Strategies for Extending Deliberation

Designing Tomorrow
Moving forward with the Leeds Declaration

OD2010
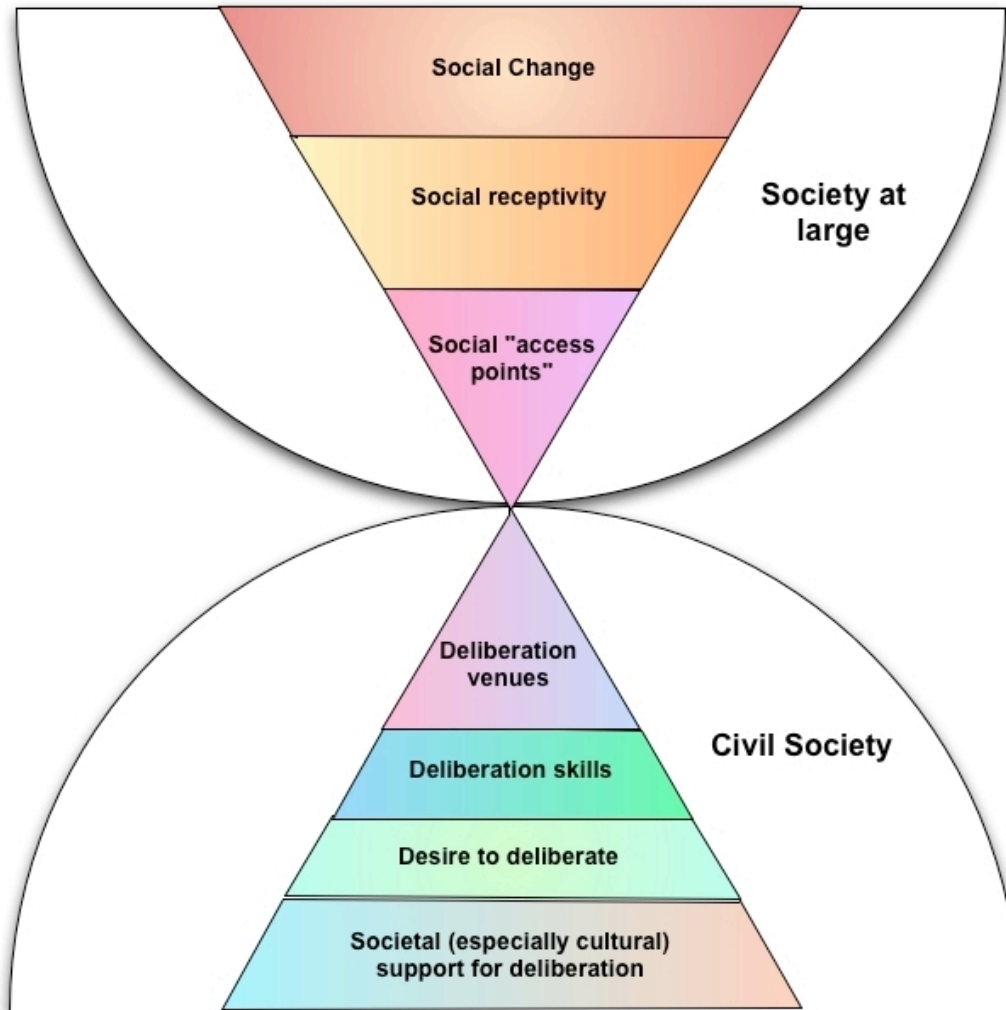Fourth International Conference on
Online Deliberation

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The Context of Deliberation

How do we take advantage of this historical opportunity to play meaningful roles in the work (now in progress) of designing tomorrow?

Perhaps a jointly developed document could help inform this effort?

A template and ideas for a Leeds Declaration follows...

The Leeds Declaration

Building an Enlightened and Empowered Citizenry [A DRAFT]

July 2, 2010   /   Version 0.1

[Preamble]
This section describes why we doing this -- our motivation

[Tenets]
This section describes tenets (or *whereas* clauses?) that characterize the realities of the situation and the broad characteristics of the design "solutions"

[Conclusions]
This section describes what we think ought to be done. It contains lists of suggestions directed to various stakeholder groups. This is intended to be fairly broad. It's not our intent to prescribe something exact, but to help gather a diverse group of dedicated people.

This DRAFT template is based to some degree on the original idea to promote a "Citizen's Assembly."

[Preamble]

The Leeds Declaration

Building an Enlightened and Empowered Citizenry [A DRAFT]

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All over the world attempts are being made to trivialize citizenship and reconstitute citizens as (everyday) consumers and (sporadic) voters. At the same time, real power is in many ways being transferred to large corporations and other unelected organizations such as the World Trade Organization. We, the organizers and attendees of the Online Deliberation Conference at the University of Leeds, July 2, 2010, hope to help counter that trend with this declaration.

Realizing the growing and critical importance of citizens and civic society in addressing humankind's common problems, we the undersigned propose the initiation of a prolonged and multi-pronged focus on deliberation. We realize that this is an extremely complex project that will require years of complex, nuanced, creative and thoughtful negotiation and collaboration. We are aware that this project will have to address an extremely broad range of social and cross-cultural factors. We, however, believe that beginning this discussion in an explicit and open way is preferable to many other varieties of globalization that lack this transparency.

Moreover, we realize that precisely defining an ideal system in advance is impossible. For that reason, we propose to begin a principled, long-term, incremental, participatory design process that integrates experimental, educational, community mobilization, research and policy work all within a common intellectual orientation: specifically to provide an inclusive and pluralistic intellectual umbrella for a diverse, distributed civil society effort.

Civil society historically is the birthplace of socially ameliorative visions. This effort is intended to help build a more effective platform for these efforts, to help address humankind's shared problems — such as environmental degradation, human rights abuses, economic injustice and war — that other sectors — notably government and business — are seemingly powerless to stem.

just a reminder that this is a draft...

[Tenets, 1]

The purpose of this declaration is to help raise the stature of citizen deliberation with the hopes of increasing its reach, effectiveness, inclusiveness, and legitimacy. To this end we put forward the following tenets.

Need for Deliberation and Citizen Engagement
- Deliberation exists to address conflicts and complex shared issues in legitimate, thoughtful, and non-violent ways.
- We believe that no country can claim to be democratic without strong, informed citizen engagement.
- Deliberation involves both citizen-to-government and citizen-to-citizen.
- It is necessary to build legitimacy to promote the type of *social* innovation that is currently needed.

Obstacles to Deliberation and Citizen Engagement
- Media concentration and lack of citizen access to media, corporate "front groups", intentional obfuscation, lack of citizenship training, repressive regimes, economic prerogatives, lobbyists, etc. etc. are, unfortunately, commonplace roadblocks to citizen deliberation.

Collaborative Emergencies
- We believe that some urgency is warranted; The historic circumstances that we are living in insist that a project like this is critical for the future of humankind and our planet.
- Some steps are being taken but more are required. Some of the problems that arise from waiting would be catastrophic.
- Although information and communication technology (ICT) will doubtless play a strong role, citizenship deliberation is primarily a social issue, not a technical one. Thus social innovation must be given special attention as the driver of technological innovation.
- This is a worldwide issue: potential and existing problems often cross borders — as do their causes!

[Tenets, 2]

The Internet as a Critical Platform
- Having the potential of connecting every person on the planet to every other planet, the Internet offers unbounded potential for expanded citizenship. (It will be interesting to see how this potential will or will not be realized as the many players, powerful and not so powerful, who determine the character of the Internet make their intentions felt over the critical next few years!)
- The Internet can provide the necessary "glue" that will help integrate the variety of venues, conversations, languages, and media that will be needed to realize strong citizenship.

The Importance of Civil Society and Civic Intelligence
- Civil society is a critical element in the development and use of civic intelligence in addressing our shared problems. Although often neglected, this sector can't be ignored in deference to government or business interests.

An Emphasis on *Social* Innovation
- Although information and communication technology (ICT) will doubtless play a strong role, citizenship deliberation is primarily a social issue, not a technical one. Thus social innovation must be given special attention as the driver of technological innovation.

Building Across Boundaries As Well As Within Boundaries
- This extends to working across national (and other political) borders and social and cultural borders. It also pertains to the necessity of building beyond purely Internet-based approaches into media, education, and place-based (public libraries, for example).
- This means including and engaging groups from across the political spectrum, marginalized groups; and across various "divides" and boundaries.

[Tenets, 3]

New Venues, Transformed Venues

This acknowledges that the merely adding another venue is not enough: existing institutions must be transformed over time if enlightened and empowered citizenship truly emerges. We could include ideas for proposed online deliberative spaces here.

Many Audiences, Many Stakeholders

No one group will be affected by enlightened and empowered citizenship. No one group will be responsible for bringing it about.

Diversity of Deliberative Spaces and Approaches

- (and the parallel necessity of learning from them all) (and integrating and bridging them)

Support for the Deliberative Community

- Includes conferences, online resources, case studies, shared problems, comparative studies, open protocols, transformable systems, online tools, links, references, source code)

Building on Current (and Building Additional) Knowledge

- We need to consolidate and make generally available and accessible what is known about deliberation -- online and otherwise -- and build on that via theory and practice

[Conclusions]

Suggestions and Recommendations to All Sectors...

No one group will be affected by enlightened and empowered citizenship. Although no one group will be responsible for the design,development, maintenance, and use of a more engaged and effective deliberative culture, we are directing our recommendations to specific sectors.

This declaration should contain suggestions to (at least) these groups: the academic and research community, parents, teachers, and other educators, the government at various levels (the responsibility to respond to citizen input social innovation -- in addition to technological innovation -- should be funded), the media, the funders, the NGOS and to the civil sector in general.

Finally, the last line in the declaration should be addressed to people everywhere -- citizens of the world.