

DiD ▶ ACT

DELIBERATION in DEMOCRACY: towards ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP TRAINING

Project Description

Encouraging new approaches to active citizenship that are based less on theory and more on practical experimentation of democratic deliberation, and promoting truly inclusive forms of democratic dialogue – rather than just marketing-oriented – are obvious priorities for policy-makers today in Europe. The DiD ▶ ACT project is aimed at understanding how innovative deliberation methods that are designed to encourage political participation and to engage citizens in the political decision-making process can act as tools to promote active citizenship¹. Among such methods, the project will focus on Deliberative Polling® (DP), which is one of the most sophisticated deliberation methods currently available. It focuses explicitly on training at the level of the individual and of the group².

From democratic deliberation...

Deliberative Polling was designed in the early 1990s by two American political scientists, Professor James Fishkin of Stanford University, and Professor Robert Luskin, of the University of Texas. The concept is simple: starting with an ordinary survey, a representative sample of citizens is invited to take part in a three to four-week long process of carefully balanced information and a weekend long of – again, carefully balanced and in-depth – citizen deliberation. The purpose is to allow the participants to forge a more sophisticated opinion actively, rather than express a passive opinion.

In order to follow the evolution of citizens' opinion, the original poll is put to the participants at different points during the process, in particular at the opening and closing of the deliberation.

Beginning in the United Kingdom in 1994, there have been over twenty Deliberative Polls, notably in the United States, Europe (UK, Denmark, Bulgaria), Australia and China.

¹ For a definition of 'Active Citizenship', see the following European Commission webpage:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/archive/citizen/citiz_fr.html.

² For further information on "Deliberative Polling", see : James S. FISHKIN, *Democracy and Deliberation*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1991; ID., *The Voice of the People*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995; Robert C. LUSKIN, James S. FISHKIN et Roger JOWELL, *Considered Opinions: Deliberative Polling in Britain*, dans *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 32, July 2002, pp. 455-487. Also of interest : Kasper M. HANSEN, *The Deliberative Poll on the Future State of the European Union. Bringing the people back in*, University of Southern Denmark, april 2002; Nonna MAYER, *Le sondage délibératif au secours de la démocratie*, in *Le Débat*, n° 96, sept.-oct.1997, pp. 67-72. The website of the Centre for Deliberative Polling also offers useful information :
www.la.utexas.edu/research/delpol

... to education to active citizenship

Clearly, while the Deliberative Poll approach seeks primarily to understand better citizens' opinion, its logic is based on the premise that opinion forming is a learning process. Deliberative Polling and learning are directly linked : *"The participants do frequently change their views, both individually and in the aggregate, and their preferences do generally become more structure. Both effects, moreover, seem related to learning"*.³ The information provided before the deliberation, knowledge gained independently by the participants prior to the deliberation, answers given to their questions by the experts invited to the deliberation, as well as what they gain from the interaction with other citizens all help participants forge a new opinion.

As Fishkin highlights, *« the participants who learn the most change the most »*⁴. In this respect, Deliberative Polling is one of the most sophisticated tools on offer. It is *"designed to show what the public would think about the issues, if it thought more earnestly and had more information about them"*⁵.

Little is known however about the factors that affect citizens' learning during Deliberative Polls, and the mechanisms that can enhance it. By examining more closely the relationship between the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, and the increase in political awareness and active citizenship, this project aims to draw lessons that will benefit other methods for active citizenship in general, and that will improve innovative techniques of citizen participation and deliberation.

Objectives

In practice, the project's first objective is to gather all relevant data on past Deliberative Polls, and to analyse an educational experiment as part of a transnational DP, which we hope to organise separately. Both sets of data will be analysed to answer four sets of questions:

1. What role does 'learning' play in the change in opinion observed. Can this factor be distinguished from other factors (such as group dynamics)? How do external and internal factors interact in influencing the acquisition of knowledge and/or skills?
2. How can the educational methods used be improved to counter factors that negatively influence deliberation (such as unequal access to information and knowledge, socio-economic factors, educational ability, etc.)? How have the education methods varied from one DP experiment to another?
3. What is the exact relationship between the acquisition of knowledge and active opinion forming. Do the methods used go beyond the mere acquisition of new data by developing new skills, i.e. knowledge that can be used to act differently and to adapt one's behaviour to a changing environment?
4. Can best practices be exported to other fields of active citizenship learning? To what extent can the methods studied be improved and/or adapted to other educational processes, whether formal or non-formal?

³ Cynthia FARRAR, James FISHKIN, Donald GREEN, Robert LUSKIN, Elizabeth LEVY PALUCK, "Experimenting with Deliberative Democracy: Effects on Policy Preferences and Social Choice", ECPR Conference, Marburg, Germany, Sept.18-21, 2003

⁴ *Meeting America's surface transportation needs. Proposal for Deliberative Poll's*, s.l., s.d. (2004), p. 1.

⁵ Lusk et al., 2002

Deliverables

It is anticipated that three concrete results will emerge from the project:

1. An evaluation model that will be transposable to similar situations.
2. Recommendations to improve the educational aspects of the Deliberative Poll.
3. Recommendations that will encourage a greater use of new forms of participatory democracy, including Deliberative Polling.

These results will be shared widely through:

- A research seminar – which proceeds will be published – aimed at confronting the initial results with outside research.
- A practical guidebook that will be published and shared widely, aimed at promoting best practices for all new approaches to collective deliberation.
- A training seminar for trainers and multipliers. This will ensure that the main results of the project will be shared in the best conditions possible to ensure that they are adopted by other parties.

Structure

The project is financed in large part by the European Commission's SOCRATES programme. It is the result of a partnership between five research organisations:

- Notre Europe (Paris)
- The Centre for European Policy Studies (Brussels)
- Europeum (Prague)
- The Initiative & Referendum Institute Europe (Amsterdam)
- The European University Institute (Florence)

These five organisations each delegate a permanent representative, who will sit on the project's Steering Committee. This committee defines the project's general approach, according to the project outlined above, and according to the contract agreed with the European Commission.

Notre Europe, as the contracting organisation with the Directorate-General for Education and Culture, will ensure the coordination of the project. It will recruit a consultant dedicated to managing the project, both intellectually and technically.

In addition, the partners will receive the support of a Scientific Committee that will bring together seven high level experts. They will approve the scientific and technical choices made by the Steering Committee and guarantee the feasibility and quality of the research.

In addition to James Fishkin (Stanford University) and Robert Luskin (University of Texas), we have in mind the following academics (this list is only tentative):

Political science

Kasper Hansen, University of Southern Denmark (Denmark)

Loïc Blondiaux, Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Lille (France)

Hans-Peter Kriesi, Université de Genève (Suisse)

Pierangelo Isernia, University of Siena (Italy)

Bernard Manin, IEP Paris (France), NYU (USA)

Education science

Britt-Mari Barth, Institut supérieur de pédagogie de Paris et Harvard (France)

Philippe Meirieu, Université Lumière-Lyon 2 (France)

Marcel Crahay, Universités de Liège et de Genève (Belgium)

Philippe Perrenoud (Université de Genève)

Agenda

The project will take place from October 2005 to August 2007.