our approach as set against needs of the context. By doing so, we map a path for design *in* democracy.

As a first step here, we now move to present our exemplar case, a research project entitled Design Innovation for New Growth (DING), which will both illustrate the approach, as well as allow us to consider the potential meaning of Dewey's democratic vision in relation to the above Scottish public participation agenda.

3.2 DING

Funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council from 2017 to 2019, DING explored the potential of Design Innovation as a strategy for enabling growth in the H&I. The project was guided by prior work examining innovation challenges faced by creative practitioners in the region (McHattie *et al.* 2018). Findings revealed the importance of non-economic forms of value for participants; in particular, the value of cultural heritage and cooperative exchange at the community level. Following on from this, DING aimed to investigate 'pluralities of value' beyond the economic imperative including: network growth; knowledge growth; value growth; and market growth (i.e. growth that considers multiple outcomes as being a valid and valuable goal of innovation).

The project was structured around a series of design-led knowledge exchange workshops, referred to as DING Studios, which brought together

a cohort of over 40 practitioners in Shetland, Orkney, and Mull. The Shetland Studio brought together a group of local creative practitioners from a range of sectors (e.g., craft); the Orkney Studio, creative producers (e.g. of festivals); and the Mull Studio, broader creative practitioners (e.g. film). Linking to Dewey's broad secondary understanding of social intelligence (i.e., as a progressive, evolving practical knowledge base), the Studios followed an 'asset-based approach' (Garven et al. 2016), wherein hyperlocal, cultural knowledge and understanding were positioned as 'shared resources' from which insight might be drawn. The existence and potential of these shared resources were identified and considered through a PD-based Design Innovation mapping method (Johnson et al. 2019) referred to as the 'DING model'. In line with the project's aims, the model required that participants identify resources and possibilities relating to: the parameters of their network; their knowledge; the value of their offering; and their market.

Using the DING model, participants were asked to:

- Share and 'map' individual and collective challenges;
- Respond to set provocations (e.g., 'Experienced practitioners are ready to innovate from Shetland's traditions');
- Reflect upon innovation approaches;
- Trace associated networks;
- Envisage future trajectories;

- And propose immediate objectives in relation to community participation and emancipation.

Through the use of the DING model in the three Studios, various local resources were identified. For example, the strength of Orkney's festival offering or the extent to which creative practitioners in Mull were able to balance a complex portfolio of activities in order to sustain their practice. However, distinct challenges were also identified. Examples included a lack of access to international markets due to the geographic position of the island archipelagos or an absence of youth engagement in cultural initiatives such as the festivals.

While many positive future trajectories could be mapped against such challenges (i.e., solutions could be envisaged), participants frequently cited a lack of 'time and resources' as an impediment to proposing immediate initiatives and objectives for their communities (McHattie *et al.* 2019).

By exploring this latter insight directly with participants beyond the Studios it was decided that a focused response to this issue in particular would be of most value for creative practitioners in the region. As result, in January 2018 an expert panel comprised of stakeholders from the island communities was established. Through deliberation, the concept of DING Innovation Fellowships was co-developed as response to the 'time and resources' challenge.

The DING Innovation Fellowship was a funded opportunity, which offered individual creative practitioners the time and resources to innovate their own practice at the same time as requiring that they work with others in the local creative community to build capability and capacity across the H&I region. Through 2018, eight Fellowships were funded in total.

Ultimately, by providing the Fellows with time and resources to undertake this work, the Fellowships alleviated and absorbed ‘risk’, financial and otherwise. Each Fellow was also proactive in building capacity locally, with community exchanges resulting in new creative horizons. For example, one Fellow worked collectively to explore and articulate the contemporary meaning of Shetland wool with local practitioners. At the same time as defining key social and cultural values associated with the product, they were also able to envisage potential future growth strategies for the sector pivoting away from the tourist market and towards export. The initiative also led to the identification of previously overlooked intra and inter-island opportunities. A key example here is the ‘Make it Happen’ initiative in Shetland, whose Fellowship centred upon finding ways of facilitating creative exchange between Shetland and elsewhere in the region.

In terms of an immediate outcome—through the Fellowships—DING can be seen to offer a ‘human scale’ strategy for supporting geographically-distributed creative practitioners in the H&Is. It

demonstrates how, when a wider value system is mobilised (e.g., in relation to networks or knowledge), it becomes possible to scope opportunities in relation not only to at the personal, economic level but also at the collective, regional level.

This brings us back to the issue identified in the Scottish policy-making context and design's potential role in enabling public participation. To consider this, we return to Dewey.

3.3 A Retrospective Rationalisation of DING via Dewey's Democratic Vision

Recalling the concepts underpinning Dewey's democratic vision, we believe that DING can be seen to exemplify *positive freedom* in so far as it allowed a community of creative practitioners to chart a collective course guided by their own, self-identified need. Specifically, in the Studios, we see the PD-based mapping method—the DING model—as coordinating a 'structured' *enabling*. By mapping practitioners' challenges, innovation approaches, networks and future trajectories, as well as doing so critically *together*, it became possible for them to 'envision' their situations in the round. Further, beyond the Studios, a finding that derived from the application of this method (i.e., that it was difficult to set initiatives and objectives against their proposed 'trajectories') allowed for the identification of a 'next step' in the form of the Innovation Fellows. Following the positive freedom thread, we see the Fellowships as offering a

space for both personal and collective growth simultaneously. By pursuing a particular predetermined venture alongside others Fellows, each individual was testing and developing their own abilities and able to share this with the other Fellows, as well as their peers. Thus, as an ‘association’, they were empowering themselves as well as the networks they mobilised.

Taking all the Deweyan concepts into account, DING may be seen to have supported the base-level of *creative democracy* as meaningful conversations relating to the everyday concerns of a particular community that were supported and given form (i.e., the Innovation Fellowships were established in response to a self-identified need). This was managed through the creative deliberation enabled by the DING model and the subsequent consideration of its results (i.e., in relation to formulating a response to the noted lack of time and resources). In essence, it is a matter of considering and noting present challenges and then *imagining* how these might be addressed in the future.

Whilst DING certainly relied on the broad-based *social intelligence* of its participants (i.e., their shared, practical knowledge base), it did *not* act as an experimental programme which directly connected participants to the institutions that hold a responsibility for their welfare and, as such, was not able to effect either immediate policy change or institutional reform. Noting this, we now move to prospect the shaping of future work via Dewey’s vision.

3.4 Prospecting via Dewey's Democratic Vision: Future Work

It is clear that a full realisation of Dewey's democratic vision—the communal, ethical ideal he sketched out—requires not only creative deliberation but also *institutional* dialogue. As such, future work aims to explore the potential of embedding institutional actors within project contexts. One project in particular, Social Studios, will apply PD methods in order to explore and innovate the Participation Request (PR) mechanism within the CEA.

As have been noted, PRs provide a means for communities to enter into a dialogue with public authorities about local issues and services but have yet to see their full potential realised (see Section 3.1). In order to address this issue, we see a need to engender an enhanced 'social intelligence', i.e., forge direct links between citizens and institutions.

As such, in Social Studios, representatives from the public authorities and government departments will be involved throughout the research process in both interviews as well as workshops sessions. Through the deployment of similar approaches to the DING model—i.e., tools which allows for the mapping of present challenges and possible future trajectories—it is envisaged that the latter sessions in particular would allow for a focused citizen-institution dialogue. The ambition is that through *prolonged* direct exposure to citizens' viewpoints a gradual but

direct impact can be effected within the conduct of the research. This would, in essence, amount to a direct realisation of formal social intelligence.

Having set out the above exemplar case, as well as considered how Dewey's vision helps us think through things retrospectively and prospectively, we now turn to consider the proposal in the round.

4. Towards Creative Democracies

Dewey's democratic vision offers a model for how democracy might function in ideal terms. He envisages a scenario where citizens will be empowered to contribute; governments will create open forums for inquiry that draw a line of communication between the everyday concerns of citizens and institutions; and not only that, they will also *actively* seek to identify new needs and allow for institutional reform when required. This may seem unrealistic. However, it has been suggested that any overstretching on Dewey's part was likely intentional (Narayan 2016)—we are being offered a vision to *continually* aim towards as opposed to actually *achieve*, once and for all.

Bearing this in mind, the lack of methods for enhanced public participation in Scotland—i.e., the absence of a clear strategy to institute positive freedom and social intelligence—need not be seen as an inherent failure. Rather, from a Deweyan perspective, it may be positioned as an

immediate and pressing concern with an ongoing, collective inquiry aiming towards a bettering of citizens' present political agency.

The various initiatives outlined in the Scottish policy-making context—from the CEA to the Open Government Action Plan—represent a bold agenda for enhancing public participation. By moving outwards from this and mobilising Dewey's vision in relation to our own Design Innovation research (i.e., DING and Social Studios), we have sought to demonstrate the potential value of applying Dewey's vision as a political frame in PD.

Here, Dewey allows us to see how PD can support both an *enabling* of citizens as well as the *facilitation* of live, informal citizen-institution dialogues. In this, we foreground the creative deliberation process as represented by the DING model as a means by which a particular community's concerns can be identified and possibly addressed in a process of positive exchange. We hold that this requires a plurality of values, with a focus on the potential of the collective in the longer term. The next step for such a model is the testing of citizen-institution dialogue, as proposed in relation to the Social Studios project.

Before finishing, it is worth briefly noting some of the ways in which this perspective might be seen to differ from such alternatives as Design Things, Labs and Adversarial Design. Turning first to Design Things (Telier 2011) and Labs (Binder et al. 2015), there is a clear and immediate

difference that can be drawn—Dewey’s conception of participation focuses on the human in particular. It is restricted to the community and the institutions which serve it and does not allow for ‘Things’ (i.e., an equal collective of human and non-humans). Indeed, as we have seen the community is prioritised, forming an essential core. This is so because, as per the second undergirding Deweyan principle, it is the source of ethical understanding. Issues on their own matter but how the community comes together in communication and inquiry is key.

In relation to Adversarial Design, it is this latter emphasis on communication and inquiry that distinguishes Dewey’s work (DiSalvo 2012). The point is not to focus on conflict as such (though its occurrence and possible productive aspect is not denied). Rather, the point is to ensure that the strength of communication and inquiry is such that conflict need not arise or be the nexus of productivity. This is why positive freedom is so significant, individuals must be equipped to deliberate effectively.

In the end, through an alignment to Dewey’s vision, we propose that a coupling of PD-based creative deliberation and citizen-institution dialogues may be positioned as almost-achievable, always-nearly-there form of *creative democracy*. This is not a democracy centred around parliaments, legislation and ‘rights’. Rather this is a democracy of the community, grounded in daily person-to-person and group-to-group interactions; of the needs of citizens; of the meanings and value of their

shared resources; of citizens being permitted and, crucially, being *able* to enter into *dialogue* with institutions. It is democracy as an ethical process—‘democracy as experience’ as Pappas put it (2008). This is because it is self-corrective, always working itself out in ongoing, creative experimentation. Crucially, imagination, not just reason, matters here and, consequently, it can be democracy by design.

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