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INTERPELLATED CITIZENS*
Suggested Subject Positions in a Deliberation Process
on Health Care Reimbursement

*The existing order coerces people not merely by physical force and material interests
but by overwhelming suggestion.*

(M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno)¹

Abstract

This article analyses how official citizen deliberation processes interpellate citizens, and argues that this act of invitation is a crucial element of the power dynamics of people's participation in such processes. The interpellation as citizen is both what offers people the opportunity to speak and a central aspect of how people's discourse is constrained and given direction. The study combines a discourse-theoretical perspective on interpellation and subject positions (Laclau and Mouffe) with frame-theoretical insights (Goffman), to analyse the way interpellation works in practice, how certain subject positions rather than others are indicated or prescribed to participants, and the ways these participants endorse them or attempt to (re)position themselves in interactions. Based on the analysis of a citizen deliberation process on health care reimbursement organised in Belgium, we show how the invited citizens are interpellated – often simultaneously – as 'nationals', as 'ordinary people', and as 'participants', and how they respond to this. On a theoretical level, this article contributes modestly to a more dynamic, multi-layered and subtle conceptualization of subject positions as constructed through suggestion, response and resistance in concrete interactive settings.

Keywords

Citizen deliberation; participation; interpellation; discourse theory; interaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on how citizen deliberation processes interpellate² citizens *as* citizens. This interpellation, we argue, is a crucial structuring element of such processes. It is both what offers people the opportunity to speak (thus empowering them) *and* a central aspect of how their talk is constrained and given direction (the exercise of

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¹ M. Horkheimer, T. Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002 (1944): 202.

² L. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes towards an Investigation", in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, edited by L. Althusser, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971: 121-176.

power on people). To paint a nuanced picture of the complex power dimensions of citizen deliberation processes, the analysis takes into account how people's invitation and responses as citizens are tied up with broader discourses about citizenship and democracy, as well as how the subject position of 'citizen' is produced and responded to in a concrete interactive setting. To conceptualize this, we combine a discourse-theoretical perspective³ on interpellation and subject positions with Goffmanian frame-theoretical insights⁴ that allow analysing how positions are offered and signalled to participants, and how they position themselves in response. Our empirical material is taken from a Citizen Lab on health care reimbursement organised in Belgium in 2014 by the King Baudouin Foundation⁵.

After some more general reflections on power dynamics in citizen deliberation processes, we turn to their subjective dimension and to the notion of 'interpellation'. We first consider the potentials and some of the criticisms of Althusser's work on interpellation, and then move towards a more 'positive' or 'productive' (in Foucault's sense) and nuanced understanding of interpellative power, building on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse-theoretical view of subject positions. We then bring in Goffmanian insights on speakers' and hearers' positions in interaction to allow for a more refined, dynamic and multi-layered analysis of how interpellation happens in practice, and how people respond to this. This gives us the basis for the empirical analysis of the different subject positions of 'citizen' that are signalled and responded to by citizens in the Citizen Lab we studied.

2. POWER IN CITIZEN DELIBERATION PROCESSES

Citizen deliberation processes (labelled, for example, citizen parliament, consensus conference and deliberative poll) have gained much traction in the last decades. This has been explicitly envisaged as a way of renewing democracy through citizens' direct participation in policy-making, of extending citizen participation beyond electing representatives, and as means of empowering citizens⁶. Simultaneously, since their emergence and progressive institutionalization in many western countries' public poli-

³ E. Laclau, C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy. Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso, 2001 (1985); J. Glynos, D. Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*, London: Routledge, 2007.

⁴ E. Goffman, "On Footing", *Semiotica*, 25 (1979): 1-29; E. Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981; M. Berger, "The Politics of Copresence. An Ecological Approach To Resistance in Top Down Participation", *European Journal of Political and Cultural Sociology*, 2, 1 (2016): 1-22; M. Berger, "Mettre les Pieds dans une Discussion Publique. La Théorie Goffmanienne de la Position énonciative Appliquée aux Assemblées de Démocratie Participative", in *Erving Goffman et l'Ordre de l'Interaction*, edited by D. Cefaï, L. Perreau, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France: 395-426.

⁵ The authors of this article were part of a team that was commissioned by the Foundation to undertake a discourse analysis of this Citizen Lab. See B. De Cleen et al., *Solidariteit en het Recht op Gezondheidszorg. Een Discourseanalyse van het Burgerlabo over de Terugbetaling van Behandelingen in de Gezondheidszorg*, Brussel: Koning Boudewijnstichting, 2015. We would like to thank Laura Calabrese, Ignaas Devisch, François Romijn and Leen Van Brussel for their input as co-authors of the report, and the Foundation (in particular Tinne Vandensande, Gerrit Rauws and Pascala Prête) for the collaboration.

⁶ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989 (1962); C. Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970; J. Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980; B. Barber, *Strong Democracy. Participatory Politics for a New Age*, Berkeley: University of California Press; B. Manin, "Esquisse d'une Théorie de la Délibération Politique", *Le Débat*, 33 (1985): 72-94; J. Cohen, "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy", in *The Good Polity*, edited by A. Hamlin, P. Petit, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989.

cy-making (city planning, social welfare, health care, etc.), critical questions about the power dynamics of these citizen deliberation processes have been constantly raised. These too are usually rooted in democratic ideals⁷.

A first range of critiques focuses on state-generated participatory processes' disconnection from and lack of impact on actual decision-making. This extends from Sherry Arnstein's classic 'ladder of participation' article⁸ that denounced impotent participatory processes as forms of 'manipulation' or mere 'therapy'⁹, to recent ethnographies that question public participatory processes' aim to be 'fun' and 'entertaining'¹⁰ and that highlight how the set-up and group dynamics of these processes can lead to the collective elaboration of a fictional, illusory relation to the issues at stake¹¹. From France to the US, critiques of this light-hearted 'DIY democracy', are concerned with the emergence of a real "market of participation"¹² or "industry of public engagement"¹³, and with its distorting effect on democracy. Practices of state-led 'e-democracy' have not been spared either. The futility of 'comment posting democracy' has been addressed, for example by Jodi Dean in *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*¹⁴. Her criticism of 'commenting' or 'formulating ideas' as an ineffective and powerless form of democratic participation also extends to real-life citizen deliberation processes.

Many others have highlighted general logics of domination in the dynamics of deliberative processes themselves, and their impact on the legitimacy of subsequent decisions. Led by feminist scholars¹⁵, these critiques have questioned gender biases, but also the role of socio-economic inequalities and cultural differences in deliberative domination¹⁶. These critiques of citizen deliberation processes link up with broader critiques of the communicative or deliberative democratic model (particularly Habermas' theory of deliberative democracy¹⁷, which has informed much citizen deliberation processes) and build on alternative theories that stress the irreducible power dimension of democratic engagement, such as Fraser's 'plural public spheres democracy'¹⁸, or Mouffe's 'ago-

⁷ N. Carpentier, *Media and Participation. A Site of Ideological-Democratic Struggle*, Bristol: Intellect, 2011, 13-63.

⁸ S. Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation", *Journal of the American Institute of Planning*, 35, 4 (1969): 216-224.

⁹ See also D. Chandler, "Active Citizens and the Therapeutic State: the Role of Democratic Participation in Local Government Reform", *Policy and Politics*, 29, 1 (2000): 3-14.

¹⁰ N. Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics. How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008; N. Eliasoph, *Making Volunteers. Civic Life after Welfare's End*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

¹¹ M. Berger, "Des Publics Fantomatiques. Participation Faible et Démophobie", *Sociologies*, January 2015. <https://sociologies.revues.org/4935>; M. Berger, J. De Munck, "Participer, entre Idéal et Illusion", *Recherches Sociologiques et Anthropologiques*, 46, 1 (2015): 1-24.

¹² M. Nonjon, "Quand la Démocratie se Professionnalise. Enquête sur les Experts de la Participation", PhD diss., Université de Lille, 2006; J. Bonaccorsi, M. Nonjon, "La Participation en Kit: L'Horizon Funèbre de l'Idéal Participatif", *Quaderni*, 79 (2012): 29-44.

¹³ C. Lee, *DIY Democracy. The Rise of the Public Engagement Industry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

¹⁴ J. Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies. Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

¹⁵ See, among others L. Sanders, "Against Deliberation", *Political Studies*, 25, 3 (1997): 347-376.

¹⁶ J. Knight, J. Johnson, "What Sort of Political Equality Does Deliberative Democracy Require?", in *Deliberative Democracy*, edited by J. Bohman, W. Rehg, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press: 279-319; M. Williams, "Représentation des Groupes et Démocratie Délibérative: Une Alliance Malaisée", *Philosophiques*, 29, 2 (2002): 215-249.

¹⁷ J. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984; J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.

¹⁸ N. Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere. A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", *Social Text*, 25/26 (1990): 56-80.

nistic democracy¹⁹. Others have put forward ways to alleviate domination and power dynamics in participation; to go ‘beyond adversary democracy’²⁰, towards a more ‘inclusive democracy’²¹.

3. INTERPELLATION: TRIGGERING SUBJECTION

In critical analyses of how (state) institutions turn people into subjects of (dominant) ideologies and of the fundamental power imbalances built into citizens’ relation to institutions, Althusser’s *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* has become an important reference. Especially the concept of ‘interpellation’ (itself inspired by Lacan²²), developed in this article, is very productive:

All ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject [...]. I shall then suggest that ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: “Hey, you there!” Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject²³.

Althusser’s concept of interpellation helped open the door towards a conceptualization of ideology as not only subjecting people but also producing them as subjects (developed later by Foucault, for example)²⁴. Also, his argument that ideology, interpellation and the reproduction of ideology by subjects are a matter of practice – that ideology functions through language (in the broad sense), rituals, behaviour, which, as Hall notes “always appear in social sites, linked with social apparatuses²⁵” – has great value for analyses of concrete institutional settings such as citizen deliberation processes.

But Althusser’s conceptualisation of ideology and interpellation has also been criticised. For our purposes, one important criticism is that Althusser’s understanding of interpellation does not apply properly to less formally coercive and more ‘positive’ interpellations. In his ethnography of an urban Jewish Orthodox community, Iddo Tavory argues that:

A juridical summoning is too violent an image. Social life has its moments of coercion. But [...] although the question of “what would the (Orthodox) neighbor think?” is an aspect of much of religious summoning, it would be simplistic to claim that power dynamics always form the core of such moments. What the juridical metaphor misses and what religious “summoning” better captures, is the sense of fulfilment, responsibility, moral failure and

¹⁹ C. Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism”, *Social Research*, 66, 3 (1999): 745-758.

²⁰ Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*.

²¹ I. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

²² J. Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, translated by E. Sheridan, New York: International, 1977.

²³ Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*: 173-174.

²⁴ See S. Hall, “Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates”, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2, 2 (1985): 91-114 (102).

²⁵ Hall, “Signification, Representation, Ideology”: 99; J. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, 5.

elation that being summoned can sometimes entail. [...] We need to be able not to reduce participation and identification to [...] a dour command²⁶.

Related to this, there is the argument that Althusser leaves insufficient margin of interpretation (or misrecognition, or failure to hear the call, or resistance) to the hailed individual²⁷. He has also been criticised for limiting ideology to the ideology of the dominant class and for ignoring alternative ideologies²⁸. Moreover, there is a danger in Althusser's insistence that ideology works through practice of equating the practice of following the rules (of speaking or acting in a certain way or at least not defying those ways of speaking or acting) or of responding to an interpellation with the belief in or identification with ideology²⁹.

4. INTERPELLATION: SUGGESTING SUBJECT POSITIONS

We believe that the notion of interpellation has significant potential for a critical approach of top-down participatory processes, but for this potential to be fully realised, the limitations discussed above need to be transcended.

Answers to this can be found in the work of Laclau and Mouffe who moved beyond traditional Marxism's negative definition of ideology as well as beyond Marxist class reductionism. Further developing Althusser's theorization of how ideology produces subjects, and building also on Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe³⁰ have theorized how discourses offer 'subject positions'. Discourse theory sees a discourse as a "social and political construction that establishes a system of [meaningful] relations between different objects and practices, while providing (subject) positions with which social agents can identify"³¹. Discourse theory thus further developed how interpellation – whilst not always calling it such – functions as a more 'positive', 'formative' process of constituting human subjects through discourse. Combined with discourse theory's insistence on how a person is simultaneously interpellated by, and can identify with, positions offered by different discourses (e.g. mother, member of the nation, member of the working class), this also implies more agency³².

However, discourse theory remains strongly focused on political rhetoric and strategy. To facilitate an empirical analysis of addressees' concrete answers to these offered positions, and certainly for the analysis of interpellation in a citizen deliberation process, we want to combine discourse theory with a more interactionist approach. By bringing in Goffman's work on positions in interaction – what he calls 'footings'³³ – we can also further refine the notions of subject position and interpellation. Attention shifts towards how subject positions are offered, in situation and in practice, as positions from which to speak (or not speak, and listen) in a particular manner and using certain reg-

²⁶ I. Tavorly, *Summoned. Identification and Religious Life in a Jewish Neighborhood*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2016, 6-7.

²⁷ Butler, *Psychic Life*, 95.

²⁸ Hall, "Signification, Representation, Ideology": 99.

²⁹ See J. Butler, *Psychic Life*, 106-131.

³⁰ Laclau, Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

³¹ D. Howarth, Y. Stavrakakis, "Introducing Discourse Theory and Political Analysis", in *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis*, edited by D. Howarth, A. Norval and Y. Stavrakakis, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000: 3.

³² Glynnos, Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*, 119.

³³ Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, 124-125.

isters (and not in another manner or using other registers); to how these positions are called or signalled, in often quite mundane and subtle ways.

By looking at how people take up particular positions and speak from them, insight into how and to what extent people identify with a range of subject positions and what this implies for how they speak is further strengthened. Bringing in an interactionist approach indeed allows analysing in a more concrete manner what it means for a citizen to cope with, combine, and navigate the various and multi-layered positions he or she is invited and expected to adopt. In this manner, combining discourse theory and interactionist insights also strengthens, refines, and nuances critical views on citizen deliberation by confronting macro criticisms with concrete, complex, ambiguous situations, and with more subtle and less univocal, imperative or coercive forms of interpellation.

5. METHOD AND MATERIAL

Our analysis of interpellation in citizen deliberation processes takes its empirical material from a so-called Citizen Lab on health care reimbursement organised by the Belgian King Baudouin Foundation in the autumn of 2014. Throughout three weekends, 32 Belgian citizens discussed the allocation of resources among health care treatments. In the Citizen Lab, like in other citizen deliberation processes, people's talk is:

- *invited and hosted* by an institution (the King Baudouin Foundation, at the request of the RIZIV/INAMI – the National Institute for Sickness and Invalidity Insurance, which decides about health care reimbursements);

- *framed* by and expected to adhere to a series of objectives, a particular focus and practical rules defined by the organisers and facilitators (focused on integrating citizens' voice in decision-making procedures regarding health care reimbursement);

- *produced* in interaction with the talk of other actors (in the Citizen Lab: organisers, invited experts and stakeholders, facilitators, and 'content facilitators').

The talk produced by citizens in deliberative processes can therefore only be understood as a *response* to the invitation by institutions, as the product of interaction, contingent on and situated in a particular interactional setting. This raises questions about the deliberative citizen himself or herself, as an ambiguous subject. This person is 'called into being a citizen' by the soliciting institutions. It is in the tension between a *passive process of subjection and recruitment* by the institution, and an *active process of subjectivation and role-taking* that the invited people become citizens.

Our analysis of how this happens in the Citizen Lab is based on an analysis of recordings and transcriptions (a total of 397,323 words) and also integrates ethnographic observations. Our analysis combines a discourse-theoretical and frame-theoretical conceptual framework with the coding procedures of constructivist grounded theory³⁴. This allows for an open-ended but theoretically informed coding process that integrates concepts from discourse theory and frame theory as well as concepts that help to understand citizen deliberation as sensitising concepts (that point us to relevant parts and aspects of the material and allow to interpret that material).

³⁴ K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd ed., Los Angeles: Sage, 2014; see N. Carpentier, B. De Cleen, "Bringing Discourse Theory into Media Studies", *Journal of Language and Politics*, 6, 2 (2007): 267-295.

6. THE SUBJECT POSITIONS OF THE CITIZEN: INVITATIONS AND RESPONSES

The term Citizen Lab makes clear that people are invited to participate as citizens. But what does this interpellation as citizen entail? Which place and which subject position does the Citizen Lab offer to the participating citizens to identify with and to speak from? Which dimensions of citizenship remain absent, are not stimulated, or even censored? And how do the citizens respond to these calls, indications, and suggestions to speak this way or that way, from this or that position?³⁵

The interpellation as citizen in the Citizen Lab is complex and multi-layered. We distinguish between three main subject positions: the citizen-as-national, the citizen-as-ordinary individual, and the citizen-as-participant. These three positions interact and complement each other, and are closely articulated in the Citizen Lab. But we consider them as analytically distinct because they each offer citizens different and relatively autonomous positions from which to speak, and because speaking from each of these three positions has particular implications for how citizens talk. These three positions are mainly signalled – produced, called, expected, evaluated – without much explicit or sustained reference to discourses about citizenship, but are nevertheless connected to three discourses that come together in the Citizen Lab: a nationalist discourse (the citizen as national), a citizen deliberation discourse that borrows from a broader deliberative democratic discourse (the citizen as ordinary individual who discusses the general interest) and the discourse of citizen participation (the citizen as a participant in a collective harmonious and constructive experience).

6.1. *Citizens as Nationals*

Firstly, the Citizen Lab invites people as Belgian citizens. Even though representativeness in the strict sense is explicitly not an aim of the Citizen Lab, the group is constructed so as to roughly represent the make-up of Belgian society: 50% French speakers and 50% Dutch speakers, a balance between the sexes and age-groups, a degree of ethnic-cultural diversity.

The simple fact that many discussions are held in separate monolingual groups also interpellates people as French-speakers or Dutch-speakers, as Flemings or Francophone Belgians (which, among other things, neglects a bilingual political community like Brussels-Region where many people do not easily fit into one of these categories). However, this linguistic-cultural identity, which plays a central role in Belgian politics (with the richer Flanders questioning its ‘solidarity’ with the poorer South, Flemish nationalists criticizing the Francophones for being spendthrift, etc.), is hardly politicized during the Citizen Lab. This is connected to a broader absence of strong political cleavages in the Citizen Lab (6.2.1), as well as to the how citizens are interpellated as collaborative and constructive ‘participants’ (6.3).

The Citizen Lab’s interpellation of citizens-as-nationals thus reproduces both Belgium as a nation-state, *and* the belief that two language-based sub-state national groups make up the Belgian nation. This is not an entirely banal nationalism³⁶, however. In a context of constant tension and division between Dutch-speaking and French-speaking

³⁵ M. Berger, “Répondre en Citoyen Ordinaire. Pour une Étude Ethno-Pragmatique des Engagements Profanes”, *Tracés*, 2, 15 (2008): 191-208.

³⁶ M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage, 1995.

political representatives in Belgium, the Citizen Lab constitutes a rare occasion to join a public discussion as a member of the national community, and to have a say about federal matters. This is related to the King Baudouin Foundation's identity as an explicitly bilingual Belgian institution (named after and financed by the former King of Belgium, Baudouin).

6.2. *Citizens as Ordinary Individuals*

The invitation as citizen in the Citizen Lab is significantly richer than the mere invitation to speak as an inhabitant of Belgium. The Citizen Lab (like many other citizen deliberation processes) is conceived as a partial alternative for and complement to representative democracy and technocratic, elite-driven decision-making that are considered to insufficiently take into account the opinions of citizens. The Lab appeals to citizens' sense of civic duty (they invest three full weekends on discussions about health care), whilst simultaneously stressing their ordinary³⁷ character as people who have no particular interests or expertise in healthcare. The notion of citizens indeed acquires meaning through its distinction from politicians, stakeholders and experts (categories of people that are also citizens in the strictly legal-national sense). The Citizen Lab does invite political and civil society representatives, pharmaceutical company representatives, patients and patient representatives, and medical experts, but these are invited as categories of people that are clearly set apart from the ordinary citizens. There are three dimensions to this ordinariness.

6.2.1. Political Ordinariness

To be an ordinary citizen, first of all, implies not being a political actor. The entire set-up of the Citizen Lab is to have citizens' opinions heard more directly in health care policy-making. People are invited to speak as a *sample* of the ordinary Belgian citizens, and about the general interest of the Belgians, and in that sense as representatives of the Belgian citizenry³⁸. The category of the ordinary citizen is thus constructed in *opposition* to actors that represent *particular* interests: political parties, civil society organisations, interest groups.

But the a-political character of the ordinary citizen goes further than not *being* in any way a political actor: people are never invited by the facilitators to express their (party-)political preferences, and are indeed discouraged from speaking about political parties, governments, or other political actors (these are "out of the framework", as the facilitators say). Moreover, people are invited to speak about values (equality, for example) in the abstract sense, without connecting these to the political ideologies (socialism, for example) and organisations representing such values (socialist parties, for example).

Citizens largely accept the organisers' framing of the issue and formulation of questions, the limitations of the scope of the Citizen Lab to priority setting within a context of a limited budget. Citizens even police discussions themselves by labelling certain issues as "outside of the framework". However, they also show some degree of

³⁷ M. Berger, J. Charles, "Persona Non Grata. Au Seuil de la Participation", *Participations*, 9 (2014): 7-35.

³⁸ As Hannah F. Pitkin would put it, they are considered as "standing for" rather than "speaking for" the broader population (*The Concept of Representation*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

defiance towards all this. For one, despite the focus on criteria for reimbursement and the exclusion of the organization of health care as a topic, citizens continue to speak, for example, about what they considered the exorbitant prices charged by pharmaceutical companies. They also reflect on how changes to the health care *system* would alter the budgetary context.

The stakeholders and experts invited to speak at the Citizen Lab – including people with particular interests and political profiles, such a representative of the pharmaceutical industry and of the socialist health insurance provider – refer to the political context much more (than the facilitators) in their presentations and argumentations, bringing in political reality in a largely depoliticised setting, so to speak. But this is not structurally included in discussions with the citizens, and even kept outside of the scope of the Citizen Lab very explicitly by the facilitators. Nevertheless – also taking into account that citizens do speak out about issues that the facilitators prefer to keep outside of discussion (e.g. the role of pharmaceutical companies in the decision-making process) – it remains remarkable that citizens hardly bring traditional political ideologies and vocabulary (socialism, liberalism, the notions of Left and Right, progressive and conservative) or the political field (political parties, governments, civil society organisations) into the discussions.

6.2.2. Epistemic Ordinarity

A second dimension of ordinarity is epistemic: citizens are considered as ‘averagely’, ‘normally’ informed about the topic of health care. Again, this acquires meaning in relation to what citizens are not: experts. In fact, a number of participants were active in the medical sector (a nurse, a veterinarian) or were studying medicine, but the organisers did not draw on their specific knowledge. Quite on the contrary, their medical profession and study were kept in the background.

Like other deliberative processes that discuss complex matters with citizens that are invited for their ordinarity, the Citizen Lab has to find a way to a) make discussions on the topic possible without turning the citizens into experts, b) make the output of that process as useful as possible to stakeholders without undermining the layperson quality of the citizens and of the talk they produce. This section reflects on the ambiguities and tensions inherent to the invitation of citizens to discuss complex issues, and on citizens’ reactions to this ambiguous invitation³⁹.

Citizens were given both medical-scientific input and information about the decision-making process. The former kind was mainly information on the pathologies and treatments used as cases for discussion (e.g. Alzheimer, orthodontic treatments). Input about decision-making was more structural to the process, which revolved around a terminology that aimed to produce an output that could a) be easily integrated into the decision-making process, b) aid to restructure the decision-making process and make it more sensitive to the citizens’ concerns. This terminological framework revolved around notions such as criteria (for determining what to reimburse and what not; e.g. effectiveness and medical need), values (underlying those criteria, e.g. solidarity, individual responsibility), and preconditions (for an individual getting a treatment reimbursed; e.g. prescription by a doctor).

³⁹ See: M. Berger, F. Romijn, “Participer ou Presque. Préciser les Ambiguïtés de la Participation dans le Domaine Médical”, *Questions de Communication*, 30 (2016).

Citizens' talk was to a significant extent structured around this proposed terminology. But, in part due to the inherent complexity and ambiguity of these notions (also to the facilitators), this terminology did not function as a straightjacket. This ambiguity also allowed citizens to use terminology rather creatively. For example, when citizens evacuated 'criteria' they had trouble with, for moral-ideological reasons (for example 'age' as a criterion for whose health care should be reimbursed or not) they several times contested that such notions would qualify as criteria from a terminological perspective. Moreover, the facilitators did alter the overarching terminological framework in response to citizens' talk. And citizens had much more impact on the names of concrete criteria, values and conditions.

Citizens were also given input on some elements of the terminology specific to health care reimbursement decision-making: for example measures used to determine the cost-effectiveness of a health care intervention. These notions as well were not understood unanimously by the citizens. Some citizens used them incorrectly, and were corrected by facilitators or experts. Others did not use these notions at all, at least partly because they were too complex. Interestingly, certain citizens also outright contested these complex notions for being "simplistic and tendentious". We see here that despite its very strong impact on citizens' talk, the introduction of a specialised vocabulary does not automatically affirm the inequality between specialists and non-specialists.

6.2.3. Ordinariness as the moderation of personality and personal interest

Getting involved as a citizen essentially means participating in a discussion by expressing individual opinions about the general interest in a non-political and non-expert manner ("I think that...", "I believe that...", "In my opinion...", etc.). This can be done by speaking as an individual citizen, which is different from speaking politically—as a particular 'we' both in the strict sense (e.g. 'we, socialists') and in the broader sense of representing a particular demographic ('we, poor people', 'we, old people'). It is also different from speaking in the authoritative voice of the expert, using a specialised vocabulary.

We need to distinguish here between speaking as an *individual* and speaking as a *person* with particular experiences and interests. Generally speaking, the 'person behind the citizen' is only present to a certain extent (a name, face, voice; sometimes basic information about professional life, family situation, education, etc.) as this personal presence is regulated by the organisers and by the citizens, where citizens are required to exercise moderation in bringing out the personal.

Invitations to speak from personal experience are not absent, but do not structure the discussions. The formats used in the Citizen Lab are rather built around sharing *individual* opinions voiced in a more abstract manner. This allows 'ordinary' people to partake in discussions about health care policy usually reserved for politicians and professionals. But the moderation of the personal also weakens citizens' authority as speakers, in two ways: a) by hindering people's rooting of their talk in personal experiences, and b) by having people express themselves in a more abstract and technical jargon that is relatively far from their own registers. This also reinforces the political ordinariness in that it moderates people, inviting them to give *individual* opinions about the *general* interest rather than speak about their own *personal* (individual or group) interests, rooted in their own experiences.

Whilst largely speaking in the manner suggested to them, citizens do sometimes go beyond these 'individual contributions' to forms of participation that are closer to

‘personal involvements’⁴⁰. Citizens do regularly draw on their experiences. Some draw on professional experiences with health care to support their arguments (“I have my professional life that has allowed me to see quite some patients...”). Others mobilise experiences with people they know. Sometimes people also draw on experiences with diseases and treatments. Certain citizens that remain quiet and invisible and seem less at ease with the more abstract terminological framework, speak almost exclusively when they can speak about concrete issues on the basis of personal experiences. For example, one young woman who hardly spoke during the Citizen Lab, did speak extensively about the reimbursement of orthodontic care based on her experiences with braces.

However, references to personal experience are often made in a moderate manner, brought up fleetingly by speakers in debates that structurally revolve around the abstract notions of ‘criteria’ and ‘values’ indicated by the Citizen Lab. At times, citizens produce meta-pragmatic reflections on how ‘personal’ their contributions should be. Some believe that it is good to share experiences. Others express the opinion that mobilizing personal experiences would be detrimental to citizens’ contributions: “If I say, ‘look, my mother died of cancer’, well everything in our discussions about health care will be related to cancer. I would lock myself with that and I would forget that there are rare diseases and other kinds of problems [that affect other people]”.

Citizens are thus not only disciplined, they also discipline themselves as far as referring to personal experiences and their personal life goes. This excerpt also clearly shows how the moderation of personal experience is connected to political ordinariness and the aim to speak about the general interest rather than about one’s own individual or group interest.

6.3. *Citizens as Participants*

Last but not least, the participants in the Citizen Lab are also interpellated as exactly that: participants. That is to say, as co-agents in a joint activity, but also as the members of a community of experience that is created and that evolves throughout the weekends of the Citizen Lab. In this manner, people who are mobilized as individuals, and who are invited to express their individual opinions about the general interest as opposed to any sub-collective’s interest, do constitute a group together, and form a collective subject, a team. As a format, the Citizen Lab strongly stimulates a harmonious and friendly group dynamic. This is sometimes very explicitly highlighted, stimulated through joint dinners, and even game-like formats meant to enhance sociability, and permanently signalled in more subtle ways.

The position of citizen-participant is produced by a citizen deliberation process that aims to involve ordinary individuals in decision-making. However, the position of citizen-as-participant *in* such a particular process is also something very different because it is no longer only about getting involved in the public sphere, talking about public problems, but also about identifying as member of a particular and closed group, and about contributing to the smooth and harmonious functioning of that particular group.

Citizens often speak in the ‘we’-form to refer to the 32 citizens that participate in the Citizen Lab. But sometimes the ‘we’ also refers to the entire group of participants

⁴⁰ J. Zask, *Participer, Essai sur les Formes Démocratiques de la Participation*, Paris: Le Bord de l’Eau, 2011.

in the Citizen Lab experience. This includes facilitators and to some extent organizers, but excludes the invited experts or stakeholders who are invited only during part of the Citizen Lab and are not part of the community of experience.

The group dynamic strengthens the interpellation as citizens that come together to speak for the Belgian population, for the general interest. At the same time, this 'we, the participants' and the concern with the harmony within that group seems to preclude speaking in the name of a societal sub-group, or at least contributes to making such a representative claim less likely. Citizens only very rarely use the 'we' to speak as member of a certain sub-group among the 32 citizens or of Belgian society.

The Citizen Lab is characterised by the absence of much conflictual and explicitly political talk that might endanger the collaborative spirit of the Citizen Lab. For one, citizens hardly refer to other sub-groups of the population ('we, the poor', 'we, the people of immigrant descent', 'we, the pensioners') nor to political affiliations ('we, the socialists', 'we, the liberals'...). The 'we' is also rarely mobilised to refer to and speak as the sub-groups of Francophones and Dutch-speaking Belgians, despite the practical importance of these linguistic differences for discussion formats and despite their blatant political importance for debates on health care in Belgium. There are reflections on how linguistic differences sometimes make the debates practically difficult, as well as humoristic and playful remarks about the differences between Flemings and Francophones. But these do not stand in the way of the formulation of joint positions. At the end of the Citizen Lab, one of the French-speaking participants states that:

Finally, [...] with this mix of persons from different communities [...], one thing is clear that comes out of this [...]: in the end the only thing that separates us is language. We agreed on all issues [...] there was a certain community of ideas. In the end, what separates the groups, is only language. Voilà.

This speaking as 'we' becomes most visible in moments where the citizens speak about themselves as citizens to other groups: when they address stakeholders, enter into dialogue with experts, or speak explicitly about how their opinions, as a group of citizens, relate to those of experts and stakeholders. Whereas party political or linguistic-cultural identifications and oppositions would highlight differences between citizens and possibly endanger collaborative group dynamics, the juxtaposition of the general interest (as voiced by citizens) and the pharmaceutical industry's interests, for example, enhances the group identification and cohesion between citizens.

7. CONCLUSION

Our analysis has shown how the interpellation of citizens as citizens and people's responses to this interpellation are a crucial dimension of the multi-layered and ambiguous power dynamics in institutionalized civic participation. The different dimensions of the interpellation as citizen in the Citizen Lab we analysed had a profound impact on what citizens said about the issue of health care reimbursement, on how they made sense of the issue, as well as on the registers they used to speak about it.

Our analysis also shows that the citizens' talk is not entirely determined by how institutions interpellate them. Citizens go beyond the registers offered to them, and go beyond the framework they are supposed to remain within. However, in so doing citizens usually draw on the subject positions of citizen offered by the process, even if they

use these positions to go somewhat beyond what the organizers had in mind. Moreover, these occasional transgressions of the suggested subject positions seem to function largely as exceptions to the rule or as relatively minor diversions. In the Citizen Lab, the overall response to interpellation may be summarised as follows: “by having accepted the invitation to this process, we now agree to follow (roughly) the host’s guidelines and suggestions, including those that regard who we are supposed to be in this process”.

The meaning of the interpellation as citizen can be understood only by considering how people practically used and articulated the three offered subject positions, that is, how they talk *at the same time* as ‘nationals’, as ‘ordinary individuals’ and as ‘participants’. Even though the three dimensions related to the ‘citizen’ subject position could have clashed in other circumstances (for instance, the citizen-as-national and the citizen-as-happy-participant in a nation-state as divided and contested as Belgium), in the Citizen Lab, they were articulated relatively smoothly and seamlessly.

The participation discourse, and the attempts to host and organise a pleasant and friendly process on three weekends, were coherent with the underlying ideal of national unity. What was to be built was the team in itself, and a shared view of citizens on health care reimbursement (even if the Foundation stressed that consensus was not an aim of the process, the organisation of the process did push in that direction). Most people participated in this spirit, without (overtly) questioning it, and most of them enjoyed (or seemed to enjoy) it.

The citizen deliberation discourse, valuing the ordinary citizens’ contributions made in the mode of intuitive, impersonal, un-opinionated opinions, proved to be very complementary with the ‘national’ and the ‘participation’ discourses. Whereas strong political, knowledgeable and personal engagements tend to create cleavages within the group and between mutually exclusive positions, contributions ‘in a minor mode’ can be considered as vaguely compossible⁴¹. Ordinary must thus be seen as a certain format for contributions, that facilitates their *aggregation* in a relatively unified outcome: here, the list of ‘criteria’ and ‘values’ supposed to summarize the citizens’ views on health care reimbursement.

Whilst taking a particular form, the interpellation of citizens in the Citizen Lab has important similarities with other citizen deliberation processes, as well as with other forms of citizen participation⁴². In combination with the observation that citizens largely ‘accept’ the invitation addressed to them, this points to the degree to which the discourse and practice of citizen deliberation processes need to be understood within the context of broader dominant ideas about and practices of citizen participation in politics and policy-making. This also implies that the interpellation of citizens as citizens, beyond a very explicit initial invitation in a Citizen Lab, and some more explicit reminders throughout, need not be signalled all that explicitly or authoritatively throughout the process to be effective, but can rely on much subtler and ‘positive’ forms of interpellation. But although the interpellation as citizen is a far cry from the policeman hailing a person on the street, inviting people to participate in a Citizen Lab does constitute a form of interpellation, and approaching it as such, we hope to have shown, contributes to understanding the nature of citizen participation in deliberative processes and the complexity of the power dynamics of such forms of participation.

⁴¹ Berger, *Publics Fantomatiques*.

⁴² See N. Carpentier, W. Hannot, “To Be a Common Hero. The Uneasy Balance between the Ordinary and Ordinarity in the Subject Position of Mediated Ordinary People in the Talk Show Jan Publick”, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 12, 6 (2009): 597-616.