The concept of deliberation.
An attempt at a comprehensive perspective

The article attempts to describe comprehensively the concept of ‘deliberation’, which is understood as an multidimensional intellectual structure referring to the phenomenon of reflection and public dialogue. A semantic analysis disclosing a denotation of the word ‘deliberation’ and its numerous connotations (communication, debate, discussion, discourse, dialogue, conversation) is supplemented with an analysis of a scholarly discourse focused around a concept of a deliberative democracy (known as ‘deliberative discourse’). A range of variants of a definition and interpretative threads developed on the grounds of this discourse clearly point to a significant differentiation of the concept of ‘deliberation’. While signalling an overt and a hidden presence of many of its aspects, they make it possible to determine both the inner relations between the particular elements (‘the structural-functional components’) and the external relations between those elements and an observable reality. It is thanks to this that a normative theory of deliberative democracy obtains an extra perspective, orientated toward empirical research, an analysis of specific cases of deliberation (case studies) in respect of the specified criteria. The final objective of the article is to propose a definition which optimally integrates a synthetic view with an analytical approach, making it possible to avoid reducing deliberations to either a holistic structure ruling out a natural complexity and variety or a set of any elements eliminating a necessary order and cohesion. The summary revisits the connection between deliberation and a deliberative democracy, pointing out the manner in which it is possible to make a global appraisal of a given, actually existing, democratic system.