

Introduction

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FROM COMMUNITY FORUMS TO CIVIC DISCUSSIONS

IS THIS RESEARCH AT ALL?

During the summer of 2008, a deliberative weekend was organized in the South-West Hungarian Kaposvár district (or ‘Small Region’, as it is officially called). Two methods were utilized: a *Deliberative Poll* – with the participation of leading experts who invented the method – and a *Citizens Jury*. When the researchers came together in an international workshop four months later to discuss the first results (variants of the studies on which the present volume is based), a foreign critic asked: “what is this? Is this research at all, or an attempt to encourage citizens to pursue political discourse and to promote the inclination to responsible participation?” There are a wide range of deliberative methods: at one end stress is laid on encouraging the probability of participants to generate well-informed, well-grounded opinions (Fishkin 1995, Fishkin-Laslett 2005, Fishkin-Farrar 2005), while at the other pole the method is primarily aimed at disseminating behavioral patterns of responsible citizens and involving the laity in policy decisions. The Deliberative Poll (DP) is closer to the former method and the Citizens Jury (CJ) to the latter. Ned Crosby’s aim in developing the Citizens Jury method in the seventies was to assist in creating adequate conditions for thrashing out public policy issues or evaluating election candidates. He wished to create a microcosm in which the weight of reason and empathy among disputants could be increased (Crosby-Nethercote 2005).

We interpreted the task (for both methods) as a *research project*. Research tasks in the narrow sense were the correct application of recruitment principles and assessment of how knowledge of the participants increased and/or how group dynamics influenced the formation of proposals. In a broader sense, however, it was also research to assess what social effects deliberative methods have; whether they produce the expected effect - in our case, whether citizens become better informed and more judicious during the debates. Also, do the events have side-effects that were not expected at the beginning? Deliberative events have an experimental character. They may influence participants’ subsequent fates, views and attitudes towards others. This is a kind of *research* with obvious social and political implications – implications the presence or absence of which may also be the subject of research.

BACKGROUND: ON THE INTUNE PROJECT

The research was organized within a European Union 6th Framework Program project, called IntUne (Integrated and United? A Quest for Citizenship in an Ever Closer Europe). IntUne was a four year project which started in September 2005. Coordinated by the University of Siena

it involved 29 European Institutions and more than 100 scholars across Eastern and Western Europe.

The main objective of this research was to study changes in the meaning of citizenship as an effect of the process of the deepening and enlargement of the European Union. The project was designed to analyze how processes of integration and decentralization affect different aspects of citizenship; namely the aspects of identity, representation, and the scope of governance. Two waves of elite surveys and population surveys were the major tools of this project (first findings from the Hungarian elite survey were published in 2008 (Lengyel 2008)). Besides the surveys, Deliberative Polls and Citizens Juries were also organized with a focus on the problems of local society in Turin and in Kaposvár. The aim of these was to enrich the methodological arsenal and, as much as possible, to try to strengthen the link between local and European approaches. At least this was the reason we included local public perceptions of the EU on the list of topics for the Kaposvár DP (see Göncz in this volume).

WHY KAPOSVÁR, WHY UNEMPLOYMENT, WHY THE EU?

Unemployment, the greatest problem for local societies, was the main topic of the Kaposvár deliberative events. While the core theme of the two meetings was the same, in the Deliberative Poll the emphasis was on what participants know about the local labor market, how they perceive unemployment and what they expect from policy measures and EU projects in this respect. In the Citizens Jury more weight was given to the relationship of unemployment to education and to laymen participants' suggestions on how to improve the situation.

We have conducted research in the Kaposvár district since 2002 (Lengyel et al. 2006, www.etk.uni-corvinus.hu) and it had become clear from field experience that problems related to unemployment and job creation are adequately relevant to local people. 54 settlements belong to the district; the only town is Kaposvár with two-thirds of the county population of 100 thousand. The workforce is even more concentrated; four out of five people work in the town. In the villages the largest employer is the local government and there is also some agricultural work. But for the majority of the people, Kaposvár is the only place to find a job. The unemployment rate in Somogy County (where the Kaposvár district is located) was 17% at the time of research, while the national average was 10%. One has to add that 1/3rd of those unemployed had been so for more than a year, and were largely without hope of finding a solution.

Additionally, we wanted to link our deliberative research to the main focus of the IntUne project - how different social groups perceive the EU – because it would enrich the analysis if we could learn more about what people expected from, and knew about, the EU. Of course there is enough evidence in the IntUne surveys concerning identity, scope of governance and the policy preferences of people. Nevertheless, we thought that studying learning processes and attitude changes concerning attachment to EU and EU policies could refine the picture, drawn mostly from this survey evidence.

ON THE RESEARCH

The preparatory work for the research lasted more than a year. Focus groups were organized with local mayors and civic activists and interviews were made with stakeholders and key figures in local politics (among others with the president of the Regional Council). A so-called research camp was organized during the summer of 2007 when our Ph.D. and M.A. students conducted

interviews and collected visual information about how local people saw their immediate and wider social environment (Simon 2007). In parallel with this we actively searched out a selection of the best local and national experts on unemployment, the labor market, education and the EU. Compilation of the questionnaire was a two month-long process itself, with weekly telephone conferences between the Hungarian team and the key experts of the DP method, James Fishkin and Robert Luskin, who volunteered to train the moderators and visit the event as well. The survey was carried out in May 2008 by TNS Hungary using professional standards and a cooperative spirit. The sample (T1) was 1514-strong and was designed to meet criteria of representativity at both district and settlement levels. Out of the 54 settlements, 14 were selected according to size and unemployment rate. The Random Walk method and the Kish Selection Table were utilized for selection of interviewees. At the end of the survey we informed the interviewee about the possibility to participate in the deliberative assembly where the participants would meet to discuss the problems of unemployment and other issues with each other and with experts. We mentioned that the event would be covered by the media and that we were offering catering, gift coupons and 7 attractive lottery prizes to the expected 250 participants. We expected this number of participants because 242 people said “yes” and 193 “maybe” to the invitation. We sent briefing material to all of those who said “yes” or “maybe” to the invitation and repeated our invitation to the event. Experienced colleagues warned us that inclination to participate might drop significantly during the last days before the event, and this is exactly what happened. 122 participants showed up during the event, out of whom 111 attended both days (108 at the DP). One of the articles (Vicsek et al., in this volume) is specifically devoted to a theoretical explanation of dropout behavior. We may add, on the basis of statistical analysis, that interviewees from small, resource-poor villages didn’t visit the event in representative numbers, most likely because of unfavorable transport conditions (the event was organized on the new campus of Kaposvár University, on the outskirts of the city, which was less convenient to approach using public transport from the villages). The moderators were selected from among our younger colleagues who were Ph.D. or MA students according to their previous experience. One day before the assembly they received special on-the-spot training from professors Fishkin and Luskin. The event was framed by the completion of T2 and T3 questionnaires on arrival on the morning of the 21st and at departure in the afternoon of the 22nd June 2008. Both questionnaires were self-administered, although in case of need moderators and volunteers provided technical help to the elderly and handicapped. In the DP, small group and plenary sessions varied according to the scenario, while the CJ expert-hearings were followed by discussions and recommendations. Most people were highly interested, a bit reserved, but not frightened by participation in a public debate. The meetings were video- or audio-taped and moderators were asked to write a report about their experiences. News in the local and national media, as well as a discussion on the Internet followed the event.

SOME EXPERIENCES

— AN EXTENSION OF OUR KNOWLEDGE ABOUT DELIBERATION

The model of deliberative democracy is conceived by many as an alternative to – or in a moderate version, a correction of – representative democracy. The representative model is under criticism because the mechanisms of representation may distort the values and interests of laymen and alienate citizens from politics; that is, from responsible participation in public life.

Most of the deliberative methods aim at involving well-informed citizens in public discourse and these methods are thought to create laboratories for deliberative democracy. The methods have common agreement on the strength of argument and presuppose the existence of wise

laymen. Some of them expect knowledge gain and some a growing awareness of people concerning public affairs; that is, a growth in the responsibility of citizens, increasing participation or even consensus as the outcome of deliberative meetings. Skeptical critics, on the other hand, say that there are many problems with deliberative methods as well - sometimes it is suggested that they are just fig leaves for democratic deficiencies.

The most frequent criticism is that there may be many distortions in the selection of a deliberative community (if nothing else, more extroverted or more interested people may be overrepresented). An uncontrolled difference between lay participants and experts and even differences in the arguing capabilities of participants may lead to biased results. As far as our research experience is concerned, the absolute majority of the participants of the Kaposvár deliberative event felt that the small group moderators provided the opportunity for everyone to participate in the discussion and that members participated relatively equally in the discussions. The relative majority also felt that their factual knowledge, communication skills and empathy as well as their motivation for participation in public debates grew significantly during the discussions.

For the participants of the DP and CJ it took time to realize that the event differed from a Community Forum, the only pattern they may have been familiar with in terms of participative methods. These forums, going back to state socialist times (and still alive) are workshops of the “culture of complaint”: once every year or so, mayors are supposed to listen to the problems of citizens. However, during the DP process no authorities are addressed in an asymmetric way in terms of power; participants themselves have to discuss the issues. DP discussion therefore lies somewhere between complaint and recommendation. Elster is right in distinguishing *arguing* - the key element of deliberation - from *bargaining* and *voting* as basic forms of collective decision making (Elster 1998). Based on our empirical research findings we may add that deliberation as a speech act may take different forms which don't necessarily involve decision-making in all cases. At a Community Forum the situation of participants is asymmetric, the aim is information-gathering and dissemination, not decision-making and the basic form is *complaint*. The mood of this complaint may be passionate, cool or humble depending on the situation, the political culture and the very nature of power asymmetry.

During the Deliberative Poll the aim is not decision-making either, but information gain and the discussion itself. The situation is not asymmetric in terms of power and influence; participants are equal. In fact, there is a sort of *information* asymmetry between invited experts and participants. This could be seen as being closer to the Community Forum structure if there are policy makers among the invited experts. In principle policy makers could be invited to a DP, but in our case they didn't participate. We were witnessing, in some cases however, that information asymmetry lead participants to try to transform the experts into decision-makers and make them accountable for providing solutions. Others complained that whatever they were able to discuss, no-one would listen to them or improve their conditions. In the case of a DP, *discussion* and reasoning is the basic form. It may be (just as in the case of the Community Forum) passionate and personal, but it may also be fact-finding and neutral as well - depending on the situation and cultural codes.

During a Citizens Jury the form is discussion and *recommendation*. There is no power asymmetry between participants, but there is a difference between experts and laymen - in this DP and CJ are similar - and a difference between opinion leaders and the rest. Due to the fact that CJ involves the element of recommendation, it presupposes a sort of collective decision-making. Therefore the asymmetry between opinion leaders and the rest of the participants here may be more important than in the case of the DP, where spokespersons have a more limited role of presenting questions during plenary sessions. True, the impact of CJ propositions is mostly

virtual and participants are not as accountable for their words and deeds as authorities are. However, due to the artificial nature of the collective effort at recommendation-formation there is less temptation to complain during a CJ, and passions are better moderated.

Table 1. Comparison of the characteristics of Community Forums, Deliberative Polls and Citizens Juries

	Community Forum	Deliberative Poll	Citizens Jury
Selection	Self-selection with likely bias due to interest-disinterest difference	Random selection with possible bias due to cost-benefit factors, distance, interest or civic engagement	Random selection with possible bias like in DP and due to small N
Typical size	20-40	100-400	10-24
Typical form of communication	Complaint	Discussion	Recommendation and discussion
Mood of arguing	From passionate to humble	From emotional to objective	Dispassionate
Possible outcome	Promise	Information gain, opinion change	Consent
Decision made	No	Limited to decision about questions for the plenary session and selection of a spokesperson	Decisions about propositions
Nature of asymmetry	Power and influence asymmetry between residents and local politicians	Information asymmetry between experts and participants	Like in DP and asymmetry of influence between opinion leaders and the rest during the formation of recommendations
Possible side effects	Decreasing social tensions	Growing tolerance, empathy, trust	Growing civic activity

Some people recalled personal events and experiences during the small group discussions. In this way the logic of argumentation was not always clear or rational in the strict sense of the word. But it was reasonable, because everyday stories illumined many motifs and constraints that justified opinions and hence created causal relations between cause and effect. These opinions sometimes deviated from media-disseminated arguments. In lay discussions it is often the telling of a story that authenticates words. It is also a guarantee that participants may set aside their prejudices and imagine themselves in others' shoes while narrating their own opinions and experiences (Godling 1994, Polletta-Lee 2006). We can assert that ideological argumentation was minimal during disputes. Also minimal was the pure logical-type argumentation of the "if A yes, then B no" type. This is probably due to the fact that neither type of argumentation can be applied to many situations. During deliberation, ideological argumentation excludes the person from the dispute, or else, if it becomes predominant, it undermines the whole deliberation process (Przeworski 1998, Stokes 1998). Logical arguments would have been useful in the discussion, but participants rarely warn speakers that his or her statements are illogical, not only because they find it impolite but also because primary logical mistakes are rarely committed. In everyday reasoning – 'street-level epistemology' as Hardin calls it (Hardin 2005) -, secondary, not so obvious mistakes are more frequent. In reasonable argumentation, new facts, viewpoints and cases are adduced which are usually set side by side as equivalents, without being ranked. After all, who is more 'right' about the question of unemployment? An old-age pensioner who has worked all his life and now sees robust young men loitering in the village, unwilling to work? Those who think that the wages they would receive for work in town would hardly be in excess of unemployment benefits because of high travel costs? The one who nurses her sick parents and could find no one to look after them if she found a job in town? A side-effect of deliberation may be that, without ranking preferences, it may lead to a position in which "everyone is right

to some extent, so everyone is right". That, one presumes, is particularly tempting when a discussion is emotionally-charged. At the same time, deliberation was shown to increase empathy towards others' lives and positions. One tentative conclusion of the deliberative weekend is that arguments based on personal experiences rarely lead to the ranking of preferences in an open discussion, but they may contribute to a latent change of opinions. The outcome of the Kaposvár discussions was that personal opinions significantly shifted towards tolerance.

The majority of pros and cons were neither ideological nor illogical. Because sometimes they exposed illogical phenomena, another side-effect of the debates may be the illumination of policy mistakes. Therefore such processes may shed light on institutional conditions that in a given social milieu have failed and require adaptation. This is why endeavors to channel the positions, opinions and propositions of lay participants into policy-making may be expedient. The majority of participants found the meeting useful and thought that group deliberations decreased tensions and increased willingness to participate in civil society events.

Since the approximately 5%-strong Roma population is vastly overrepresented among the undereducated and unemployed it was predictable that discussions would touch upon the unsolved problems of Roma integration. A segment of the tabloid media and political movements exploited these unsolved problems to spread animosity and prejudice. We were concerned about how to handle possible injuries or tensions and conflicts between non-Roma and Roma participants, but it proved to be unnecessary. Participants were ready to express their own opinions, listen to each other and react to others' views according to their relative merits.

Another social effect of the discussions is their contribution to the atmosphere of trust. After the deliberation the level of generalized trust was higher among participants than in the local population. Taking a closer look, we find that half of this effect is attributable to composition: participants were originally of a different nature from those who stayed away. The other half of the effect derived from the fact that, after the debate, participants found that they could be more trustful towards their fellow humans than earlier. In this way, participative methods appear to generate social resources. Being able to debate with strangers and with people of differing life-situations and outlooks contributed to a growth in trust towards strangers. The positive effect of the deliberative event in regard both to *civic participation* and *generalized trust* is particularly noteworthy in Hungary, because – similarly to the majority of post-socialist countries – these components of social capital are found at considerably lower levels than the European average (Giczy-Sik 2009).

Opinions about who should get state benefits and under what conditions also significantly changed. The proportion of respondents saying that allowances should be paid only to those who worked for them decreased and the proportion of respondents who stated that everyone who is in difficulty should be taken care of increased after deliberation. At the same time, the proportion of those who thought that finding a job was one's own responsibility increased, and the proportion of those insisting on the government's responsibility dropped significantly after the deliberation. We tend to presume that this means a greater evenness of opinions. The participants became better informed about unemployment-related facts and policies on the one hand, and about the lives of other participants on the other. Let us repeat: one outcome of the DP was increasing empathy towards the needy.

By contrast, one of the recommendations of the Citizens Jury was "to provide subsidies to those who are unemployed who are physically capable of working only in the case that they carry out communal work and are willing to participate in training" This more stringent reservation is in contradiction with enhanced empathy towards the needy, as an opponent of the IntUne project pointed out (Follesdal 2009). This, in turn, raises the question of how stable or contingent the opinions formed during deliberation may be.

Deliberative events are obviously indirectly influenced by politics and the media and directly by the invited experts' opinions and group dynamics and atmosphere and also the presence or absence of an opinion leader. Since the Deliberative Poll and the Citizens Jury were staged at the same time and place, political and media influences can be taken as constant. In both politics and the media the view that welfare benefits should be offered under more rigorous conditions (tied to communal work and schooling of the children) was widely broached. As regards experts, their effect was also constant – as the same specialists were involved in both events concerning unemployment and job creation. Composition of the Citizens Jury did not considerably differ from that of the Deliberative Poll groups. As I mentioned before, the noteworthy difference between the two methods was that while the task of the DP participants was to discuss unemployment-related and other phenomena, the participants of the Citizens Jury had also to formulate policy recommendations as a result of these deliberations. In the small groups of the Deliberative Poll – according to moderators – discussions about unemployment and the memories of personal and family experiences elicited deep emotions, often ending in tears. Personal experiences were also related in the Citizens Jury group discussions but less time and attention was devoted to them since the emphasis was on working out consensually-formulated policy proposals. By nature, consensual small group policy proposals reflect the dominant public discourse, dominated by politics and the media. It is one thing to deliberate a phenomenon and it is another thing to put forth recommendations for the whole of the community on the basis of the same information. In deliberations, everyday personal experience and emotions may have a greater weight, while in recommendations the mainstream public discourse may surface more easily. The moderators of the Citizens Jury were aware of the difficulties and performed to the best of their abilities, but it was not their goal to eliminate the differences inherent in the methods, nor did they have the possibility to do so. Maybe with different group dynamics and/or more powerful spokespeople describing experiences of first-hand unemployment the recommendations could also have been more subtly nuanced. Since, however, the goal was to propose policy, participants presumably laid less weight on personal experience and tried to curb their emotional outbursts more strongly. Out of fifty comparable evaluation questions there was only one which differed significantly between DP and CJ participants. This was the question about the ability of one's small group to decrease emotional tensions, which was slightly more positively evaluated in the case of DP participants. It was more positively evaluated in DP groups because the emotional glow was higher (at least in some groups). In the CJ this group ability was also positively evaluated but it was needed less.

The first – greater - part of this volume contains articles dealing with different aspects of the Deliberative Poll, while the last two papers discuss the experiences of the Citizens Jury. Göncz and Tóth provide an overview of the topics and major findings of previous Deliberative Polls. Herman and Ignác measure knowledge gain and attitude changes during the DP. They find that the level of information was low at the beginning and increased only moderately during the weekend. The authors think that this is due to a “floor effect”, stemming from the originally low level of knowledge. They also found that learning and attitude changes were interwoven in the case of the evaluation of unemployment issues.

The paper by Lilla Vicsek and her coauthors is devoted to an explanation of participation on the basis of rational-calculative behavioral presuppositions. The authors argue that even if interviewees do not actually do a cost-benefit analysis, their decisions concerning participation may be properly described using this conceptual frame. They check their propositions using multivariate models and prove that, if other impacts are controlled, education had no real role in explaining participation. On the other hand, the ‘less effort-more expected benefit’ principle adds to the explanation for attendance.

Borbála Göncz analyses knowledge and attitudes concerning EU-issues. She relies upon survey evidence as well as a qualitative analysis of the discussions. After realistic and sometimes skeptical discussions, significant changes occurred in terms of participant support for further unification and the positive evaluation of Hungarian membership of the EU. Growing uncertainty could however be observed over other issues; for example in the case of the evaluation of competence and the fairness of EU decision-makers. Here the attitudes became more positive after the deliberation, but the proportion of 'don't know' answers also grew. The most likely explanation in this case is that more information and discussion contributed to the undermining of previously rigidly-held opinions. In another case people felt that after the deliberation the impact of European issues on their personal lives was less important. This finding may be interpreted as a sort of growing solidification of opinion replacing previously more opaque enthusiasm.

People are ambivalent and sometimes confused about how to evaluate the market (as Eszter Bakonyi's paper proves), as well as in their expectations concerning welfare institutions (as is exemplified in the contribution by Ivett Szalma). The latter article proves that discussion may contribute to clarification. The proportion of those who think that unemployment can't be totally avoided increased after discussions. This is especially interesting in the light of the fact that the small group discussions were emotionally-motivated and, as Lilla Tóth argues in her article, subjective well-being was negatively correlated with participant contributions to the cognitive processes of deliberative groups.

Fishkin et al. stress that there is a significant difference between numerical and textual questions when knowledge gain is taken into account. Textual questions seem to serve better to measure knowledge gain - and therefore to provide information on complex policy issues as well. It is emphasized in this chapter that positive attitudes toward the market grew during discussions and how participants themselves evaluate the event is also described. Subjective feelings of knowledge gain as well as enthusiasm concerning civic participation suggest that the relative majority of participants felt enriched and encouraged by the event.

Gábor Király and Réka Várnagy (the moderators of the Kaposvár Citizens Jury) state among other facts (after providing a careful description of the theoretical and methodological implications) that the event proved to be a learning process. Participants learned not only facts and figures concerning unemployment and local policy but about their own role in the process as well. Since recommendations need consensus, without careful guidance the very process may exclude otherwise important issues where consensus is not easily reachable.

Éva Vépy-Schlemmer investigated the structure and dynamics of opinions concerning the connections between the demand of the local labor market and the supply of educational institutions. She analyzed the content of stakeholder interviews as well as expert presentations and participant contributions to the debate and to the formation of recommendations. She mentions that, although most of the recommendations were clear-cut, their addressees were not always clearly enlightened because the competence of local and national policy makers was sometimes unclear to participants.

All in all, it was verified that the participative methods of Deliberative Poll and Citizens Jury are suitable for examining the problems of local society and raising the relevant knowledge and activity levels of participants. This finding was not without contradictions, was not evident in all areas and did not concern all questions. But it can be contended in general that opinions became more nuanced and that the level of knowledge increased during the discussions. Feelings of solidarity and tolerance were enhanced and opinions that tended to favor individual responsibility in the process of acquiring a job gained more ground.

Further examination is needed to explore how all segments of a studied populace can be involved in discussions using these methods and on how group dynamic processes can be interpreted.

When there is moderate readiness-to-participate and low interest in public questions, there is a chance that participant composition will be group-specific, confined disproportionately to those with an original interest in public matters, or that the latter will become the opinion leaders. It is also worth investigating whether the impacts of a deliberative event are lasting or temporary. Research to follow-up these questions is being planned.

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