

Climate assemblies and communicative flows: A conceptual framework for studying media and communication in deliberative systems

Dannica Fleuss and Jane Suiter

1. Introduction

The primary objective of this chapter is to provide a framework to analyse the increasingly complex hybrid media landscape of the 21st century and to elucidate the potential impact on policy and the implementation of recommendations from climate assemblies. Additionally, it seeks to offer insights into why specific recommendations may be disregarded.

Since the first climate assembly in Ireland in 2016, a broad range of mini-publics in different national and transnational/global contexts have focused on climate change, biodiversity and the development of environmental policies. Despite all these efforts on behalf of civil society organisations, public administrations, environmentally-conscious politicians, activists and citizens involved in these processes, there is a significant lack of consequential political action to achieve the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) or by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Contemporary climate scholarship suggests that one of the significant impediments to climate action is the influence of vested interests, whose narratives often either deny or, more recently, seek to delay climate action they perceive as contrary to their interests (Lamb et al., 2021). In this way, misperception-generating communication strategies can be strategically utilised by actors aiming to prevent (or delay) disruptive measures (BBC 2020). Partly as a result, misperceptions about climate change are still prevalent among comparatively large parts of the population in different countries (e.g. Lewandowsky 2021; Poortinga et al. 2011; Weber and Stern 2011; Whitmarsh 2011).

These narratives form part of the deliberative system of climate discourses alongside those advocating for action originating, for instance, from climate assemblies. To comprehend how these discourses and flows operate within the broader information environment, it is imperative to introduce key communication concepts to the deliberative democracy scholarship. This approach facilitates the undertaking of research aimed at mapping the sites and actors involved in discourse pertaining to climate action.

So far, assessments of citizens' assemblies have devoted much attention to the quality of deliberation within assemblies (Himmelroos 2017; also see Escobar and Elstub 2017 for an overview). Boswell et al. (2023) found that climate assemblies' actual impact on politics, polity and policy depends on several factors, e.g. their connections to different parts of a polity and the extent to which they engage in public outreach to media and civil society (Boswell et al. 2023, 14). However, in an increasingly complex hybrid media landscape (Chadwick 2017), we require a more nuanced analysis of climate assemblies' embeddedness in what we envisage as Habermas' proverbial "network of communication stretched across society" (Habermas 1996, 56).

Addressing this gap is crucial since a comprehensive theoretical and empirical understanding of climate assemblies' potential to impact policymaking requires a nuanced understanding of how different actors with vested interests utilise diverse media and platforms to disseminate misperception-generating communication strategies about climate change to avoid or delay consequential policy change. In other words, it requires an assessment of "communicative flows" within complex networks of media, platforms and actors. This chapter aims to develop a conceptual-theoretical framework that will enable empirical researchers and practitioners to analyse and make use of the mechanisms and dynamics that are at work in this context and to develop strategies that can guide consequential climate action.

To develop the conceptual communicative flows framework, we apply a problem-driven approach to political theorising (Shapiro 2002; Green and Shapiro 1994). Problem-oriented research starts from “puzzles” and relies on theoretically grounded depictions of research problems or questions (Shapiro 2002).¹ This chapter addresses three research questions that need to be answered by our framework.

First, we ask: “How can we conceptualise ‘the network of communication’ that is relevant for assessing climate assemblies?”. We have two sub-questions here, i. which *deliberative sites* must be considered to provide a conceptual background for understanding communicative flows in contemporary sociopolitical systems? And ii. Which *actors* need to be included in studying climate assemblies, and which deliberative sites are dominated by what actors?

Second, we provide an operational definition of “communicative flows”: How can communicative flows between different deliberative sites be conceptualised so that they also allow for systematic comparative analyses at a larger scale (i.e., are operationalisable to translate them into measurement approaches for large-n studies)?

Third, we ask: Which climate change discourses are prevalent in different deliberative sites, where do they “travel” throughout sociopolitical systems—and which actors strategically use different misperception-generating strategies to deny or delay climate change action?

Fourth, we summarise the overall framework and outline its merits for uncovering discourses by pointing to illustrative findings from applications to different climate assemblies and their communicative environment. We shall argue that our framework can develop a more profound understanding of climate assemblies’ potential to achieve consequential policy change and the power dynamics in these processes.

2. Analysing communicative flows

Our chapter addresses a crucial gap: existing research primarily focuses on climate assemblies’ embeddedness in political institutions or policy cycles but does not systematically analyse their embeddedness in (increasingly complex) hybrid media environments. Furthermore, they tend to ignore that the media—and/or corporations funding them—must also be considered as *actors* in climate change discourses and corresponding political processes, i.e. by (selectively) conveying messages of actors with vested interests (e.g. big fossil fuel companies, automobile industry, agribusiness).

Discourses matter for political action—as well as the lack thereof. Dryzek and Niemeyer (2008) define discourse as “a set of categories and concepts embodying specific assumptions, judgments, contentions, dispositions, and capabilities”. With this, discourses “enable [...] the mind to process sensory inputs into coherent accounts, which can then be shared in an intersubjectively meaningful fashion”. Different discourses conceive of different individuals or collectives as “relevant” and ascribe agency to those actors (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008, 481; also see Dryzek 2022, 9-11). Briefly put, climate change discourses –and the extent to which they are spread across different deliberative sites– are crucial: different discourses suggest different accounts of the relevance of climate change, the urgency of (more radical, consequential) political action and distinct pathways for addressing climate change. These discourses will likely be utilised by different actors with different interests, including those with vested interests.

Systemic deliberative democrats understand democracies’ legitimacy as the result of deliberative processes in “networks of communication” (Habermas 1996, 50; also see Mansbridge et al. 2012) constituted by diverse deliberative sites and the flow of communication’ between them. The focal

¹ In taking problems as a point of departure, researchers can avoid both the pitfalls associated with “method-driven” and “theory-driven” approaches. In their extremes, method-driven research constructs problems based on available data or preferred methodological strategies while theory-driven research self-servingly constructs problems to validate a specific model (Shapiro 2002).

point of normative deliberative theory is the uptake of lay citizens and civil society agents' arguments, demands, and perspectives in empowered institutions as particularly important for democratic legitimacy (Dryzek 2012, 11-12; Parkinson 2003, 191; also see Goodin and Dryzek 2006). Yet, most deliberative democratic theories conceptualise the public sphere as a comparatively homogeneous space. In contrast, communication studies suggest that understanding climate change discourses in contemporary sociopolitical systems requires a more nuanced approach to analysing political communication and deliberation that accounts for (a) an increasingly complex, hybrid 21st-century media landscape and (b) considers media as actors in their own right. How media act and intervene in political discourses arguably depends on whether those media are captured or independent (Schiffrin, 2017; 2021). Against this backdrop, this chapter's crucial task is bridging deliberative democracy research with insights from communication studies.

Chadwick (2017) famously proposed an account of hybrid media systems, 21st-century media environments based on conflict and competition between older and newer media logics but also characterised by interdependence. Chadwick's approach thereby enables researchers to move "beyond dichotomous modes of thought and [...] to understand how the older and the newer are layered into each other in political communication" (Chadwick 2017, 285). He argues that on balance there are now greater opportunities for citizens to influence public discourse than during the "stultifying" duopoly of broadcasting and media logics (Chadwick 2017, p. 288). Based on his analysis of US and UK media landscapes' (ongoing) transformation, he concludes that "it seems to be inescapable that political communication in Britain and the United States is more polycentric than during the period of mass communication that dominated the twentieth century" (Chadwick 2017, 288

Moreover, Schiffrin (2017; 2021) illustrates the distinction between captured and independent media outlets through examples of media capture in Tanzania, Latin America, Turkey, and Hungary. Unlike independent media, which operate autonomously, captured media are under the influence of corporate entities and serve as mouthpieces for their interests and those of government bodies. Despite discourses that tout the "liberating" or "democratising" effects of many-to-many communication facilitated by social media and digital platforms, the internet has also mainly enabled unregulated corporate monopolies such as Meta to wield significant influence over public discourse (Schiffrin, 2021, 3). Although scholars frequently had high expectations concerning the web's democratising effects, "digital media may have had the opposite effect: making capture less expensive and more likely and presenting even bigger policy challenges for those who want to prevent it" (Schiffrin 2021, 8; see Schiffrin 2017, 5-6). Focusing on these features enables researchers to identify actors that create, convey, and perpetuate particular discourses or narratives about climate change that aim either at preventing/delaying or promoting consequential policy change.

These analyses, therefore, provide a critical complementary perspective for understanding the dynamics involved in climate change communication and policymaking as attention is directed to actors and collectives who tend to occupy different deliberative sites in the public sphere and the broader democratic system. A more nuanced analysis of these deliberative sites and actors –and communicative flows between them– is crucial for a comprehensive, fine-grained understanding of climate assemblies' potential to counteract vested interests and the perpetuating of misperceptions and, therefore, needs to be included in our assessment of communicative flows. We apply a problem-driven approach to developing our conceptual framework. In line with Shapiro (2002), we base our theoretical-conceptual work neither solely on abstract normative theory nor exclusively on empirical findings but start from research problems.

3. Developing the communicative flows framework

3.1. Building block I: Deliberative sites, actors, and discourses

Systemic deliberative theory provides a suitable point of departure that aligns with the premises that guide the design of citizens' assemblies and ascribes a crucial role to public sphere communication.

Achieving the Habermasian ideal of inclusive, uncoerced, respectful, and reasonable exchanges of arguments about collectively binding decisions among all affected members is impossible in large-scale communities (see Habermas 1996, 107). Deliberative democrats acknowledge this “problem of scale” (see Parkinson 2003, 181): systemic approaches understand democracies’ legitimacy as the result of deliberative processes in multiple deliberative sites and the flow of communication between them. The classical model proposed by deliberative democrats such as Habermas or, more recently, Christina Lafont is a two-track model (Habermas 1996; Lafont 2019). In Habermas’s terms, the political system is constituted by a “political centre” and “the periphery”:

The centre of the political system consists of the familiar institutions: parliaments, courts, administrative agencies and government. Each branch can be described as a specialised deliberative arena. [...] At the periphery of the political system, the public sphere is rooted in networks for wild flows of messages—news, reports, commentaries, talks, scenes and images, and shows and movies with informative, polemical, educational, or entertaining content. (Habermas, 2006, pp. 415–416)

Broadly in line with this approach, Dryzek (2012, 11-12) distinguishes “public” and “empowered spaces” in sociopolitical systems. The core features that distinguish public and empowered spaces largely overlap with Habermas’s centre-periphery distinction: institutions in the empowered space have the capacity to make collectively binding decisions, while the broader public sphere is the space where lay citizens acquire information about political processes from peers as well as via the media and various media figures (e.g. journalists, politicians and other public opinion makers). These arguments are then, at least in well-functioning democracies, fed into empowered space debates, i.e. deliberative theorists tend to adopt a bottom-up perspective on political processes and their legitimacy (e.g. Dryzek 2012; Fleuss 2023).

The concept of the public sphere, which often serves as a conceptual basis in deliberative theorising, emerged from Habermas’ *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) and built on a reconstruction of the evolution of political communication and debate in 19th-century Europe. Today’s hybrid media landscape is much more complex: there is an increasing amount of online and offline media outlets, as well as interactions between these platforms, social media, newspapers, tabloids, etc. (see Chadwick 2017). Even before digitalisation-associated transformations impacted media landscapes, there was arguably no homogeneous public sphere—but with the advent of digital media, public sphere(s) arguably became even more heterogeneous (or, in Chadwick’s terms, “messy”) (2017, 288). As Habermas has argued more recently (Habermas 2023), the enclosed informational bubbles or echo chambers have split citizens into a plurality of pseudo-publics largely closed from one another, endangering democratic institutions and norms. Hence, our Communicative Flows Framework requires a more nuanced conceptual account of the public sphere. Therefore, we integrate deliberative democracy’s accounts with communication studies that offer more fine-grained distinctions between different kinds of deliberative sites in hybrid public spheres. Furthermore, we account for Schiffrin’s (2017; 2021) distinction between captured and independent media and platforms: this distinction is crucial for analysing power relationships that manifest themselves in environmental discourses and for understanding the ways in which actors with vested interests utilise diverse media or platforms.

In addition to citizens’ assemblies and empowered space actors, we should also consider lobbyists, activists and civil society organisations, as well as digital and analogue media and platforms that, following the distinction introduced above, fall into two basic categories: independent and captured media –although we acknowledge there is a continuum, and it is a matter of gradation. This distinction is fundamental since our remarks above indicate that actors with different interests are likely to approach communication related to climate change in diverse ways. “[D]iscourses are bound with political power” (Dryzek 2022, 9). Since certain actors are likely to be equipped with more (e.g. financial) resources, the constellation of actors involved in climate change discourses is also expected to affect communicative flows, i.e. the quantity and impact of discourses on other deliberative sites –not restricted to, but including empowered spaces where collectively binding decisions are made (also see Chalaye 2023).

Turning to our third question: “What discourses and communicative strategies are likely to be used by different actors?” While Dryzek’s work (e.g. 2022, 14-17) on overarching environmental discourses provides an invaluable point of departure, research is needed to answer this question in a more nuanced, empirically grounded manner. As we shall indicate in section 4, particularly denialist and delay climate change discourses are likely to be disseminated by captured media and by corporate or political actors who have an interest in avoiding the implementation of disruptive climate change policies.

Table 1 outlines the first conceptual building block for our Communicative Flows Framework. However, it must be somewhat tentative since actors dominating different sites are highly context-dependent. Nevertheless, it provides a theoretically and empirically informed point of departure for analysing communicative flows in diverse sociopolitical systems.

	ROLES IN DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES	ACTORS INHABITING THESE SITES
<u>Empowered space:</u> Parliament, public administration	Collectively binding decision-making, implementation	Politicians, policymakers, regulators, and civil and public servants are frequently influenced by lobby groups (corporate/political actors with vested interests)
<u>The public sphere, a:</u> Independent media	Traditionally, it is a space for debate and information for public opinion and will formation and epistemic filtering of discourses and opinions. Increasing pluralism and complexity of public sphere(s) and opinion and will-formation processes in hybrid media environments.	Context-dependent: in many European countries, non-commercial TV and Radio stations (public funding); newspapers funded by publishing companies (no/limited influence of advertisers); freelancing journalists/blogs/podcasts; media/platforms funded by non-profit organisations;
<u>The public sphere, b:</u> Captured media	Increasing space for polarisation, propaganda, misperception generation, echo chambers and so on	Social media, tabloids, and legacy mass media owned/strongly influenced by lobby groups; global social platform corporations; corporate actors such as the agrarian sector, car companies, fossil fuel interests, etc; and billionaire media barons.
<u>Informal everyday political talk</u>	Roots of political communication in peoples’ “lifeworld”. Potential for inequalities that shape	Everyone

	everyday political talk (Conover and Searing, 2005).	
<u>Climate Assemblies</u>	Depending on the organisation: Bottom-up/top-down/hybrid forms of opinion/will-formation, action-guiding proposals	Lay citizens, public administration officials, civil society organisations, advocates, interest groups and 'experts' of various kinds (including scientists as well as experts by lived experience).

Table 1: Overview map of sociopolitical systems

3.2. Building block II: An operational definition of communicative flows

From the perspective of systemic approaches to deliberative democracy, dialogical communication is essential for well-informed, egalitarian, legitimate and broadly accepted decision-making, particularly when it comes to decisions about highly contentious and complex issues such as climate change policies. From a science communication perspective, Boykoff (2019, xi; 57) comes to similar conclusions: while previously dominant information deficit models promote communication from scientists to citizens,² Boykoff argues that these counterproductively provide oxygen to breathe more life into counterproductive claims (Boykoff 2019, xi). Instead, he proposes a dialogical approach to communication about climate change where climate scientists essentially “level” with so-called “lay citizens” and embrace their contextual knowledge and creativity in finding solutions to complex policy problems (Boykoff 2019, 9; also see Goodinand Cooper 2013). Climate assemblies are usually designed, moderated, and comparatively isolated forums, thus upscaling the results of deliberations in these assemblies—communicative flows between mini-publics and maxi-publics as well as other deliberative sites—are crucial goals (Niemeyer and Jennstal 2018; Suiter et al. 2020).

One essential task for developing an analytical framework is translating the metaphorical term communicative flows into an operationalisable concept that can be applied in systematic empirical analyses. In the first instance, our basic conceptualisation of communicative flows can be represented as a fourfold relationship:

1. First are climate change discourses or elements thereof—on the one hand, discourses demanding climate action, and on the other, discourses of delay/denial/ or misperception-generating discourses.
2. These discourses (or elements thereof) can be located in a deliberative site (e.g., a citizens' assembly, a Facebook forum, a newspaper article, a blog post, a parliamentary debate, a press release, a lobbying campaign).
3. They then travel to another deliberative site (e.g., another debate in a citizens' assembly, Facebook forum, newspaper article, blog post, or parliamentary debate).
4. We need to take into account feedback loops: Our conceptualisation of communicative flows thereby explicitly includes a dynamic element that accounts for the dialogical character that communicative processes have, i.e. discourses/discursive elements that travel from one deliberative site to another, can receive feedback or responses, e.g. likes or shares or comments, discussion in the real world and so on.

² “[T]he model assumes that public scepticism about the communication of scientific findings is principally due to the lack of public knowledge about the topic and issues communicated. Secondly, the provision of sufficient information about the topic to fill the knowledge gap is the ideal approach to alleviate public scepticism [...] and encourage the acceptance of risk messages. (Abunyahwah et al. 2020).

The above is clearly a strongly simplified conceptualisation. It notably omits that there (ideally) are multifarious and iterative feedback loops between different deliberative sites, which are not merely normatively desirable but also to be expected in nuanced empirical analyses of these processes. Furthermore, discourses about climate change (or elements thereof) will likely be transformed while travelling through sociopolitical systems. Finally, the impact of actors who promote diverse climate change discourses will be crucial for analysing communicative flows. While this final point can be tackled with different methodological strategies, including, for example, qualitative analyses that trace different discourses back to actors in respective deliberative sites; but also Natural Language Processing methods and even Large Language Models, assessing multifarious and interactive feedback loops already constitutes a significant challenge at the conceptual level.

The “network of communication” mentioned by Habermas (1996, 5) requires a conceptual approach for analysing communicative flows that is not restricted to *two* deliberative sites. Consequently, a more adequate conceptualisation and visualisation of communicative flows will build on a more complex account of sites and actors that can serve as a basis for tracking discourses and narratives (or elements thereof) throughout this network of deliberative sites. Thus these feedback loops should be understood as iterative processes. These processes are not merely iterative or necessarily feedbacked between two specific deliberative sites. Instead, we can expect more complicated travel routes: discourses or discursive elements may, for example, originate in deliberations in a citizens’ assembly, be picked up in several newspaper articles where they are addressed with a different framing or wording, and then travel back to subsequent citizens’ assemblies—or take an even more complicated route that involves multiple stopovers in social media debates, online forums, parliamentary debates, tabloids or legacy mass media. It may be important to point out here that more complicated travel routes are likely to also lead to more significant transformations of discourses or discursive elements.

While communicative flows and feedback loops are generally crucial for a healthy flow of communication in sociopolitical systems, the Communicative Flows Framework developed in this chapter also allows for a critical perspective on certain communicative flows: “healthy” deliberation (in mini-publics and at the systemic level) generally require symmetrical communication conditions (Habermas 1984, 25). Hence, severe power imbalances resulting from inequality conditions—e.g., corporate actors, lobbyists, or captured media having access to more economic resources—lead to “systematically distorted communication” (Habermas 1985, 375). In this case, the impact of discourses disseminated to other sites of sociopolitical systems is not dominated by the proverbial “forceless force of the better argument” but simply by unequal access to resources (Habermas 1985, 108).

Our approach to analysing communicative flows between climate assemblies and other actors is visualised in Figure 1 below, which summarises our overarching strategy for analysing climate assemblies’ embeddedness in a complex network of deliberative sites and actors in public and empowered spaces—including captured media and lobbyists (red colouring). The arrows represent (iterative, recursive) feedback loops between citizens’ assemblies (and related actors) and actors within and between diverse public and empowered spaces. This more nuanced picture of “communicative networks” that climate assemblies are embedded in will serve as a point of departure for our outline of exemplary research questions and illustrative empirical findings in section 4.

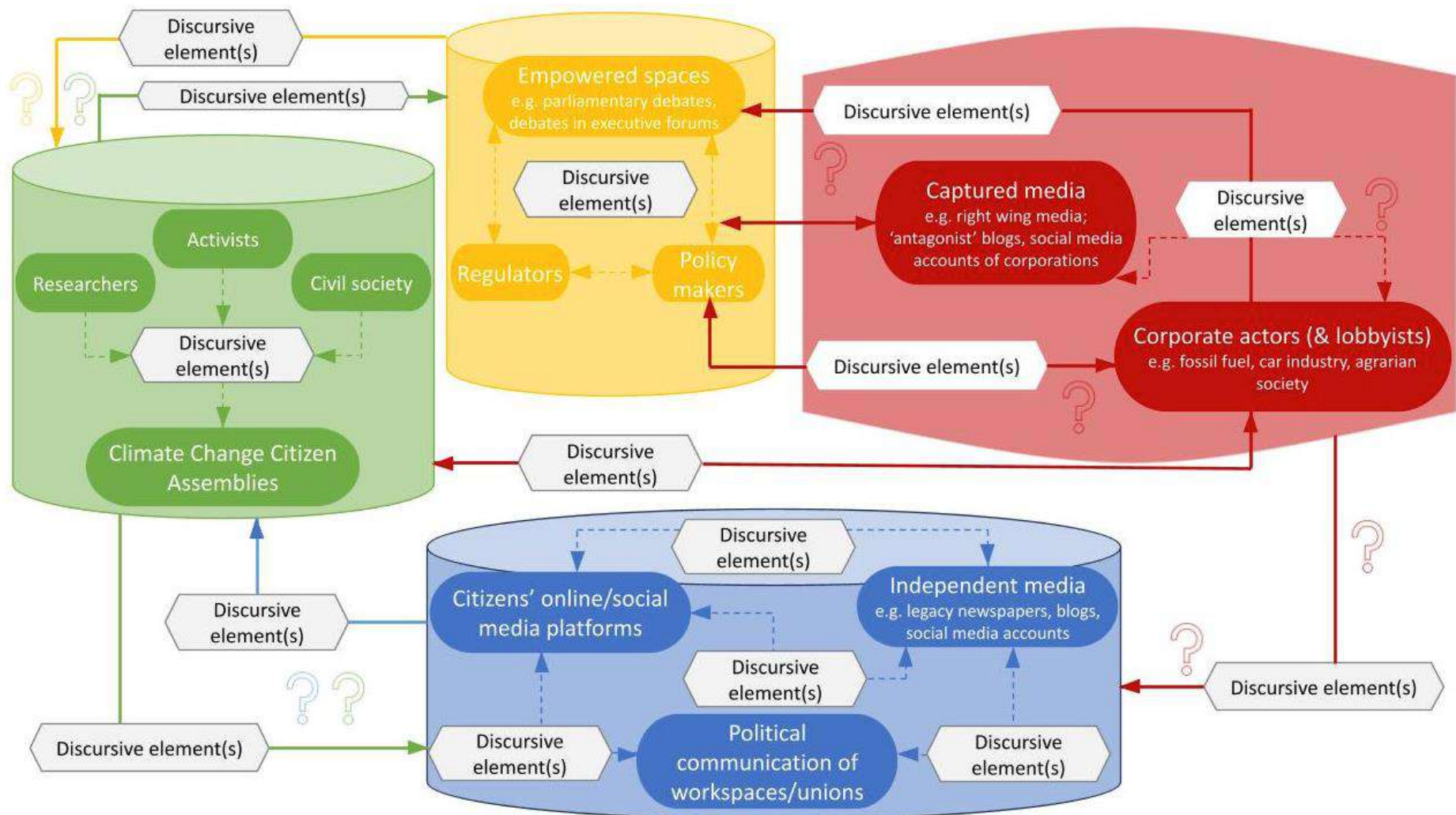


Figure One: Summary–communicative flows, deliberative sites and actors

Legend: Red cylinder and boxes—climate change antagonists; Yellow cylinder and boxes: empowered space (actors); Blue cylinder and boxes—(social)media; Green cylinder and boxes: climate assemblies , activists, researchers and civil society, ; Arrows—communicative flows; Dashed arrows—communicative flows within different constellations of deliberative sites; “??”--signifying communicative flows that require empirical analysis; “?⊗”--communicative flows from antagonists to other sites that are of particular interest..

4. Discussion and conclusions: Assessing communicative flows

4.1. Recap: The Communicative Flows Framework and its conceptual building blocks

The overarching aim of this chapter is developing an analytical framework suitable for conceptualising, analysing and assessing communicative flows between various deliberative sites and thereby providing a foundation for discerning and tracking discourses over different deliberative sites. This is necessary in order to account for the complex world of hybrid media and to elucidate the potential impact on policy of climate assemblies.

We proposed a problem-driven account for developing our Communicative Flows Framework by combining deliberative democracy scholarship and communication studies. We then elaborated on two fundamental conceptual building blocks: a map of democratic systems that accounts for differentiated, increasingly complex 21st-century public spheres and elaborates on the distinction between independent and captured media and different actors that are likely to dominate in diverse deliberative sites. We then develop a conceptualisation of communicative flows that explicitly accounts for the dialogical, iterative character of communicative processes within sociopolitical systems and rejects accounts that conceptualise communicative flows as a "one-way process" (also see Fleuss 2022; Neblo 2005).

Our conceptual framework thereby increases the complexity of existing models for studying interactions between climate assemblies, empowered spaces, and the public sphere in three regards: First, it outlines a more systematic and nuanced map of the democratic system that does not consider public spheres as homogeneous spaces for political communication. Second, it complements this account of public spheres by including different actors and deliberative sites into one analytical framework. This differentiation is crucial since discourse matters for political action, and different deliberative sites provide different opportunity structures for actors to disseminate their messages and thereby influence climate change politics. Hence, analysing the dynamics of political communication about climate change (policies) requires this more nuanced account because different actors are likely to utilise various media outlets, platforms, etc., to pursue their interests.

Third, the conceptualisation of communicative flows presented does not merely consider the uptake of particular discursive elements that, for example, originate in citizens' assemblies and are then transmitted to empowered spaces. The extent to which climate assemblies are integrated into a network of deliberative sites and communicative flows is crucial to making citizen deliberation count. Ensuring the results of citizen deliberation matter for political communication in the broader public sphere and empowered spaces is an intricate task. This applies particularly when it comes to complex, contentious political issues such as consequential climate change policies that are hardly in the interest of many powerful actors—and are therefore likely to be misrepresented in captured mass media which are owned or co-funded by economic actors who would (at least on the short run) suffer severe losses from fundamental structural changes demanded by many climate assemblies, activists, the COP21 agreement or the IPCC.

4.2. The Communicative Flows Framework: perspectives for future research

Climate change is not merely one of the most salient issues of contemporary political communication. Human-made climate change is, at least since the COP 21 agreement, also widely accepted as a fact in most mainstream discourses. Similarly, climate assemblies tend to recommend "far more progressive [measures for tackling climate change] than existing national policy"; moreover, citizens "have been willing to propose policy interventions in areas where governments have been unwilling to act" (Smith 2023, 5-6) in an increasing number of

climate assemblies at the national and even the international level (e.g. Buergerat Klima 2021; Curato et al. 2023; Climate Assembly UK 2020). However, despite this, action has been insufficient to meet targets.

Our Communicative Flows Framework provides a helpful analytical tool for developing a deeper understanding of this situation and underlying power dynamics between the different deliberative sites in the public sphere and the potential influence of differentiated media sites, admittedly somewhat simplistically classified into independent and captured. It also helps to develop conceptually and empirically grounded perspectives for actions that conform with climate scientists' and lay citizens' proposals. On the one hand, our framework forms a bedrock for understanding where particular discourses (or elements thereof) originate and who disseminates them. On the other hand, it explicitly includes the broader communicative environment, i.e. diverse deliberative sites within and beyond the mainstream that address and reach diverse audiences and provide opportunity structures for different actors who disseminate discourses to achieve their goals.

With this, the Communicative Flows Framework bears promising potential for analysing climate assemblies to counteract misperception-generating information spread by actors with vested interests: first, our more inclusive assessment of political communication in diverse deliberative sites enables researchers to assess climate change communication, e.g. of climate-change policy antagonists, its origin and impact on policymaking. It thereby facilitates a more profound understanding of the broader impact and spread of diverse communication strategies that prevent (or promote) progressive climate change policies. For example, organisers of climate assemblies often bemoan an absence of media coverage, assuming a one-way transmission of their discourse should be achievable. However, conceptually, other ways exist for the people's discourses within assemblies to be heard. But first, we must map them. This framework will allow that work to begin.

Interestingly, recent research found that, in most contexts, straightforward climate change denial does not constitute a viable strategy anymore. In contrast to denialism, climate change antagonists now tend to use more sophisticated delay discourses to prevent or delay the implementation of disruptive policies, which would arguably amount to significant structural, particularly social-economic, changes (e.g. Lamb et al. 2020). Prominent subtypes of these misperception-generating strategies are diverse forms of individualism that "redirect responsibility to individual consumption choices" or "technological optimism" (or "scientific utopias"), which argue that technological progress can solve the challenges that originate in climate change. An illustrative example of this is "fossil fuel solutionism", i.e., the claim that the fossil fuel industry is "part of the solution to the scourge of climate change" (OPEC Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo, see Lamb et al. 2020, 3). In any case, these discourses are "at the heart of industry pushback against regulation" (Lamb et al. 2020, 3) and have been criticised in a targeted and rhetorically pointed manner in Naomi Klein's "This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs the Climate" (2015).

The conceptual framework outlined in this chapter bears potential for analyses of climate assemblies' successes and failures in political practice —and for possibilities that make citizens' voices count. Subsequent empirical analyses can use the framework to study communicative flows and identify the discourses' spread systematically, as well as the actors responsible for their dissemination. Based on previous research, our framework allows researchers to explore the following overarching expectations and to test corresponding hypotheses:

Expectation 1: Captured media and respective lobby organisations for corporate sectors are particularly prone to distributing denialist or delay discourses. Since they are funded by "big business" (Schiffrin 2021), they are likely to have the resources and networks which enable them to have a powerful impact on empowered decision-making —and thus aim at counteracting more "progressive" actors, among them many

climate assemblies. Among other things, this means that we can expect misperception-generating strategies such as denial and delay discourses to be significantly more prevalent in captured than in independent media.

Expectation 2: Successes in "upscaling deliberation" are likely to depend on the structure of (national) media landscapes, more specifically, on the extent to which mass media are captured or independent actors: if captured media dominate, the dissemination of misperception-generating discourses will be much more pronounced than in contexts where independent media are more common.

Recent research on illustrative German and Irish cases of climate assemblies indicates that the overarching propositions spelt out above are generally plausible. Indications for the validity of Expectation 1 are technological utopias, utilised in corporate actors' political communication—predominantly by German car companies (e.g. Mercedes 2022) or the Irish agricultural sector (see Teagasc 2021). This is obviously rooted in the fact that significant structural changes would be disruptive to these economic sectors.

With regards to Expectation 2, Boykoff (2008) and Saunders (2018) hint at the differences between (usually captured) tabloids—which reach significantly broader audiences than broadsheets—and have different news values when it comes to climate coverage. Our expectation is that they may be more prone to disseminate denialist and aggressive delay discourses than legacy mass media. This is likely a fruitful avenue for future investigation.

Although testing these expectations certainly requires systematic comparative analyses at a larger scale, the framework and tentative evidence for our overarching expectations outlined here illustrate that the Communicative Flows Framework provides a valuable point of departure for analysing the complex dynamics in "networks of communication" and the flows of communication between diverse spaces and actors. It can thereby provide a critical contribution to climate assemblies' potential to upscale the results of their deliberations and to advance substantive policy change – a (or maybe the) crucial problem that climate assemblies across Europe and the globe are struggling with (see Buergerat Klima 2021; Curato et al. 2023, 141-2; Smith 2023, 5-6).

References

- Abunyewah, M. Gajendran T, Maund K, Okyere SA. 2020. Strengthening the information deficit model for disaster preparedness: Mediating and moderating effects of community participation. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 46, June 1, 101492.
- BBC News. 2020. Big Oil vs the World tells the 40 year story of how the oil industry delayed action on climate change. Last modified 21 July 2022. https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.bbc.com/mediacentre/2022/big-oil-vs-the-worldandsa=Dandsource=docsandust=1707491531961190andusg=AOvVaw2g9_CJ_Ws_OqYFQoOhh9b9
- Boswell, J., Dean, R. and Smith, G., 2023. Integrating citizen deliberation into climate governance: Lessons on robust design from six climate assemblies. *Public Administration*, 101(1), pp.182-200. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12883>
- Boykoff, M.T., 2008. The cultural politics of climate change discourse in UK tabloids. *Political Geography*, 27(5), pp.549-569.
- Boykoff, M. 2019. *Creative (climate) communications*. Cambridge University Press.
- Buergerat Klima. 2021. Gutachten. Online acces: <https://buergerat-klima.de/ergebnisse-gutachten>
- Chadwick, A. 2017. *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. Oxford University Press.
- Chalaye, P. 2023. The discursive sources of environmental progress and its limits: biodiversity politics in France, *Environmental Politics*, 32(1), 90-112.

- Climate Assembly UK. 2020. The path to net zero. Full report. Online access: [Report - Climate Assembly UK](#)
- Conover, P. J., and Searing, D. 2005. Studying 'everyday political talk' in the deliberative system. *Acta Politica*, 40(3), 269–283.
- Curato, N., Chalaye, P., Lamb, W.C., De Pryck, K., Elstub, S., Morán, A., Oppold, D., Romero, J., Ross, M., Sanchez, E. and Sari, N., (2020). Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis Evaluation Report. Online access: [Global Assembly Evaluation Report.pdf \(canberra.edu.au\)](#)
- Dryzek, J. S. 2022. *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*. Oxford University Press.
- Dryzek, J.S., 2012. *Foundations and frontiers of deliberative governance*. Oxford University Press.
- Dryzek, J. S., and Niemeyer, S. 2008. Discursive representation. *American Political Science Review*, 102(4), 481-493.
- Escobar, O., and Elstub, S. 2017. Forms of mini-publics: An introduction to deliberative innovations in democratic practice. *Research and Development Note*, 4(1-14). URL= <https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/2017/05/08/forms-of-mini-publics/>
- Eveland Jr, W. P., and Cooper, K. E. 2013. An integrated model of communication influence on beliefs. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110(supplement_3), 14088-14095.
- Fleuß, D. 2022: Macro-Level Assessment of Deliberative Quality. In: *Research Methods in Deliberative Democracy*. Edited by: Selen A. Ercan, Hans Asenbaum, Nicole Curato, and Ricardo F. Mendonça, Oxford University Press, 129-147.
- Fleuß, D. 2023. Challenging the “Rules of the Game” The Role of Bottom-Up Participatory Experiments for Deliberative Democracy. *Reclaiming Participatory Governance: Social Movements and the Reinvention of Democratic Innovation* (eds. Bua, A. and Bussu, S.). Routledge, 1-16.
- Goodin, R. E., and Dryzek, J. S. 2006. Deliberative Impacts: The Macro-Political Uptake of Mini-Publics *Politics and Society*, 34(2), 219-244.
- Green, D. and Shapiro, I., 1994. *Pathologies of rational choice theory: A critique of applications in political science*. Yale University Press.
- Habermas, J. 1984. *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 1: Reason and Rationalization of Society*. Polity.
- Habermas, J. 1985. *The Theory of Communicative Action. Volume 2: Lifeworld and System. A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Polity.
- Habermas, J., 1989. *Jurgen Habermas on society and politics: A reader*. Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. 1996. *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*. Polity.
- Habermas, J. 2006. Political communication in media society: Does democracy still enjoy an epistemic dimension? The impact of normative theory on empirical research. *Communication Theory*, 16(4), 411-426.
- Habermas, J. 2023. *A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Deliberative Politics* . Polity
- Himmelroos, S 2017. Discourse Quality in Deliberative Citizen Forums—A Comparison of Four Deliberative Mini-Publics. *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 13(1), Art.3.
- Klein, N. 2015. *This changes everything: Capitalism vs. the climate*. Simon and Schuster.
- Lafont, C., 2019. *Democracy without shortcuts: A participatory conception of deliberative democracy*. Oxford University Press.
- Lamb, W.F., Mattioli, G., Levi, S., Roberts, J.T., Capstick, S., Creutzig, F., Minx, J.C., Müller-Hansen, F., Culhane, T. and Steinberger, J.K., 2020. Discourses of climate delay. *Global Sustainability*, 3, e17.
- Lewandowsky, S. (2021). Climate change disinformation and how to combat it. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 42, 1-21.

- Mansbridge, J., Bohman, J., Chambers, S., Christiano, T., Fung, A., Parkinson, J., Thompson, D.F. and Warren, M.E., 2012. A systemic approach to deliberative democracy. *Deliberative systems: Deliberative democracy at the large scale*, pp.1-26.
- Mercedes 2022. Sustainability Report. Online access: https://sustainabilityreport.mercedesbenz.com/2022/_assets/downloads/entire-mercedes-benz-sr22.pdf
- Neblo, M.I. 2005. Thinking through Democracy: Between the Theory and Practice of Deliberative Politics. *Acta Politica* 40 (2): 169–181.
- Niemeyer, S., and Jennstål, J. (2018). 'Scaling up deliberative effects: Applying lessons of mini-publics'. *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy*, 329-347.
- Parkinson, J. 2003. Legitimacy problems in deliberative democracy. *Political Studies*, 51(1), 180-196.
- Poortinga, W., Spence, A., Whitmarsh, L., Capstick, S. and Pidgeon, N.F., (2011). Uncertain climate: An investigation into public scepticism about anthropogenic climate change. *Global Environmental Change*, 21(3), 1015-1024.
- Saunders, C., Grasso, M.T. and Hedges, C., 2018. Attention to climate change in British newspapers in three attention cycles (1997–2017). *Geoforum*, 94, pp.94-102.
- Schiffrin, A. (Ed.). 2017. 'Introduction'. *In the service of power: Media capture and the threat to democracy*. Center for International Media Assistance, 1-8.
- Schiffrin, A. (Ed.). 2021. 'Introduction'. *Media capture: How money, digital platforms, and governments control the news*. Columbia University Press, 1-23.
- Shapiro, I. 2002. "Problems, methods, and theories in the study of politics, or what's wrong with political science and what to do about it." *Political Theory* 30, no. 4 (2002): 596-619.
- Smith, G. 2023. KNOCA Report. Climate assemblies: emerging trends, challenges and opportunities A report of the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies. Online access: [KNOCA_2023_Climate-assemblies_emerging-trends-challenges-and-opportunities.pdf](#)
- Suiter, J., Muradova, L., Gastil, J., & Farrell, D. M. (2020). Scaling up Deliberation: Testing the Potential of Mini- Publics to Enhance the Deliberative Capacity of Citizens. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 26(3), 253-272.
- Teagasc 2021. National Farm Survey-2021 Sustainability Report. Online access: [2022 - National Farm Survey - 2021 Sustainability Report - Teagasc | Agriculture and Food Development Authority](#)
- Weber, E. U., and Stern, P. C. 2011. Public understanding of climate change in the United States. *American Psychologist*, 66(4), 315.
- Whitmarsh, L. 2011. Scepticism and uncertainty about climate change: Dimensions, determinants and change over time. *Global Environmental Change*, 21(2), 690-700.