

The Belgian initiative G1000. A feasible model of deliberative cyber democracy¹

La iniciativa Belga “G1000”. Un posible modelo de ciberdemocracia deliberativa

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Abstract:

In 2010, after five hundred days without any stable form of government, a group of Belgian citizens from a wide range of social backgrounds launched a citizenship summit called 'G1000'. The aim of the event was to create citizen involvement in politics by stimulating participants to take part in debates about social issues and by applying innovative techniques of deliberative democracy. In order to verify whether the model mentioned meets the criteria of an “online democratic-deliberative” experiment, this article carried out a quantitative analysis of the G1000 based on the work of Fishkin, Chadwick and Habermas. According to the majority of authors who have contributed to the topic, including the spokesperson and organizer of the event, Vincent Jacquet the results demonstrate that the G1000 summit is, in fact, a genuine democratic-deliberative initiative.

Keywords:

Cyber democracy; deliberative democracy; participatory democracy; transparency; participation

Resumen:

En 2010, tras quinientos días sin gobierno, un grupo de ciudadanos belgas de diferentes estratos sociales crearon una cumbre ciudadana llamada G1000. Este experimento pretendía acercar la política a los ciudadanos a través de técnicas innovadoras de democracia deliberativa. A fin de constatar si dicho modelo cumple con los requisitos de democracia deliberativa, este artículo realiza un estudio práctico de carácter cuantitativo con la valoración de la iniciativa G1000 basado en la obra de Fishkin, Chadwick y Habermas. El resultado, en sintonía con la mayoría de autores que han hecho aportaciones sobre el tema como el portavoz y organizador del evento, Vincent Jacquet, nos permite verificar que el G1000 es una verdadera iniciativa democrático-deliberativa.

Palabras clave:

Ciberdemocracia; democracia deliberativa; democracia participativa; transparencia; participación.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Object of study

“Over the past few years of economic crisis, the gap between institutions, politics and citizens has been growing” (Mascarell, 2014: web). At the same time, democratization of new mass media, as well as the speed and multi-directionality of messages broadcast, encourages many citizens to debate and participate in a more active way in political matters that concern them.

The evolution of new digital tools in the field of political communication has disclosed new challenges, both for citizens and political representatives. In this context, the e-democracy seems to have become a new type of democracy. The role of new information and communication technologies (NTIC) reformulates the contemporary political theory about modern democracy, opening the door that allows each citizen to express their opinion.

This article aims to investigate a specific case of a Belgian initiative of online deliberation called G1000. This topic has been chosen as a subject of study due to the writers’ personal interest and its importance for a summit whose purpose is to bring politics closer to citizens through innovative tools of deliberative democracy.

The objective is to demonstrate two different approaches. Firstly, from a theoretical point of view: to study the historical context of traditional deliberation until it evolves into the concept of E-deliberation. Secondly, from a practical perspective: to evaluate the G1000 as model of deliberative cyber democracy based on our own compilation of the necessary requirements.

On the one hand, the importance and interest of this work was aroused by observing the divorce between politicians and citizens and how it has resulted in a high rate of abstention in Europe, which sparks off debates and actions from governors, academics and politicians. On the other hand, this research shows how the modern organization of G1000 in Belgium, a practical example of deliberative democracy through new technologies, may positively influence the implementation of this initiative in other countries such as Spain.

As a result, the main hypothesis thoroughly analysed in this work is: ‘The Belgian initiative is a cyber deliberative initiative which fulfils all the requirements of deliberative e-democracy’.

1.2. The state of the art

Liberal authors tend to show their satisfaction with representative democracy, as it respects the decision of those preferring to dedicate the majority of their time to private issues. Protectionist writers, on the other hand, tend to foster deliberative democracy despite the demands formulated by citizens who want to develop civic virtues and devote their time to the public sphere.

As José Luis Martí (2008: 8) highlights, is not easy to make citizens compromised into public and democratic challenges. Consequently, it is absolutely crucial for this type of system to have a citizenship politically aware of public issues.

Habermas' concept of public sphere constitutes a kind of "political ecology" that redefines relationships between society, State and market, between local, national, international and transnational and between the concept of public and private spheres. In this respect, Habermas proposes a new political paradigm focused on the procedure of deliberation, including societal and state dimensions, and offering a redefinition of the popular sovereignty in a discursive way (Habermas, 1982: 24-34).

Habermas proposes in his work called *Three models of democracy*, the advantages and disadvantages of both tendencies, showing a preference for the republican conception since it connects directly with his idea of participation, communicative action and development of a deliberative democracy where everybody is involved in the process, trying to find a consensus between all of them, making disappear the differences of class created by capitalism, an economic movement followed by the liberal conception (Habermas, 2005: 2-8). The auto organization of society by a body of citizens is the 'habermasian ideal' of public deliberative sphere: in it, each individual can overcome their specific private interest.

Afterwards, Habermas recognized that deliberative democracy is a project designed to be developed in small scale for a limited number of people and that this system is not relevant to solve all type of problems. Other authors like Przeworski have stated that current structures of modern and the number of citizens make deliberative democracy impossible.

However, Andrew Chadwick, professor and specialist in political communication at London University, believes in the potential of Internet to reconfigure the democracy through the granular involvement of the citizen (Chadwick, 2009: 12). He states that *granularity* technique must be used to incentive the citizen to participate in a web page, what means offering different digital tools according to the target and then establish a relationship between the user and the portal, offering options like: short posts, I like it, votes to arrange in order of importance and others.

James Fishkin is in between those theories with his proposal of "deliberative polls" (Fishkin, 2009: 6-9), that are little forums of citizens chosen randomly to debate, get informed and, at the end, take position on political issues. This idea brings a deliberative citizen system inside a representative democracy. Additionally, Fishkin points out that this is important to help participants who will deliberate by giving them relevant information, taking into account that they are not specialists.

In this investigation we understand cyber democracy as a "transparent, multipolar, deliberative and political communication of a universal civic system created through new technologies such as Internet, in a democratic process" (Dader, 2012: 18). Thus, cyber democracy can be executed in different ways, for instance, giving citizens sufficient information to express their vote knowing exhaustively each political alternative. It also includes, for instance, all type of informative and audiovisual resources that give the citizen's right to vote. Philosophers like Jürgen Habermas, Joshua

Cohen, John A. Dryzek and Carlos Santiago Nino, have been linked to this theory, and they have showed their support to this way of considering democracy.

The central idea of deliberative democracy is that political decisions are only legitimate when they are the result of a large democratic deliberation which implies, on the one hand, the participation of all concerned citizens, on the other hand, the possibility of presenting, debating and accepting arguments from each person who can declare himself in favour or against contrasting alternatives of decision.

1.3. Historical background of deliberative democracy

Although one might think that deliberative models are new, it actually comes from an idea that came true in ancient Greece. The Greek democracy developed it as a political system where each citizen participated directly in the decisions of the *polis*. In the third book of Politics, Aristoteles defines the citizen as the one who can participate in the judicial power and the Government (Aristoteles, 1920: web).

The legislative power was in the hands of the Assembly (Ecclesia), where the Athenian citizens deliberated before taking decisions, weighed up publicly the benefits and drawbacks of possible alternatives on diverse issues. The idea of balance is in “deliberate” itself, which come from the Latin word “Libra”, meaning “balance”.

Throughout debates, one can consider attentively the advantages and disadvantages before taking any decision, and the reason of their choice before voting. The Assembly promulgated laws, decided the peace and war and chose the policy-makers. Each citizen could go to the Assembly at any time: they had right to participate in the discussion, propose amendments and vote.

Another form of deliberative democracy can be found in the Middle Ages, which breaks with the orthodox vision about this period of history as a dark time of repression and feudal oppression. It is the Open Council, neighbours assembly in the localities that govern in the Christian reigns in the Middle Ages period where this form of democracy appeared. In these Assemblies, the neighbourhood decided about the communal better use of meadows, forests, mills, irrigated lands and ovens but also dealt with administrative, judicial and even military functions that were also conducted by democratic principles. The open Council is still working in Spanish town halls with less than one hundred inhabitants through assembly's plenary session, where all neighbours have a voice and can vote (Tierravoz, 2012: web).

There was also local deliberation in the modern age. For instance, in the ancient reign of Valencia various organisms' members of the professional body were in charge to deal and debate about the government problems. The most important institution representing politically the Valencia population was the Congress. Inside it, the representation was divided in three arms: the military or noble, formed by all the nobles and gentlemen with or without possessions that were convoked;

the ecclesiastical arm, formed by the high authorities of the Church; and the Real arm that was represented by the trustee sent by the cities and real village.

Evidently, the political representation of the Valencia people in these three arms was not selected in a democratic way but it is a good example of a deliberative process incorporated in another system. Even inside a monarchy, the representatives of the three statements of the époque took decisions through deliberations.

The last two hundred years have been a long way of consolidation of the representative democracy, basically in Europe and the United States. The democracy has always been in a constant evolution and frequently forgets that some of the fundamental characteristics of the contemporary democracies and the very idea of democracy was achieved few decades ago. Thus, universal suffrage with women vote was not achieved in the majority of countries until twenty century. In fact, some of the most developed states delayed the incorporation, like Switzerland, that did not do it until 1971.

Consequently, democracy, in the way we know it, is a recent construction, as a result of an endless series of transformations that exist to increase the legitimacy of the political order. Thus, it would be very exclusive to state that this democracy cannot be even more democratic, especially in the time being, where scientific and technological knowledge have advanced so intensely and deep social changes have taken place.

Finally, at the beginning of the 21th century, appeared the “2.0 web” which allows a public and open interaction with a content constructed collectively by and for everybody and where the user do one’s bit and can be the main character (Chadwick, 2009: 13). This allows introducing the online deliberation in the democratic history of Europe through different initiatives, for example, the online work in 2013 of a citizen committee in the new Constitution of Iceland proposed to the Parliament.

According to Mercado Percia, “this «new» model of democracy seeks to improve the quality of political decisions, so the whole body of citizens can benefit, but above all, they can participate actively in the legislation of those. It seeks the collective consecution of a common good as an alternative to the aggregation of wills with its particular interests or those of the parties” (Mercado, 2014: 12).

1.4. Information and citizens

In *When the people speak*, James Fishkin begins his investigation stating that “democracy gives voice to everyone” (2009: 1). According to the investigator, we may arrive to a democratic system thanks to egalitarian politics and to the practice of deliberations. However, he highlights four types of citizen’s behaviours that impede the application of an effective deliberative democracy.

First of all, he refers to a practical problem: it is difficult to encourage what he calls “the mass” to get informed about political issues (Fishkin, 2009: 4). It must be taken into account that the general information level about general politics or

current affairs is very low. Secondly, the abundant and chaotic stream of opinions limits the effectivity of deliberation, because generates many speeches and loses its efficacy (Ibid: 5).

Thirdly, the “internal” debates between citizens do not have too much interest because they usually debate with people thinking the same as them. In the case of opposite opinions, they just decide not to speak any more about politics so as not to put in risk their friendship because of political matters. Especially in Spain, the political issue implies a high risk of conflict and, even now, for a part of the population, reminds bad memories of their country divided into two parts. In the same way, Internet has deeply changed this reality. The online consultation is very easy, in just a click we are in TV channels, radio, blogs, online newspapers, etc. So reading, listening to and looking at other points of view is very common when and where we want.

Lastly, Fishkin remarks the vulnerability of the mass opinion (Ibid: 6). He says it is easier to manipulate a uniform public lacking of political thoughts than another having an opinion based on discussions and thoughts. Mass opinion is more volatile in an individual level. The answer to make people massively informed is forgetting about manipulation techniques: disinformation or biased information. Consequently, citizens must have everything in their hands.

It is Alfred Schütz’s belief that the exercise of democracy implies the existence of a well-informed citizen. According to the Austrian sociologist, between street men that only knows what he experiments directly and an expert in a specific field, is the citizen who knows that his personal world is determined by public affairs that are not directly accessible to him. As a result, this citizen needs to have access to knowledge socially derived obtained from analysts and commentators able to give him unbiased information (Schütz, 2003: 23).

The well-informed citizens are well prepared to speak up about their own ideas, to participate in the elections, to get opportunities, to obtain services, to fight for their rights, to negotiate with efficiency and to control both the activities of the State and those of the rest of the society’s actors. All these factors are key to the democracy’s good operation (Gros, 2010: web).

Hence the responsibility of the mass media in the good operation of a society aiming to be absolutely democratic. “A responsibility that has provoked the media rating -and, consequently, the radiophonic, televisual and those bulletins circulating in the Internet- the fourth power. This is a confusing rating because the press does not take part of the three Montesquieu’s powers –legislative, executive and judicial- which, when are independent, is a warranty of a quality democracy” (Cardús, 2015: web).

The concept of well-informed citizen implies the responsibility of the citizen himself. That means, a citizen that aims –or should aim- to be well-informed (Ibid: web). In a complex society and an advanced democracy like the current one with the blooming of all type of channels of information, it should exist a critic and responsible citizen with the information that

he uses so as to create his own opinion. For this reason, next to the worrying of having better media is the one of having the biggest number of citizens able to value a well-informed analyse and well-reasoned comment. Therefore, people knowing how to resist the strength of the demagogic discourse that, from a unique point of view, resolves everything by pointing at unique enemy and a unique simple solution.

Finally, the citizen participation is a concept related to participative democracy. It is about the integration of the population in general in the process of taking decisions; the collective or individual participation in politics, understood as something in which we all take part. The important is that people owning to a community work in common, know each other, create social network and establish a dialogue that may motivate many other initiatives, besides those for that was created.

Sadly, citizen participation is not high enough in Europe. As the 'Spain's Youth Inform' association states, "associative participation has descended progressively through the last decades and especially since year 2000". Until that date, the global membership to associations (apart from the type and content of the entities) was around 40% of young people" (Camacho et al., 2012: 231). However, in 2004 the number of associated young people had decreased to the fourth part of the collective and in 2012 only 22% of youths had a current link with associations and collective organizations.

1.5. Technology and democracy 2.0

Internet has permitted the easy access and practically unlimited to the majority of people to a variety of resources that were very difficult to achieve or had restrictions or access conditions before. An immense quantity of public and private entities publish in Internet information of interest with different opinions and points of view, that otherwise would be of difficult access.

In addition, having a computer at home is becoming more and more common. A study of the Statistical National Institute (INE, 2014: 1-2) about the use of Internet in Spanish homes states that 74, 4% of them had an Internet connexion in 2014. In accordance with INE, almost 11, 9 millions of family homes in Spain have access to Internet.

Technology amplifies the vote by its accessibility: it is not necessary to go out because everyone can vote from home, at work or being abroad. Besides, TICs support the amplification of the participation beyond the formal politics and the ballot box, promoting the subsidiarity in the local and neighbourhood level. This take advantage of the resources, knowledge and local abilities, developing new forms of support and social capital.

In the same way, TICS can explore the huge reserves of data coming from the public sector to visualize decisions and political and also involving the mandataries through the political representatives or directly through informational process, consultation and active electoral participation. As a result, TICS contribute to attract voices and experiences of citizens, to establish their own programmes and to develop their own politics under new forms of massive collaboration.

Besides, some tools and models have emerged as part of the 2.0 web that can be used or inspire the design of electronic participation. In particular, “The emergence of online communities oriented toward the creation of useful products suggests that it may be possible to design socially mediating technology that support public-government collaborations” (Kriplean et al., 2009: 1).

The “E-participation” report published by *Estrategia Magazine* (2012: web) does an inventory of the fundamental tools in an online political process: participation tools, Wikis, social networks and blogs; the mechanisms, electronic vote or Internet petitions; and the transparency tools, through a digital follow, a data mining or a data visualization. The problem is that technology by itself is not an incentive enough for participation and many identify the use of social networks with entertainment or maintaining of social relationships.

Of course there are some several problems related to the use of TICs in the legislative process such as the usurpations of debates by elites with access to technology. For instance, firsts experiments with electronic vote in United Kingdom and Ireland that included the use of mobile phones had not had success and had provoked denounces of fraud and irregularities, as well as technical problems. In contrast, almost the 15% of Estonia voters in recent elections to European Parliament have voted in line, that meaning a high increase with respect to 5% of general elections in 2007. In some contexts, this change may take as long as a generation, while in others may be relatively quick.

1.6. Collaboration of the political body

When studied the causes of the ramping dissatisfaction of European citizens with their democracies (in different grades) the first highlight is the perception of a bad economic situation, and, the second, the intervention in the democratic internal processes of the politics and markets. While in October 2011, only 9, 2% of the Spanish population declared that corruption was the main issue in Spain, this number came to 42,3% in 2014 (Garea, 2014: web).

Moreover, according to the data from the Spanish Sociological Investigative Centre studied by Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona’s Political Science Professor, Eva Anduiza, the percentage of dissatisfied citizens with democracy working in Spain was 68% in 2012, almost thirty points above the average of the previous period (40%), and with an error margin of 2%. 2012 was the last year in where the question was introduced, and not only nothing impulses to think it has improved, but quite the opposite (Anduiza y Bosch, 2012: 15). Indeed, the CIS barometer of March 2015 (CIS, 2015: 2) concludes that 77, 1% of the Spanish people consider the Spanish political situation is bad or very bad.

As a result, there is a large dissatisfaction with democracy working in the majority of population having relevant implications: it decreases political reliance, democratic values, electoral participation and the vote for ‘big parties’.

The latter has been observed in the results of Spanish general elections on the 20th of December, with 12, 7% of the population having found hopes in Podemos (Ministerio del Interior, 2015: web). At the beginning of Rajoy's legislature, Izquierda Unida and Unión Progreso y Democracia, were the parties picking up a part of the discontent, and another important part, in accordance with CIS results, went to abstention. The Pablo Iglesias political party has achieved to move an important portion of those that did not use to vote. Why is this new party so successful? Between other reasons, they want to renovate the Spanish political system. Through the citizen's assembly organizations, the party leave in people's arms their political organization, and they are the ones who chose the different projects.

The enthusiasm for a democratic change may come from the political body itself. Many complain about a high level of anxiety as well as constant pressure by the electors, which will not give the vote for the representative not keeping his promises. So, reconstructing a dialogue between these two actors is the core of the deliberative democracy.

A deliberative democracy supposes a more responsible and transparent democracy so as citizens can debate with access to the whole data. Rosa Nonell establishes different areas subjected to transparency principle. The first area, public organizations and independent agencies sustained by public financing. The second, the whole of society's intermediate organizations, such as foundations, associations and non-government organizations. The third is in the enterprises environment, through the social responsibility affecting not only to actionists but also to all those citizens affected by their decisions and with whom they share interests (Nonell, 2012: 86)

Many authors support the indispensable relationship between democracy, accountability and transparency. It is the case of the Indian writer Pareek (2012: web), for whom the "birth of a true democracy may only be achieved with a public participation and the best tools to increase public participation in the democracy, depend on transparency and accountability".

We firmly believe that "transparency is a democracy's pillar since it cannot exist a democracy if citizens do not have free access to the information accessible to their representatives affecting the exercise of citizens' rights" (Tejedor, 2014: 153-154). Indeed, a representative's little proactive attitude in the transparency impulse is perceived as a voluntary tendency to opacity. In short, the bigger the transparency and responsibility in their behaviour the bigger their legitimacy and social acceptance.

Lastly, the use of information and communication technologies allows amplifying and going deeper in the citizens' political participation so they can connect with themselves and their elected representatives (Macintosh, 2004: 45). Consequently, it includes all those interested in Government process for decisions taking and political formulation. It is not only putting the governmental services online and improving their appliances but also listening to the citizens. Hence the use of new technologies must complement traditional media and offer a synergy between the new and ancient communication media.

1.7. Fundamental bases of G1000 project

The Belgian initiative emerged as an answer to the absence of Government in Belgium for 541 days, a period that constituted a record, not only European but global, converting it in an unusual and unique situation. The country was more than a year without an elected leader, due to the parties' incapacity to reach an agreement about the Government's composition.

The Belgian political crisis started in April 2010 when the coalition broke due to the divergences about electoral and judicial district Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde, that englobe Brussels (officially bilingual, but with an overwhelming majority francophone) and the Flemish municipalities of the periphery (with an important francophone minority). The elections of June 2010 did not solve the question since the winner was the nationalist Flemish party N-VA, in favour of a progressive soberness transition towards independence of Flanders. However, N-VA and its leader, the polemic Bart De Wever, supposed an obstacle in the negotiations developed during a year.

The Belgian were 541 days facing this situation of non-government, what led them to take several measures. More than 30.000 people gathered to protest through the platform 'Not in my name'. They also did the same in the well-known protest of 'fries revolution', named as the favourite Belgian dishes, and one of the lasts symbols of national unity (apart from their delicious beers), in order "to express their anger and frustration over the ongoing failure to establish a government" (Diab, 2011: web).

Moreover, the sex strike proposed by socialist senator Marleen Temmerman started at the shout of "I am absolutely convinced that if all of us agree in the sexual abstinence we can achieve that negotiations go quicker" (Temmerman, 2011) and there were proposals like not shaving until a government was hold or even camping virtually in front of the Parliament as a protest.

Belgian crisis finished on Monday 6th of December 2011 with the agreement between Balloons and Flemish, French speakers in the south and Dutch speakers in the north, provoked by the debt crisis in the Eurozone. Besides, the financial services company *Standard & Poor's* decreased on Friday 3th December 2011 the credit mark of Belgium, what forced both parties to make a pact about the budget.

In spite of that "Belgium grow up more than 2% between the elections in June 2010 and the 6th December 2011, the day social democrat Elio Di Rupo became prime minister. In the same period Spain lost Internal Brut Product and the Eurozone grew below 2%. The Belgian unemployment descended that year and a half, the same time it grew in the Eurozone and shot up over 20% in Spain" (Pérez, 2016: web).

1.8. The three phases of the deliberative G1000 system.

G1000 was an initiative created by citizens for citizens. As an independent organization, it depended on crowdfunding and all the project was financed by donations, “about 3.000 donors of less than 500 euros and 40 donors of more than 500 euros” (G1000, 2012: web).

Regarding the organization, G1000 was convinced that the best technique to make participants deliberate during the meetings, was to do it by drawing lots. Indeed, it gives each citizen the same possibility of being chosen, it makes sure that different opinions are listened and that “participants are forced to consider alternative arguments and points of view and to discuss them with others very contrasted” (Fishkin and Luskin, 2005: 284).

Then, the first phase consisted of an online public consultation as open as possible whose objective was to define the day order of 11th November’s citizen summit (second phase). This day order was not decided by organizers, as it is usually done in this type of deliberative practices, but for the citizens themselves. “But what should they talk about? Let them decide for themselves. Right from the start, the G1000 has been different from other deliberative exercises in that it enabled complete participation in setting the agenda” (Bell et al, 2012: 25).

In order to guarantee freedom of election of the day order, they organized a big consultation to the people in their website. At the beginning of July 2011 a brainstorm was launched online: each citizen could publish there the questions or problems that he wanted to deal with in the citizen summit. This consultation online generated millions of ideas about different questions of political, social or economic order. Besides, each of them could also vote for other people’s proposals, what allowed a hierarchical structuring of ideas.

All in all, 6000 people have participated in this process. Many of the proposals appeared several times in the list. Afterwards, ideas were classified according to the number of apparitions and the number of votes received until end up with a top of 25 topics that was published in October 2011. The order of apparition in the user’s pc screen was completely random so as to avoid bias and the IP directions were verified to avoid a massive vote for a unique individual or group.

Later, citizens were invited to vote for three topics they wish to address and the chosen ones were “social security, immigration and the distribution of wealth at a time of crises” (Bell et al., 2012: 44).

After the public consultation phase, the second phase of the project consisted of a citizen deliberative process: G1000 citizen summit. Taking a selection sample of official lists was too much difficult, long and expensive, so they asked the agency GFK Significant to put in contact with the potential participants by telephone selection. This technique generates a random list with a penetration of 99% in Belgium since every citizen with a telephone had the same possibilities of being selected for G1000 summit. However, only one of each 100 calls gives a positive answer to such invitations, what means a 1%. This percentage may seem very low by comparison with the answers to political polls that tends to be between 10%

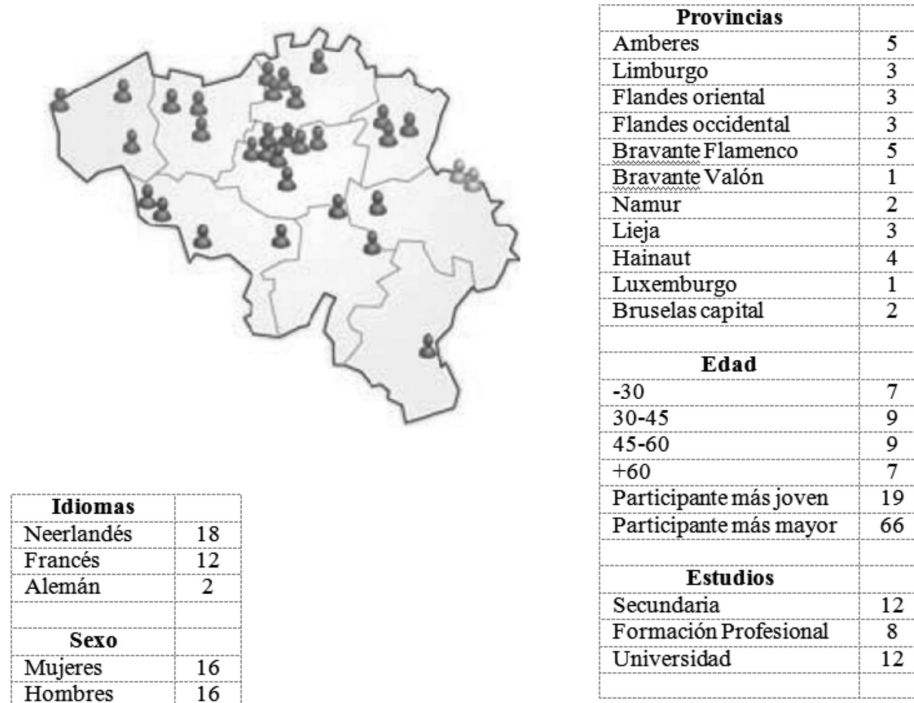
and 50%, since in this type of poll the participant does not have to get involved. In the case of an invitation to participate in a deliberative experience, they ask people to dedicate one or more free days to talk about things that, sometimes, they ignore completely or in which they are not interested at all.

As a result, 1000 citizens were invited to participate in the citizen summit of 11th November 2011 in Brussels. Gathered in 81 tables, 32 bilingual tables, 30 tables exclusively Dutch-speaking, 18 French-speaking and one mixed French- and German-speaking (Bell et al., 2012: 28), participants were invited to reflect on, debate and reason proposals about the three topics mentioned above. Each group had an interpreter and a voluntary with a specific formation before the event so as to moderate the deliberations and help them to create a dynamics.

After that, names were drawn to decide who will be participants for the third phase from a list of 400 candidates, all of them from the G1000 citizen's summit. A panel of 32 citizens chose a topic among the three discussed during the previous phases and elaborated a report on one issue: "How to address labour issues and unemployment in our society?" (Bell et al, 2012: 49).

Lastly, the group defined six topics to address in debates: differences of remuneration, quality of life, salary, access to work market, future generations and discrimination. All were debated in the citizen panel G32 composed representatively by sex, age, origin and education, that took the following form (Ibid: 85):

Figure 1: G32 Citizen panel



Fuente: Elaboración propia a partir de datos tomados del informe final del G1000

As a result of these debates, the G32 began a dialogue with governmental actors in place back then. On the 11th November 2012, one year after the summit, they submitted a report to the seven Belgian parliament chairpersons, in which they formulated their opinions and feedback.

2. Methodology

Regarding the methodology, the procedure followed in the elaboration of this article has consisted in, firstly, a quantitative analysis from different authors and theories developed in the theory framework and practical cases. Secondly, we have applied a quantitative analysis to G1000 event from an empirical and descriptive perspective.

To do so, we have employed resources, data bases and final reports available on the G1000 official website (<http://www.g1000.org/en/>), as well as newspapers and up-to-date barometers from the Spanish Sociological Investigative Centre.

Besides, we have interviewed Vincent Jacquet, the G1000's spokesman and organizer. All of this has been achieved to contextualize and add some qualitative aspects to contrast our hypothesis of investigation.

In order to value the G1000 as an online deliberative democratic initiative, we have developed a quantitative study based on the analysis method of the book: "The Spanish parties' websites during the campaign for the 2008 General Elections. Cyber marketing guides' with little signs of cyber democracy" (Dader et al., 2011: 20-30).

We have created our own codebook, as compiled in the appendix, structured in six dimensions: information, technology, deliberation, organisation, persuasive attractive and legitimacy. Each dimension has three categories or categorized items multiplied by a ponderation of 1, 2 or 3 according to the importance given by authors such as Fishkin or Chadwick. The categories are valued with a punctuation of 0, 1 or 2, depending on the data available in the official website and the G1000's final report, the interview we conducted with Vincent Jacquet (2015) and the echo in media.

3. Results: toward the institutionalisation of the G1000 initiative

As usual in this type of deliberation, the organisation had a drop out of 30 %. Even though everybody had confirmed their presence before the event, the final number of participants was 704. It is possible to interpret it as a failure of the objective of 1000. However, in order to analyse this drop out with exactitude, it is necessary to bear in mind "the beautiful weather and the railway strike on 10 November (which had knock-on effects until the next morning) and the fact that G1000 participants are not offered any financial compensation" (Bell et al., 2012: 27). In fact, in the majority of the events of this type, the participants are usually paid up to 300 euros (Jacquet, 2015).

In spite of this, there was a real enthusiasm in Belgium for this political initiative. The project inspired a wave of civil initiatives among the whole country such as G100 that was one summit of citizens, students, teachers and parents who met all together to speak about the future of Education. Another so called initiative K35 emerged in Courtrai from a protest of young people who wanted to be listened without be committed into the classic intermediation of traditional parties. In addition, in the Netherlands, a G500 was created, proving that "citizens' participation is a challenge that does not stop at the borders of a country. The G1000 exchanged ideas with several European countries" (Bell et al., 2012: 40).

The particularity of the G1000 resides in the fact that citizens actively take part in the whole process; selecting by themselves the topics and the way of working as well as interacting directly with leaders and officials at the end of the process. In spite of being an experimental project (which can be extrapolated to other European countries and up to different levels of government), it might lead to settle down something innovative and permanent. Consequently, the experiment was a tremendous success in Belgium.

It is necessary to estimate the socio-political consequences of these new virtual uses on the daily exercise of the political communication, showing the possibilities of evolution of the idea of democracy. The aim of G1000 is to integrate a consultative chamber of citizens that would establish a structured dialogue with legislative chambers about topics they care about. This citizen chamber would not be a legislative one, since "this one would not enjoy democratic legitimacy given by the set of the popular sovereignty, but a chamber of direct complementary participation to the legislative one" (Mascarell, 2014: web). It would be composed by citizens from a wide range of social backgrounds and would rotate every six months according to a series of variables (age, education, profession, income, location). The unique requirement to take part of this would be the will to do it under the guardianship of an independent Committee of experts that would ensure the election of citizens.

The fact that each citizen is involved on behalf of himself is exactly the reason why he finds an incentive to participate in this project because they do not represent any political party or any organization of the civil society (Ibid: web). Thus, the example of G1000 demonstrates that citizens are much more than simple voters and may be interested in contributing in the political sphere even though they are not experts.

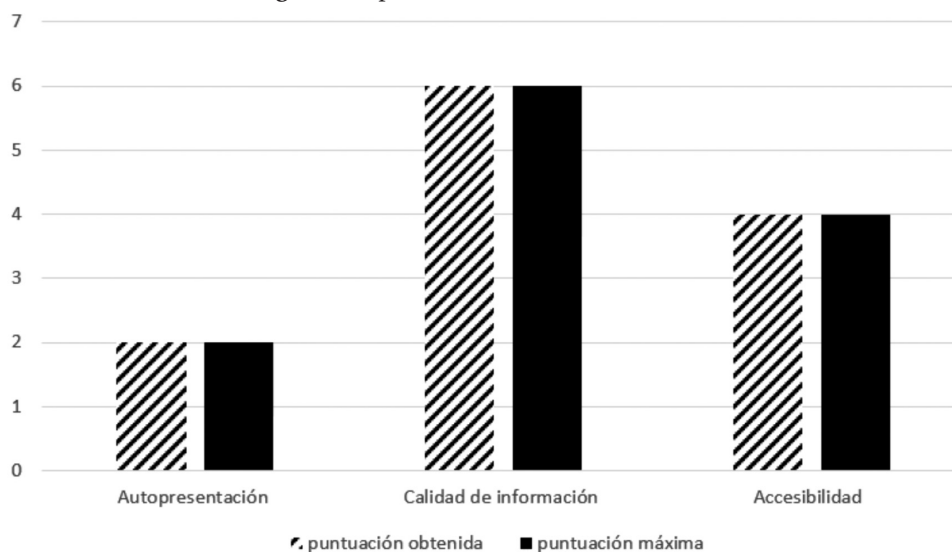
3.1. The G1000: Quantitative analysis

Below, we itemize the punctuations obtained by the G1000 based on different criteria.

3.1.1. Information

In the following figure, we observe the use and diffusion of the information throughout the event.

Figure 2: Input from the use of information



Source: self-elaboration

The project of G1000 carried out several actions to ensure that participants had access to sufficient information for debating during the event. For example, they distributed a briefing document before each meeting. In addition, the website of the organization had a complete presentation of the initiative and, for every stage, the G1000 published a press release.

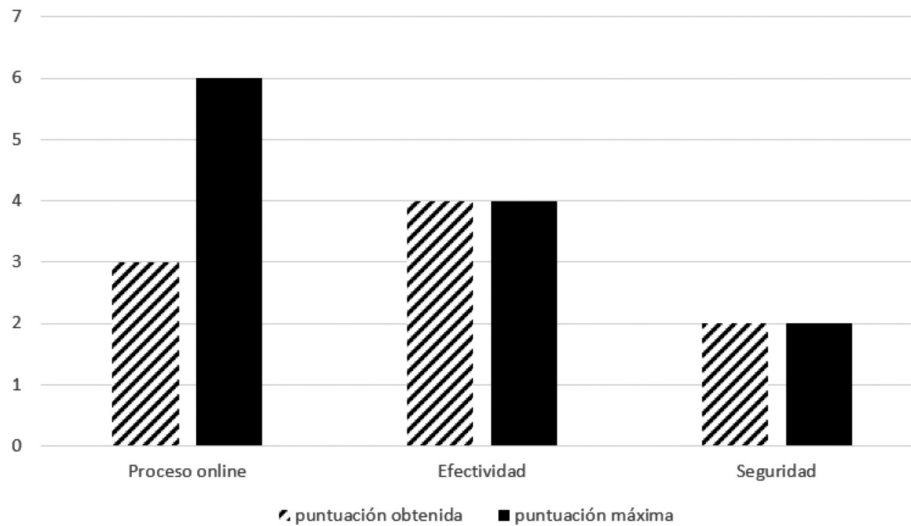
The quality of the information is considered also across the variety of opinions, considering that their sources of information were varied. In the third phase, several experts came to provide a professional and deep knowledge to the participants.

Finally, as it is possible to verify in the official website (G1000, 2012: web), the content and resources were published in English, French and Dutch, in order to offer the highest level of access and to guarantee the widespread use of the information. Overall, the use of the information in the G1000 was fully satisfactory.

3.1.2. Technology

In the following graph, we evaluate the input of the use of technology during G1000

Figure 3: Input from the use of technology



Source: self-elaboration

One of the preconditions of the ‘online-deliberative democracy’ or ‘deliberative cyber democracy’, is that the process of participation is online. For this reason, we deliver a 1 for the criteria ‘online process’ because only 50 % of the event was online (notably in the first phase) and, later, aside from some debates online, decisions were taken directly during the summit and needed a physical presence.

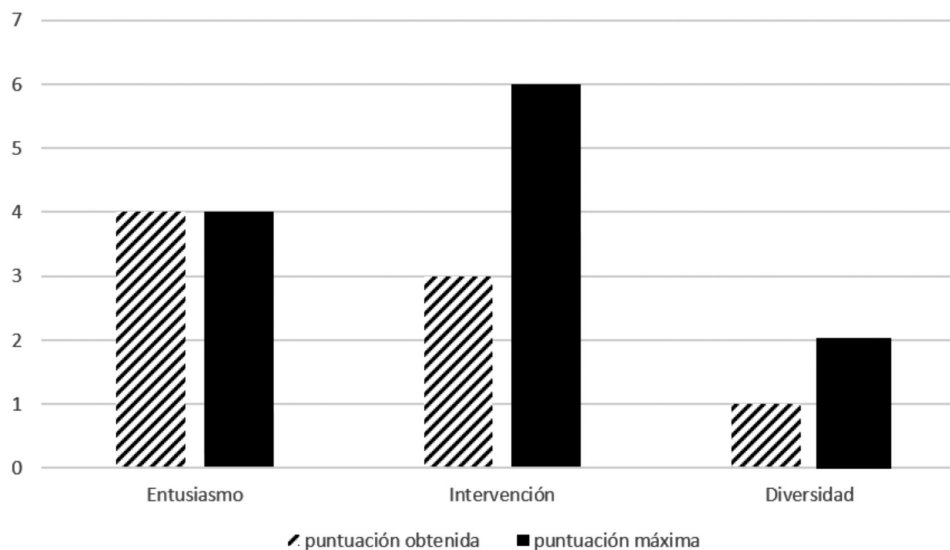
The efficiency of the website is weighed by its facility of use: in two clicks it was possible to take part, had very a little time of load and there was adapted to mobiles, which is known as ‘web responsive design’.

Finally, the level of safety was high enough because there was neither technical failures nor virus in the website during the whole process online. In general, G1000 is a good example of how technology can be used as a democratic tool.

3.1.3. Level of deliberation

The graph below exposes the level of deliberation during the event

Figure 4: Input from the use of deliberation



Source: self-elaboration

The enthusiasm and the high level of collaboration needed in a deliberative process of this type were well represented by the participation itself: 704 participants and 800 volunteers. This number cannot be interpreted as a failure of the initial objective of 1000 participants. Thus, a 30% drop out is habitual, keeping in mind that usually organizers remunerate participants, which G1000 did not do. In addition, as we mentioned earlier, the day of the event (November 11) turned out to be a very sunny day and the rail network disturbance did not help to make all the participants arrive to the event. Therefore, this category obtained the maximum result.

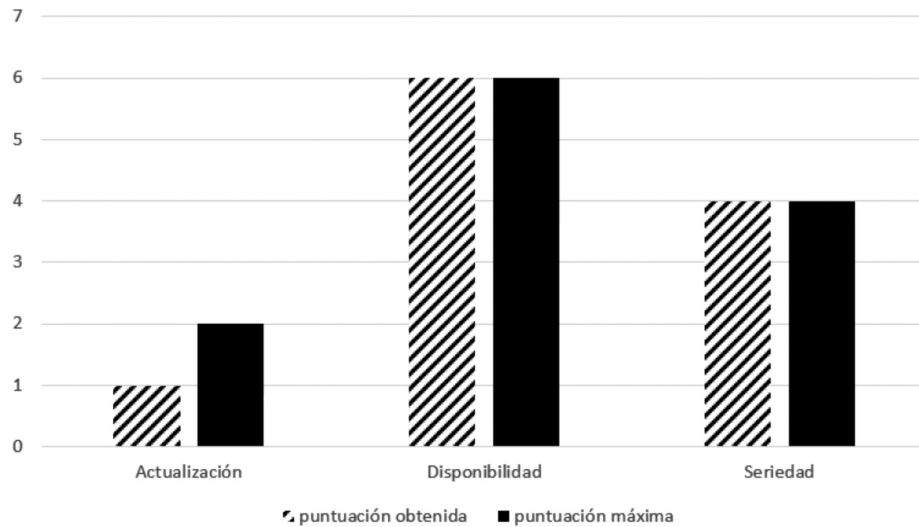
Regarding the level of intervention, initially, participants were not speaking very much and they were feeling uncomfortable since they were not used to speaking publicly, especially about politics in society (Jacquet, 2012). Nevertheless, after several meetings, the environment became more relaxed and they all ended up participating, which justifies the 50% of the section "intervention".

Finally, the diversity of opinions was high enough during the summits, which made the debates interesting and intense. In general, the level of deliberation was high, which is noteworthy taking into account that was the first experience for the majority of participants.

3.1.4. Organisation

In the following graph we attest of the quality of the organisation.

Figure 5: Input from the organisation



Source: self-elaboration

First of all, the webpage of G1000 was getting up-to-date frequently, especially in the section prepared for the press. Nevertheless, sometimes the press releases were published few days later.

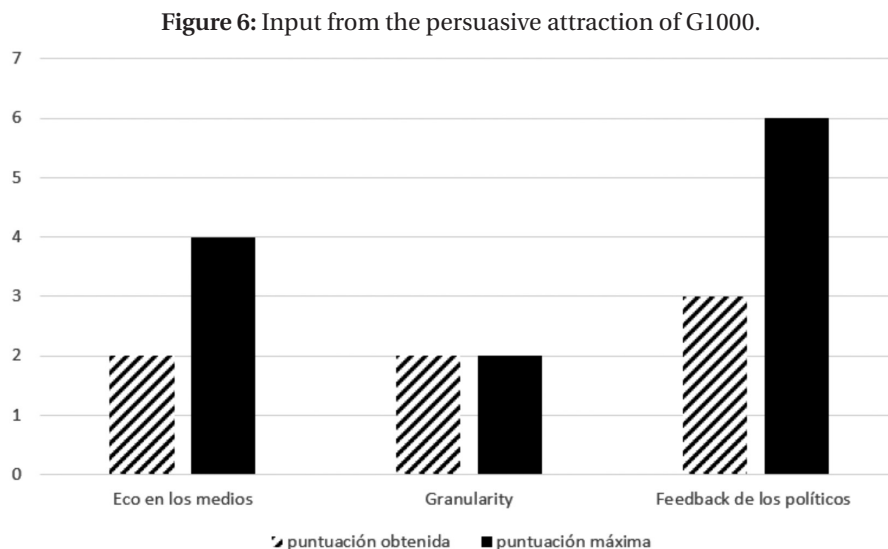
From the organizers part, they were constantly at the disposal of participants to help if it was necessary and every group had a 'person of contact'. The so called "facilitators" existed in addition, and "applied participatory methods that allowed for active participation (...) Moreover, they alternated between different formats and techniques, which made the whole process lively and easy to follow even for those who are not used to speak in public " (Bell et al., 2012: 105).

In general, "despite that organizers were volunteers², participants could notice the credibility of this project for the high quality of the organization" (Jacquet, 2015), which explains why we grant the maximum results to the latter category.

² The majority of the organizers were volunteers, "with the exception of a few extern consultants in charge of process coaching" (Bell et al., 35)

3.1.5. Persuasive attraction

Below, we evaluate the contribution of the persuasive attraction as a very important factor for participation during the process.



Source: self-elaboration

On the one hand, different sources of media mentioned the event many times: "surprisingly, we were often received very graciously! (...) The media supported us, with articles or publicity space, because they liked our initiative" (Bell et al., 2012: 31). Nevertheless, we might esteem that the G1000 did not receive the whole attention that it deserved taking into consideration its importance and level of innovation, as the first attempt of large-scale cyber deliberation. In fact, "the G1000 received more media attention from Flanders than from the French-speaking media" (Ibid: 98). Therefore, the result obtained by the 'impact on media' is 50%.

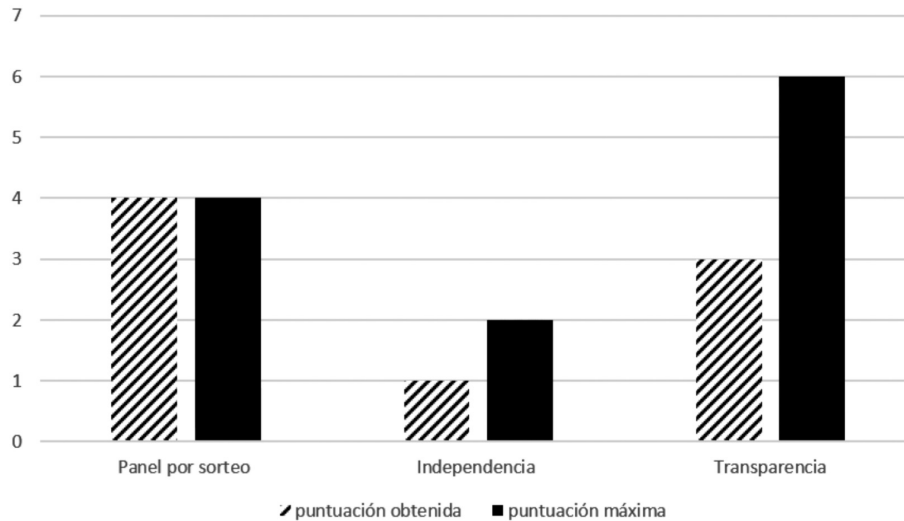
On the other hand, different levels of participation were implemented and small contributions could be done with a massive effect as a whole, in harmony with the definition of 'granularity' by Chadwick. Besides, any donation equal or higher than 40 euros was giving right for a tax reduction, which was another persuasive attraction.

Finally, during the last phase, 32 participants, from the panel of citizens, presented their final report with their conclusions and recommendations for the members of the Congress and the Senate in Brussels, but they did not receive much feedback (Bell et al., 2012: 90).

3.1.6. Legitimacy

The last graph of this analysis verifies the level of legitimacy of the Belgian project.

Figure 7: Input from the use of legitimacy during the event.



Source: self-elaboration

The panel of citizens was selected by ‘drawing lots’. This method provides a high level of legitimacy since neither age, profession nor gender were taken into account throughout the selection process. Paul Hermant, a journalist who writes for RTBF (Radio Télévision Belge Francophone), declared himself in favour of a random selection: "the power of citizen panels resides in the random selection of the participants. Drawing lots is the birth of democracy, more than that, its cradle" (Bell et al., 2012: 12). Even though the panel of the third and last phase was reduced to 32 citizens (not being selected randomly), everyone could follow the process by watching it in streaming on the section ‘G-Home’ (Bell et al., 2012: 28).

Secondly, the G1000 was financially independent. They did not have any sponsor or collaboration with mass media or businesses. The event was financed by 3.040 anonymous donations. However, in the third phase, they received public funds.

Finally, it is possible to witness the level of transparency on their webpage in the section ‘Finances’ (G1000, 2012: web), where they published the entire budget of the G1000, ordered by phases and events. Likewise, "they did not moderate any discussion or censure any comment" (Jacquet, 2015). The global transparency and ripeness of their actions emphasize

the legitimacy of the event, in spite of the fact that the names of donors had never been released, since donations were anonymous.

4. Conclusion. G1000, a 'deliberative and cyber democratic' initiative.

From the moment where democracy was relatively applied in a direct way, up to nowadays, the political representation has always been considered as necessary. From the point of view of many conservative thinkers, this representation allows to condense citizen's interests, as well as to stop passions and irrationalities coming from the people. Beyond this reasoning, modern and contemporary searchers in democracy have always agreed on the importance of representation. In other words, it is a necessary and inevitable evil. Therefore, for worse or for better, the civil participation in democracy has never been considered as something more than an additional tool for governments. Nevertheless, for the very first time in the history, all of this is not accurate anymore. In the time being, direct democracy is already physically and technologically feasible.

Throughout a theoretical and practical perspective, this research have deepened in the knowledge of the deliberative cyber democracy. To that end, we have checked contributions from several researchers on this subject and on new informative and communicative tools. As a preamble, we have studied the historical context of the deliberative process. What come out of this investigation is that deliberative democracy had experienced a long-lived proceeding before leading to a digital deliberation.

Our main hypothesis has been verified. Indeed, the G1000 is an online citizen's initiative that meets all requirements needed for a deliberative cyber democracy. In line with the persons involved (Jacquet, 2015) and from the results of our evaluation, we can conclude that the G1000 can be considered as a "deliberative and cyber democratic initiative" by 76 %.

This hypothesis has been verified by a quantitative study and the contribution of six variables. The punctuation that we obtained is compiled in the following figure. The methodology used is explained in the second epigraph of this article and its full version is located in the Codebook in the appendix.

Figure 8: Quantitative analysis of G1000

	RESULTS OBTAINED	MAXIMUM RESULTS	%
Information	12 (2*1)+(2*3)+(2*2)	12 (2*1)+(2*3)+(2*2)	100%
Technology	9 (1*3)+(2*2)+(2*1)	12 (2*3)+(2*2)+(2*1)	75%
Deliberation	8 (2*2)+(1*3)+(1*1)	12 (2*2)+(2*3)+(2*1)	67%
Organisation	11 (1*1)+(2*3)+(2*2)	12 (2*1)+(2*3)+(2*2)	92%
Persuasive attraction	7 (1*2)+(2*1)+(1*3)	12 (2*2)+(2*1)+(2*3)	58%
Legitimacy	8 (2*2)+(1*1)+(1*3)	12 (2*2)+(2*1)+(2*3)	67%
Total:	55	72	76%

Source: self-elaboration

In this way, we have verified that all the members of the G1000 kept in mind that in order to insure a high-quality deliberation, they needed a lot of information from trustworthy sources and experts' advice (Ibid, 2015). Also, they knew that to spread the information it is necessary to rely on the NTICs. Thus, we have estimated that technology has a significant potential in terms of democratic process because it can handle astronomical amount of information and make governments more democratic and participative over the use of new technologic tools.

On the other hand, they stated the importance of relying on a large number of participants, diversity of contributions, as well as organizers (mainly volunteers) committed to the initiative. The key secrets that legitimized the G1000 citizen's initiative are: financial independence, support and feedback from the Belgian political body, draw lots selection, transparency and a great persuasive attraction to motivate future participants.

The final report of the summit itself affirms that "each stage of the G1000 confirmed our suspicion: ordinary citizens are not only willing to think about political issues; they are also capable of doing so. If they are given enough space, information and a rigorous methodology to work with, ordinary citizens can come up with constructive solutions; even for complex or emotionally charged issues. If one is taken seriously, one will respond to that seriously. The G1000 has thus confirmed prior findings from abroad: deliberative democracy works" (Bell et al., 2012: 7-8).

Regarding the future researches in this field, it would be interesting to study if this cyber deliberative initiative would achieve as much success in Spain as it did in Belgium, or simply, if such event could be organised with the same support of politicians and citizens and could have the same level of enthusiasm and commitment than this great initiative of deliberative cyber democracy had on a large scale.

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6. Appendix. Codebook

The following codebook is divided by: dimensions, category, ponderation values and punctuation criteria. The results of the quantitative analysis, presented in this research, were obtained via the application and calculation of those criteria.

Figure 9: Codebook

DIMENSION	CATEGORY	PONDERATION	PUNCTUATION	CRITERIA
INFORMATION	Self-presentation	1	0	It does not provide access to the event's data
			1	It provides access to some of the event's data
			2	It provides access to all of the event's data (briefing, press release, etc.)
	Quality of information	3	0	There is no variety of information sources or experts' opinions
			1	There is variety of information sources but no experts' opinions
			2	There is a variety of information sources and experts' opinions
	Accessibility	2	0	Both content and resources are published in French
			1	Both content and resources are published in French and Dutch
			2	Both content and resources are published in French, Dutch and English

DIMENSION	CATEGORY	PONDERATION	PUNCTUATION	CRITERIA
TECHNOLOGY	Online process	3	0	The participation process is not online
			1	A part of the participation process is online
			2	All the participation process is online
	Effectiveness	2	0	The web page is not easy to use (slow and not web responsive design)
			1	The web is partially easy to use (more or less quick or web responsive)
			2	The web is really easy to use (quick and web responsive)
	Safety	1	0	There are some technical failures and viruses in the web during the process
			1	There are some technical failures or viruses in the web during the process
			2	Neither technical failures nor virus were in the web during the process

DIMENSION	CATEGORY	PONDERATION	PUNCTUATION	CRITERIA
DELIBERATION	Enthusiasm	2	0	There is a low level of participants and volunteers (<500)
			1	There is a medium level of participants and volunteers (>500≤700)
			2	There is a high level of participants and volunteers (>700≤1000)
	Intervention	3	0	The participants do not take part in the working tables
			1	The participants take little part in the working tables
			2	The participants take active part in the working tables
	Diversity	1	0	There is few diversity of opinions in the working tables
			1	There is a medium diversity of opinions in the working tables
			2	There is a great diversity of opinions in the working tables

DIMENSION	CATEGORY	PONDERATION	PUNCTUATION	CRITERIA
	Updating	1	0	The web page is not updated and press releases are published several days later
			1	The web is frequently updated but press releases are published with delay
			2	The web is updated frequently and press releases are published punctually
	Availability	3	0	Organizers are not at the disposal of participants at all
			1	Organizers are sometimes at the disposal of participants
			2	Organizers are always at the disposal of participants
	Thoughtfulness	2	0	Organizers are neither reliable nor committed
			1	Organizers are partially reliable and committed
			2	Organizers are totally reliable and committed

DIMENSION	CATEGORY	PONDERATION	PUNCTUATION	CRITERIA
PERSUASIVE ATTRACTION	Impact on media	2	0	It has little impact on media
			1	It has medium impact on media
			2	It has high impact on media
	Granularity	1	0	User cannot do contributions to the website
			1	User can do little contributions to the website
			2	User can do a great number of contributions to the website
	Feedback from politicians	3	0	Neither conclusions nor recommendations are presented to the Congress and the Senate members
			1	Conclusions and recommendations are presented with a medium feedback from the members
			2	Conclusions and recommendations are presented with a high feedback from the members

DIMENSION	CATEGORY	PONDERATION	PUNCTUATION	CRITERIA
	Selection by drawing lots	2	0	The selection is not random
			1	The selection is partially random
			2	The selection is totally random
	Independence	1	0	It is financially dependent from a sponsor
			1	Some of the phases are financially independent from a sponsor
			2	It is financially independent from a sponsor
	Transparency	3	0	It does not publish the G1000's budget or the donors' name
			1	It publish G1000's budget but not the donors' name
			2	It publish G1000's budget and donors' name

Source: self-elaboration