







# Between councils and conferences: deliberative arenas on human rights in Minas Gerais

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**ABSTRACT Introduction:** The academic literature on deliberative systems suggests exploring the connections between deliberative forums and other components of the political system and society. This article investigates the participation of governmental actors and civil society in councils and conferences addressing public policies on human rights in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. The objectives are twofold: to propose a theoretical framework for examining deliberative subsystems and to identify the connectors in a multilevel network consisting of human rights councils and conferences. **Materials and methods:** We adopted a methodology centered on subsystem theory, prioritizing the dynamics of deliberation arenas and the synergy between councils at local and state levels. We reinterpreted the concept of subsystem to develop an empirical model that incorporates its thematic dimension. To examine the interconnections between councils and conferences, we employed an analytical approach known as two mode network analysis, also referred to as affiliation network analysis, situated in the domain of Social Network Analysis. **Results:** Our findings suggest a high level of integration within the subsystem. In contrast to prior studies, we found that civil society actors, alongside governmental agents, significantly contribute to interconnecting various arenas within the subsystem. This finding underlines the functional specialization of liaison agents within the context of the deliberation system. **Discussion:** Our findings offer a twofold contribution to the existing literature. Firstly, we present an innovative theoretical model for analyzing deliberative systems. Secondly, we recommend the use of multilevel network analysis as a robust tool for identifying connections between multiple arenas.

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## I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

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The creation and functioning of a wide range of participatory institutions have made Brazil an important case study, which has received attention from national and international researchers (Avritzer, 2009; Wampler, 2015; Curato et al., 2020; Faria et al., 2012; Mendonça & Lavalle, 2019). In this sense, public policy councils and conferences stand out for their extensive dissemination throughout the national territory, at the local, state, and federal levels (Pires, 2011).

Thematic conferences are a participatory way of creating a common agenda between state and society. They have preparatory stages and, at local level, are open to anyone, ensuring a wider range of demands and interests represented. At this stage, delegates are elected and proposals for the state stage are defined. The same dynamic occurs at this stage, which defines delegates and proposals for the national thematic conference, where, at the end, a document is created with principles and guidelines that should guide the entire process of formulating public policies (Souza et al., 2013). In other words, conferences are spaces par excellence that combine the dynamics of participation and representation, with a full cycle lasting around four years.

The public policy councils, in turn, consolidate the decisions made at the conferences, formulating and strengthening the proposals. They are collegiate bodies linked to the executive, of a permanent and deliberative nature, whose purpose is to set priorities for the political agenda, formulate, monitor and exercise control over public policies (IPEA/DIEST, 2013). Councils can be considered hybrid institutions, since the State and civil society share decision-making power through parity of representation. The total of 50% of government representatives and 50% of civil society representatives (associations, entities, users, among others) are appointed, who capture demands and agree on specific interests of various groups involved in each policy area (Avritzer & Pereira, 2005).

The daily functioning of participatory institutions allows for discussion and debate between society and State actors in the periods between elections. These are therefore essential mechanisms for public control. Based on the analytical suggestion of a systemic deliberative model, some analysts have set out to investigate the Brazilian participatory institutions (hereinafter referred to as PIs) through the lens of subsystems (Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012; Faria & Lins, 2013; Almeida & Cunha, 2016; Silva & Ribeiro, 2016).

Some authors have proposed the analytical model of the deliberative subsystems, which critically dialogues with the literature on deliberative systems (Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012; Silva & Ribeiro, 2016). In this way, deliberative arenas must be analyzed in their connections with other parts of the political system and society, and we consider it relevant to analyze the PIs in the same way. A critical analysis of the systemic model makes it possible to identify deficiencies in indicating the main connectors of these arenas, as well as the mechanisms of transmission of deliberations from one part of the system to another (Mendonça, 2016; Elstub et al., 2016).

Silva & Ribeiro (2016) used techniques derived from social network analysis (SNA) to identify the possible connectors of the subsystem of public policy councils in the city of Belo Horizonte. Three criteria guided the identification of subsystems: (1) the nature of the deliberative arenas, (2) the territorial dimension of the site where they are located, (3) and the thematic area of the public policy in which they are located.

This paper analyzes councils and conferences simultaneously, focusing on the human rights policies in the state of Minas Gerais. The results show that the simultaneous or concomitant participation of actors in more than one arena can be an informal mechanism through which there is a connection and/or transmission of information between various parts of the system (Silva & Ribeiro, 2016).

The model applied at local level was then used to replicate the same techniques within the council subsystem in the state of Minas Gerais. The analysis proposed was based on two criteria: (1) the nature of deliberative arenas, (2) territoriality. The current analytical assumption is that the problem of scale imposes restrictions on citizens' participation in the deliberative arenas mentioned (Parkinson, 2006; Silva et al., 2016). In other words, the costs of time, resources, and transportation are much higher in a state as vast as Minas Gerais, which is larger than countries like Spain or France.

We included another deliberative arena (conferences) in this proposal, focusing on the third criterion of the thematic area of public policies (human rights), as these themes have also been considered as possible connectors of deliberative systems (Lins & Faria, 2017).

The results indicate that the state council subsystem in Minas Gerais is made up of 48 councils and approximately 960 councilors. Among them, 35 councils are active and functioning. However, the data obtained by the research only accounts for 17 of these councils, as they responded to our calls for data. We concluded that public power councilors are the main connectors in deliberative arenas, as the most active ones are present in two, three or even four councils simultaneously. In other words, public authority actors account for 86.66% of the connectors, while civil society accounts for only 13.34% of the connectors of the subsystem in question (Silva et al., 2016). In the local sphere, the presence of public authority actors accounted for 64.8%. Therefore, we conclude that one of the consequences of the increase in participation costs has been the greater importance of public authority actors in the role of connectors in the subsystem.

The prospects for further research are promising. We plan to analyze the subsystems including other deliberative arenas, especially conferences. This creates a model that assumes the themes of deliberative politics as what defines the subsystems.

The aim is to verify whether the inclusion of new arenas allows the observation of new patterns of connection between arenas that could affect the deliberative process. We tested the hypothesis that the function of connectors in deliberative systems responds to specializations, which refer to the types of subsystems that make up this larger system. To do this, we selected the human rights councils and conferences in the state of Minas Gerais.

The first section of this paper presents the perspective of the deliberative subsystem, focusing on its contribution to the analysis of the connection mechanisms between the different parts of deliberative systems. The second part presents the problem, the hypothesis and explores the specificities of the participation in councils in the context of conferences. In the same section, aspects of the methodology applied are explained. In the third part, we describe the characteristics of the thematic subsystem of human rights in Minas Gerais. In the final considerations, we point out ways in which the work carried out can be taken forward in the future. We highlight the phenomenon of specialization in the role of connectors in the deliberative system and suggest future research capable of indicating the connection between councils and conferences besides other parts of the deliberative system.

## **II. The deliberative subsystem: the challenge of connectors and transmission**

The systemic model has three distinctive characteristics: large-scale deliberation, a focus on the division of labor within the system, and the idea of ensuring deliberation through a myriad of institutions and processes of contemporary politics (Estulb et al., 2016). This paper suggests an approach to researching deliberative systems from a meso perspective. We use social network analysis techniques to identify the connectors of deliberative subsystems.

The approach proposed here aims to improve the mechanisms for researching deliberative systems based on the challenges presented in the literature following the systemic turn (Curato et al., 2020; Barvosa, 2018). The main root of this discussion is the systemic manifesto, as it has been called in the literature, or the deliberative turn within studies on deliberative democracy (Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012). In previous articles, we suggested the meso-level approach as a methodological strategy to bridge the gap between theory

and the development of the empirical studies. At that time, we presented a theoretical strategy called the deliberative subsystems approach (Silva & Ribeiro, 2016; Silva & Ribeiro, 2021).

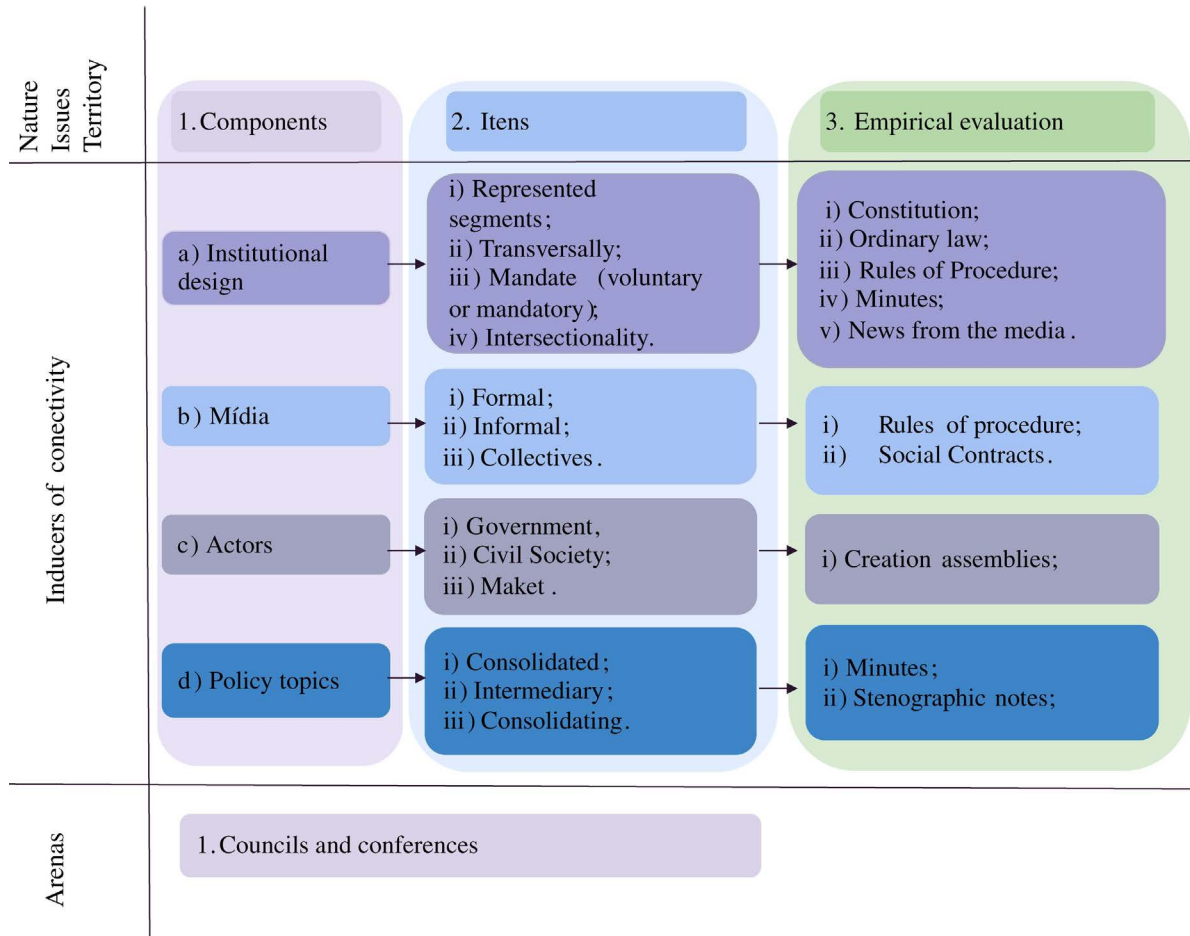
The approach is defined as a specific way of understanding deliberative systems through the analytical strategy of focusing on the meso-level dimension of a broader deliberative systems. In other words, it is possible to identify three distinct ways of researching deliberative systems: macro, micro and meso. The first focuses on a broader deliberative system, made up of all the institutions and actors, formal and/or informal, present in contemporary democracies. Then, we can study the relationship between parliaments, judicial and societal arenas, for example. The micro perspective focuses on mini-publics (in the global north) or participatory institutions (in the global south). Attention can be paid to each deliberative arena, such as parliaments, parties, forums, mini-publics or participatory institutions like councils, conferences, public hearing and so on. This research aims to identify the role of the actors within the deliberative process and how they can share power within the decision-making process. In its previous formulation, the meso-level approach focused on a group of similar components identified by a combination of criteria<sup>2</sup>.

Now, we propose to include another fourth element in the approach. The first offers a strategy for systematizing the literature efforts to answer the following statement. How can we study the systemic dangers present in deliberative systems as a lack of connection mechanisms between the different arenas of the deliberative system? Mendonça (2016) suggests three inducers of connectivity: 1) institutional design; 2) the media; 3) the role of actors representing civil society and bureaucracy in deliberative systems. Silva & Ribeiro (2017) suggest the inclusion of a further (4) four elements, which is the theme of policy areas. In short, we suggest investigating four elements together. The first is made up of the three dimensions of deliberative systems, which are (a) nature, (b) issues and (c) territory. We can identify within deliberative systems (i) their components; (ii) the items within the components; (iii) the empirical evaluation. The second dimension is the connectivity inducer, where we can find (a) institutional design, (b) media, (c) actors, (d) thematic policies. We suggest items and conditions for empirical evaluation in each column of the Figure 1. The third important issue, the last line of the figure, is the arenas researched here, made up of councils and conferences. Our approach is important because it can link the different proposals in the literature and suggest reflection on the empirical strategies to study each one of these elements, as we can see in Figure 1.

The first Dimension of the approach refers to (1) the components of deliberative systems related to each connectivity inducer. Next, we can think about the role of (a) institutional design in connecting deliberative arenas through the co-participation of actors and institutions. This means that if we can find in the internal rules of the institutions a composition that can stimulate the communicative process between the different arenas because they simultaneously share two or more institutions. The premise here is that the presence of the same institution in different arenas can stimulate the communicative process between these deliberative arenas because the discussion in one can be held in the other through the action of information sharing and deliberation by the common institutions.

(b) The media is another important connector of deliberative arenas. As a producer of information and an active actor in the process of shaping public opinion, the media can make information flow from one to other arenas and

Figure 1 - Deliberative subsystems approach



Source: prepared by the authors based on [Mendonça \(2016\)](#), [Faria \(2017\)](#) and [Silva & Ribeiro \(2016, 2020\)](#).

function as an important way of communicative interaction between deliberative arenas.

Despite the centrality of the media in public opinion, it is not a central actor within mini-publics or participatory institutions because these arenas are not objects often analyzed by journalists. To analyze the media, we can look to the number of formal media agencies, including TV, Radio, newspapers and magazines. In some countries, there is a strong concentration of these communication channels in the hands of a few economic groups or families. On the other hand, we can find independent communication channels, such as NGOs and social movements collectives. These actors have played a significant role in the democratization process in Latin American ([Peruzzotti & Slumovitz, 2006](#)). In the current context, we can identify the action of collectives from minority groups such as blacks, LGBTI, women, the elderly and others.

Similarly, for institutional design, the third dimension is the (c) actors and can play the same role if they act in different spaces at the same time. If some deliberation takes place in different arenas and the same actor is present simultaneously in these different arenas, we can discover the probability of communication from one arena to another arena. The actors who co-participate are central to this communicative process. We can specify the actors in two types of other, such as the bureaucracy besides the elected and non-elected actors.

The bureaucracy is another important connectivity inducer. We can see the different levels of its organization. Then, it is important to distinguish the civil service organized at different levels, such as local, district, municipal, state, national and transnational. The findings of [Silva et al. \(2016\)](#) show that the importance of bureaucracy as a connector of councils is more significant at the state level than at municipal level. Analyses of councils in one municipality shows that the role of government as a connector represents 64% of actors. At the state level, this figure rises sharply, reaching 87% of actors who co-participate in deliberative arenas. These results may suggest that time and resource constrain limit the participation of civil society actors in public discussions. At the national level, we find the centrality of the oldest councils, such as Health Council (CNS) and the Environmental Council (CONAMA), both created during the 1980s. They are also the councils, such as the largest number of counselors shared with other deliberative arenas. Finally, bureaucracy is central to the role of connectors between national councils ([Silva & Ribeiro, 2021](#)).

It is important to investigate the possible role of elected and non-elected representatives within deliberative arenas. These actors can connect the deliberative arenas with society, as they have the function of representing different segments of civil society and the market within deliberative arenas. In this way, they can broaden discussions and deliberations to public opinion ([Almeida, 2015](#)).

The literature suggests paying attention to the role of (d) thematically related to policies because the subject of the discussion may attract some actors and institutions. In other words, the policy issue acts as a connectivity inducer. The findings of [Faria \(2017\)](#) show the centrality of some issues of policies within deliberative systems because actors work together with the institutional incentives of the policy area.

The third dimension of the approach refers to the (2) items related to each component. This means that each component has a set of items, and we can observe the role of each one them in the deliberative arenas. The institutional design of the connectivity inducer has the following items (second column of the figure). The (i) segments of the government and the public represented within the deliberative arenas are the first important item. We can find some institutions that tend to be more open to the diversity of society and government representatives, for instance, when they select the members through open elections.

On the other hand, we can find some institutions where the segments are previously defined by the internal rules, and it is not possible to change the institutions represented there. This means a situation close to the participation of the whole society.

(ii) Transversally is another important issue, as it can increase the number of institutions from different areas in the deliberative arenas. Then, the communicative flow between institutions can improve the connections of deliberative arenas.

It is important to identify whether the presence of representatives and their (iii) mandate is a duty or a choice resulting from an electoral process, for example. This difference can result in a different form of participation within deliberative arenas. In general, we can find this type of selection in the rules of councils and conferences. Government representatives are selected from within the bureaucracy. On the other hand, an electoral process selects the representatives of the public.

The last question relates to the rules on equal gender participation within the arenas. In other words, we can identify whether there is (iv) intersectionality in the rules of deliberative arenas. Feminist studies emphasize the importance of this type of strategy to improve the representation of women and minorities groups in politics. We can think of the interaction between institutions and segments of society as a way of connecting representatives and electorates. It can broaden the audience for decisions made in deliberative arenas.

Another significant connectivity inducer is the co-participation of actors in different deliberative arenas. The findings of [Silva & Ribeiro \(2016, 2021\)](#) demonstrate the relevance of the actors as connectors of councils and conferences in Brazil. We deal with the premise that the co-participation of actors can improve the communicative exchange of information and deliberations between different arenas. The role of the actor is to bridge the gap between the institutions. It is possible to find three distinct types of actors within deliberative arenas because they come from government, civil society or the market (in health, for example). We do not ignore the fact that this can lead to less diversity and inclusion of actors and themes. In the case of conferences, this is mitigated by the local stages, whose participation is open and tends to welcome a greater plurality of people and interests. The renewal of representation at conferences can open up space for new leadership, particularly among civil society actors.

Another important connectivity inducer is the thematic questions discussed in the policies. It is common to see the same actors taking part in different discussions on a given subject because they work with these issues on a daily basis. For example, human rights NGOs tend to be present at all discussions on this issue in online forums, public hearings, councils and conferences in this area. They are experts in human rights discussion, and can be invited for their relevant work in this field. So, these actors can make some contributions on the issues related to these thematic policies.

We can find three different items within the thematic component of policies (see the second column of [Figure 1](#)). The literature suggests that there are three distinct stages of maturity policy subsystems. Consolidated subsystems have a long history of construction because they are made up of core areas of social policies that are central to the consolidation of citizenship compose them. For example, we can see the role of education and health subsystems because they are central to the consolidation of minimum conditions of equalization within states worried with the welfare of citizens. Schools and hospitals are central services here and have a long history of implementation in different states. Then, this area can be seen as a model for the other areas. We can find intermediate subsystems where the process of implementation has some developments in normative aspects, such as the construction of integrated policy systems, but its actual stages are not complete. For example, we can mention the area of social assistance in Brazil, which has made many normative advances, but is not fully implemented in all municipalities. The third situation is the consolidation of subsystems that are now being built institutionally. The example here is the area of human rights or policies for women or young people. This area has recent systems, and the implementation of services and equipment is growing at the moment.

The third column in [Figure 1](#) deals with the (3) empirical evaluation. Before describing each row, it is important to remember that the three columns are interconnected. To research the (a) institutional design, we can analyze constitutions, ordinary laws, rules of procedure, minutes. In specific cases, it is

possible to find some news from in the media, especially during the conference process, as it is a major event with hundreds of participants. It takes place in every city and state in the country.

To assess the (b) media, you can look for articles of association to find information about the owners and what the main purpose of the media outlets is. Another important document is the rules of procedure, as we can find the connectivity inducers imposed by the internal rules. The main connectivity inducers from the media are the discourses on politics and policies, as they can inform society about important dimensions of public goods.

Then, (c) actors can be assessed by rules of procedures because, in general, there is information about the organizations that are represented in the institutional design. Institutional websites are another important locus of research because they can list the members of councils and conferences, for example. We are looking for the names of actors who are simultaneously in more than one institution. The findings of the social network analysis show a significant role played by actors located in strategic places in the network.

Finally, we have the (d) theme of policy, which can be researched through documentary analysis. Two types of documents are essential here, the stenographic report and the minutes of meetings. The former is better because it is possible to assess the full discussion and the positions of the actors. The second can be a transcript when we find better conditions. However, it can be text with a general description of the meeting or just a summary. The latter limits the findings of research.

### **III. The subsystem of councils and conferences: the challenge of connectors and transmission**

Brazil's broad, diverse, and heterogeneous participatory institutions have attracted the attention of national and international researchers. Since the dissemination of different participatory arrangements throughout the national territory from the 1990s onwards, through the spread of participatory budgets, public policy councils and conferences, river basin committees, among others, academia has joined forces to characterize various aspects of functioning of participatory institutions and their possible impacts on public policy outcomes (Avritzer, 2009; Pires, 2011; Almeida et al., 2016). The systemic deliberative perspective has been used by researchers to analyze the dimensions of the public policy formulation processes in Brazil (Almeida & Cunha, 2016; Faria, et al., 2012; Faria, 2017; Silva & Ribeiro, 2016; Baggia, 2016; Avritzer, 2016). In Brazil, the configuration of some areas of public policy has normative incentives to operate as a chain of communication and transmission of demands and decisions, from the local and state levels to the national sphere.

It is worth noting the case of the Unified Health System (SUS, in Portuguese) in the health area, or the Unified Social Assistance System (SUAS), in social assistance. In addition to conferences and councils in the three federative units, there are Inter-Managerial Committees (bipartite and tripartite) for planning, implementing, and monitoring policies. Therefore, there are theoretical and practical (empirical) reasons that would stimulate the accomplishment of research grounded on the systemic perspective.

Nevertheless, specialized literature has pointed out the limits of the proposed systemic deliberative model, especially with regard to the mechanisms capable of promoting the connection and transmission of deliberations between different deliberative arenas (Mendonça, 2016; Parkinson, 2016;



[Boswell et al., 2016](#)). This paper shows how the deliberative subsystems perspective can contribute to the development of research in the field, by focusing on the thematic area of human rights policy.

First, the subsystem perspective acknowledges the impossibility of carrying out research that addresses the entire deliberative system of contemporary democracies. In this sense, our contribution seeks to point out the advantages of identifying the connections between the parts of the system before thinking about the connections of the wider spaces and arenas of the system.

Another critical contribution concerns the effort to research two different subsystems together: councils and conferences. The separate analysis of councils pointed out that government actor played a significant role as informal subsystem connectors. The intention is to investigate whether the inclusion of another arena will promote changes in the role of the active actors as connectors. Our data indicates that this may be the case.

In addition, the focus on the thematic area can reveal specificities in the performance of informal actors as connectors. Themes have been studied as connectors of deliberative systems ([Lins & Faria, 2017](#)). We now want to examine whether research on various thematic areas relating to human rights may indicate differentiated connectors in the council and conference subsystems. We propose a model in which the interests and actions expressed by the actors within the subsystems in which they are inserted (councils and conferences) can affect the outcomes, as actors can be vehicles for transmitting information and deliberations between arenas. In other words, the central connecting element between the arenas is not just the fact that they deal with a common theme, but rather the expression of the interests, perspectives, discourses and behaviors of the actors within the subsystems.

### *III.1. Methods and results: the multilevel character of the thematic subsystems*

We used Social Network Analysis (SNA) to construct and analyze data on the participatory subsystem of the deliberative arenas on human rights in Minas Gerais. SNA is a set of tools for modelling the interdependence of the components that make up a social system. This approach allowed us to study the deliberative systems and investigate whether and how deliberative systems work, whether different components of the system relate to each other. This study uses the two-mode technique in particular. This type of structure is characterized by the incidence of an agent of one ontological level, usually people or social groups, with an event that constitutes an occasion for interaction, such as State Conference and State Council. Two-mode networks are particularly appropriate for studying the connection between deliberative arenas. This technique assumes that the co-participation of agents (same actor being present in two or more different arenas) connects events ([Silva et al., 2023](#)).

We used two-mode networks to identify connections between deliberative arenas (state conferences and councils). We collected data from the websites of 17 state policy councils, as well as the list of delegates from the six state human rights conferences in 2015. We selected the arenas based on their relationship to human rights issues. Through this consultation, we created a database in which we recorded the conferences and councils that relate to the issue of human rights and the identification of all the people (council members and conference delegates).

The data refers to mandates and conferences from 2015 to 2016, when it was accessed, processed and analyzed using Pajek 5.0 software for social network analysis. Through this strategy, it was possible to discover the existence of people who served on more than one council and/or on more than one conference and/or on councils and conferences simultaneously. To create a representation of the human rights subsystem, we started to isolate the network of arenas (events). In this network, the lines connecting the arenas represent councilors and delegates (actors). This strategy resulted in [Figure 2](#) as a representation of the subsystem.

This strategy does not require interviews with the actors in the system, and it assumes that the presence of actors in two or more events is enough to deduce a link between them. It also makes it possible to measure the strength of these links based on the number of actors shared by two or more events. The deliberative subsystem approach developed in this article adopts the second delimitation criterion proposed by [Silva & Ribeiro \(2016\)](#). According to this, the delimitation of the subsystems must be based on the theme of public policy. Based on data available for the state of Minas Gerais, we chose to analyze the human rights subsystem. To represent this thematic area, we considered arenas of a dual nature: councils and conferences.

As postulated by the theory of deliberative systems, and as observed in the subsystem of councils ([Silva & Ribeiro, 2016](#)), the thematic subsystem of human rights is fully connected.

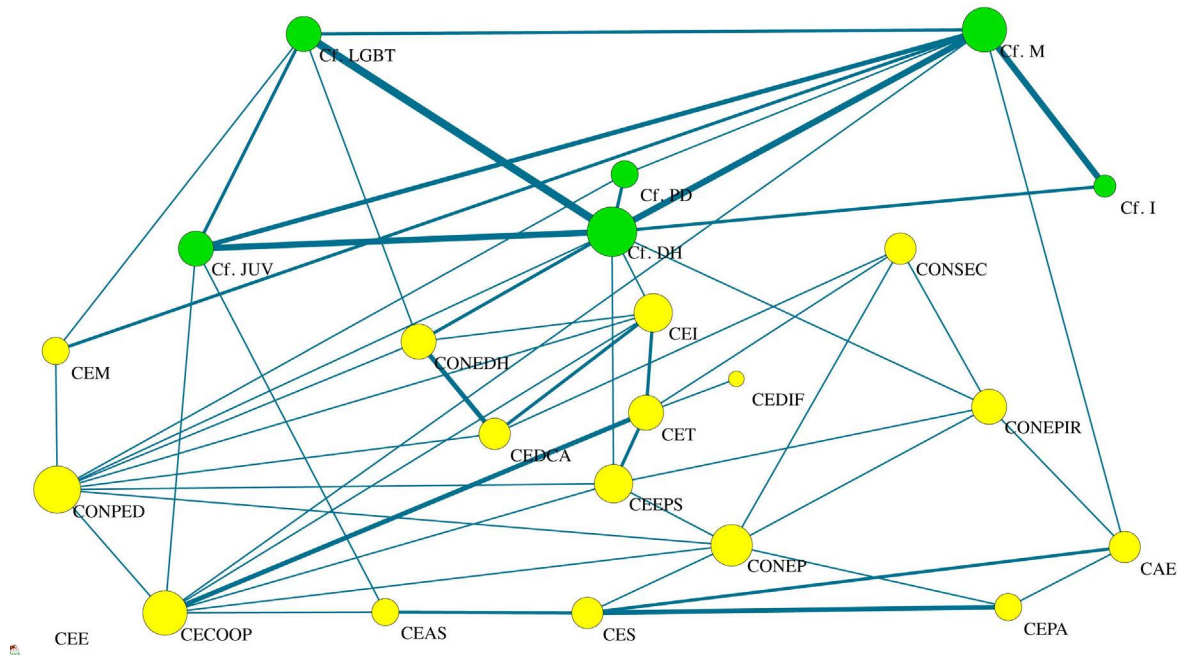
[Figure 2](#) suggest that the thematic subsystems are composed of different overlapping levels in the case analyzed, defined by the nature of each arena. This characteristic reveal that the thematic criterion allows the mapping of reality from a meso perspective, closer to how we conceive deliberative subsystems in previous studies ([Silva & Ribeiro, 2016](#); [Silva et al., 2016](#)). In this sense, we believe this paper offers a new contribution, for the thematic subsystems present a higher degree of complexity and, therefore, reveal new aspects about the performance of political actors as informal connectors in deliberative systems.

For instance, we can observe the relations between arenas. In the [Figure 2](#), the solid lines show pairs of arenas that share actors at the same level. In turn, the dotted lines reveal the relationship between the two levels, based on the frequent presence of actors operating in the pairs of arenas. In this case, the dotted lines represent actors who performed in the subsystem simultaneously as councilors and delegates in the elaboration of human rights policies. In other words, the behavior of these actors' registers a more significant flow within the subsystem, which may increase their chances of influencing the public policies of the subsystem analyzed.

In this subsystem, which is multi-level by nature, the State Conference on Human Rights (Cf.DH) appears as the main connecting port between arenas. Although it shares a central position at the level of interaction between conferences on the thematic area of women's policy (Cf.M), it stands out as the primary subsystem responsible for connecting levels (council and conference). Although this is expected, two findings can be highlighted as for this configuration of the subsystem. We are working with the concept of *discursive connectivity* in another text using *machine learning* to analyze the decrees, reports, and other documents produced by councils and conferences ([Silva et al., 2022](#)).

This can be explained by the transversal nature of human rights, which involves issues of health, education, social work, among others. Each of the

Figure 2 - Thematic subsystem of human rights (conferences and councils)



Key: green = State Conferences; yellow = State Councils. Acronyms: Cf. LGBT = ; LGBT State Conference; Cf.DH = Human Rights State Conference; Cf.i = Elderly State Conference; Cf.JUV = Youth State Conference; Cf.M = Women State Conference; Cf.PD = People with Disabilities State Conference; CEE = Education State Council; CECOOP = Cooperativism State Council; CEAS = Social Assistance State Council; CES = Health State Council; CEPA = Agricultural and Agrarian Policy State Council; CAE = School Feeding State Council; CONEP = Cultural Heritage State Council; CONEPIR = Promoting Racial Equality State Council; CONSEC = Cultural Policy State Council; CEEPS = Popular Solidarity Economy State Council; CET = Tourism State Council; CEDIF = Diffused Rights State Council; CEI = Elderly State Council; CONEDH = Human Rights State Council; CEDCA = Children and Adolescents Rights State Council; CONPED = People with Disabilities State Council; CEM = Women's Policy State Council. Source: prepared by the authors - Research Data, 2016.

vulnerable groups represented there has different demands in each of these areas that have already addressed by other councils and conferences. Although in an analysis of the human rights subsystem this may demonstrate a weakness, the capillarity of representation in other subsystems may indicate strength. For example, in the education conferences, there is a strong representation of people with disabilities, particularly in working groups on inclusive education.

The second finding reveals that, despite the possible domination (Mansbridge et al., 2012) of the human rights conferences - given their position as the primary links between subsystem levels - we realize that six out of nine councils directly linked at conference level do not rely on the human rights conference to integrate themselves at the conference level. This fact leads us to suggest that there are conditions in the subsystem for the elaboration of alternative strategies to influence human rights policy, even indirectly.

We point to the possibility that important parts of this policy, related to specific minority groups, take place in deliberative processes linked to other arenas, in which interested actors join and in which they act as special connectors. For instance, we highlight the direct interaction between the State Council on Women's Policy (CEM, in Portuguese) and the conferences on LGBTs and women. As part of the human rights deliberative subsystem, we must consider how the discussions within the CEM are more likely to reach the conference on human rights and are mediated by the connectors (actors)

that circulate in the three conferences addressed in this paper. At these conferences, the actors meet with the other connectors (actors) that connect them to the State Council on Women's Policy.

These findings suggest that although participatory arenas, especially because of the human rights conference, can influence the human rights policy in Minas Gerais the discussions and demands from other arenas linked to the issue can find other ways. Hence, a broad discussion is guaranteed, reinforcing the argument that the democratic nature of deliberative politics is strengthened when the political process is more open to public debate. An integrated subsystem and the presence of alternative channels through which different visions, demands, and perspectives can flow are fundamental to the success of this process. We have no time and space to explore this issue of success here, as we have shown in another article in the same research (Silva et al., 2021).

### III.2. The connectors in the thematic subsystem

The meso perspective of deliberative subsystems proposed in this paper is carried out empirically based on the assumption that the members of deliberative arenas are important connectors of the system because they circulate through the different arenas that compose it. Methodologically, we applied network techniques in two ways to identify and analyze these subsystems. In previous work, we found that government representatives act as the primary connectors of the council subsystems.

By focusing on the state subsystem of human rights, we included arenas with different characteristics in the analysis: public policy conferences. This study allowed us to identify the participation of actors representing civil society as important connectors of deliberative subsystems. Figure 3 shows that the relationship between the conferences is grounded on the circulation of civil society representatives in the deliberative arenas (blue circles in the figure). We observed that 19 of the 27 conference connectors (70.37%) are delegates representing civil society.

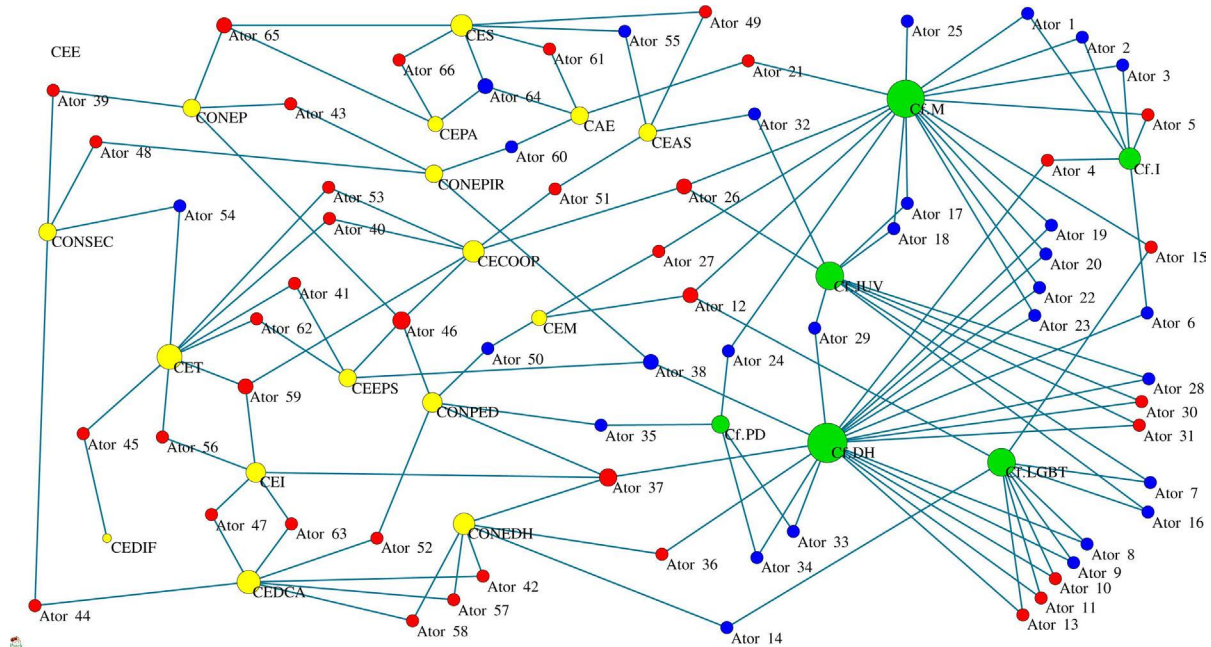
This finding demonstrates the importance of societal actors for the theory of deliberative systems. Considering the predominance of public power representatives at the council level (22 of 27 connectors belong to this segment in the subsystem analyzed in this paper, represented by red circles<sup>3</sup>), we consider the hypothesis that the dynamics of conferences allow greater participation of civil society actors, given their intermittent nature.

In contrast, councils operate with regular meetings, usually monthly, which makes it more difficult for actors to get involved in activities they cannot take get away from on a recurring basis, such as the work they do in their home organizations. This difference reduces participation costs and encourages more civil society representatives take part in conferences.

Specifically with regard to the fact that we are analyzing a process that takes place at state level, which implies the problem of scale, the frequency with which the conferences are held (usually every two years) favors greater planning of participation. This *modus operandi* goes against the logic of how the councils work, which tends to favor the participation of actors based in the state capital, where the councils have their headquarters, and the public power representatives, who incorporate participation in the councils as part of their daily work activities.

<sup>3</sup> The predominance of public authority representatives as connectors of the council subsystem was also observed in the case of the municipality of Belo Horizonte.

Figure 3 - Connectors in the human rights subsystem (conferences and councils)



Key: Yellow = State Councils; Green = State Conferences; Blue = Civil Society Representatives; Red = Public Power Representatives. Acronyms: Cf. LGBT = ; LGBT State Conference; Cf.DH = Human Rights State Conference; Cf.i = Elderly State Conference; Cf.JUV = ; Youth State Conference; Cf.M = Women State Conference; Cf.PD = People with Disabilities State Conference; CEE = Education State Council; CELOOP = Cooperativism State Council; CEAS = Social Work State Council; CES = Health State Council; CEPA = Agricultural and Agrarian Policy State Council; CAE = School Feeding State Council; CONEP = Cultural Heritage State Council; CONEPIR = Promoting Racial Equality State Council; CONSEC = Cultural Policy State Council; CEEPS = Popular Solidarity Economy State Council; CET = Tourism State Council; CEDIF = Diffused Rights State Council; CEI = Elderly State Council; CONEDH = Human Rights State Council; CEDCA = Children and adolescents Rights State Council; CONPED = People with Disabilities State Council; CEM = Women's Policy State Council. Source: prepared by the authors - Research Data, 2016.

By revealing itself as a multi-level phenomenon, the thematic subsystem approach imposes the challenge of analyzing the connection mechanism between the two constituent levels. Given the strategy adopted in this study, which focuses on the circulation of actors who act simultaneously in the deliberative arenas as connecting elements between them, we sought to identify the characteristics of such actors. Given the prevalence of diverse types of connectors at each level, this reveals a particular specialization of representatives - the public power as the primary connectors of the councils. On the other hand, civil society actors appear as priority conference connectors. In view of this, we wonder: have any of these groups or segments monopolized the function of connectors between the two different levels?

Figure 3 shows that, of the 10 connectors that circulate through the two types of arenas, 60% are public power representatives, and 40% are members of civil society, in the case analyzed. This indicates certain equality and balance in the exercise of this function between the two groups since the group of public power representatives has only two more members.

In addition to the difference in profile, it should be noted that only 15.15% (10 of 66 connectors) act as connectors between the two different levels. In other words, they simultaneously play the role of counselors and delegates within deliberative human rights subsystem in Minas Gerais. As we have seen, this function is not a privilege of public power or civil society. However, a more detailed analysis of Figure 2 may show that the connector role between

the two levels is most often exerted by actors that do not reveal themselves as the primary connectors within each level. Moreover, when the intra-level connectors also stood out in connecting the two levels of the subsystem, we did not observe, in the case studied, any tendency of them being exclusively associated with the conference or the council arena specifically.

This result reveals that the multi-level character of the thematic subsystem - and by extension, we believe that this hypothesis may hold true for the wider deliberative system of democracies - operates under a logic different from its component parts. In former work, we referred to the systems defined by the nature of arenas as subsystems. Deepening the investigation of the performance of inter-level connectors beyond what our analysis at the meso level suggests requires an approach based on qualitative methodologies, capable of investigating who these actors are and how they think. For now, we suggest the existence of a connection link in the integration of the deliberative subsystem. The interests, discourses, perspectives, and debates promoted between subsystems of different arenas (councils and conferences) can pass through the system. However, the subsystem does not have a single pattern of behavior by the actors that is easily captured by a single segment active in these arenas, not least because they have different actors, participatory and representative designs.

#### IV. Final remarks

This paper presented the analytical model of deliberative subsystems, which proposes a theoretical, analytical, and methodological adjustment to the systemic perspective recently proposed by different deliberative democracy scholars (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2010; Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012; Parkinson, 2016; Tonasoca, 2016). The systemic turn can be considered and named as the fourth generation of studies in deliberative democracy theory (Elstub et al., 2016).

The three previous generations were described and identified in the first part of this paper, which identified the main characteristics of the systemic deliberative perspective. This perspective has the merit of promoting the integration of the advances and findings of the three preceding generations. In other words, it is possible to identify a triple movement in the systemic turn, as it seeks to explicitly combine the advances and limits of the deliberative theory expressed by the following elements: strong normative premises; institutional viability of the deliberative model and consistent empirical results.

Therefore, it represents a significant advance in the scope of research carried out by deliberative democracy theorists. However, we have shown how challenges persist, in terms of methodological identification and analysis of the main connectors of the broad deliberative system of contemporary democracies (Parkinson, 2016; Mendonça, 2016). Similarly, there are problems regarding how the mechanisms for transmitting deliberations from one arena to the others within the system can be constituted (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2010; Tonasoca, 2016; Boswell et al., 2016).

In the second part of this paper, we briefly described how the systemic perspective was used to develop studies and research on participatory institutions in Brazil. We indicated how the dissemination of these institutions spread throughout the country. We then suggested the advances and limits of the use of the systemic perspective to understand and analyze the PIs.

We also demonstrated how the perspective of deliberative subsystems could be an essential analytical tool for overcoming some of the theoretical and methodological difficulties presented by the systemic approach to deliberative democracy. Subsystems are defined by three basic criteria: (1) the nature of the deliberative arenas, (2) the territorial dimension of the place where they are located, (3) and the thematic area of the public policy in which they are located. Methodologically, the model has resorted to the social network analysis (SNA) technique known as two-mode network. The research also used a meso-level approach, i.e. an analysis situated in the intermediate space between the macro-level (the broad deliberative system of democracies) and the micro-analytical level (the parts that make up broad deliberative system).

The findings of the previous and recent studies were described and analyzed in the third part of this paper. Results contribute to improving the model of deliberative subsystems (Figure 1) by granting relevance to the themes (line 4) and the different arenas in the mapping from a meso perspective. On the subject of human rights, the characteristics related to the way in which civil society current operates, as well as the transversality with other areas such as health, social assistance or education, directly interfere in its functioning.

Furthermore, the results reveal new aspects about the performance of political actors as connectors in deliberative systems, considering their characteristics (line 3, Figure 1). Firstly, we pointed out a particular specialization in the exercise of representative functions within the different deliberative arenas surveyed. On the one hand, in the arena of state councils, there is an expressive predominance of government actors as subsystem connectors, as approximately 80% of the actors participate in two or more councils simultaneously. On the other hand, in the conference arena, the main connectors are civil society actors, who represent 70.37%. The advances in our research agenda on deliberative subsystems point to the need to adopt social selection models applied in multi-level networks (Wang et al., 2016) so that we can better understand the operation of deliberative systems, especially the relationship between their constituent parts (the different arenas). The adaptation of such models is mainly revealed from the results reported in this paper. Our assumption for the next paper on this subject is that the deliberative arenas demonstrate specific behavior through their members that can be predicted.

Consequently, we consider the hypothesis that, in order to increase their influence in the deliberative process of public policy-making, members of deliberative arenas develop strategies limited by the natural or inherent characteristics of the segments of origin that they represent (government or civil society). Based on this idea, we suspect that policy councils are more closed institutions, in which their members develop strong ties with each other and strategically seek to position themselves in various conferences. On the other hand, conferences are more open arenas, legitimizing their deliberations within the system by seeking to connect to multiple councils as well as other conferences. In this sense, we expect the links between conference arenas consist primarily of co-participants in the councils, for there is a connection between the levels of councils and conferences, as shown in Figure 2.

In turn, the links established between conference participants are based on the friendship/knowledge relationship that participants maintain when they attend these events. We suspect that there are two mechanisms at work in this case, as individuals meet in councils and strategically go to different conferences. In another direction, actors meet at similar conferences and go together to other conferences in the same thematic area of human rights.

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## Entre conselhos e conferências: as arenas deliberativas sobre direitos humanos em Minas Gerais

Palavras-chave: direitos humanos, políticas públicas, sociedade civil, conselhos e conferências deliberativas, Análise de Rede Social.

**RESUMO Introdução:** A literatura sobre sistemas deliberativos recomenda investigar as conexões dos fóruns deliberativos com outras partes do sistema político e da sociedade. O artigo analisa a participação de atores governamentais e da sociedade civil em conselhos e conferências de políticas públicas sobre direitos humanos no estado de Minas Gerais, Brasil. Os objetivos são dois: propor um modelo teórico para estudar subsistemas deliberativos; e identificar os conectores de uma rede multinível composta por conselhos e conferências de Direitos Humanos. **Materiais e métodos:** Adotamos uma metodologia centrada na teoria de subsistemas, priorizando a dinâmica das arenas de deliberação e a sinergia entre conselhos em âmbitos local e estadual. Reinterpretamos o conceito de subsistema e desenvolvemos um modelo empírico que incorpora sua dimensão temática. Para examinar as interligações entre conselhos e conferências, recorremos a uma abordagem analítica conhecida como análise de redes de dois modos, também referida como análise de redes de afiliação, situada no domínio da Análise de Redes Sociais. **Resultados:** Os achados sugerem que o subsistema é altamente integrado. Contrastando com pesquisas anteriores, notamos que, paralelamente à relevância dos agentes governamentais na interligação das arenas, os participantes da sociedade civil desempenham um papel preponderante na articulação das diferentes áreas que constituem o subsistema. Este resultado destaca a especialização funcional dos agentes de ligação no contexto do sistema de deliberação. **Discussão:** Nossas descobertas contribuem em dois aspectos fundamentais para a literatura existente. Primeiramente, introduzimos um modelo teórico inovador para a análise de sistemas deliberativos. Em segundo lugar, recomendamos a utilização da análise de rede multinível como uma ferramenta eficaz para identificar as conexões entre múltiplas arenas.



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