I.
Deliberative Poll

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APPROACHES AND EXPERIENCES OF PREVIOUS DELIBERATIVE POLLING

Several participative research methods exist. These are all different in terms of the themes dealt with, sample size and target population – some address experts, while others address the mass public[1]. The Institute of Sociology and Social Policy of the Corvinus University of Budapest conducted a Deliberative Poll in the summer of 2008 in Kaposvár and its area on the topics of employment and job creation and the European Union and its employment policy.

Deliberative Polling was conceived by Professor James Fishkin in 1988[2]. The research program since that time has been conducted in collaboration with Professor Robert C. Luskin. Deliberative Polling is a technique which combines traditional random sampling public opinion polls with deliberation in small group discussions. A number of Deliberative Polls have been conducted in various countries around the world (e.g. Britain, Australia, Denmark, US, etc.) on various themes – some national and some local.

In the following article a brief overview of the method of Deliberative Polling is presented along with a description of the method, the main problems it addresses and a description of problematic areas based on experience gained from previous research.

About Deliberative Polling: the main ideas behind it

Deliberative polling is a method designed to provide creative answers to two main problem areas: on the one hand it aims to provide solutions to the problems of representative democracy, and on the other hand it is designed to assist in solving problems related to assessing public opinion (Ackerman & Fishkin 2003).

When dealing with representative democracy the main questions are how a democracy of engaged citizens can be created and how such citizens be mobilized and motivated. How can adequate conditions for deliberation be settled in current countries where many millions of people live together? When and how should people speak?

The main point of reference when dealing with democracy is the democracy of ancient Athens which combined the representative model of democracy with a model based on personal

1 Examples of participative research methods: Citizens Jury, Consensus Conference, Planning Cells, Scenario building exercise, The Café Seminar, 21 Century Town Meeting, Charette, Delphi, Expert Panel

2 Deliberative Polling® is a trade mark registered by James S. Fishkin. Any fees from the trade mark are used to support research.

participation. Representation in the democratic regime of ancient Athens took the form of randomly-elected commissions, councils and reunions as elements of direct democracy, where the limit of participation in the deliberation was defined by how far the human voice could be heard. The problems with the current systems of mass democracy can be apprehended through witnessing the increasing passivity of citizens, decreasing trust of democratic institutions and their elected representatives and a decreasing turnout rate at national elections.

The other main issue addressed by deliberative polling is the problem of public opinion and its measurement. The concept of "rational ignorance" used in social sciences (Downs 1956) is applied to the social phenomenon when it is not judged worthwhile for people to assign time and effort to gather the necessary information in order to formulate well–grounded opinions. However, a lack of information or formulated opinion does not prevent anyone from formulating an opinion when asked during public opinion research – although, as citizens are often not well-informed enough on public issues, public opinion polls present only a superficial view of public opinions. Another problem with assessing public opinion is that, as information and cognitive capacities are not equally distributed between people, not everyone has an opinion about every public issue (Zaller 1993); this problem highlights the question of the equivalency of opinions (Bourdieu 1997). Less-often elaborated opinions or attitudes are also less stable over time, can be easily changed and furthermore, inconsistent (even contradictory) opinions can also coexist concurrently in one person's mind (Zaller–Feldman 1992).

Beside the problem with assessing public opinion itself, there are several other technical problems related to its measurement. Some have highlighted the difficulty not only with measuring public opinion, but with the random variation of opinions over time and the way questions are formulated and/or phrased and in which order (Zaller–Feldman, 1992). Besides the inconsistency of opinions which may be present at the individual level, another problem with public opinion polls is whether a collective decision can be reached through a simple aggregation of individual opinions (Hardin 2003). Opinions that are still consistent at the individual level do not necessarily lead to consistent opinions at the collective level (Pettit 2003). Those who deal with collective rationality stress that collective decisions where deliberation of the issue is allowed are often more rational from the point of view of the group than those decisions obtained by simple aggregation of individual opinions – this corresponds to a deliberative model of democracy.

The process of a Deliberative Polls

Deliberative Polling is designed to utilize public opinion research in a new way to include the possibility of public consultation. A representative sample of people is firstly polled about the targeted issue/s. Then, respondents of the first poll are invited to gather at a single place for a weekend in order to discuss the issue.

The participants of the deliberative weekend are firstly presented with balanced briefing material prior to this event in order to provide them with information. During the deliberative weekend participants discuss the issue in small groups of 5–15 participants with the help of trained moderators. Each small group discussion session ends up with the formulation of a question that is answered by experts and political leaders during plenary sessions where all participants are present. Several small group discussions and plenary sessions are held during a weekend. After the event, the sub–sample is again asked the original question. The resulting changes in opinion are taken to represent the conclusions the public would reach if they had the opportunity to become more informed and more engaged by the issues.

Ideally, the media is present during the whole process, thereby ensuring a higher level of interest and also a higher level of impact on political decision-makers. Deliberative polls are different in this respect; some are more channeled into the policy-making process, others depend less on the issue than on who has ordered the research and from where the funds are derived.

Regarding the rate of participation during the deliberative weekend, great variation may be found, depending on the scale of the issue – a national issue will typically generate higher levels of interest than a local one.

Results of previous Deliberative Polls

There are two main approaches available when it comes to analyzing the results of a Deliberative Poll. On the one hand it is very important to see whether the participants of the deliberative weekend can be considered a representative sample of the population. In this regard the participants of the event may be compared to non-participants in terms of their demographic characteristics and their initial opinions and attitudes.

On the other hand, as the main aim of DP is to generate informed public opinion, it is very interesting to analyze the changes that occur in the level of knowledge and the opinions and attitudes of the participants of the deliberative weekend. In order to achieve this outcome, survey data from before and after deliberation is analyzed. When analyzing opinion and attitude changes, individual-level and collective-level changes can be both analyzed simply as changes in the consistency of opinions. These changes can be either attributed to the information provided through (for example) the briefing material, or alternatively to the effect of the deliberative process; furthermore, one can also analyze the effect of the small group discussions in comparison with the effect of the plenary sessions. This can be achieved through a special design format where different groups of participants complete questionnaires during different parts of the event. It is also interesting to see the effect of certain contextual factors on opinion and attitude changes (e.g. the effect of the small group dynamics).

When dealing with changes in opinion and attitude, it has already been mentioned that if these are not well–grounded enough they are unstable over time. In order to see whether these changes are a product of a cognitive process of the elaboration of opinions it is very useful to measure the long–term effect of a DP; however, this kind of follow–up research is not conducted in every case. Furthermore, opinions and attitudes can change due to factors other than the deliberative event itself – in order to control for the effect of other factors which may have a synchronous influence, the usage of control groups can be very efficient.

According to the Centre for Deliberative Democracy homepage (from 2008), between 1994 and 2000 a total of 22 DP were held in the Unites States and all over the world. From that time on there have been held almost as many as this, including the first – ever – EU wide deliberative poll. There have been deliberative weekends held in Great Britain, in Australia, in Denmark, in the United States of America, China, and Hungary.

The weekend sample sizes varied between 200 and 466 people. The most general outcome of the deliberations is that there is a statistically significant difference between the 'before' and 'after' deliberation opinions. Thus there is always an opportunity to show the differences ('opinion was that, and became this'). The process of DP implies representativity of scientific research with the concrete nature and informality of focus or discussion groups. The recordings of DP group discussions give opportunity for members of the public to re-word and reframe the issues in order to link them to the everyday experiences of common people.

Some previous Deliberative Polls and their results

Topic, title and venue of the event	Date/ duration	Number of participants/ number of small discussion groups	Question where the greatest change occurred %	Question where the least change occurred %
The National Issues Convention, Austin, Texas	January, 1996		"Make divorce harder to get" +21	"Biggest problem facing the American family is breakdown of traditional values" – 10
Deliberative Polling on Crime, Britain	1994		"Sending more offenders to prison is an effective way of fighting crime" –19	"The police should sometimes be able to bend the rules to get a conviction (strongly disagree) +9
British Deliberative Polling on Europe, Britain	1995		"Britain is a lot better off in the EU than out of it" +15	"With a single currency, Britain would lose control of its own economic policy" – 12
British Deliberative Polling on the Monarchy, Britain			"Monarch should not stay head of the Church of England" +30	"The Monarchy's role in uniting people from throughout Britain is very important" + 9
British Deliberative Polling on the General Election, Britain			Voting intention towards Liberal Democrats +22	Voting intention towards Conservative –7
Electric Utility DP Conducted for CPL, WTU and SWEPCO, State Texas			Renewable energy (CPL) –51	Buy and transport power (WTU) +8
Australia Deliberates on alteration to the Constitution (changing from a monarchy to a republic), Old Parliament House, Canberra	October 22–24, 1999	347	The proportion of supporters of the republican model increased from 53 to 73; the Australian flag would not change as a result of a yes vote decreased from 59 to 8 percent	The ratio of uncommitted before deliberation: 7 after:0 percent
Danish Deliberative Polling on the Euro, Odense , Denmark	August 25–27, 2000	364	The single currency is a step toward 'the United States of Europe' –21	No on the Euro +4
Australian Deliberative Polling on Aboriginal Reconciliation, Old Parliament House, Canberra http//www.ida.org.au	16–18, February, 2001	240	Perception of reconciliation as an important issue + 31	The support for initiatives such as a treaty or seat of agreements between indigenous and non–indigenous Australians – remained relatively unchanged
New Haven Deliberative Polling on Regional Economic Cooperation, Yale University	March –3, 2002	randomly selected representative sample of residents of 15 towns in the New Haven region	Support for "my town should maintain control over all of its tax revenues for new business and industries" –38	Support for "the state providing "incentives for towns in the region to share some tax revenue for new business and industry" +12

Bulgaria, Policies toward the Roma in Bulgaria – Ghettos, Crime & Education	April 14–15, 2007	national representative sample of 255 residents	The Roma should live in separate Roma neighborhood –22	Roma neighborhoods breed crime and disease that affect everyone +9
By the People: Americas Role in the World (U.S. foreign policy, health care, education and citizenship in the 21st century)	October –November 2007	11 communities +National Online DP		
China, Wenling City, Zegou Township, on city planning issues	2005			
Tomorrow's Europe	2007			
Greek Deliberative Poll for Candidate Selection (PASOK used DP to select this candidate for mayor in Marousi)	2006	138	voting intention +14,5	
Italy, Regione Lazio on health care and financial investment ethics	December 2006	119		
DP in Northern Ireland: Educational Policy in Omagh	27 January 2007	127 (from 250 yes/maybe; pre–deliberation sample: 565)	schools receive more funding for older pupils correct answer +57	feel favorably about protestants +0,3
CANADA, Halifax, NS Nova Scotia Power on Renewable Energy	19 November 2004	150		

Source: http://cdd.stanford.edu/

Problematic areas of a Deliberative Poll

There are several general presuppositions which are mainly based on common democratic values such as the following; that informed citizens are better than uninformed citizens; that deliberative decision-making is better than non-deliberative; that DP can be a remedy for problems with representative democracy; that citizens are able and ready to deliberate, and that participants of deliberative discussions meet the requirements of the discourse ethic (Habermas, 1981)[3].

There are several practical considerations regarding the topic for deliberative polling; the survey and the following discussions. It seems to be favorable when questions originate from the area or region involved. The question should be something which fundamentally affects the interests of many people. These preconditions guarantee that the questions raised will motivate participants to discuss by themselves. It is also important that the question or questions should have alternative solutions and thus provide the possibility of a choice. And it is also desirable that there should be well-identifiable representatives for each solution (politicians and experts).

Judging by the home page of the Centre for the Deliberative Democracy, the basic mission of DP is to deal especially with such issues that the public opinion are not informed about, or where the public has not yet faced the compromises apparent in public politics.

The composition of the participant groups for the deliberative weekends also deserves further consideration. Composition is important, and accordingly, how should we ensure that the weekend participants will be a representative sub-sample of the original representative survey sample? What should we do in order to make them come, remain and get involved as much as possible?

The briefing material should be informative, readable and understandable to the representative sample. This being so, we always should take into consideration the weakest member of the representative sample from the perspective of literacy, but at the same time bear in mind that presentation of information must not be boring for the rest of our audience. It cannot be an aim to justify pre-existing rational ignorance, yet the briefing material must not demand too much time and energy to be understood. Comprehension of the representative sample should be the aim.

The unique features of the small discussion groups of the deliberative weekend also raise several issues. The number of people in a group influences the group dynamics. For example, with more than 16–18 people there is a tendency to form subgroups and it is not easy to keep participants together – which can lead to violation of one of the basic principles; that everybody should have the equal chance to talk and to be listened to. On the other hand, with too few participants (below 5–6) in the small group there is less of a chance to bring up all points of view and it is therefore more difficult to generate a high diversity of opinions. The inequalities brought with the participants, like social status, communication skills, impression management and other personality traits will also influence the above-mentioned equal chance.

The person of moderators also makes a difference. There should be a strategy for their recruitment and selection. We have to decide what to measure and what to develop during their

3 Habermas extracts moral principles from the necessities forced upon individuals engaged in the discursive justification of validity claims from the inescapable presuppositions of communication and argumentation. Preliminary presuppositions are as follows: participants in communicative exchange are using the same linguistic expressions in the same way; no relevant argument is suppressed or excluded by the participants; no force except that of the better argument is exerted; all the participants are motivated only by a concern for the better argument.
Presuppositions unique to discourse are: everyone would agree to the universal validity of the claim thematized; everyone capable of speech and action is entitled to participate; everyone is equally entitled to introduce new topics or express attitudes, needs or desires; no validity claim is exempt in principle from critical evaluation in argumentation.
According to the theory, the implication of these presuppositions is a deep structure of moral norms; the conditions that every valid norm must fulfill.

training. Should they be topic experts or experts on groups? The diversity of moderators will influence the groups and it would be useful to know to what extent and in what direction.

We have to find suitable experts and politicians with different attitudes and views in order to allow a balanced and unbiased picture of the issue for discussion. It is questionable whether there are such experts and politicians and if they are ready to co–operate with each other and with us. The mere appearance of some of them can divide the participants of the plenary session. For example, in Hungary it is interesting how pre–existing party preferences influence the focus and concentration of attention and the cognitive process.

The role of the media is important, but also contradictory. There is a presupposition that the presence of the media will increase the responsibility of the participant. We know from earlier observation that publicity can change participants' behavior and attitudes. The people of "Magic Town"4 felt the responsibility to form considered judgments and they created an engaged community where they worked together towards public causes (Fishkin, 1995). We do not know much about the nature of this change; is it permanent, or provisional? And it is also to be examined whether the media uses (exploits) the DP, or whether DP can or should use the media. Can DP be used to give apparent legitimacy to political decision–making?

There are further issues arising from the presupposition of extrapolation from groups to the whole population; where are the borders of the population in the case of different issues? What is the impact of the cultural differences on the whole DP method? Does the Anglo–Saxon tradition of education and deliberation make any difference to the process compared, for example, to the more authoritarian style of the Central–European region?

And finally, it is interesting to reveal the effects of the level and quality of public education on the need and opportunity for cognitive mobilization (e.g. to what extent will a lack of basic reading skills and comprehension threaten the participation of people undergoing a deliberative process).

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4 Magic Town, a film made in 1947 in Hollywood, was about "Grandview", a small town which proved to be an exact statistical microcosm of the United State; a place where public opinion matched perfectly with Gallup data about the entire nation. As a result of the media presence, the citizens of the town became self-conscious and began to feel greater responsibility about forming and expressing their opinions.