

Experimenting with Deliberation

Graham Smith

gsmith@soton.ac.uk

Corinne Wales

C.A.Wales@soton.ac.uk

Themes of paper

- Context of the experiment
- Research questions
- Experimental design
- Outstanding issues

Background and context

- Development of mini-publics, especially citizens' juries
 - Random selection
 - Small numbers
- Emergence of ICT and online consultation
 - Reinforce differential rates of participation?

Research questions

- How do randomly-selected citizens behave when given the opportunity to participate in a large-scale online consultation event?
- How effective is deliberation in achieving recommendations which can usefully inform public policy and practice?
- How does online participants' behaviour compare to that of participants in a citizens' jury?
- How does knowledge of the online event and citizens' jury affect preferences and perspectives of non-participants? How confident are they in the judgements from the two different types of citizen engagement?
- What impact does involvement in deliberation have on the civic attitudes of those who take part and those who have knowledge of it?

Experimental design

- Group 1: Participants in online event (1,000 participants)
- Group 2: Participants in citizens' jury (up to 25 participants)
- Group 3: Non-participants exposed to details and results of online event (1,000)
- Group 4: Non-participants exposed to details and results of citizens' jury (1,000)
- Group 5: Control group (1,000)

Experimental design

- Pre- and post-experiment questionnaires
 - Substantive policy and more general civic disposition questions)
- Data on behaviour (from both online event and citizens' jury):
 - Quantitative data on time on line; materials accessed and downloaded; number of contributions to debates; etc.
 - Qualitative data on form of contribution and interactions.

Outstanding issues

- Impact of topic(s) on deliberation?
 - Community cohesion
- Impact of facilitation?
 - Style and intensity
- Impact of knowledge vs. deliberation?
 - Relative impact on opinion change
- Tough design choices...