**Reviving the demos**

How local participation of the people can restore democracy

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# Abstract

Amongst the inhabitants of today’s Western societies, there is a growing discontent with traditional models of state-level representative democracy. Specifically, the perceived distance between politics and citizens is a matter of increasing concern. The two main causes of this concern are a perceived loss of individual self-governance, on the one hand, and a perceived decrease of social cohesion, on the other. In this thesis, through a comparative analysis of Richard Dagger’s republican liberalism and Murray Bookchin’s confederal municipalism, my aim is to explore models of local political organization that could serve as an alternative to state-level organization. In this way, I hope to provide some suggestions as to how democracy could be revived through the participation of the people. Richard Dagger proposes a model of local representative democracy in which the state serves as the guarantor of individual rights. He argues that, because of the mutual interdependency between individual autonomy and shared civic virtues, the private citizen must be obliged to contribute to society. Murray Bookchin, alternatively, argues for state-less, direct democracy on the municipal level. According to him, both the individual and the municipal capacity for self-governance are incompatible with hierarchy. Accordingly, the state and capitalism must be abolished. Dagger’s combination of autonomy and civic virtue proves to be problematic in theory and practice. Bookchin’s argument for the abolishment of the state does not hold. Dagger’s practical implementation is more feasible but unlikely to make a real change within current democracy. Bookchin’s confederal municipalism is laborious, yet more promising to make for change in democracy by local participation of the people. As little research has been done on local democracy, this thesis offers a view on its potential to revive democracy. Other theories on local democracy and social movement that attempt to implement democracy locally are recommended for further research.

# Introduction

## Discontent democracy

In many of today’s western societies, there appears to be an increasing loss of faith in representative democracy. Many people with various political affiliations, are voicing their discontent about their democratic governments and the political system. For example, the ‘yellow vest’ movement, which is made up of tens of thousands of people, and which arose in France in November 2018, illustrates the sense of discontent with the French government ("The 'yellow vest' movement explained," 2018). Although the protest was sparked by the increase of car fuel taxes, the movement has since become a formation of different groups; all of them expressing their own grievances with the government resulting from misrepresentation in politics. The yellow vests that they wear are a symbol of their sense of invisibility to their elected political leaders. They demand to be seen and heard. In spite of their differences, what the protesters all have in common is the desire for a change of political organization (Lianos, 2019).

The yellow vest movement is only one example of the people’s dissatisfaction with liberal representative democracy in its current form. Research shows that there are more indicators of a decrease of trust in representative democracy (Wike, Silver, & Castillo, 2019). Like the ‘yellow vests’, some don’t feel heard or represented by their democratically elected government. They believe that they have no influence on politics and that their political leaders are inadequately managing societal and political issues. Others distrust politicians because of corruption scandals and the general alienation of the people from politics (Rosanvallon & Goldhammer, 2008). A large amount of research has been done to account for this discontent. At the root of people’s dissatisfaction with democracy lies a perceived sense of loss of self-government and the erosion of community (Sandel, 1998, p. 3). According to some, it is neo-liberal democracy which has diminished the feeling for community, the sense of cohesion that allows a nation’s citizens to conceive of themselves as a *demos* – as a unified civic body (Sandel, 2018). People have become estranged from each other and from society. This affects their expectations of the government. Pierre Rosanvallon describes present-day society as “a society of generalized distrust”, in which interpersonal distrust of people in society is interconnected with people’s trust in their government (Rosanvallon & Goldhammer, 2008, pp. 10-11).

This lack of faith in present-day democracy hasn’t gone unnoticed by today’s political parties. There has been a significant rise of a brand of populism whose main characteristic is its emphasis on the importance of the people’s voice (Sandel, 2018). Politicians – mostly those belonging to extreme right-wing parties – commonly respond to the discontent of the people by presenting them as the center of politics, and the importance of democracy as the foundation of society. For example, the far-right Spanish party VOX states: “VOX is a political party that has been created for the renewal and strengthening of Spanish democratic life.”[[1]](#endnote-1) One of the most prominent standpoints of Dutch Far-right *Forum voor Democratie* (Forum for Democracy, or FvD) in their last election campaign, was the fight against “cartels” in politics. The FvD considers these cartels to be a threat to society as the latter’s political interests don’t align with those of the people. “They work for themselves, not the country”, says the FvD.[[2]](#endnote-2) All this talk of reforming democracy sounds appealing, especially to those members of the population who believe that they are not being represented in politics. But the question remains how democracy should be changed to solve the issues mentioned above. If we indeed agree that western democracy stands in need of some kind of reform, then what kind of reforms do we envision, and, perhaps more importantly, what will be the extent of people’s participation in determining both the form and the content of such reforms?

## Local democracy – Reviving the demos through local participation

In this thesis, I will have a closer look at the works of Richard Dagger and Murray Bookchin, both of whom believe in a form of democracy in which local political participation of the people is essential (Bookchin, 1992; Dagger, 1997). Dagger and Bookchin agree that there exists a chasm between state-level politics and the people, which is why people ought to get politically engaged on a local level. It is there, on a local level, that people are able to get to know each other, to strengthen social cohesion. This, in combination with the fact that local politics is accessible than distant state-level politics, makes it more likely for people to participate politically, they argue.

However, the respective visions of Dagger and Bookchin on local democracy conflict in many respects. Broadly speaking, Dagger believes that the problem lies with the people themselves. That is, Dagger argues that people are politically apathetic, and that it is this apathy which keeps them from active political participation. By combining liberalism with republicanism, Dagger formulates a more active conception of citizenship that would obligate people to participate actively in politics (Dagger, 1997). He believes that the people of any given society are deeply interdependent. Accordingly, when individuals start acting merely out of self-interest this creates a problem for the whole society. Because the focus on individual rights eventually have negative consequences for everyone in society, Dagger proposes to add an important republican value to a less strict notion of liberalism, namely civic virtue, which is the politically determined codes of conduct of individuals in their roles of citizens towards society. For example, Dagger favors what he calls the principle of ‘fair play,’ which basically means that people ought to contribute to the society from which they benefit. The combination of individual autonomy, civic virtue and political obligation leads him to an ideal construction of a political society in the form of a local representative democracy through political decentralization of cities, with the preservation of the state as a guarantor of individual rights and as enforcer of political obligations.

Bookchin, on the other hand, believes that the problem of democracy is not caused by the reluctance of people to participate politically. Rather, says he, people are obstructed in their participation by the state and by capitalist society as a whole. Bookchin’s main theory, called ‘social ecology,’ is based on the idea that through the introduction of hierarchy in society, people have created a political disequilibrium socially as well as naturally (Bookchin, 1982, p. 21). He argues that both hierarchy and the domination of people by people are not natural phenomena but rather social constructions. According to him, these constructions have caused many social problems today such as poverty, racism, and sexism, to only name a few. To take it even one step further, Bookchin believes that these social forms of domination have resulted in the domination of human kind over nature, resulting in today’s a global environmental crisis. For this reason, Bookchin argues that social and ecological issues are intertwined and cannot simply be separated. It is because of these social as well as ecological issues that people are discontented as to their capacity for political contributions. This is precisely why Bookchin rejects representative democracy; there should be no (political) hierarchy to begin with. According to him, the people should be the sole political decision-makers through face-to-face assemblies on municipal level. His name for this alternative form of political organization is ‘confederal municipalism.’

The interesting thing about the figures of Dagger and Bookchin, and my reason for giving them a central place in this thesis, is that they stand on opposite sides of two interrelated debates concerning the reviving of democracy. The first debate revolves around the choice between a ‘state’ and a ‘non-state society.’ Where Dagger defends the state as a guarantor of autonomy, Bookchin conceives of the state itself as a perverter of political autonomy. According to Dagger, people are to be persuaded by the principle of fair play to contribute to society, but in the end political participation is mandatory and to be overseen by the state. Bookchin, on the other hand, passionately rejects the state as he believes it to be an inherent obstructer of individual freedom. The second debate revolves around the choice between representative and direct democracy. While Dagger argues in favor of the first, which he believes should be more intensively organized on a local level, Bookchin is convinced that direct democracy is the only true form of democracy. From the positions that Dagger and Bookchin take in these two debates we can establish a broader understanding of the available theoretical strategies on the issues of democratic reform and public participation.

Locality is the common denominator in both theories, and is in both cases framed as a response to the discontent with representative democracy. In this thesis I will analyze and compare Dagger’s Republican Liberalism and Bookchin’s confederal municipalism in order to answer the following research question how democracy may be revived through local participation of the people.

## Societal relevance

The term “democracy” comes from the Greek *Demokratía* which means ‘rule by the people’. It is a governing form that can be practiced in many different ways. Today, it seems that the most common form, representative democracy, has drifted off from one essential aspect of democracy, namely the people. If people do not feel represented by those to whom they have surrendered their political power, then representative democracy is not functioning as it should. This does not, however, mean that it can’t be reformed to make it do so. A restructuring of the political system is required in order to revive democracy in a way that it gives people the idea that they have an influence in politics; by giving them an active political role. This thesis offers potential ways to reach that goal.

## Scientific relevance

A lot of research has been done on the problem of discontent with democracy. There is an endless array of work on different forms of democracy and the problems that arise with them. Yet, the majority of this work concerns state level democracy, while relatively little has been written on local democracy. This is why both Dagger and Bookchin offer interesting and relevant views on the revival of democracy through political participation on a local level. Although they have very different views on what democracy ought to be and as to what role the people are to have in it, they have a strong common focus on the locality of politics. They both believe, that in order to obtain more political engagement of the people, it is essential to shape conditions that enable them to do so. The distance between politics and the people is largely due to the size of states which hinders the cultivation of a sense of politics. For this reason, politics must again be brought closer to home.

## Outline

I will this thesis by elaborating on Dagger’s Republican Liberalism. This theory is based on Dagger’s conception on autonomy, civic virtue and citizenship. Dagger explores the meaning of individual autonomy and its interdependency with community which requires the implementation of civic virtue. Once this interrelation is established, he goes on to discuss the various rights and obligations that go along with being a citizen and the manner in which civic virtues, as a conception of fair play, add to the improvement of citizenship. In chapter 3, I will discuss Bookchin’s confederal municipalism. His conception of hierarchy, freedom and direct democracy are at the core of this theory. Hierarchy, according to Bookchin, is at the root of social and political disequilibrium. It is a socially constructed phenomenon that we must get rid of in order to obtain the freedom of an organic society. Reforming societies into organic ones, in which all people are actively and publicly involved, would enable true democracy (Bookchin, 1982). The fourth chapter will be a comparison of Dagger and Bookchin’s theories by which I intend to show how, despite the different concepts that they use, they discuss the same topics that are relevant to my research question. The fifth chapter is a critical analysis of both theories. It demonstrates the strengths and weaknesses of the authors’ theories which will allow me to show which one of the two carries the most potential for the revival of democracy through active, local participation of the people.

# 1. Republican Liberalism – Dagger

## Introduction

Dagger’s Republican Liberalism is based on the idea that an effusive importance of individual rights in society is untenable because one can only obtain and maintain these individual rights due to the community. In order to make for a sustainable community civic virtue is required (Dagger, 2005, p. 178). Civic virtue generally entails the politically determined codes of conduct of individuals in their roles of citizens towards society. A domination of individual rights goes at the expense of a sense of community and of the responsibility of citizens for that community, which undermines the creation and cultivation of civic virtue. The importance of community made Dagger reanalyze what a well-functioning society requires. What role do people have to take on a strong civic responsibility? Or, what does citizenship entail to create and sustain a democracy? The establishment of rights requires that of obligations which, Dagger says, are to be embodied in civic virtues. For Dagger, obligations are best exercised through the cultivation of political awareness and participation of citizens.

Having rights as a citizen implies an interdependency between citizens; the ability to govern oneself, which is autonomy, is made possible and cultivated by others. Subsequently, the fundamental right to autonomy implies the protection and promotion of the ability to self-govern by laws (Dagger, 1997, p. 32). Dagger proposes to combine core values of two seemingly incompatible political ideologies, liberalism and republicanism, into republican liberalism (Dagger, 1997, p. 12). He merges the liberal values of individual rights and autonomy with the republican notions of civic virtue and responsibility. Dagger does not only argue that they are compatible; he in fact believes that these values are mutually implied. Supposedly, republican liberalism provides citizens with the tools to develop their autonomy; the ability to lead a self-governed life, while respecting the importance and necessity of community (Dagger, 1997, p. 195). Dagger’s theory provides an interesting perspective on what political society and democracy as such entail. He offers a view on how the latter should be achieved and on what role citizens have in this process. Accordingly, Dagger’s insights go a long way in answering my question as to how democracy could be revived through local political participation of the people.

## Individual rights and autonomy

Dagger believes that in present-day, democratic society, there is an overemphasis on individual rights. This constitutes a problem, he claims, as putting one’s individual rights first is to prioritize one’s personal interest over the common interest. In short, overemphasizing individual rights goes at the expense of community (Dagger, 1997, p. 3). Dagger’s seemingly paradoxical insight is that the securing of individual rights implies a strong civic community. Dagger states that for individual rights to subsist, there is an inescapable need of other people’s commitment to such rights. There is a strong interdependence between people in society, on which basis the right to autonomy, which is the ability to govern oneself, is both obtained and maintained (Dagger, 1997, p. 30). The ability for self-governance is not a given. People do not possess it a priori. Rather, this ability must be facilitated by the community and protected by the state. This fact calls for a certain conduct, by individuals, towards the community from which they benefit. If individuals do not commit to society, they inadvertently undermine the very structure that facilitates their own autonomy. This insight leads Dagger to argue in favor of civic virtue, as this concept describes the contributive role that people ought to play in society; namely their role as citizens (Dagger, 1997, p. 13). Civic virtue denotes the normative determination of this role, and places central focus on the general willingness to put public before private interests in order to benefit both the community and the individual (Dagger, 1997, p. 14).

The combination of autonomy and civic virtue might seem contradictory, but Dagger attempts to demonstrate how they are in fact inextricably linked (Dagger, 1997, p. 17). His understanding of autonomy doesn’t merely concern independence and self-governance. As mentioned before, the latter restrictive conception of autonomy proves itself to be self-destructive, according to Dagger. According to him, it is virtually impossible for an individual to be completely self-sufficient in society. Perhaps if individuals lead a most technologically primitive sort of life they might come close to being self-sufficient, for instance by growing their own food or building their own houses. Yet, for many activities that go beyond satisfying such basic needs, we cannot simply provide for ourselves. Take a look at every-day activities and the objects and services - provided by other people - that are required to perform them. One needs an alarm to wake up, soap to get clean, plates and cutlery to eat breakfast with, the newspaper to stay informed, a bicycle, car or public transport to get from A to B, etc. And we are not even past noon yet. Almost everything we use or consume in society was produced by a chain of actors on which we rely.

The cooperation of other people is also a requisite for the securing of individuals rights. Without the cooperation of others in respecting one’s individual rights, legally speaking, such rights would be worthless. One’s right to vote is worth nothing if that casted vote isn’t acknowledged by one’s fellow citizens and the government. The right to inviolability is useless if people that do you physical harm wouldn’t be punished in accordance with the law that is secured by the state.

Another aspect, which is at least as important as the practical necessity of the cooperative other, is the existential and educational necessity of the other’s good will. It is the presence of, and interaction with other individuals around us that establish our conception of the self which is necessary for making decisions, and thus for being autonomous (Dagger, 1997, p. 39). Simply put, in obtaining autonomy people are interdependent and therefore reliant on community.

It is important to emphasize that Dagger makes a distinction between the concepts of autonomy, freedom and liberty. Although these terms are similar and overlap to a certain extent, autonomy is distinguished from the latter two through the associated concept of consciousness (Dagger, 1997, p. 29). Dagger states that only human beings can be autonomous – as opposed to other animals – because they are capable of reflecting upon the choices that they make. According to Dagger, “autonomy is the ability and capacity to govern oneself” (Dagger, 1997, p. 30). Liberty and freedom do not intrinsically imply self-governance, whereas autonomy does.

The idea that people themselves choose the rules that they live by – which is what autonomy means – implies that choices can in fact be made; that there are different alternatives to choose from. These alternatives can only be known to an individual when they are demonstrated by others. Other people are needed, first, in order for one to be able to reflect on one’s choices, and, subsequently, to make better decisions. Parents and teachers, for example, are the usually the first to inform people on the many possibilities of the world, but Dagger’s argument concerns more than just them. The development and cultivation of autonomy is a continuous process and it involves everyone that has even the smallest bit of influence on an individual. Everyone around us helps us to develop a sense of reflection, on ourselves and the world, in order to make an informed decision concerning the types of rules by which we choose to live. One’s interaction with others, therefore, determines one’s development of autonomy. Autonomy, like any other ability, is measured by degrees, and mostly with respect to the level of its cultivation. (Dagger, 1997, p. 38). To develop one’s autonomy one has to be well informed, which, again, requires the presence of others. This means that autonomy implies a seemingly contradictory interdependency between people; to obtain the independency for self-rule, one relies on others (Dagger, 1997, p. 39).

We have now established that autonomy and private rights do not imply the isolation of people from others surrounding them, or from the society that they live in. In fact, they need community in order to be autonomous. Even those that are merely focused on their own rights must find a way to co-exist with others. This makes community an indispensable necessity for one’s own subsistence. That begs the question: how do we co-exist? What can people expect from, and what are they expected to do for society? This is where Dagger tries to add a republican touch to the liberal society that informs current democracy. He does this by adding the notion of civic virtue to the already established values of individual rights and autonomy.

## Obligation and community

Dagger considers society to be a cooperative enterprise. This means that society and its organization are a shared endeavor of all members of that society (Dagger, 1997, p. 59). And although the concept of community is very important in his view, he doesn’t hold a so-called communitarian view on civic participation as a voluntary act of solidarity. Communitarians, says Dagger, do not consider political engagement in the community to be an obligation. Their personal identity is so closely knit with the community that it is logical to engage politically, no questions asked, for the people *are* the community. But Dagger argues that an overemphasis on community would go at the expense of autonomy. Community is important for the cultivation of autonomy, but a sense of community that is too strong undermines any personal autonomy (Dagger, 1997, p. 53). A very strong sense of community is likely to make the people either uncritical of community, or it would hinder them to express criticism on the community. This is why Dagger is in favor of focusing on the civic aspects of politics, rather than the community as such (Dagger, 2009, p. 317). A community isn’t inherently political, which is why certain conditions are required to make it so.

The notion of society or community as a cooperative enterprise fits this view perfectly. In a cooperation people don’t uncritically exercise the tasks they are expected to do. Unlike communitarians, he feels that people, even though it would benefit them, wouldn’t automatically engage politically in their community without convincing conditions to persuade them to do so (Beiner, 1999, p. 431). This is why an account for political obligation is required. Dagger is in favor of the principle of fair play which means that “anyone who takes part in and enjoys the benefits of a cooperative practice must contribute to the production of these benefits even when his or her contribution is not necessary to their production” (Dagger, 1997, p. 46). This principle is based on reciprocity; society provides you with the rights, goods and services that enable the establishment and cultivation of autonomy, so you will do your fair share of the collective contribution to society. Everyone benefits from a functioning society which is why it would be *fair* for everyone to do their part.

So how do we get people to actually do their part in society? Dagger believes that people rely on each other and society, but he acknowledges that it is difficult to activate people to get involved and carry responsibility for that society. Especially in democratic societies, citizens can have a passive attitude, not in the least when it comes to political engagement. On top of this, people aren’t necessarily stimulated to participate politically. Dagger calls this the problem of apathy (Dagger, 1997, p. 132). He has found that this political abstinence can only be overcome by obligating people to participate politically. How this obligation is put into practice I will explain further on in this chapter. First, I will elaborate on the importance of sense of citizenship in order for individuals to feel accountable in society. Without this connection, people are less likely to take an active part in society and develop a corresponding sense of responsibility. In order to establish this connection, a concept of an active, involved citizen is required.

## Citizenship

The importance of interdependence that I have explained before, is essential to Dagger’s idea of citizenship. Citizens need the community and thus can’t merely act out of self-interest. Civic virtue needs to be implemented in order to have people contribute to society. In this context, Dagger points the theory of ‘the assurance game,’ which he considers to be the best way to achieve a fair cooperation in society (Dagger, 1997, p. 113). According to this theory, all participants in society are basically rational and conditionally altruistic. This means that they require the assurance of the commitment of other participating members in society in order to be and to stay involved.

Dagger proposes five key factors that are interconnected and are essential to the establishment of the assurance of participation of oneself *and* others. Firstly, the group must be *small* enough to enable solidarity amongst its members. This alone is a difficult requirement to fulfil as the majority of political democratic societies as we know them today are organized on very large scales. Secondly, the group must be *stable*. Again, a difficult demand to meet as there is a high mobility of people which causes a dynamically changing population. The third factor is *fairness* in society. Members must feel they are treated fairly because the individual’s contribution in a cooperation only makes sense if people can be sure that the well-being of that cooperation will benefit them personally (Dagger, 1997, p. 114). Individuals will not be drawn to invest time and effort in a system that doesn’t give them their fair share in return. The fourth point concerns the importance of *communication* for the obvious reason that proper communication informs individuals on who is and who isn’t cooperative in the assurance game (Dagger, 1997, p. 115). Again, communication is more advantageous in smaller groups as it decreases the chance of miscommunication and misunderstandings. The last and most essential aspect for this thesis is *participation*. It is important to note that Dagger doesn’t see political participation as a mere goal in itself. Rather, it is a necessary means for people to connect and to feel attached to the society of which they are a part. This will increase people’s awareness of their interdependency and thus facilitate conditional altruism. Simply put, by being amongst each other, people become aware of what society does for them and what they are to do for society in return. They are confronted with the responsibility that they have towards others and vice versa.

There are three contexts, says Dagger, in which the factors enabling conditional altruism must be stimulated in order to enhance citizenship. They are education, decentralization of cities and participation, all of three on which I will now elaborate.

### Education

First of all, education is essential in the creation of an engaged citizenship as opposed to individuals that merely develop personal interests. According to Dagger, education should enable individual autonomy as well as cultivate civic virtue (Dagger, 1997, p. 117). As I mentioned previously, Dagger holds that people have a consciousness which separates them from other beings, and gives them the potential to be autonomous. At the same time, people cannot obtain this autonomy all on their own. By linking autonomy with civic virtue in education, people are taught on the one hand, that the government ought to guarantee basic individual rights of everyone in the community. On the other hand, it is the citizens’ responsibility to respect and to defend those rights for all in community when the state should fail to do so (Dagger, 1997, p. 131).

### Decentralization

For republican liberals, traditionally, the city is the designated area for the implementation and flourishing of citizenship (Dagger, 1997, p. 155). Modern-day cities, however, are far from ideal models, considering their big size, their political fragmentation, and the high mobility of their inhabitants. All these aspects hinder the factors of conditional altruism and thus the sense of citizenship. Dagger believes that creating smaller cities through the decentralization, rather than the fragmentation, of metropoles is the solution to this problem (Dagger, 1997, p. 168). There are two types of fragmentation that Dagger refers to which are geographical – the fragmentation of political authority – and functional – entailing the transfer of city government tasks to professionals (Dagger, 1997, p. 159). A geographical fragmentation can lead to a city being divided into hundreds of local governments which is a logistic and judicial nightmare. The privatization of governmental functions, on the other hand, clouds the visibility and creates a distance between politics and the people. In addition to the problems with fragmentation, modern cities are characterized by the high mobility of people which makes it challenging for people to build a civic relationship for cooperation.

That is why Dagger suggests to politically decentralize cities which will be ensured to be small and stable, enabling fairness, proper communication and the local participation of citizens (Dagger, 1997, p. 167). This new decentralized politics is based on a representative electoral system. A city (including suburbs), governed by an elected mayor and council, is to be divided into districts that consist of smaller wards. All these political subdivisions will have their own elected councils. This creates many more political positions that citizens can fill in, which is the most direct participation one can think of. Apart from participation, decentralization creates stability and it enables people to get to know and trust each other. Its local character enables good communication which makes a fair society more feasible and with it overall participation more likely.

In order to once again emphasize the importance of the display of civic virtue in society, and call attention to the benefit of everyone’s autonomy, Dagger names ‘civic memory’ as stimulator for people to feel part of the community. The term civic memory refers to the shared history and development of a place – like a city – that makes people feel connected to it, which is exactly what is needed for people to participate in politics on a local scale, and to make for an optimal community from which all members benefit.

### Participation

As mentioned before, Dagger believes political participation to be crucial for the functioning of democratic society, as it strengthens civic virtue and citizenship, which in turn are essential for the safeguarding of the autonomy of individual people. Dagger compares different ways to establish political participation. The suggestion of instant direct democracy in the form of computer-device voting where a majority vote is decisive in the adoption of proposals, is quickly revoked. He believes instant direct democracy to be too time-consuming. People don’t have the time to become informed enough on complex politic issues (Dagger, 1997, pp. 141-145). He also argues that instant direct democracy is discouraging of active citizenship and community as it only requires voting which can be executed without any further political engagement. He does mention that these arguments only apply to instant direct democracy; not all types of direct democracy, which might offer other implementations.

Dagger is an advocate of local representative democracy. Voting, accordingly, is essential to him. Failing to vote means that people are benefiting from a society that they do not contribute to (Dagger, 1997, p. 148). Voting increases political participation, which is why Dagger would like it to be compulsory (Dagger, 1997, p. 147). As a less demanding form of obligatory participation, Dagger suggests that voter-registration should be mandatory. This, he believes, would increase the chance of people voting. Apparently, in his mind, the act of voting would make one more prone to participate in other political activities, like engaging with representatives and having political discussions with other citizens. It is important to note here that Dagger has a distinctly American perspective of politics. The voting rate in the United States is very low in comparison to other democratic countries. Only 56 percent of the U.S. voting-age population voted in the 2016 presidential elections (Lynch, 2018). This explains why Dagger might think that resolving the voting issue might make a significant difference in the functioning of democracy. He understands that obligating people to vote might be counterproductive and cause people to become resentful for being pressured. This may also affect the way they vote. Responding to these issues, Dagger draws on Rousseau to account for this obligation. Voting, he says, is ultimately beneficial for an individual as it is a civic virtue that contributes to the community and thus, in the end, to an individual’s autonomy. Even if a people do not want to vote, whether this is due to ignorance or simple unwillingness, obligating them to vote is, in fact, to forcefully free them (Dagger, 1997, p. 149). This is why Dagger believes that the benefits of obligatory voting outweigh the potential downsides.

## Conclusion Dagger

What is most important to understand from Dagger’s theory is his insistence on the interconnectedness and interdependency of autonomy and civic virtue in citizenship. Dagger acknowledges the importance of being autonomous in the sense of having the ability to have a self-governed life. But he emphasizes the necessity of community in order to both obtain and maintain autonomy. This is why civic virtue is essential to his normative interpretation of citizenship and participation of the citizen. All citizens are thus interdependent for the subsistence of their own autonomy which means everyone ought to do their part in society. His fair play principle is intended to defend this idea by posing five conditions that cultivate conditional altruism; they are small size community, stability, fairness, communication and participation. Meeting these conditions, Dagger believes, will reassure individuals of the cooperation of others in the community, which will then move them, in turn, to become actively engaged themselves. These conditions are to be met in the contexts of education, in the decentralized cities and in the participation of citizens to strengthen citizenship. Dagger’s design of citizenship enforces a notion of individual autonomy – the ability to self-govern – that is informed and cultivated by the community surrounding the individual.

Dagger’s theory is best summed up in the following quote: “a republican liberal will aim to promote the civic virtues that enhance the individual’s ability to lead a self-governed life as a cooperating member of a political society” (Dagger, 1997, p. 195). A citizen can live an autonomous life due to his or her membership in society, for which he or she ought to live in line with civic virtue. Living virtuously as a citizen means respecting individual rights, valuing autonomy, tolerating different opinions and beliefs, playing fair, cherishing civic memory, and participating actively in the community. In order to uphold these values, says Dagger, there is a need for obligation and control. Public entities like the state and rule of law are important factors for the establishment and cultivation of virtuous citizenship as they function as a safeguard of people’s rights and of their ability to cultivate autonomy and civic virtue.

# 2. Libertarian Municipalism - Bookchin

Murray Bookchin has a more critical view on current society in democracy under state rule. He believes that representative democracy as we know it today is not democratic at all, and that the people’s alienation from politics and the domination of state and capitalism over the people have caused major societal as well as ecological problems. He wrote the following: “If we do not do the impossible, we shall be faced with the unthinkable.” This citation from *The Ecology of Freedom*, resonates the urgency to radically and immediately change the organization of the political and social realm in order to prevent further damage to the world and its inhabitants (Bookchin, 1982, p. 41).

Bookchin refers to the social and ecological crises that the world is facing today. He states that these crises have been caused by an accumulated history of hierarchy, currently identifiable as state politics and capitalism. The transition from organic societies into hierarchical societies over the course of history has led people to lose touch with the social and the political. They have handed over the organization of their societies to external entities and internalized an hierarchical psyche that has normalized an unnatural and unequal relationship amongst humans and between humans and nature. The most important features of Bookchin’s work that I will discuss here are the crucial interconnectedness of society and nature, profoundly explained in his *social ecology*, and the restoration of the rule of people, or direct democracy, through confederal municipalism.

## Libertarian or confederal municipalism

Bookchin’s theories offer an interesting point of view on my research question that mostly concerns local democracy and the role of people in it. Bookchin pleads for the realization of a society in which politics and democracy retrieve their true and original meaning. He suggests libertarian municipalism as a promising political project to meet these demands. It is important to note that Bookchin’s conception of libertarianism is a reaction to what he considers the appropriation of the word by right-wing political parties. In a 1985 lecture on forms of freedom, he explains that these parties have changed the original meaning of the school of libertarianism in their search of liberty rather than freedom ("Forms of Freedom - Talk - 1985," 2013). By liberty he means owning property and using it as one pleases. Whereas freedom, to Bookchin, signifies the absence of hierarchy, on which I will elaborate in this chapter. According to Bookchin, original term libertarianism has been created in times that the French government cast aspersions on anarchism and in which people who identified with this school of thinking were in jeopardy of being prosecuted. In his work he uses libertarian municipalism and confederal municipalism interchangeably. This political system is based on the premises of policy-making through citizen participation in assemblies and administration by confederated municipalities. The implementation of this scheme implies the absolute abolishment of the state and the capitalist system in order to do away with any kind of hierarchy and thus recover the power of the people.

Confederal municipalism is the political implementation of Bookchin’s social ecology. At the core of this theory lies the idea that people in society should live in harmony with one another as well as with nature in order to live a free, self-governing life. The emphasis of social ecology is on how these two – society and nature – are intertwined and interdependent. The required harmony has been disrupted throughout human history because of domination of human by human and hierarchical institutions. Hierarchy amongst humans has caused the domination of humans over nature to that extent that both are now dangerously threatened in their subsistence . One of the reasons is the wrongful separation between social and natural phenomena which gets in the way of properly resolving issues that concern them both. In western, capitalist democracies issues are classified as either social or natural, as if they were separate categories. However, Bookchin insists, natural and social phenomena are interconnected and intertwined.

In this chapter I will first explain the theoretical foundation of Bookchin’s revolutionary views concerning democracy, which is rooted in social ecology. This theory is essential to the understanding of his view of the world and the place that humanity has in it. It then explains the role he attributes to citizens in society. I shall elaborate on the concepts of nature, hierarchy and freedom which are crucial to his idea of a path towards true democracy. This theoretical conception will then lead to his practical approach towards defying the institutionalized power of national politics and replacing it entirely with a municipal politics in which all power belongs to the people. By implementing libertarian municipalism, Bookchin aims for “a recovery of new participatory politics structures around free, self-empowered, and active citizens (1992, p. 228).” At the end of this chapter it will be clear how Bookchin’s radical change of the political and social realm centers around the participation of the people and what their place in society and nature ought to be.

## Human kind and the natural world – Social Ecology

According to Bookchin, people wrongfully separate natural and social phenomena. He states that nature and society are dynamic and inseparably intertwined. There hides a great danger in the denial of this interconnectedness by categorizing issues as merely natural – climate change, natural disasters, extinction of species – or social – poverty, inequality, refugee crises. Failing to acknowledge how ecological issues are in fact social issues and vice versa forms a consequential obstruction in the search of problem resolution. In order to understand this dynamic unity of nature and society we turn to social ecology.

In order explain the interconnectedness and interdependence of nature and society, it is important to understand his concepts of first (biological) and second (social) nature and the intended transcendence into a third, *free nature.* “Biological nature is above all the cumulative evolution of ever-differentiating and increasingly complex life-forms with a vibrant and interactive organic world” (Bookchin, 1990, p. 29). Basically, first nature is nature as we commonly experience it; it is the evolution of all organisms that has eventually also led to human life. Note how first nature is not a separate entity from human kind. Second nature is the product of the evolution of first nature and what we consider society; it is all that is created and institutionalized by humans, such as the political, the cultural and the social (Bookchin, 1990, pp. 31-32). It is in second nature that phenomena like class, hierarchy and domination have come into being, making them social conceptions, rather than natural elements. This is highly important in Bookchin’s theory, as it supposedly proves that domination and lack of freedom are not natural – as in originating in first nature – , rational and, most importantly, inevitable phenomena. They can in fact be changed. I will return to the concept of hierarchy later.

As mentioned before, Bookchin’s aim is for first and second nature to transcend into free nature which is the intended ecological society that is based on harmonious interaction between human society and natural environment (Bookchin, 1990, p. 33). Bookchin draws upon dialectical naturalism to explain people’s moral and rational responsibility towards first nature to clarify the logic of free nature (Biehl, 1999, pp. 223-224). The human species has separated itself from first nature by its awareness of the self, their consciousness and ability to self-reflect. But even though they have evolved into a second nature, the fact remains that it emerged from first nature, making humanity an inherent part of first nature and its continuing evolution. This point is crucial for the clarification of Bookchin’s view of humanity’s place in the world. Even though people have the capacity to destroy nature doesn’t mean they have the right to. Most importantly, doing so is an act of self-destruction. There ought to be no hierarchy between humans and nature. More logically, human kind should take its capacity to self-reflect and take it back to first nature as part of the ongoing evolution. This would make for a dynamic unity in which first and second nature are harmoniously integrated “into a free, rational and ethical nature.”

According to Bookchin, there ought to be no domination of either people over people, nor of people over domination. He even believes it to be an unnatural phenomenon. This begs the question how hierarchy of humans over nature has come about, considering its irrationality. This is what I will elaborate on next.

## Hierarchy and Limited Freedom

According to Bookchin, hierarchy is not a natural phenomenon but rather a socially and materially constructed one. It is a structure that is the result of complex social dynamics; thus socially implemented rather than a natural given like many might think. Besides, hierarchy has not always been an immutable part of societal life. Bookchin denies the idea that organic societies, by which he refers to preliterate societies, were hierarchical. He argues that differences between people were considered a “unity of diversity” instead of an indication for social ranking (Bookchin, 1982, p. 5). A common conception of domination is that it originated in times of ecological scarcity, known as “periods of difficulty” (Rudy, 1998, p. 278). But according to Bookchin, ecological scarcity was either no issue, or it had no effect on the social equilibrium within a community. He draws upon history to demonstrate that hierarchy only arose because of human insecurities which led them to seek power over others, starting with gerontocracy (Bookchin, 1982, p. 12). In this structure, elderly sought to guarantee their material livelihood, which they were challenged to provide for by themselves because of the decrease of physical strength, by exercising power through their superior social knowledge. After this followed shamanism in which shamans used their knowledge to dominate over others, the priestly caste using religion to dominate, and, still present today, male dominance over females; all exercising power over others to safeguard themselves. If hierarchy and domination are indeed not natural facts, but rather socially constructed phenomena, it means that current hierarchical institutions that define the social and political realms are not inevitable and unchangeable. In fact, Bookchin says, they can and should be changed – or even more radically, removed – as they deprive people of power and freedom.

It is important not to confuse hierarchy and classes (Bookchin, 1982, p. 4). Hierarchy existed in societies before classes did and creating a class-less society would not automatically resolve hierarchy. Besides, linking hierarchy merely to class differences denies other hierarchical issues like sexism, racism and nationalism (Bookchin, 2015, p. 20). The issue of hierarchy needs to be addressed explicitly and cannot be denied by merely re-organizing or removing certain institutions. It comprises a bigger structural issue. This is because hierarchy is not merely a social condition; it is not only a social structure that defines social and political relations. Hierarchy also influences the psyche of people; their consciousness, the way they perceive themselves, others and the world, which consequently determines their attitude and behavior in and towards society (Best, 1998, p. 341). In order to abolish hierarchy all together, a new culture must be created, a new way of thinking (Bookchin, 1982, p. 340). It requires an attitude that changes the hierarchical doctrine that is so deeply rooted in mind and society.

According to Bookchin, hierarchy is not a new phenomenon but in current society it has taken on the form of capitalism and the state. Bookchin states that capitalism has caused the increase of social inequality and injustice (Bookchin, 2015, p. 20). In order to implement true democracy, capitalism must be done away with all together. To him, it is the embodiment of the concentration of power with a small dominant group. There is no decreasing or introducing a softer form of capitalism if the aim is to create a society in which free citizens are self-governing. Bookchin warns for “workplace democracy” which creates the illusion of people obtaining some power while in fact, this distraction from where the real power lies makes them complicit in their own exploitation (Bookchin, 2015, p. 82). As long as capitalism exists, hierarchy is maintained and fortified, which keeps the power with the powerful few. Bookchin’s aim is to create an organic society that is based on egalitarian, non-coercive cooperation in which individuals live in harmony with each other and the natural world (Best, 1998, p. 342).

Harmony signifies respecting and stimulating the dynamics between people and that of people with nature, aiming to sustain rather than violate it. Bookchin describes what he considers to be more harmonious times, in which people used to have spaces where they would meet, which enabled a more engaged political life. Bookchin says that for example in the thirties of the previous century, people felt they had more control over their lives because they lived in neighborhoods in which there was more social cohesion. There were public spaces where people encountered each other in a casual manner; where they interacted naturally which enabled communication and social dynamics. Because of increased capitalist commodity thinking this has changed. People have changed the way they see each other. Instead of an interdependent community in which people know one another and rely on each other which created a sense of safety and harmony, people are now competitors. They *need* something from the other in the material sense. A telling observation that he shares is how capitalist thinking manifests itself in the language we use, like not “buying” an idea (“This panic about climate change ? I’m not buying it!”) or “investing” in a relationship. Capitalism and the state ought to be exchanged for a harmonious community which will make for a more egalitarian and free society. I will next explain what role politics will have in such a society.

## Politics – Return to the People

“Politics, almost by definition, is the active engagement of free citizens in the handling of their municipal affairs and in their defense of freedom” (Bookchin, 2015, p. 23). Bookchin argues strongly against national representative democracy. He describes party-politics as a top-down ruling form that is distant from the people who in fact should have the ruling power (Bookchin, 2015, p. 77). The issue is that over time the concepts of social, political and state have become intertwined and interchangeably used (Bookchin, 1992, p. 226). This has caused the people to have lost their sense of what politics is and what it means to be political. People have handed over their political tasks to professionals, namely politicians, which has caused politics to become an activity that is external to the people. Bookchin even considers the state as a formation that is alien to the social and political realms. Rather than serving these realm, “the state has been an end in itself” (Bookchin, 2015, p. 79). This clarifies why Bookchin believes that society and its politics must get rid of the state all together.

The abolishment of the state is an essential and non-negotiable premise for the realization of true democratic politics – people’s power to rule themselves – because power cannot be shared by the state and the people; power is either with the people or with the state (Bookchin, 1992, p. 284). Any so-called shared power can only exist in a phase of transition and is still then prone to shift back to the state. This means that politics need to be redefined. Bookchin suggests a “return to the original Greek meaning as management of the community, polis, by means of direct face-to-face assemblies of the people in the formation of public policy and based on an ethics of complementarity and solidarity” (Bookchin, 2015, p. 78). A return to locality is essential for the realization of this form of politics. According to Bookchin, municipalities have the great potential to enable “a dialectic of social development and reason” (Bookchin, 2015, p. 27). It is locality that facilitates individuals to meet one another, exchange thoughts, and engage with one another, developing people’s minds and discourse in society (Bookchin, 2015, p. 26).

Bookchin created a blue print for this new politics in libertarian municipalism which he believes is truly democratic. It is the practical politics that derives from the political theory of social ecology. It aims to give freedom and power to the people by institutionalizing it in decision-making through public assemblies (Bookchin, 2015, p. 87). He states that “municipal freedom is the basis for political freedom and political freedom is the basis for individual freedom – a recovery of a new participatory politics structured around free, self-empowered, and active citizens” (Bookchin, 1992, p. 228).

## Put into practice – Libertarian Municipalism

In libertarian municipalism an important distinction is made between policy-making and administration (Bookchin, 2015, p. 81). The actual content of societal topics and thus decision-making on political policy must be in the hands of free citizens. They must assemble in communities or neighborhoods for decision-making. The executive part, the administration, is to be executed by confederal councils that comprise deputies from all communities.

Bookchin suggests four principles that enable the realization of municipal freedom (Bookchin, 1992, p. 257). The first and most important one is the re-establishment of the citizen’s assembly. Note again how the emphasis of a new politics is on the active involvement and empowerment of the people. Policy-making by the people can only be done if they meet face-to-face and participate actively. This can only be done on municipal level as they are virtually impossible to implement on a larger scale. The second principle is the need for assemblies to communicate between one another. As mentioned before, decision-making is done by people within communities enabled by assemblies. Yet, there are obviously issues that transcend community borders. They should be discussed and dealt with in the same manner as those that are confined within communities (Bookchin, 2015, p. 28). This is why there needs to be a confederation of municipalities. This network of communities has a mere administrative and coordinative function which is exercised by recallable deputies. Apart from the cooperation of communities the purpose of confederation is also to check one another and prevent parochialism and corruption from occurring within communities (Bookchin, 2015, p. 80).

The third premise is the creation of a school for ‘genuine’ citizenship. For Bookchin it is a given that every citizen is capable to participate politically and in fact should be encouraged to do so. The implementation of this new participatory politics requires a reanalysis of citizenship. Just as people’s sense of politics has been lost, so has their sense of citizenship. Bookchin discusses how citizens play their part merely by voting and paying taxes, reducing them to basic constituents (Bookchin 1992, 227). This passive citizenship might be suitable in representative democracies where expectations for citizens to be politically involved are low and opportunities to actively participate few. But Bookchin believes that for people to merely vote, is to reduce their views and beliefs to numbers (Bookchin, 1992, p. 250). It is the quantification of the values and perceptions that people hold which does not correspond with his view on democracy. He generally believes that representative democracy is a contradiction in terms. Democracy seen as “rule by the people” is inconsistent with the ideas of representing those people. Simply put, in a representative democracy the people are not the ones ruling. True citizenship requires “the on-going formation of personality, education, a growing sense of public responsibility and commitment that render communing and an active body politic meaningful, indeed that give it existential substance” (Bookchin, 1992, p. 250). Bookchin is convinced that everyone has the capacity to be a true citizen and politically active, but it does require education. He draws his conception of education from the Greek *paideia* which goes beyond the scope of scholarly education. Rather, it is civic education that includes personal development and the development of a sense of duty and the priority of public interest (Bookchin, 1992, p. 59). What is important is that citizens are educated on citizenship not only in schools or other educational institutions. Civic values and education should be present in all aspects of societal life. Values of community, public service and cooperation are omnipresent and expected to be continuously acted upon in day-to-day life.

The fourth principle for municipal freedom concerns a sense of civic commonality. What characterizes society more so than it did in the past (and will do even more in the future) is the existence of new *transclass* issues that are the result of urbanization (Bookchin, 1992, p. 260). These are topics that are a concern to almost all communities globally. Examples are the quality of urban life, population growth, and access to resources. It is important to emphasize these issues as they concern all members of society despite their socio-economic status or political preference. They are binding topics which should connect people in managing these issues.

Bookchin offers an interesting take on my research question in the sense that his view on democracy and the role of the citizen differ a great deal from how we know these concepts today; in representative democracy in which people are mere constituents. He discusses problems in representative democracies which are the alienation of the people from politics and society causing great societal and ecological issues. His is indeed a very ambitious suggestion to revive democracy with the utmost essence of the active participation of the people. His view on politics and democracy is informed by the conviction that there ought to be a harmony amongst people and between people and nature which enables them to be free in the sense of self-governing. This, for him, implies the absolute absence of hierarchy. His trust in people’s capacity and ability to be self-governing, be it through *paideia*, strengthens his conviction of the abolishment of the state and a shift to libertarian communalism in which people have full power by policymaking through face-to-face assemblies.

Bookchin’s approach towards changing the political and social realm is radical and straightforward. The abolishment of state and capitalism are inherent to the empowerment of the people. In Libertarian Municipalism there is no space for hierarchy. Society and politics are managed horizontally and democratically by none other than the people. But the foundation of the empowerment of the people lies in an ecological society. The people have the power to self-rule but never to rule over nature. They ought to live in harmony with nature as they exist only by virtue of nature. This means they can no longer deny the fact that the societal issues that they democratically decide upon are intrinsically ecological and vice versa. In conclusion, there should be a complete shift of power, from the state to the people. In politics, it is the people that rule in a non-hierarchical, egalitarian manner with respect and responsibility towards each other and nature.

# 3. Democracy through different lenses

The problem that I have posed at the start of this thesis is that current democracy is malfunctioning. Supposedly, many people feel badly or not at all represented by their government. David van Reybrouck describes different ‘symptoms’ of a badly-functioning or infirm representative democracy which are based on the people’s current perception of democracy. He names suspicion of the people towards politics and politicians, crisis of legitimacy and lack of efficiency in politics as main indicators of democracy losing its bearings (Van Reybrouck, 2016, pp. 9-22). He maps the changes over time in electoral-representative systems in Western Democracies in which you see an increasing chasm between the people from politics. He shows how a close bond between political parties and the citizens, in the fifties, became more and more unraveled over the following decades because of an increase of center parties and media-influence. This led to an emphasis on campaigning for elections instead of actually practicing politics (Van Reybrouck, 2016, pp. 46-58). Now, we have arrived at a place where people do not feel represented in politics which defies the essence of democracy. The question that I pose in this thesis is therefore how to revive democracy through the local political participation of the people. Democracy, after all, is a governing system that ought to voice the will of the people. That’s why, in order to revive true democracy, I am interested in what political role the people play in such democracy. Many people are apparently unhappy with the current lack of proper representation which gives them the feeling that they have no political power. What is it then, that their political role should look like and can this be established in a well-functioning true democracy?

In order to answer this question I will analyze and compare Dagger and Bookchin’s theories by answering two sub-questions. The first one, ‘*how do Dagger and Bookchin respectively consider democracy?’*, will clarify their different world views and values they deem the most important in society. It will explain what both theorists believe causes the problem in current society and what it ought to look like. The second sub-question, *what role do Dagger and Bookchin believe citizens to have in their interpretation of democracy?*, will elaborate on the values that citizens ought to have, what their political role looks like and how to activate them politically. I will then be able to give a clear overview of the practical implementation of their theories.

## Dagger vs Bookchin

Dagger and Bookchin both offer interesting views on what local democratic society ought to look like, in which the role of the citizen is essential. By posing civic virtue as a necessity for the realization of autonomy, Dagger offers a perspective on how the political role of citizens on a local scale enables the ability to be, what he considers, self-governing, which could offer a potential way to revive democracy through local political participation of the citizens. Also Bookchin’s confederal municipalism, based on social ecology is centered around people’s participation in local politics as this is the one true form of democracy, according to him. They both make a case for self-governance on a local level, but their perception of what that exactly entails differs greatly.

The reason that it is interesting to compare Dagger and Bookchin specifically, apart from their shared focus on local democracy is that they vouch for two different sides of a debate that concerns democracy, respectively representative and direct democracy. Their particular contrasting views are linked to another relevant debate which is state versus non-state society. As you can gather from the authors’ theories in the previous chapters, Dagger argues in favor of a society with a state that ensures the rule of law in which the people are represented in politics, while Bookchin passionately rejects state presence and considers the only true way to practice politics to be direct democracy through face-to-face assemblies. While Dagger wishes to change the democratic system from within, Bookchin pleads for a society and politics without the existing state and economic structure. Their complete different approach to a common denominator – reformation of democratic society on a local level by looking closely at the role of the people in politics – is caused by their different views on what democracy is and how they consider people and their role in democracy.

In this chapter I am going to show how these different theorists can be compared in which we will find both similarities and differences. The comparison will be threefold. The first topic of comparison, which is the most important one as it explains the underlying philosophical basis of the authors’ thinking, is the idea of freedom in society. For Dagger this concept is captured in his notion of autonomy while Bookchin considers freedom of hierarchy as the ultimate indicator of individual freedom. This comparison adds to the state vs non-state debate. The second topic concerns the view of people and what values they ought to have as political citizens, which is part of the debate between representative versus direct democracy. Thirdly, these two comparisons will be concluded in Dagger and Bookchin’s practical implementation of their respective views of democracy.

## Democracy - State vs Non-state society

### Autonomy

The most important difference between the two authors is their interpretation of freedom to be self-governing; what Dagger calls autonomy and Bookchin names freedom from hierarchy. Autonomy to Dagger, the ability to lead a self-governed life, is the most important value for an individual in society. He draws his views from liberalism and republicanism as he believes that the two can be unified precisely because of the value that they attach to the concept (Dagger, 2005, p. 178). The well-known opposition between liberalism and republicanism is that the first puts individual liberty before the public good, while the latter is based on the idea that individual liberty can only be accomplished by putting public interest before individual interest. Republican criticism on liberalism is therefore that it is prone to corruption and dependence. Corruption is, as is also perceptible today, a peril for democracy when people are free to do what they want, as in not checked by laws. It sacrifices the common interest to the advantage of personal benefit. Take, for example, land grabbing of public grounds for personal production, or monopolizing services or basic goods like water. These free-market enterprises create an inequality that leads to the dependency of “unchecked rulers” (Dagger, 1997, p. 179). On the other hand, republicans also pursue autonomy, and they too consider external forces a jeopardy to their ability to self-govern. Dagger emphasizes the fact that liberalism does not imply individualism and the sacrifice of rights of others for the benefit of their own. It is the *shared* commitment to autonomy that leads Dagger to believe that the two are compatible and complementary. Autonomy for Dagger, is thus the most important value for individuals in society, but it cannot be obtained through individualism as the community, and thus civic virtue, is required for its subsistence.

Dagger’s focus on the interdependence of individual autonomy and civic virtue, does not imply the absence of authority, in this case the state. He argues in fact that the presence of authority is indispensable for the existence of autonomy as it safeguards the laws that enable people to have individual rights and thus be autonomous (Dagger, 2018 , p.100). People are therefore obligated to obey the laws *if* the principle of fair play is lived by. The state also functions as a guard to prevent groups from generating too much power and becoming dominant over other groups (1997, p. 200). Dagger doesn’t see the state as an entity that is separate from the private realm. Rather, it is a necessary institution that the people themselves influence to guarantee individual autonomy. Civil society in fact functions as a buffer between the private realm and the state. It is like a mediator between these two entities and thus a protector from domination by the state. Having this position, its task is twofold and captured in an understanding of civility. First, members of civil society must respect and promote each other’s rights and interests. Second, they should collaborate to take care of the common good. These responsibilities will enable the equal right for all to pursue their private interests. I will return to the exact responsibilities of citizens later in this chapter.

To sum up, Dagger’s republican-liberal conception of autonomy is the ability to lead a self-governed life which is protected by the rule of law and enabled by civil society abiding by civic virtue. His interpretation of autonomy thus requires community, civic virtue, and state. Let us now have a look at what Bookchin’s interpretation of self-governance is and how it compares to Dagger’s perception.

### Freedom from hierarchy

For Bookchin, there is no defense for the preservation of the state. According to him, current social and ecological problems that are intertwined are not merely rooted in present social society. Rather, it is the long-accumulated structure of the system, being the state and market society, that has caused an increasing amount of societal and ecological crises (Bookchin, 2015, p. 40). Think about inequality caused by free-market economy (Merkel, 2014, p. 114). Or the extremely urgent issue of climate change that is not properly dealt with by democratic governments (Perkins, 2015). Unlike Dagger, Bookchin strongly believes that the state is an illegitimate and unnatural authority in society and politics.Bookchin takes a very different stance in this subject as his thoughts are to a great extent informed by his rejection of capitalism and state-politics. According to him, individual freedom within a state is logically impossible because state power inherently takes power away from the people. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, Bookchin believes the state to be an entity that is alien to society and politics. In fact, the state even functions at the expense of the power of society.His anti-state principle is a product of his previous affiliation with anarchism, which is based on anti-authoritarian ideals. However, unlike anarchists, Bookchin is in favor of an organized democratic politics because “politics is the embodiment of civicism” (Bookchin, 2015, p. 23). Beyond anarchism, the roots of Bookchin’s rejection of hierarchy are in dialectical naturalism as I mentioned in the previous chapter. Rather than people dominating each other and nature, there ought to be mutual respect and responsibility. Second nature and thus society, originated in and flowed from first nature which is why domination over nature is self-destructive. As for people, domination amongst them is equally destructive as they need one another to subsist. In short, Bookchin is in favor of a true politics that is democratically practiced by people that are free from hierarchy. The idea that hierarchy is a social construct makes a non-hierarchical society possible and any form of current hierarchy in any area of society doubtful.

The opposition is clear; for Dagger the state is a necessary entity to ensure all citizen’s autonomy, while for Bookchin the absolute absence of the state is the only way to guarantee freedom for the people. In the next part I will show how the authors’ view on people in democracy compare to one another.

## The people - Representative vs direct democracy

### Assurance game and conditional altruism

Let’s now have a look at how Dagger and Bookchin’ view on the way people in society should relate to each other compare. I have demonstrated how the authors differ in their interpretation of democracy and self-governance. This logically leads to a distinct view on how people then relate to each other and the community. We could say that both Dagger and Bookchin consider the participation of the people in society essential, but the ways in which they participate, and especially why, differ from one another.

An important concept in Dagger’s theory is interdependency. We can only obtain autonomy through the community which is why people ought to have civic virtue. Society is a cooperative enterprise from which people benefit, which is why they have the responsibility to return the favor to society; it is a cooperation that must be maintained by the people, or it will collapse. In order for people to feel that they are part of this dynamics they must feel that they are citizens, rather than individuals in society. Dagger states that there are four dimensions to republican liberal citizenship. They are legal, ethical, integrative and educative which are all essential and overlapping. He is against the idea of citizens as consumers, which derives for example from a market-driven democracy, as this defies the entire idea of community (1997, p. 106). If citizens are mere consumers they are not prone to contribute to the common good. They might not even be aware of the necessity to do so which would increase individualism and weaken the sense of community that is necessary for individual autonomy. To clarify, Dagger believes that community and the indispensable role that people have in it are values that must be cultivated; they are a necessity that people must be made aware of. It looks like Dagger sees people as inherently individualistic beings that must be taught how to cooperate because it works in their benefit to do so. He therefore considers education a most important activity as it can teach people to be autonomous and civically virtuous, rather than merely shape personal interests (Dagger, 1997, p. 117). Once people are aware of the necessity to be civically virtuous and to participate they need to be activated to do. Dagger believes that there needs to be an external assurance to activate them to do their part in society, hence his taking to the assurance game for which conditional altruism must be cultivated. Knowing that other members of society do their share, encourages them to do theirs.

Until now Dagger has only discussed how to create the awareness for citizens to participate and the conditions under which they *would*. This still leaves the question of how to mobilize them to actually do so. Despite his ideas on how to cultivate awareness of the necessity of community for individual autonomy, Dagger is concerned with political apathy which is at odds with his drive for active participation of people in the community. This is because he believes that active participation in democracy adds intellectual and moral value to the citizen (1997, p. 134). The most feasible way for Dagger to force people to be politically active is to make voting compulsory as it will increase the voting rate and supposedly cultivate civic virtue such as political participation (Dagger 1997, p. 149). This means that Dagger chooses to remain within the representative democratic system.

### Free nature & Communalism

Bookchin also strongly argues for a conscious approach to our world and society. People shouldn’t unquestioningly assume the system that they live in with its customs and habits. Rather, people ought to thoughtfully consider the world and their place and responsibility in this world. He states that reason, reflection, and discourse - the traits that separate us as human kind from other species – are the skills that we should appeal to in order to create society (Bookchin, 2015, p. 18). Like Dagger is against citizens seeing themselves as mere consumers because it makes them politically passive, so does Bookchin also mention the danger of citizens considering themselves as mere constituents whose task it is merely to vote, pay taxes, and unthinkingly obey the rules prescribed to them (Bookchin, 1992, p. 227). He establishes that the people have drifted from what it truly means to be a citizen. But Bookchin is more demanding than Dagger as the first considers mere voting to defy the sense of being a citizen. To him, confederal municipalism is the truest form of democracy as it enables local freedom which enables personal freedom. This implies a much more active participation of citizens as they are the sole actors making all political decisions.

Also similar to Dagger, Bookchin stresses the importance of and interdependency within community which stimulates responsibility and commitment to others and society. Where Dagger considers civic responsibility for the community a moral capacity of citizens, so does Bookchin also promote civic loyalty and responsibility on moral grounds (Bookchin, 1992, p. 273; Dagger, 1997, p. 134). He also applies this idea to an economical commonality which ought to be a moral enterprise if it is to escape the peril of profit-oriented market that leads to decay (Bookchin, 1992, p. 276). He says that people *need* to support a communal economy instead of a system that would merely benefit themselves in order to be capable of self-governance. For the cultivation of this loyalty and responsibility, education and participation are crucial.

Maybe even more so in Bookchin’s society than it is in Dagger’s, considering that Bookchin’s aim is to change the political structure into a direct democratic society. This implies very far-reaching changes that are demanding of the people as they will be the sole responsible actors, in the absence of authorities, for the management of society. The transition is a process of which the first steps are to increasingly develop local freedom which implies decreasing the power of the state (Bookchin, 2015, p. 89). He believes all citizens should be encouraged to participate in society and its politics as they are all competent to do so (Bookchin, 1992, p. 259). But considering the fact that hierarchy is so deeply embedded in our psyches, as I explained in the previous chapter, *paideia* (civic education) is essential for the development of local civic life. In short, for Bookchin direct democracy is the only true democracy as it is the only way to self-govern. It requires education, participation and leadership to enable the people to achieve it, but as Bookchin himself puts it: “If state power begets state power, so too does self-governance beget self-governance” (Bookchin, 1992, p. 277).

There are similarities in Dagger’s and Bookchin’s notions of citizenship. They both argue strongly for a civic education that teaches them civic values and duties because community enables self-realization and autonomy. For both of them this civic education is never-ending and continuously forming people to be citizens. Civic education in which the importance of civic virtue and autonomy are taught, is of high importance. Like Bookchin, for whom *paideia* entails both civic schooling and personal training, Dagger also suggests that education is necessary for the cultivation for both autonomy and civic virtue which entails the education of a whole person (Dagger, 1997, p. 120). But considering the distinct expectations that Dagger and Bookchin have of their citizens, the content of their respective educations must surely be different.

## New Society – Local politics

### Decentralized city

As Dagger mentioned several times before, it is important for people to feel part of a community which can only be done when it is small enough for people to interact and communicate well. Politics is historically linked to the city but the metropolitan city as we know it today poses a problem as it complicates the cultivation of sense of community which jeopardizes autonomy (Dagger, 1997, p. 155). It is large cities, their fragmented political authority and dynamic mobility of people that pose great challenges for citizens to feel like citizens and obtain a sense of responsibility and duty towards community. Dagger therefore suggests a decentralization instead of a fragmentation of cities. He argues for a politics on different levels under an overarching authority of the state; cities divided into districts that are divided into wards. An electoral system would account for councils. A decentralization is preferred over political fragmentation as it decreases confusion over authority and jurisdiction and increases people’s participation in public affairs as they concern them directly (1997, p. 169). People would be obligated to fulfil civic duties in the form of community service in return for certain services (Dagger, 1997, p. 170). Obligatory voting would also be a part of the scheme. This civic participation in combination with the aforementioned political structure and civic design – city planning – is what Dagger considers a promising design for a well-functioning, democratic society sustained and benefited by its people.

*Libertarian Municipalism (Confederal Municipalism)*

Bookchin describes libertarian municipalism as a “politics that seeks to create a vital democratic public sphere” (Bookchin, 2015, p. 87). He aims to practice politics on a more local level in which municipalities are the societal and political units that enable face-to-face assemblies. It is a reimplementation of the original Greek meaning of politics and democracy, where decision-making is done by the people through majority-voting. But unlike Dagger, there are no elected representatives that hold any power and there is no state as an overarching political authority. All real politics is exercised within and between municipalities in the sense of policy-making while deputies only have coordinative and administrative functions (Bookchin, 1991). The confederation of municipalities also functions as a measure against local parochialism which Bookchin believes to be a perilous possibility in decentralization (Bookchin, 2015, p. 80). An overemphasis on one’s own community would again create exclusionist societies whereas the aim is cooperation in the absence of domination of one over the other. In Dagger’s suggestion of decentralized cities, this hazard could be checked by the state. Yet, this could then again lead to state parochialism. Besides, Dagger seems to actually want to implement measures to increase the focus on local community through civic memory (Dagger, 1997, p. 162). He wants people to have a shared history of building a community together which can easily lead to the exclusion of people that haven’t been there “from the beginning”.

The way in which both Dagger and Bookchin divide society into smaller political units that are interconnected are quite similar. They both argue for smaller areas within which local decisions are made, and a network of these areas to attend to cross-border issues in which representatives or deputies of all areas come together to collaborate. The most important differences between the two are in what way people are expected to participate politically and in what way they are motivated to do so. Dagger’s implementation involves coercion of the people to act civically virtuous, fulfil communal tasks and to vote. Bookchin’s view seems to entail a more lenient approach in which people are free to participate whenever they want. Yet, knowing that they are the ones are responsible for policy-making they ought to feel prone to engage. Thus, in Bookchin’s ideal society, people aren’t obligated to participate. However, he has stated that he believes in law. And his aim is to reassure some rules being set in a constitution as a basis of the confederated municipalities (White, 2008, p. 186). This constitution should be democratically established and voted on by the people after which it will be binding for everyone. In this sense Bookchin distanced himself from anarchism by strongly believing in political structure and institutions for the assurance of democracy, and to avoid power abuse and domination.

I have shown how to compare Dagger and Bookchin in the light of democracy and political participation of the citizen. In the next chapter I will show which one of the two has the most promising outlook on how to potentially revive democracy through active political participation of the people, based on their theoretical consistency and practical feasibility.

# 4. Reviving Democracy – theoretical soundness and practical feasibility

In the previous chapter I have explained how Dagger and Bookchin can be compared; how despite their different discourses, they touch upon the same topics of democracy and participation of people in democracy. My analysis has been objective in order to create a common denominator which enables me to apply the two theories to my research question. I will now first critically assess them after which I will be able to show which of the two is more promising to answer the questions on how to revive democracy and what role the people play in this endeavor.

As I have demonstrated, Dagger and Bookchin, despite some general views that they share, oppose each other in two debates that are important for this thesis. These debates consider state presence in society and democracy. Dagger is in favor of a representative democracy checked by the state while Bookchin pleads for a non-state direct democracy. They rely their notions of core concepts to make their theories convincing which for Dagger are autonomy, civic virtue and political obligation. Bookchin’s view is essentially based on his conception of hierarchy, freedom and confederal municipalism. It is their interpretation of these concepts that must be theoretically sound in order for their theories to be credible and feasible. In this chapter I will show that even though promising, they are certainly not free of criticism. Dagger’s main flaws are the incompatibility of liberalism and republicanism that is based on the interdependency between autonomy and civic virtue, and how he translates his theory into practice. The political obligation that is essential in his view of society collides with his the objective to obtain and maintain individual autonomy. Also, his design of a decentralized city doesn’t seem convincing and radical enough to make a change within the current political system. In his turn, Bookchin’s attempt to create a radical and holistic theory has caused him to contradict himself on more than one occasion, most importantly when it comes to his endeavor to abolish hierarchy, which weakens his argument to create a state-less society. He is also plagued by the great difficulty of the practical implementation of his politics which necessitates a complete break with the current liberal politics and capitalist society, and the re-education of citizens to become policy-makers. After critically analyzing both theories it will become clear which one comes out strongest. I will then demonstrate which of the two theories is the best fit to help answer my question on how to revive democracy through active political participation of the people.

## Theoretical challenges

### Autonomy and authority

It is a challenging and daring endeavor to take two theories that appear to be opposites and put them together in a compatible whole, as is Dagger’s quest. The thought that a strict reading of liberalism is inherently impossible to practically exist because of the overemphasis on individual rights, is very convincing. Indeed, as Dagger proposes, the individualistic character of liberalism defies the aim of the theory, the protection of individual rights. People need others to lead autonomous lives; practically, for their livelihoods; cognitively, for education on autonomy; and lawfully, as a guarantee of that autonomy. Also, the idea that civic virtue – borrowed from republicanism – is in fact inevitable for obtaining liberal goals, is a valid and interesting point to make. It shows that the guarantee of those individual rights requires the commitment of all members of society. However, these concepts are still rooted in two schools that collide in their essence.

One of Dagger’s most important theoretical flaws lies in the fact that liberal autonomy and republican civic virtue are in their cores incompatible. In order to be truly civically virtuous for which Dagger uses Rousseau’s philosophy, one must put the general will, or the common good, before personal interest. Let’s remember, autonomy is the *ability* the lead a self-governed life for which indeed others are needed. But this doesn’t imply putting the common good before personal interest. For Rousseau, the general will always takes priority over the private will (Kain, 1990, p. 330). But as Dagger puts it, the only reason that community, and thus the public interest, is important is that it enables and guarantees individual rights. Admittedly, he explains that it is a question of interdependency; not only does civic virtue enable autonomy, people also need to be autonomous in order to be civically virtuous and contribute to the community. Yet, the focus still seems to be more on autonomy than on civic virtue which is manifested in how Dagger distances himself from communitarianism. The reason he does so is that community is not the starting point in managing society, it is the only civic aspects of society. This seems to refer to duties towards the community, meaning obligations. Why would one have obligations towards society? Because they need society for their own benefit. This means that autonomy and individual rights precede common interest and thus the community. If autonomy and civic virtue are not equally interdependent it is only a matter of time before the priority of autonomy will go at the expense of civic virtue and thus the community.

Of course, Dagger is in favor of the state and obligatory participation of citizens in politics which could forcefully guarantee civic virtue. But if we have to rely on the state to use its power to control people’s actions it would take away at least a great part of their autonomy, which defies Dagger’s purpose all together. It is exactly the incongruity between republicanism and liberalism that makes Dagger’s argument less convincing. The liberal and republican notions of the ability to self-rule are too incompatible because of the different priorities they give to personal and public interest. Dagger’s effort to establish republican liberalism is an attempt to change a feature that is inherent to the liberal political system, individual autonomy. Because this feature within liberalism can’t be changed, neither can society within liberalism.

This is in fact precisely what Bookchin warns for and why his political and societal changes are so radical. It is *because* real change is impossible within this liberal system that is, according to him, dominated by the state and dictated by capitalism that we need to do without them. That is why he finds it necessary to create a society in which people are truly free to govern themselves without the threat of power shifting to a dominant group, which is what will always happen under liberal reign. Of course, Bookchin, on his turn, relies on a different conception of freedom than Dagger, which is not free of criticism either. Bookchin’s theory is substantially built on his argument to prove the illegitimacy and unnatural origin of hierarchy. The credibility of Bookchin’s non-state design of society depends completely on the validity of this argument concerning domination and hierarchy as social constructions. This means that, if his argument doesn’t hold, the demand for abolishment of the state would go unfounded. The questions, then, are: is hierarchy, and with it domination, unnatural? And more importantly, is it truly possible to create a society that is completely free of hierarchy, and is it then even desirable?

Rudy suggests that Bookchin contradicts himself in his explanation of the origin of domination and hierarchy (Rudy, 1998). While Bookchin states that his approach is dialectical, the development of his argument is certainly not that. He explains domination as a product of the social, not of nature. By claiming that hierarchy originated in gerontocracy and shamanism he denies any type of natural factor involved in the emergence of hierarchy and domination which defies his dialectic theory. He wrongfully separates nature and the social as if they didn’t influence each other mutually. It weakens his argument that hierarchy is a social phenomenon and therefore doesn’t have to exist. If we were to approach his argument dialectically, we could argue that aging is in fact a natural phenomenon which comes with both physical weakness and social and mental wisdom which could indeed naturally lead to hierarchy. And even if the validity of his argument would hold, hierarchy is very much present in society now. As Bookchin himself argues, it is embedded in our psyche. That begs the question of how we can ever get rid of it. I will discuss this question and the one concerning the desirability of a non-hierarchy society later on in this chapter.

### The political

Despite the fact that Bookchin fails to defend his notion of the origin of hierarchy, he does have a point in that it has negative consequences such as power abuse and inequality, which is why Bookchin opposes the state. His argument against the state is substantiated in his division of spheres. He separates the social from the political realm and considers the state to be external to both of them. This is part of the theoretical proof he offers to demonstrate that the state has no business in the political or social realm. This conviction, however, again contradicts his theoretical foundation in dialectics (Clark, 1998, p. 156). Separating the spheres is a dualistic approach which doesn’t fit his philosophical argument. Rather, in a dialectical approach, the social realm, the political realm and the state could be seen as three entities that enable and influence each other. Just as he dialectically approaches first, second and free nature, thus should he – according to his own theory - approach these realms. Curran makes a valid point in suggesting that perhaps the state is a necessary entity that enables people to push against such authority, as happens in social movements (Curran, 1999, p. 89). It could be said that the state is part of a dynamics that enables people to take a political stance; and vice versa, their political position influences politics and the actions of the state. After all, ideas, visions and actions are not created in isolation, but rather by virtue of the presence of an “other.” However, could this antagonism not exist in Bookchin’s ideal of society of confederated communities? The absence of a state does not mean that the people suddenly would become a homogenous unity. As well as in a state-governed nation, people still have their personal opinions on societal and political issues in communities, which would make for the same dynamics enabling people to take a stance as the state would offer, be it on an equal basis. This brings us to how these different opinions and views should be dealt with. What role should people have in politics in their contribution to society?

Considering the fact that Dagger’s theory assumes a representative democracy while Bookchin pleads for a direct democracy, it is clear that they have a different view on the role of the people in these respective societies. They both believe that education is vital to the formation of citizens, or, active participants in society. And their conceptions of education show similarities. Given the fact that citizenship entails active political participation for which the cultivation of autonomy and civic virtue are fundamental, both their ideas of education are holistic and is not contained within schools. Rather, education of the citizen is education of the individual as a whole (Bookchin, 1992, p. 59; Dagger, 1997, p. 120). However, they are educating citizens for very different tasks. For Bookchin, *paideia* is the premise for citizenship in a direct democracy. This implies a different sort of political activation for which people must be trained. Dagger’s education is the formation of a citizen that operates within a society in which major political decisions are still being made by politicians and not by the people themselves. Considering what is required from “Bookchin’s citizen” the demands are higher and the approach more holistic in the sense that one isn’t educated to merely become a good citizen, but rather a good and ethical person (Bookchin, 1992, p. xviii). Because citizens for Bookchin are much more than constituents in a representative democracy whose political task is limited – as politicians are the final decision-makers – his notion of *paideia* entails education on every aspect of life. Likewise, Dagger demonstrates his disdain towards citizens as consumers, as “his citizen” has legal, ethical, integrative and educative dimensions. Yet, despite his remark that the task of “real” citizens entails more than “an occasional trip to the polling place” (Dagger, 1997, p. 100), compulsory voting the most important political obligation, that his citizens would have (Dagger, 1997, p. 145).

## Practical difficulties – change within or without current political system

Though there might be inconsistencies in Dagger’s theory, his practical reformation of society and politics looks a lot more feasible than Bookchin’s. Compulsory voting and the political structure around representatives on different geographical levels seem doable. They are suggestions that are not that far from the electoral system as we know it today. However, apart from creating smaller societal and political units – districts and wards – these practical suggestions don’t seem to live up to Dagger’s ambitious theory. The creation of more political positions as a result of the decentralization of cities might draw more people into politics, but these would be *professional* political positions, not necessarily citizen participation. The transition from Dagger’s theoretical attempt to combine civic virtue with personal autonomy, to a practical implementation whose political highlight *for citizens* is compulsory voting, is disappointing to say the least. And it would be his political highlight, considering the fact that compulsory voting is something that the state can control. All other forms of political activity depend on people’s will to participate based on the interdependency between civic virtue and autonomy, which, I explained at the beginning of this chapter, is an argument that isn’t convincing as autonomy seems to take precedence over civic virtue.

The suggestion of obligating people to vote is convincing when following Dagger’s line of argument; as a citizen you enjoy certain rights for which you should bear some responsibilities (Dagger, 1997, p. 151). But is this it? *The* responsibility? He states that an obligation to (register to) vote enhances the chance that people become more politically active which in its turn strengthens the sense of community and civic duty (Dagger, 1997, p. 150). Yet, he doesn’t quite explain how. There is no need to interact with anybody in order to fulfil ones duty to (register to) vote. It seems the most solitary and minimal political action that people can undertake. And the problem of representation remains. You can oblige people to go out and vote and “force them to be free”, but how free are they to choose if they do not feel represented by the politicians that they can choose from? If representation is inadequate, as many complain about today, it actually emphasizes the lack of true democracy in the sense that there is a gap between the people and politics. And under these conditions, people would be forced to make a choice they might not want to make? This does not precisely seem to align with Dagger’s idea of forcing people to be free.

In Bookchin’s confederated municipalities there is no such problem as it simply does not include representatives. If people are the ones directly in charge of political decision-making, then no one can complain about not having enough influence on the handling of political issues. They themselves are responsible to get involved if they wish to have a say in decision-making. Of course, Bookchin is not the first one to suggest direct democracy as a replacement of representative democracy. And many a critic has given ample reasons against this governing form, Dagger being one of them. But the arguments that he uses to back up this opposition would almost exclusively pose problems within the current political system. Obviously, we would have to reform society a lot more than the mere voting system if we were to change society into a direct democracy. He mentions that people lack time to get informed enough in order to make a proper decision. But if direct democracy takes place on a local level, which is something that Dagger advocates, voting will be mostly about things that directly concern the people; it will be topics that they are informed on because it concerns *them*. Isn’t that what politics is supposed to be? Another objection is the idea that people don’t feel part of the community and that it would make people politically passive and not engaged as they won’t be pushed to get involved (Dagger, 1997, p. 144). Yet again, he applies these arguments to national direct democracy, which is not what he was discussing before. This change of conditions seems like an excuse not to deal with the actual option of local direct democracy.

However, it is a fair point that people, in the role of citizen that they fulfil today, wouldn’t be well equipped and informed on particular topics which would make them either make an unfounded decision or uninterested to participate. It is true that Bookchin does not offer a clear cut program on how to make the transition from the state-controlled politics based on, or at least very influenced by, capitalism and confederal municipalism. He is, as I mentioned before, in favor of a constitution that should be democratically decided upon as a foundation of his new society. Yet, achieving this constitution raises another question. How do you democratically decide on a binding constitution if the constitution is needed to establish direct democracy? There must be some shared views concerning society that are indisputable in the establishment of the constitution, namely and mainly non-hierarchical, democratic decision-making. If this condition is nonnegotiable, then how does Bookchin propose forcing this conviction onto other people since force implies exercising power over others? Bookchin’s trust in people’s responsibility and honesty in this sense is problematic. In his scheme of policy-making by the people through assemblies with administrators as powerless officials to execute what the people have decided, there is no mention of checking parties. It makes one wonder if the lack of judicial authority doesn’t make this municipal politics prone to a concentration of power with administrators, which is the exact opposite of what Bookchin intends to create (Clark, 1998, pp. 164-165). Even if one manages to establish a binding constitution to which everyone agrees, who will have the power to enforce the constitution? What is the political apparatus around it that guarantees people’s compliance with the constitution. Another issue is the guarantee of an objective constitution. It is certainly not a new phenomenon and there are plenty of examples of the interpretability of constitutions that have been bent a certain way to serve the interest of an individual or group.

Perhaps we shouldn’t take Bookchin’s theories as a clear-cut, practical design for a new society. Popp-Madsen suggests that instead, Bookchin’s radical different views on society and politics offer a world view that changes the static image of politics and democracy; systems that influence the people greatly but to which many feel they have such little insight and influence (Popp-Madsen, 2017, p. 277). Considering the fact that Bookchin’s ideal society would be one in which people decide politically and democratically on how society is organized, his aim is not to enforce an image of society, but rather to offer the tools for people to imagine and create society themselves.

## The revival of democracy through political participation

Now let’s move on to what these theories with all their strengths and weaknesses mean for my research question. I detected the problem of a flawed representative democracy that leaves people unsatisfied and politically passive and unengaged. I wanted to research the possibilities to revive democracy through the active political participation of the people. As I have made clear throughout this thesis, Republican Liberalism and Confederal Municipalism both offer potential ways to go about this question, but they oppose one another when it comes to my main topics, democracy and participation of the people.

People are unsatisfied with representative democracy. This discontent is caused by the distance between politics and politicians, and the people. Many feel they don’t have an influence on political decision-making. What both theories make clear is that politics on a national level is problematic as it is difficult for people to affiliate with political issues that are distant from them. Both municipalization and decentralization of cities seem promising as they bring local decision-making closer to the people; for Dagger through representation within decentralized cities and for Bookchin by direct face-to-face assemblies in municipalities. The major difference between the two is their distinct premises. For Dagger, the issue with democracy is that people should be politically engaged but aren’t because they don’t *want* to. For Bookchin, on the other hand, the problem is that they want to but they *can’t* because of the domination that is inherent to the state and representative democracy, and a powerful capitalist market that influences them both. Dagger’s solution then is to obligate people to participate politically in order to make them realize that being civically virtuous enables their personal autonomy. Educating them on civic virtues and obligating them to be politically engaged would then make for informed citizens that are able to be self-governing while taking into account the importance of the civic that enables them to be so. This is a noble suggestion and could indeed increase the focus on the common good which would benefit society as a whole. However, as long as this scheme is implemented within a representative democracy it will be the representatives, and thus yet again the politicians and established order, that would decide on what these civic virtues are. Obligating people to vote still only gives them limited options on what to vote for and it would still be parties or politicians that implement *their* ideas on what civic virtues are. Even if it is the people that vote on those who represent their ideas the best, their ideas are informed by education on civic virtue. There is an idea of civic virtue in place, informed by the existing representatives that decide on this education, which informs their vote. This is all the more influencing considering the fact that Dagger regards citizens as passive individuals that need to be motivated to become politically activated. In this scheme, the encouragement of those who aren’t politically engaged yet, would be influenced by those who already are, which is the people that already hold political power. Even though the idea of implementing civic virtues in society seems like a noble idea, Dagger’s republican liberalism would quickly return to how we know liberal democracy today. As long as civic virtues are decided upon by representatives and obligated by the state, Dagger’s conception of obligated political participation will be unlikely to revive democracy.

This demonstrates how difficult, or maybe even impossible, it is to have people participate politically within a system, representative democracy, that is based on taking political tasks away from the people. This is exactly what lies at the foundation of Bookchin’s societal reformation. For Bookchin, the problem with representative democracy is the lack of possibility for people to participate politically. This aligns perfectly with the problem of democracy that we are dealing with here. It is not that people don’t care or don’t want to participate. It is the fact that doing so is hindered by the existing political apparatus. The direct political participation of the people wouldn’t merely revive democracy; it *is* democracy. In a direct democracy the people themselves would decide on what civic virtues entail. Without representatives, or any other kind of intermediary parties, it is truly up to the people to engage in and decide upon societal issues that concern them. Bookchin doesn’t suggest an obligation to participate in politics as he believes that if people are given the chance to, they will engage on their own account. Indeed, it requires radical changes both structurally as well as mentally to make a shift to confederal municipalism, but it comes closer to solving the issue of the discontent of the people concerning democracy. Bookchin’s view on people as capable and willing individuals to lead self-governed lives – *if* given the chance – seems to correspond with the discontent of the people in democracy and social movements that attempt to influence society and politics despite the difficulties of influencing policymaking. Taken that the abolishment of any kind of hierarchy seems highly unlikely, it would be interesting to revisit Bookchin’s conception of hierarchy in order to determine if there is a way to either go around his all-or-nothing approach, or to translate it in such a way that it can be implemented in society. Also, it would be essential to examine ways to commence his changes bottom-up in order to deal with the transformation of people’s psyche towards a shift to confederal municipalism.

# Discussion

Even though this thesis hasn’t been able to offer a decisive theory to revive democracy through the local participation of the people, it has shown that local political engagement of the people is important for a well-functioning democracy. This research was rather broad as it was based on theories that represented two extremes of local democracy. This is why further research on local democracy would be valuable to the exploration on how to potentially revive democracy. Although research on this local democracy is scarce, other work is certainly available.

Like that of Benjamin Barber, who passionately argues for a political shift from national government to city-level governance. The subtitle of his most important work on that topic, *Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities*, is quite self-explanatory (Barber, 2013). Barber believes that nation-state governments fail to resolve global issues that the world is facing today, like global warming and immigration, which is why mayors should be the new global leaders. He argues that mayors are more suitable to handle political issues as they are “more popular, more democratic, and more effective than national leaders” (McNitt, 2016). Even though he doesn’t pay much attention to what active role citizen take in his scheme of mayors as global rulers, he does emphasize the good relationships that mayors sustain with their citizens. According to Barber, mayors are better representatives of the people which decreases the gap between politics and the public, and thus potentially improves democracy.

In fact, Barber’s idea of global governance by mayors has already been formed into an association which is the Global Parliament of Mayors. It is a governance body that enables mayors from all over the world to exchange experience, strategies and knowledge that concern local governance. It is a platform that is completely in the hands of mayors, which makes for an accessible and informative organization to help mayors govern their respective cities. Barber’s conception of democracy and global governance by mayors would make for an interesting addition to research on local democracy.

Because of the theoretical nature of this thesis I have chosen not to include empirical examples of local democracy. There are, however, a number of political and non-political movements that are attempting to implement a local democracy in which the citizens are more closely involved in politics. In fact, there is already a global municipalist movement ongoing whose goal it is, amongst other things, to defend local democracy and the common good. *Fearless Cities* is a global network of towns and cities whose aim it is to transform politics locally by radicalizing democracy, and to create a horizontal, inclusive collaboration of municipalities from all over the world (Russell, 2019). The first Fearless Cities summit was organized in 2017 by Barcelona en Comú that had already paved the way to change in the city of Barcelona by making radical changes in local politics.

*Barcelona en Comú* (BeC) is a political platform that arose in 2014 in response to the inadequate performance of national and local governance in the aftermath of the economic crisis in 2008 (Eizaguirre, Pradel-Miquel, & García, 2017). Its aim was to break with the traditional political order. As the origin of the platform is rooted in political and social movements such as 15M and the *indignados*, BeC wanted to ensure that it carried the support of the people, not merely through elections but by actively collecting signatures of support. Subsequently, the platform created a code of political ethics for everyone involved in BeC that is based on the principle of ‘governing is obeying.’ which contains topics such as accountability, transparency and democratization of political representation ("Governing by obeying, Code of political ethics,"). Besides the responsibility and accountability that is expected of the representatives, the people themselves are stimulated to take an active part in assemblies where political and social topics are discussed. BeC’s entire political and social organization is based on the inclusion of the citizens and the assurance that the platform legitimately and truly represents those citizens.

Another example of a social movement that aims for local democracy is that of the Zapatistas in the south of Mexico (Esteva, 1999). The Zapatistas have, since 1994 been fighting for autonomy. Their uprising took place after the signing of the NAFTA agreement by the Mexican government. The Zapatistas originally consisted of farmers whose livelihoods depended on their land. The NAFTA facilitated foreign companies to take these lands with support of the Mexican government. The Zapatista’s aim was never to seize power from the government but merely to become self-governing. They have since, while under constant pressure of the Mexican government, become self-sustainable and politically and socially organized with governments, schools, and health facilities. Their political system is based on a cooperation of communities that divide political tasks within each community. In order to involve members of the community, political tasks are rotated (Haar, 2004). The politics of the Zapatistas is an example of confederated communities that have rejected the state and become self-governing which I’d say would have been very much to Bookchin’s liking. It would be interesting to have a closer look at how their political and social structure came into being and how it functions today.

# 5. Conclusion

In this thesis I have tried to answer the question how to revive democracy through the local participation of the people, for which I drew upon Dagger’s Republican Liberalism and Bookchin’s Confederal Municipalism. They make for an interesting comparison as their theories both center around the significance of political participation of the people in democracy, be it on opposite sides of the spectrum. Where Dagger pleads for a representative democracy that is controlled by the state, Bookchin’s objective is a state-less direct democracy.

Dagger and Bookchin have different views on what is the lacking aspect in present-day democracy. For Dagger, the overemphasis on individual rights goes at the expense of the community. This is problematic as community is essential for the subsistence of individual rights and vice versa. Dagger believes that the problem in democracy is caused by the people rather than by the political system itself. He claims that there is a strong interdependency between personal autonomy and civic virtue. But citizens are apathetic to participate politically, which causes a malfunctioning society as it stands in the way of their sense of responsibility and duty towards the civic. That is why citizens should be both motivated as well as partially obligated to participate politically.

The logic behind participation is interdependency and thus obtaining autonomy by fulfilling civic virtues. The persuasion of people to act civically virtuous and participate, is the assurance game which is the assurance of the participation of other members of society, in order for themselves to get involved. The principles of fair play, enabled by the assurance game, should stimulate people to contribute their fair share to society. This approach fits Dagger’s businesslike consideration of society as a cooperative; invest in society so that you get your share out of it. If the contribution of citizens is known to be fairly distributed and executed, people will themselves be more prone to participate as well. And finally, the guarantee that people participate is the obligation to do so which is imposed by the state. The state guarantees individual autonomy as it obligates people to live by certain rules. Dagger believes that the authority of the state makes sure that people’s individual rights are respected. These individual rights are dependent on community. And in order to organize a well-functioning community, people are “forced to be free”, in Dagger’s case by obligatory voting. Obligating people to do anything seems to jeopardize their autonomy but in this case it is a necessary act to make people contribute to the society that they rely on to enable their autonomy.

All of Dagger’s efforts to stimulate and obligate civic virtues, which exist for a substantial part of political engagement and participation, are based on the premise that people don’t feel the necessity to participate. This is a problem to him as the lack of civic virtue will go at the expense of autonomy.

People ought to be motivated to participate politically in order to make for a representative democracy that protects individual autonomy. There are two issues that are problematic here. The first one is that, even though Dagger claims that autonomy and civic virtue are equally interdependent, the stimulation for people to reciprocate to the community is for their own good. Community isn’t a goal in itself but rather a political cooperation which he makes clear by distancing himself from communitarianism. It is why he prefers appealing to the civic aspect of society instead of to community because of its political character. Civic virtue is then a necessity to obtain autonomy, rather than a value that is equal to it. From this we can conclude that autonomy has a higher value than civic virtue. In Dagger’s society, the public good will never take the priority over individual interest unless it eventually benefits individual interest; people are only *conditionally* altruistic. If this is true, then Dagger’s suggestion to reform society into decentralized cities, in which obligatory voting is the most important form of political participation, is not a promising way to revive democracy.

The second problem is the fact that his scheme remains within a representative democratic system that is controlled by the state. That means that there is an existing power structure that defines in what way the civic body is supposed to be virtuous. The people wouldn’t contribute to the content of civic virtues which is problematic as these civic virtues, through civic education, influence what people vote for. In short, those in power influence voting to such an extent that even if civic virtues were implemented it could be a steering mechanism of those in power over citizens.

The suggestion of implementing civic virtues in society could be a noble and beneficial idea both for society and its individual citizens. Yet, the implementation within a representative democracy under the rule of a state would inhibit any real change within society because of persisting priority of autonomy and the preservation of political power with representatives and the state.

This is precisely why Bookchin suggests we refrain from any type of reform that takes place within the existing political system. Any form of political change that is implemented within a liberal, representative democracy under state control will eventually be undermined by that same political structure. According to him, hierarchy will always cause power to lie with a dominant group that inherently takes it away from another.

According to Bookchin, the problem in current society is not that the people do not want to be involved, it is the fact that they can’t, not in a significant way that allows them to truly influence politics. In his opinion, it is the political sphere that needs reformation, not the people as such. People do need *paideia*, which apart from scholarly education, entails the social and ethical formation of a citizen, to fulfil the role that they are supposed to have, that of policy-makers. But they needn’t be forced to do so. What is necessary is for people to regain a sense of politics and citizenship which is now obstructed by hierarchical thinking. This supposedly leads individuals to believe that it is either not their place to participate politically, or that the means to do so are too limited to have an influence. Throughout history, hierarchy, domination and eventually the state and capitalism have taken power away from the people and placed it with a select group of dominant actors.

Bookchin’s attempts to explain that this establishment of power is a social construct rather than a natural phenomenon which should legitimize the abolishment of the state. Yet, he lacks satisfying proof that this is true and thus fails to defend the elimination of all kinds of hierarchy. However, he does demonstrate that representation in politics and state control has caused people to become alienated from politics, which is one of the main reasons for turmoil and discontent with democracy. Furthermore, he states that domination is a great risk in the search of solutions of not only social, but also ecological problems as the two are intertwined. In people’s alienation from politics and society caused by domination of one group of the other, they have also become alienated from nature on which they depend greatly. He states that this is the reason that social and ecological issues are the same or at least intertwined. What he aims for, is a society in which people live harmoniously with each other as well as with nature.

This should be enabled by confederated municipalities in which the people themselves are the policy-makers based on face-to-face assemblies. The execution of policy and the discussion of issues that transcend the municipal borders would be dealt with by confederated councils. Bookchin believes that making the people responsible for politics, and thus restoring people’s freedom to handle their own municipal affairs, would increase a sense of responsibility for themselves and one another. Participating would not be obligated, like in Dagger’s theory, but it would be logical to do so as the management of the community would be in the people’s own hands. Of course, this conviction demonstrates a complete trust in people’s ability and motivation to be in charge of decision-making. It remains the question if this is truly the case. Political issues that we deal with today comprise global topics such as climate change and migration. Despite the fact that there is a local component to these issues, they transcend borders globally and it is unclear how Bookchin expects people to handle these issues in confederal municipalism. Another issue is the lack of an authority that safeguards a fair process of decision-making and administration. There is no mention of a legal institution that checks if decision-making proceeds in a just fashion. Bookchin does plead for a constitution that is to be democratically decided upon but who guarantees the democratic factor in this decision-making before such a constitution is established? Despite these objections that require explaining, confederal municipality would truly be a revival of democracy through active political participation in the sense that the community would be ruled by the people.

In the end, considering that the problem that preceded my research question was the fact that the people are unsatisfied with democracy because of the distance between politics and the people, Bookchin’s approach to the revival of democracy is more fitting. Because Dagger considers the problem to lie with the people, his obligation to participate politically wouldn’t solve the discontent with democracy. Bookchin on the other hand, acknowledges the fact that the discontent of the people with democracy comes from a flawed political system and seeks to solve the problem by reforming its structure radically. Again, Bookchin’s aim is not to offer a blueprint for a pre-made society. Rather, he intends to restore people’s freedom from domination in order to enable *them* to create a society in accordance with their wishes.

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