



The EuroPolis Deliberative Poll

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Abstract

This special issue focuses on EuroPolis, a unique experiment in ‘deliberative democracy’ at the European level convened in Brussels soon before the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections. A European wide random sample of the 27 member countries at the time was gathered to deliberate about two key issues—climate change and immigration as well as its voting intentions. The articles in the special issue focus on this Deliberative Poll, both quantitatively and qualitatively to assess what it tells us about ambitious versions of a ‘European wide public sphere.’ Can the citizens of Europe deliberate together across all the barriers of language and nationality? Can there be a credible process of European wide ‘public will formation’ about substantive policy issues and about voting?

Keywords

European Parliament, direct democracy, quasi-experiment, public opinion

There is an enormous discussion about the European Union’s (EU) ‘democratic deficit’—the limitations in the democratic character of the EU and its institutions. However, the credibility of these claims depends on the theory of democracy that is being applied and on how the EU is conceived. From some perspectives, there is no problem of democracy in the EU at all. After all, the member states are generally functioning democracies, responsible to their own electorates. Those functioning democracies have their interests represented in Brussels in the Commission and the Council and in other EU institutions. Furthermore, all of the member states elect members of the European Parliament. Hence, some have concluded that there is no reason to be concerned about a deficit in democracy in the EU (Majone, 2005; Moravcsik, 2006). Yet, the internal democracy of the parts does not decide the

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question of the democratic character of the whole. There are EU wide decisions and EU wide issues and the claims about a democratic deficit focus on them and on how decisions at the EU level impact decisions within the nation states and regions.

These claims about a democratic deficit are widespread. We are told that '[t]he notion of the "democratic deficit" has swiftly become the most prominent label attributed to the EU polity; treatises on how to improve the democratic legitimacy of the EU have filled scores of books, academic journals, and newspapers' (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2007: 1). Even by 2005, the number of articles and books on the EU's democratic deficit had become 'too numerous to count' (Nettesheim, 2005: 358). The EU is perceived as bureaucratic and unresponsive to the public, its institutional engineering too complex and its performance too difficult to assess by the public (Follesdal and Hix, 2006).

Consider the three main forms of democratic practice that are now applied to European issues. These approaches correspond to three of the four most prominent notions of democracy. First, Schumpeterian notions of 'competitive democracy' can be applied to elections to the European Parliament (Schumpeter, 1942; Shapiro, 2003). Party competition democracy is central to most democratic practice and is probably the most influential view of democracy in modern times (for an overview of where party competition fits within democratic theory, see Dahl, 1989). However, elections to the European Parliament are famously 'second-order' low turnout and low salience affairs in which voting is largely a by-product of domestic national concerns rather than European wide issues (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). Most important for the Schumpeterian conception, they are notably lacking in party competition. While this picture has changed in certain regards since it was first formulated, primarily as the EU Parliament has become more powerful and hence its elections arguably more consequential, the basic image remains intact (and the turnout in European Parliamentary elections has actually been sinking). While the European party groupings have influence in Brussels, it would be an exaggeration to say that elections to the European Parliament represent genuine party competition as those elections conducted in the member states (Follesdal and Hix, 2006). Second, consider a second form of democracy, the direct democracy that occasionally punctuates European issues when countries hold referendums on treaty revisions or 'constitutional' changes. While party cues can provide a basis for voting in such referendums, particularly when they are high salience and parties disagree (Hobolt, 2007), national referendums are also vulnerable to populist capture when the passions of the public can be aroused (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005; Leonard, 2011). Referendums are a blunt instrument for expressions of the collective will. Voters are often uninformed about the complexities of the issues and, as suggested by Downs (1957), have little reason to become effectively informed, having only one vote in millions. Third, there is a form of democracy that might be termed elite deliberation. It is not deliberation by the people themselves but by elected representatives or those appointed on behalf of the respective member states. It is the deliberation of policy elites engaged in the EU's complex shared decision processes. Whatever one may think of the policy outputs, it should be

clear that the often nearly inscrutable EU decision processes do not narrow the gap between the public and EU level decisions. Rather, they exemplify it.

Why experiment with deliberative democracy?

Most actual functioning democratic systems combine elements of these three forms of democratic practice—party competition, direct democracy (at least on some occasions) and elite deliberation by policy experts and representatives. Different systems differ in the exact mix of these alternate approaches. Hence, it should not be surprising to find all three applied to some degree to EU decisions. Yet, it is worth emphasizing that there is another distinctive form of democracy, currently much discussed but rarely practiced in modern times. This form might be characterized as deliberative democracy—not deliberation by policy elites or elected representatives, but deliberation by the people themselves (see Bohman and Rehg, 1997; Elster, 1998; Fishkin, 1991; Fishkin and Laslett, 2003). This form of democracy engages ordinary citizens to consider competing reasons, to weigh arguments in a context of good information and to offer their considered judgments about what is to be done. The distinctive concern it adds to the mix of democratic practices is a focus on reason-based public will formation (Offe, 2011). From different perspectives, the democratic deficit has focused on the lack of party competition, or forms of plebiscitary direct democracy open to populist capture or elite deliberation in the comitology that is inscrutable or inaccessible to the public (Guegnen, 2010). None of these ‘democratic deficits’ speak directly to the absence, at the European level, of any basis for reasoned public will formation. Such an aspiration seems very much out of reach, the subject of ideal speculation, for a communication system as fragmented and an elite decision process as insulated from the public as the one comprised by current EU institutions. A distinctive challenge facing the development of deliberative democracy at the European level is whether the system of communication and the design of institutions will eventually permit EU citizens ‘to participate in a joint process of democratic will formation reaching across national borders’ (Habermas, 2012: 46).

Deliberative democracy would seem especially problematic at the European level. After all, the population of the EU is very large, on the order of around 500 million citizens, and there are many different languages and national differences—between northern and southern Europe, between western and eastern Europe, between old and new member states, etc. More than other forms of democratic practice, deliberative democracy, if it were to be applied at the European level, would require effective communication across these differences for a shared consideration of competing reasons. Yet, the communication systems, especially with old media (television, radio and the print press), are to a considerable degree divided by nation state and language. While there are ‘spill over effects’ (Eder, 2007) and while there are communities of interest and regional interests and pockets of European discussion that cut across these divisions, these patterns of

interpenetration fall far short of any European wide public sphere at the mass level (Erik, 2007; Fossum and Schlesinger, 2007).

With these challenges in view, how might deliberative democracy by the people themselves be possible or even imaginable at the European level? The EuroPolis project¹ pilots a form of deliberative democracy that is practical and realizable at the European level. It would not presume to be a replacement for familiar modern institutions, but perhaps a supplement, allowing for representative and informed public judgments about what should be done to become part of one or another institutional procedure or part of the public dialogue.

The EuroPolis project is an application of Deliberative Polling^{®2} on a European wide basis. Deliberative Polling is a form of public consultation that engages a microcosm of the population in moderated small group discussions and facilitates dialogues in plenary sessions in which competing experts and policy makers answer questions agreed on in the small groups from different perspectives. The polling in Deliberative Polling takes place before and after this intensive deliberative process in order to generate a picture of the public's considered judgments, in answer to the question: what would the public think about what should be done under good conditions for thinking about and weighing competing arguments?

The whole process is intended to facilitate a representative sample arriving at considered judgments to questions they may have initially answered from 'top of the head' impressions of sound bites and headlines. It is meant to embody reason-based collective will formation. The first question facing such an aspiration is: can it be made to work in a European wide context? If the answer to this question is encouraging, then the second question is: how might it be institutionalized or sited so as to have some influence on decisions made within the EU? This pilot was limited to the first question, but in a time of institutional experimentation the second is not utopian or irrelevant. Successive structural and quasi-'constitutional' changes have led to new offices (such as President of the European Council), new voting procedures (qualified majority voting), new powers for the Parliament as well as many other informal efforts to consult the public in all European member states, many actually sponsored by the EU (notably the Euro-Barometer and some activities sponsored by the 7th Framework Programme and by private foundations). In such a period of institutional experimentation, why not consider efforts to consult the European-wide public in a representative and thoughtful way?

The basic idea of the deliberating microcosm, chosen by random sampling, goes all the way back to the first forms of democracy in ancient Athens. There, the randomly selected Council of 500 set the agenda for what could be voted on in the Assembly and legislative commissions (*nomothetai*) of 500 randomly selected citizens were convened for a day to hear the arguments for and against a legislative proposal before voting on its adoption (Hansen, 1991). Might this kind of democracy be applicable to modern decisions? It has been tried in various contexts around the world at different levels (see Fishkin, 2009 for an overview). Before it can usefully be considered for the modern tool kit of democratic experimentation

at the European level, it needs to be credibly piloted and evaluated. The EuroPolis project and this special issue are offered as a contribution to that effort.

The EuroPolis research design

The main characteristics of a Deliberative Poll include random recruitment of participants, informational input about the issues discussed in balanced briefing materials, moderated small group discussions, plenary sessions in which questions from the small groups are answered and repeated attitude measurement (Fishkin, 2009). As compared to most (but not all) Deliberative Polls, the EuroPolis added two further elements: a control group that did not attend the event but that was administered a before–after questionnaire via computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) or computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) and a systematic recording of all verbal interactions in the small group to obtain both individual-level and group-level measures of the quality of the discussion. Figure 1 reports the overall EuroPolis research design. We discuss how these four characteristics were implemented in this project.

First, Deliberative Polls make a systematic effort at recruiting a random and representative microcosm of the reference population, large enough to allow for statistical procedures to be used and for the evaluation of both representativeness and opinion changes (Ryfe, 2005). EuroPolis used a stratified random sample of the adult population aged 18 years and over in all EU member states.³ Given the self-selection problems inherent in so many of these deliberative processes, we expressly adopted several strategies aimed at minimizing the risk that only those more

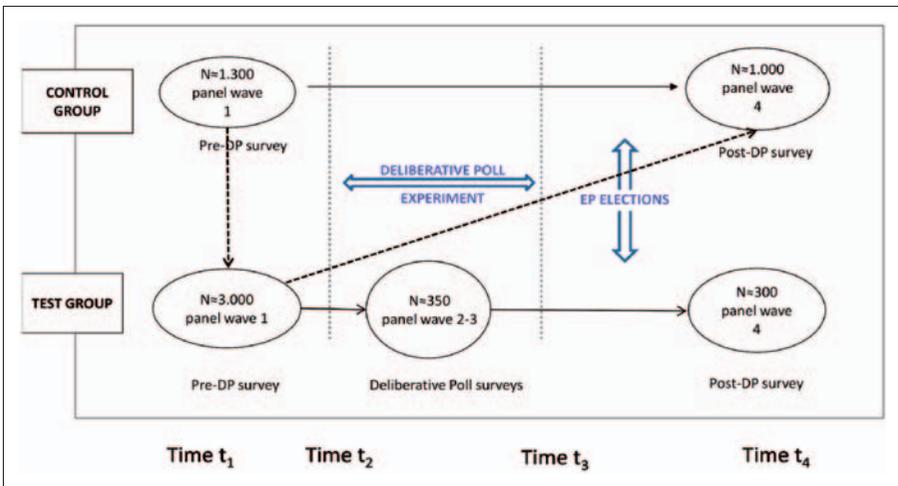


Figure 1. EuroPolis research design.

interested in the issues, in politics in general and in EU issues in particular, were attending. For this purpose, all prospective participants were regularly followed up from the recruitment stage to their arrival, interacting with staff who spoke their native tongue and who were able to solve their personal and logistical problems. Once in Brussels, participants were hosted in a nice resort and received a financial incentive (€80) for their participation. All of their travel and accommodation expenses from their home to the place of the event were covered by the project. EuroPolis also ensured that everybody could speak in his or her own native language through simultaneous translation (more than 150 translators made this possible) in the 21 different languages represented in both the small group discussions and the plenary sessions.

Overall, a Europe-wide representative sample of about 4300 citizens aged 18 and above was interviewed, starting 16 April 2009.⁴ Respondents were administered through CATI or computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI; depending on telephone penetration in the country and in their own mother tongue), a questionnaire approximately 20 minutes long about their general attitudes, policy preferences, level of knowledge on the two policy issues selected for the Deliberative Poll (climate change and immigration), their views on European integration, their perceptions of EU institutions, their general political orientation, participation and interest in politics and finally their horizontal trust and voting intentions for the European Parliamentary election in June 2009. They were also asked standard socio-demographic data. About 3000 of them, randomly selected, were asked at the end of the interview whether they would be interested in participating in a deliberative event to be held in May. The other randomly assigned 1300 did not receive such an invitation to the event and they constitute our control group. Out of the 3000 randomly selected to be part of the test group, a sub-sample of 348 actually attended the Deliberative Poll event. This group was proportionally stratified according to the number of seats allocated to each Member State in the EU Parliament.

Second, weeks before the event took place, all invited participants were supplied with background material on the two issues under discussion as well as information about the EU machinery and functioning in these areas. This briefing document aimed to offer an accurate and balanced description of the problems at hand and competing viewpoints about the policy alternatives. 43% of the participants declared they had read it all before their arrival, and another 20% had read more than half of it, while only 6% said they had not read it at all. The briefing document was initially drafted by a group of independent experts under the coordination of the European Policy Centre, a partner in the EuroPolis project. The document went through three drafting rounds, based on comments by experts covering different positions and by politicians from all the party families in the EU Parliament. A shared version of the briefing document was eventually agreed upon by the scientific advisory team. The final version was tested for its 'understandability' and was eventually translated into 21 languages. Some of the experts and politicians who contributed with comments on the drafts of the briefing

material were also invited to participate in the plenary of the Deliberative Polling experiment.⁵

Third, the participants came together for three days in Brussels on 29–31 May 2009 to discuss the issues of climate change and immigration in small groups and to ask questions to experts and politicians. At their arrival, staff welcomed the guests. Participants received a timetable of the experiment, another copy of the briefing document in their own language, information about the discussion groups they belonged to and other logistical details. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the 25 moderated small groups to discuss the issues. In each group, two to three languages were allowed.⁶ All verbal exchanges occurred in the participants' mother tongue and communications were facilitated by simultaneous interpretation both in the group discussion and in the plenary sessions with experts and politicians. 83% of the participants said they had little or no problem following the discussion through simultaneous translation. As part of their small group discussions, participants formulated questions to be asked to the panels of experts and to the final plenary with politicians. The discussion started with immigration followed by climate change. A final plenary took place late Sunday morning with the Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, the former Italian prime minister Giuliano Amato, the Danish MEP Jens Peter Bonde and the Belgian deputy prime minister Isabelle Durant. The participants were able to put their questions on immigration, climate change and EU decision-making to the politicians. After the plenary, participants returned to their small group to fill in the last on-site questionnaire. All small group discussions were led by a team of moderators expressly recruited and trained for the event. *Avventura Urbana*, the EuroPolis partner in charge of the recruitment and training of group moderators, selected and trained 30 moderators from the Brussels area, all with previous experience in managing and leading group discussions in focus groups. *Avventura Urbana*, together with Robert Luskin and James Fishkin, carried out a two-day training session right before the event. A majority (72%) of participants felt that moderators 'made sure that opposing arguments were considered' and only 12% felt that moderators 'sometimes tried to influence the group with their ideas.'⁷

Fourth and finally, we measured attitudes before, during and after the event to gauge the extent to which people change their attitudes and policy preferences as they become more aware, more thoughtful and better informed about the issues discussed in the event. All participants were exposed to four questionnaires: a first at the recruitment stage, when they were first contacted; a second at their arrival at the site; a third just before leaving the event at the end of the weekend; and a fourth starting immediately after the European Parliamentary elections, one week after the event had taken place. The first and last surveys were also administered to a control group. While these two were conducted via CATI/CAPI, the second and third were self-administered, confidential questionnaires distributed to participants when they were in the small groups. They were filled out individually by self-completion to guarantee anonymity among those present while at the same time allowing us to preserve the panel design.

We added two further twists to our design. First, we attempted to measure the individual level of deliberation in the various small group discussions using the Discourse Quality Index (DQI). Since the level of deliberation varies from participant to participant and also from group to group, we used such an index precisely to get at such variation. The concept of the DQI has been developed by investigating parliamentary debates in plenary sessions and committees in Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States (Steiner et al., 2004). More recently, it has been applied to the citizen level, namely in Colombia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Belgium and Finland (Steiner, 2012). Moving from the parliamentary level to the citizen level, however, required some adaptations of the index. The units of analysis for the coding are still the individual speech acts. This means that when an actor speaks up several times during a discussion session, each speech is considered as a separate speech act and correspondingly coded. Early on in a discussion, an actor may have been respectful; later on less so. With separate codes for each speech act, we get at such dynamics over time. For each speech act, we code the following elements of deliberation: length of speech act in seconds, speech act interrupted or not, level of justification, content of justification, respect, interactivity, consensual approaches, source of arguments, and finally statements of moderators. As there has been criticism that the Habermasian approach to the level of justification is too narrow and that personal stories should also count as justification for arguments (Mansbridge, 2010), we expanded our DQI to include stories.

Second, we paralleled the test group, i.e. the actual participants, with a control group consisting of people who were exposed to the first and last questionnaire but not to the deliberative experience. The design of the Deliberative Poll fits between observational and experimental designs, thus in this case can be most appropriately defined as a ‘quasi-experiment’ (Cook and Campbell, 1979). Of the three hallmarks of experimental design—the comparison of a test and control group, the random assignment to them and the manipulation of the treatment—this deliberative poll falls short of experimental standards on the second of these three requirements.⁸ In particular, in Deliberative Polls such as ours, in which one group has been invited to participate while another has not, eligibility for participation was randomly assigned to participants at the time of interview. However, not all of those who were invited participated in the actual event. Many of those who were eligible to participate declined, while a very few accepted but did not show up. Similarly, not all who were assigned to the control group (and thus not invited) agreed to be re-interviewed a second time after the European elections of June 2009. Those who self-selected into the treatment, i.e. agreed to participate in the event and actually took part in it, are not strictly comparable to the group of those who were not invited. That is to say, we cannot easily assume that there is no baseline difference between those who have been exposed to the treatment—i.e. the deliberative event—and those who were not—i.e. the control group. In itself, random assignment to the

treatment or control group does not guarantee that these two groups do not differ. On the other hand, as the reader will see, there are ways to address this problem and we have explored them in this project.

Two possible solutions are at hand. The first, increasingly practiced in empirical deliberative analysis, is propensity score matching (for an application to deliberation, see Barabas, 2004). This is an attempt to equalize the control and test group while controlling for all possible confounders. Of course, this approach is only as good as our theory of what the confounders that jeopardize the comparison are. As other studies (e.g. Isernia et al., 2013; Luskin et al., 2002) suggest, self-selection in Deliberative Polls magnifies biases that are already present in survey research. Those who are more attentive to politics, better educated and more advantaged in society are also somewhat more likely to accept and participate in such events, while those who are less educated, less interested in and motivated by politics and less advantaged are somewhat less likely to agree to participate in such experiences.

The alternative is to exploit the panel nature of our design. In summary form, we assume that absent the treatment, changes in the outcomes of the treated and control units would have shown parallel trends, thus we impute Y_0 for the treated units. This will allow us to estimate the average treatment of the treated (ATET). The estimate of this effect is simply the after–before difference in the means for the treated units minus the after–before difference for the controls. The main problem with this approach is that one would ideally like to have as many time points prior to treatment as possible to lend credibility to the parallel trends assumption. Unfortunately, we do not have that luxury here.

Both approaches have their problems and advantages. Given the nature of the assumptions implied by both, we eventually preferred to report results from both approaches when relevant (not all papers in fact exploit the test-control group comparison). We asked all contributors to run a common set of propensity matching analyses to compare the results with and without matching. Moreover, studies that used both the test and control groups (e.g. Fraile, 2014; Smets and Isernia, 2014) adopted the difference-in-difference model (and sometime also the difference-in-difference-in difference model) to test for changes in outcomes for both the test and control groups. None of the contributors reported any substantial differences among results produced using propensity matching and those without it. Some papers have reported their propensity score results in their online appendices. The fact that both kinds of results point in the same direction conveys a certain robustness to our results, even if the two approaches rely on somewhat different models of causal inference and therefore do not lend themselves to be easily compared.

While the limits of random assignment are the major departure from a truly experimental design due to the added stage of self-selection, Deliberative Polls differ from standard experiments also on a second account: the nature of the treatment or manipulation. Deliberative Polling provides any researcher working empirically on deliberative democracy with a robust and well-tested research

methodology, linked to a quasi-experimental design, specifically aimed at exploring the potential impact of empowering citizens through dialogue vis-à-vis policy makers such as the EU. There are several things to be commended about Deliberative Polls as a scientific approach: a clear research protocol; an attempt at inclusivity through random sampling; the explicit attempt to create an environment conducive to free and equal discussion among participants; the experimentally oriented approach to the measurement of attitudes; and a rich and ever-growing number of applications from which to draw useful comparison and learning. However, there are also limits to that approach. Two main disadvantages stand out. The first is that the careful design of ideal conditions for cross national deliberation makes the experience ‘artificial’ in the sense that it is very different from ordinary life. The high costs make it difficult to spread the apparent positive effects to a broader population. Second, the nature of the overall ‘treatment’ makes it sometimes difficult to understand what really ‘caused’ the observed changes since ‘[t]he one grand treatment consists of everything that happens from the moment of recruitment, immediately following the pre-deliberation questionnaire, to the post-deliberation questionnaire at the end’ (Luskin et al., 2002). For this reason, as an example, we were pleased to have the opportunity to record and analyze the verbal exchanges that allow us to add a further element to better understand what really occurs in the discussions when Deliberative Polls take place. In addition, we have the advantage of an arrival questionnaire that distinguishes opinion change and learning before the event from during the event.

A last note on the rationale for choosing the two public issues selected for discussion—climate change and immigration. They were chosen by the research team for three reasons.⁹ First, they cut across countries and party families and prompt strong citizen opinions (as shown in several public opinion polls, e.g. Eurobarometer). Second, they are very different issues. Climate change is typically a highly technical issue on which one might expect information inroads to produce changes in attitude due to knowledge gain and exposure to competing arguments through the briefing document, the discussion and the questioning of experts. On the other hand, immigration is still an issue on which ignorance is widespread and emotions run very high. One issue is thus hot while the other is thus cold (or at least colder). Third, we chose issues that were expected to be relevant for discussion among parties at both domestic and European levels in the period leading to the European Parliamentary election in June 2009.

Who participates

Besides the inferential issues about the causal nature of the deliberative experience, another issue for any Deliberative Poll is its representativeness as compared to the general population. The typical Deliberative Poll shows both the power and the limits of any attempt at recruiting a truly representative cross-section of the population to participate. As compared to other deliberative techniques, such as focus groups, citizens’ juries, town meetings and other participatory experiments that rely

on quota or convenience samples, the Deliberative Poll is clearly superior both in the size of the sample and in the explicit attempt at recruiting a truly genuine random portion of the population. A similar point can be made about lab experiments in deliberation. The recruitment of a random sample is an attempt to achieve more credible claims of external validity than those attached to alternative methods of consultation. Random sampling ensures that the group of participants is as inclusive as possible (Ryfe, 2005: 50-54). Unlike most other methods, data from both participants and non-participants allow for a systematic evaluation of representativeness based on self-selection or convenience samples. As compared to standard surveys and polls (Brehm, 1993; Berinsky, 2004), recruitment in Deliberative Polls ‘creates a second point at which designated respondents may bow out’ (Fishkin and Luskin, 1999: 15). This produces a slight but consistent pattern in bias (Fishkin and Luskin, 1999; Luskin et al., 2002; Olmastroni, 2013) that usually modestly reinforces those biases already present in survey samples. In general, the major difference among participants and non-participants is that the former are somewhat more politically involved, active and interested than the non-participants. We question whether this problem is increased in a pan-European context.

Given that the EuroPolis sample aspires to be representative at the European level, the socio-demographic characteristics of the European population could be compared with those of the selected participants (see the online appendix for a systematic comparison of participants and non-participants, as well as participants and the control group). We used two sorts of comparison to gauge the overall representativeness of our sample. The first comparison is on socio-demographic characteristics between the participants and the European population of comparable age (18 or more), based on census data as provided by Eurostat. We used three sets of indicators: gender, age and education. In terms of age and gender, the differences are not important. The EuroPolis participants are slightly more middle-aged (46–55 years old), as compared to the census population. In terms of education, our sample appears better educated than the general population. While 31% of the European population has no more than a lower education (ISCED 2), in our sample this number is less than a tenth (9.3%). The second comparison is with the Eurobarometer data, the most noticeable survey source for the EU–27 countries. A variable on which this comparison is possible is the left–right continuum. The comparison is not exact due to the different scales used by EuroPolis and Eurobarometer. However, recoding the respondents in three groups (left, center and right) shows that in both cases, roughly one-third of the population belongs to each of the three categories. The major source of these differences is the higher number of ‘Don’t knows’ (DKs) in the Eurobarometer data that does, however, spread out evenly among left, right and center. In conclusion, there is no dramatic over-representation of people of any particular political leaning among the participants in our experiment.

If in terms of general population demographics and left–right political orientations, our participants are comparable to those who did not agree to participate in the event, some more systematic differences do, however, emerge on several

variables. The participants in the EuroPolis experiment are slightly more educated and of a higher social class than the non-participants, and are also somewhat more pro-immigration, pro-European and more likely to vote in the European parliamentary election. Despite these differences, both groups start from the same knowledge base when it comes to these issues. On most of the knowledge questions, differences between the two groups are minimal and non-significant. The two exceptions are about the 'Blue Card' for immigration and the Greenhouse effect for climate change.

While no comparable attitudinal differences materialized for climate change, these differences between participants and non-participants on immigration could suggest that some process of self-selection against views that are too negative on immigration might be at work during the recruitment process. Those who entertain more negative views of immigration and immigrants might be reluctant to engage in a frank and open discussion with others about their own ideas. However, this does not mean that all had rosy views on immigrants either. Although somehow truncated in its variance, 12% of the participant sample holds the extreme position on sending all illegal immigrants back to their countries of origin (among non-participants this proportion is 18%). Similarly, 12% of the participants strongly disagree with the statement that illegal immigrants should be eligible for national health care (this is 17% among non-participants), and 8% strongly disagree that the 'children of illegal immigrants should be eligible to attend public school' (11% among the non-participants).

Finally, we can compare the test and control groups. Attrition, a typical problem of panel designs, affected the two groups differently. For the test group, out of the 348 initially participating in the event, European Omnibus Survey/Taylor Nelson and Sofres (EOS/TNS) was able to re-interview 333 of them, with only 15 missed (4%). The attrition in the response rate for the control group was, not surprisingly, higher. Out of the 1311 originally interviewed at T₁, TNS was able to re-interview only 729 of them (55.6%). To bring the sample size to the target of 1000, we brought 266 people into the control group that had either been invited to participate to the event but had not accepted or had not been invited at all. We checked whether this group was in any way systematically different from the rest of the control group due to being invited to the event at some point and found that the differences between the two groups were minimal. Only seven questions show statistically significant differences in the two groups. Given that the differences between this group and the rest of the control group are few, we ignored them in several analyses. However, to strengthen the validity of our results, all analyses in the special issue are based only on the control group consisting of those who had been randomly assigned to it at the beginning of the experience. This explains why the total N for the control group is only 729.

While the sample was not perfect, it is one of only two European wide Deliberative Polls ever gathered in a single place. Hence, it is certainly one of the best microcosms of the entire European electorate ever convened for a deliberative process. Other methods for gathering citizens rarely, if ever, begin with

random sampling and are usually not large enough in scale to be evaluated in a statistically meaningful way. Furthermore, the collection of attitudinal as well as demographic data on its representativeness allows for transparency in who these people were and what motivated them. The question for this issue is what happened when they deliberated?

The papers in this special issue approach this topic from different angles. Fishkin et al. (2014) sketch the conditions for a European-wide public sphere and examine whether the EuroPolis project approximated them. In particular they look at whether, after deliberation, the participants in the treatment group were able to make a coherent connection between their policy preferences on climate change and immigration and their voting intentions. They clearly did so in the case of the Greens, support for which also rose dramatically.

Bernhagen and Schmitt (2014) also look at voting intention but focus on whether the change in knowledge from deliberation can be used to explain the changes in voting intention and in particular the change in support for the Greens. The question of whether deliberation affects voting intention, either through knowledge or through changes in policy attitudes, has not been investigated in a pan-European context so these papers explore new territory. Gerber et al. (2014) analyze the discussions within the Deliberative Poll to look at the role of what they call ‘deliberative persuasion’—whether ‘statements backed by reasons’ produce opinion change. They find deliberative persuasion on the contentious issue of legalizing illegal immigrants but not on the more technical issue of what topics are most appropriate to handle at the European level. The question of the nature of arguments offered within the black box of deliberation and how it might be connected to opinion change is a rarely explored topic for deliberation by ordinary citizens and is entirely novel in the pan-European context. Smets and Isernia also look at opinion change, this time using before and after quantitative data to examine the application of three competing micro-models to look at the exact mechanisms producing change. There has been a lot of discussion of before and after differences in deliberative forums, but little attention to the exact micromechanisms of opinion change. Again, in the pan-European context, this is new territory. Fraile looks at whether deliberation affects the gender gap in knowledge. She finds that it reduces the gap both through learning and by increasing the confidence of women to provide answers. This exploration of the gender gap is a new contribution in the context of pan-European deliberation. Claus Offe concludes the special issue with the reflections of a social theorist who has written extensively both about deliberative democracy and about the EU. He is uniquely situated to place the project in the broader context of debates about Europe, debates about the public sphere and about deliberative democracy.

Finally, this issue provides a window on democratic possibilities that are hardly, as yet, realized in practice. We do not have a European wide public sphere, we do not have widespread deliberative discussions of European issues on a European wide basis. But what if we did? The European wide Deliberative Poll gives us a picture of a possible future—a version of the EU in which the people of Europe

share their reasons together and weigh trade-offs, become more informed and make their choices in European elections. It is a picture of Europe where the ‘will of the people’ means something on a European-wide basis. The piloting of such a European-wide public sphere in this unprecedented (quasi) experiment in the context of European Parliamentary elections may help clarify the debate and focus attention on different paths to Europe’s contested future.

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Notes

1. The EuroPolis experiment was made possible by the support of a group of private foundations coordinated by the Compagnia di San Paolo (including the King Baudouin Foundation, the Bosch Stiftung and the Open Society Institute) and by a grant under the 7th Framework programme (grant agreement SSH7-CT-2009-225314). For more information on the project, see www.europolis-project.eu. The partners of the team were the University of Essex, MZES; Science Po Paris, the University of Oslo, the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC) in Spain; and Median Research Center (MRC) in Romania. The University of Siena was the project coordinator. The project cost was around 2.5 million euros, half of which was covered by the 7th Framework Programme and the other half from the group of private European foundations. The second author of this introduction, James Fishkin, and Robert Luskin acted as advisors to the team. For more information on the substantive topics and designs of each Deliberative Poll, see <http://cdd.stanford.edu/>. Most of the projects around the world have been conducted in collaboration with Robert Luskin.
2. Deliberative Polling is a trade mark of James S Fishkin. The trade mark supports research at the Stanford Center for Deliberative Democracy.
3. EuroPolis used a mixed design mode based on telephone (CATI) interviews and face-to-face (CAPI) interviews for those countries in which telephone penetration did not allow for a reliable national sample. The overall sample was stratified according to the size of the population of the respective countries on the overall European population. In each country, telephone numbers were selected using Random Digit Dialling (RDD). For face-to-face interviews, a random selection of sampling points was drawn for both test and control groups and addresses were randomly chosen following the random route procedure and the last birthday rule. Response rate for each national sample can be made available by authors upon request.
4. The first survey started 16 April 2009, approximately one month before the Deliberative Polling event, and lasted until 28 April 2009. It was coordinated by EOS/TNS Opinion and carried out through its national agencies. Citizens were interviewed in their mother tongue. Most countries used the CATI system, where households were selected using RDD. In each household, respondents were selected using the last birthday method.

Due to low landlines penetration rates, in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania, interviews were CAPI and households were selected using the ‘random route’ procedure, and in each selected household, respondents were selected using the last birthday method. The post-event survey started from 8 June to 22 June 2009, for both test and control groups.

5. The experts in the Immigration Plenary were Elizabeth Collet (EPC); Marco Cilento (ETUC); Giulia Lagana (UNDP). For Climate Change, the experts were Marie-Hélène Fandel (EPC) and Nick Campbell (Business Europe).
6. To allocate participants to groups we had to balance four variables: number of groups, number of languages, diversity of groups and cost. We strived for a diversity of languages given financial constraints, number of groups and size of the different countries’ participants.
7. We report here the percentage of those with a score greater than five on each of the two 0–10 scales.
8. The ‘Experimental’ nature of design-based research, in part for its popularity and prestige, suffers from some sort of ‘conceptual stretching’ in social sciences, since several qualifiers have been added to the term experiment, such as field, natural and quasi-experiments that, for different reasons, diverge from pure ‘experiments.’ We acknowledge this complexity and try to make clear here in what sense our design departs from pure experiments. Quasi-experiments distinguish themselves from natural experiments (Dunning, 2012) because in the latter the manipulation of treatment is found in nature and not man-made as in Deliberative Polls. It should be noted that while in earlier writings Campbell and Stanley (1966: 34) defined quasi-experimental designs as ‘natural’ experiments, stressing the lack of ‘full control over the scheduling of experimental stimuli,’ in later writings (Cook and Campbell, 1979: 6), quasi-experiments were defined as ‘experiments that have treatments, outcome measures, and experimental units, but do not use random assignment to create comparisons from which treatment-caused change is inferred.’
9. The choice was based on several criteria among which EOS/TNS prepared a report on what were considered the most important topics for the European public (three emerged: economic conditions, climate change and globalization). Eventually, the list was shortened to four issues (climate change, immigration, jobs and the economy, and enlargement). The EPC prepared a short outline of the main issues on each of these four topics and eventually immigration and climate change were selected as those closer to the scientific goals of the project.

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