



# ***The Micro–Macro Link in Deliberative Polling:*** *Deliberative experiments and democratic legitimacy*

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*Working Paper  
No. 5, June 2013*

*ARENA Working Paper (print) | ISSN 1890-7733  
ARENA Working Paper (online) | ISSN 1890-7741*

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, we critically examine the question of how to link the 'micro' of deliberative mini-publics with the 'macro' of the larger democratic system. As a test case, we relate to Europolis, a transnational deliberative experiment that took place one week ahead of the 2009 European Parliamentary elections. We argue that while deliberative polls through careful scientific design and organization may enhance equal participation and informed opinion-making of selected citizens (the micro dimension), their representative status as part of a broader constituency and as a generator of democratic legitimacy (the macro dimension) is less clear-cut. This problem is potentially exacerbated in deliberative settings that cut across domestic political cultures and nationalized public spheres.

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## Introduction

This paper discusses how deliberative experiments taking place in a transnational and pluri-lingual setting can claim to generate democratic legitimacy. Such experiments, like citizens' assemblies, citizens' juries, town meetings, and deliberative polls provide a microcosmic snapshot of deliberative practice between lay citizens (Dryzek 2010, Fung 2003). As such, they often rest on an assumption that the mini-public can have a tangible and lasting impact on mass politics.

The question of how to link the 'micro' of mini-publics with the 'macro' of the larger political system can be examined by focusing on deliberative 'successes' in terms of a) factual information that is acquired about the issue and that informs political decision-makers about the political preferences of the citizens (Goodin and Dryzek 2006), b) the quality of the deliberative process as such that is justified in terms of equal participation and informed opinion-making (Fishkin 2009), and c) the trust generating potential of deliberative mini-publics that inform wider public debates and guide political judgments of the broader citizenry (Warren 2009). The claim is, in short, that representation of deliberative mini-public can be anticipatory, gyroscopic and surrogate (Mansbridge 2003). As *information proxies* and *anticipatory publics* they signal potential problems and their solutions to decision-making bodies. As *gyroscopes*, they 'look within' and make use of their own experience to derive conceptions of public interest (Dovi 2011). Finally, as *trustees*, they appeal to the broader constituency and suggest potential concerns or problems of shared relevance (Mackenzie and Warren 2012).

In deliberative polling experiments, mini-publics are mainly conceived as 'gyroscopes'. The underlying assumption is that a statistically representative sample of the relevant population of a mini-public – the claim of validity – is by *itself* sufficient for acknowledging its potential macro-consequences. Taking issue with this view, we argue in this paper that the democratic legitimacy of the collective will expressed by randomly selected citizens also needs to feed back into procedures of public authorization and accountability. The latter refers to the validation of the legitimacy claims raised by deliberative mini-publics through publicity, contestation and debates that mediate between informed opinion-making of selected participants and the collective will of all.

## **From Micro to Macro in Deliberative Polls: Internal Validity and Democratic Legitimacy**

Deliberative experiments, like citizens' assemblies, citizens' juries, town meetings, and deliberative polls are part of a practical turn in deliberative democratic research in recent years (Dryzek 2010). Experiments of so-called mini-publics provide a 'microcosmic' snapshot of deliberative practice between lay citizens. As such, they often rest on an assumption that the mini-public can have a tangible and lasting impact on mass politics (Fishkin 2009). This is further grounded on the idea that the political equality between citizens and thereby the public relevance of the bounded deliberative event is secured through some form of random sampling from the relevant population (Fishkin 2009).

In this paper, we take issue with the idea that a statistically representative sample of the relevant population of a mini-public is by *itself* sufficient for acknowledging its potential macro-consequences. Based on an analysis of the results and organization of EuroPolis, a transnational deliberative poll on the EU level, we argue that random sampling can be considered as a sufficient condition for claiming that the internal (scientific) validity of democratic experiment but not for defending the representativeness of the 'mini-public' as 'standing for' or 'speaking in the name of' the political community of democracy. As a general contribution to the debate on citizen's deliberation and participatory democracy that is promoted in this volume, we thus propose to distinguish more neatly between the internal validity of bounded deliberative setting and the democratic legitimacy of public debate and decision-making.

In the next part we start out by highlighting the core features of the EuroPolis deliberative pool. We then proceed to assess the equality of participation in EuroPolis. In the remainder of the analytical part we critically assess the transmission of the results from the validated private dialogue of EuroPolis to the wider European public. We utilize the experience and organization of deliberative polling among European citizens to critically assess the representative and public status of citizens' deliberations in a transnational setting. Concretely, we argue that in plural and multicultural societies, the claim for democratic legitimacy of the citizens' voice is not only insufficiently grounded in the statistical representativeness of the sample but also needs to be generated through public authorisation and accountability. The latter refers to the condition of publicity, contestations and debates that cannot be controlled by the deliberative setting but can only be its contingent outcome.

## The Case: The EuroPolis Deliberative Poll

EuroPolis, a transnational deliberative poll that took place one week ahead of the 2009 European Parliamentary elections<sup>1</sup> is an ideal case for analysing the link between the internal validity and democratic legitimacy of deliberative experiments because it introduced variation in terms of constituency and group plurality under the controlled conditions of a scientific experiment.<sup>2</sup> The democratic constituency of EU politics is clearly less settled and more contested than in local or national settings. From this perspective, a transnational mini-public provides a strong test for the internal validity of experiments in lay citizen deliberation. EuroPolis is further an interesting critical case from the point of view of EU studies. In the aftermath of the Maastricht Treaty and the debate on the democratic deficit the possibilities of activating European citizens as members of a constituency of European democracy has frequently been addressed. The citizens participating in the bounded deliberative exercise of EuroPolis might have experienced a sense of ‘personal Europeanization’. From a legitimacy point of view the question would be: So what? This paper addresses exactly the vexing issue of the extent to which face-to-face deliberation can be transformed to salient issues for a general European public. We address this issue by focusing on three inter-related issues. First, we provide a first take on specifying scope conditions for deliberation, with direct reference to the lessons from the polling experiment. Second, we reflect on the methodological problems associated with this undertaking, focusing especially on the link between random sampling and democratic constituency. Third, we attempt to discern ways to move from citizen deliberation to will-formation and from specific to general legitimacy in the transnational setting of EU politics.

EuroPolis was set up to conduct a transnational deliberative experiment that engaged citizens from all EU Member States in debates on issues of shared concern. The cross-national citizen dialogue specifically addressed climate change and immigration, two high-profile issues of recent political debates in Europe. The participants were divided into several groups consisting of two or

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<sup>1</sup> EuroPolis was a project co-funded by the 7th Framework Programme of the European Commission, the King Baudoin Foundation, the Robert Bosch Stiftung, Compagnia di San Paolo, and the Open Society Institute. For an overview, see <http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/eu/> [Last accessed: July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013].

<sup>2</sup> Deliberative Polling® is a trade mark of James S. Fishkin. For a further specification of research design and method, see Fishkin and Luskin (2005).

more languages.<sup>3</sup> EuroPolis' main innovation was, therefore, to probe the conditions for deliberation among citizens in a transnational and multilingual setting through an empirical and comparative experiment. By facilitating and testing the political outcomes of deliberative practice, EuroPolis allowed assessment of opinion transformation that is likely to occur as a result of raising political awareness of randomly selected citizens and engaging them in thoughtful argumentation and dialogue. In addition to these issues of practice with regard to the constituency of deliberation and the group dynamics, by addressing questions regarding multilevel decision-making and the division of competences between national and EU institutions EuroPolis also crucially reflected the issue of democratic legitimacy and citizens' involvement in European politics.

## **Transnational Deliberative Polling: Testing the Link between Citizen Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy**

There has been a long discussion on how to assess the discursive quality of deliberative mini publics and the validity claims generated by them (Grönlund et al. 2010, Steiner et al. 2004). The main aspects of discursive quality within a deliberative mini public are based on the following assumptions: discussions should a) pay respect to each participant and offer a fair chance to be heard (*equality* condition), b) be ruled by the informational and the substantive value of the arguments (*epistemic* condition). We argue that these two criteria relate to what can be called the internal validity of the deliberative setting but are not sufficient to generate democratic legitimacy.

From the outset, political equality is defined as 'equal consideration of everyone's preferences', where 'everyone' refers to some relevant population or *demos*, and 'equal consideration' means a process of equal counting so that everyone has the same 'voting power' (Fishkin and Luskin 2005: 285). In turn, 'deliberation' refers to procedures of 'weighing' competing considerations through discussion that is informed, balanced, conscientious, substantive and comprehensive (*ibid.*).

In EuroPolis, the political equality condition was handled through random sampling and a claim to statistical representativeness. Through this approach, the organisers of the event could claim to have created a 'scientifically selected

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<sup>3</sup> Discussions were led by moderators who had the task to raise certain pre-determined issues for debate as well as to manage the workings of the group. In addition, there was a host of translators involved with each group due to their pluri-lingual character.

European microcosm,<sup>4</sup> that revealed how Europeans would think, had they a better opportunity to be engaged in reasoned opinion and will formation. There is an inherent link here between the selection of participants to the micro-setting of deliberative polling and democratic legitimacy. Statistical (or descriptive) representation through scientifically validated random sampling is seen as one crucial variable for the generation of political legitimacy. It assures that the selected sample mirrors the larger constituency in socio-demographic terms like age, gender, and class background. In this view, the representative body reproduces the ‘higher being’ of democratic politics and therefore can legitimately claim to speak for it.<sup>5</sup>

In order to turn a private, experimental and ‘internal’ deliberative setting focused on statistical equality and knowledge formation into public deliberation with the potential to claim democratic legitimacy, two additional requirements need to be met. We argue that deliberative bodies in order to generate democratic legitimacy need c) to represent the informed opinions of the general public (*representativity* condition) and d) to address and to potentially include all the citizens that collective decisions apply to (*publicity* condition).

How can deliberative polling in a transnational setting simultaneously maximise the values of deliberation and political equality and spell out procedural guarantees for representation and publicity? In other words: how can the ‘micro’ of citizen deliberation be linked to the ‘macro’ of democratic politics and public legitimacy? We answer this question related to the *politics* of deliberative polling in the next section, focusing on the crucial mechanisms of representativity and publicity.

## Representativity

In terms of representativity of the selected participants, the available data<sup>6</sup> from EuroPolis point in somewhat different directions. On basic background variables like gender, age, and education, EuroPolis participants deviated from non-participants only to a little extent. In terms of age groups there was virtual parity between participants and the control group. For gender there was a slight over-representation of male citizens taking part in the deliberative

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<sup>4</sup> See James Fishkin in an interview at: [http://www.opendemocracy.net/blog/dliberation/this\\_experiment\\_revealed\\_euopres\\_public\\_sphere\\_a\\_conversation\\_with\\_james\\_fishkin](http://www.opendemocracy.net/blog/dliberation/this_experiment_revealed_euopres_public_sphere_a_conversation_with_james_fishkin). [Last accessed: July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013]

<sup>5</sup> On the notion of descriptive representation, see Pollak et al. (2009: 11).

<sup>6</sup> For the data from the questionnaires, see <http://cdd.stanford.edu/quest/>. [Last accessed: July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013]

poll. There were also a slightly higher percentage of students among the participants, and a somewhat higher level of education.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of class, the sample of EuroPolis was less representative. There was a strong over-representation of so-called 'upper middle class' (38,17 per cent against 24,88 per cent in the control group) and equally strong under-representation of participants from a 'working class' background (23,96 per cent against 38,28 per cent in the control group). This aspect is crucial for our assessment of the discursive quality and democratic credentials of EuroPolis, not the least as it is more difficult to pinpoint the popular constituency of EU democracy than in a national setting. Several studies on popular opinion have indeed highlighted a class and educational divide regarding support for the EU and European integration (Diez Medrano 2003, Eichenberg and Dalton 2007, Gabel 1998).

EuroPolis was assembled to address substantive policy issues and citizens' views on European institutions and the distribution of competences between the EU and national levels. In light of this, the deviation in terms of class background may have contributed to biases in the participants' responses. Hence, while EuroPolis can clearly document isolated opinion change due to participation in the deliberative event itself, it is less clear that we can draw sound conclusions regarding the EU polity dimension. In addition, EuroPolis participants also to a much higher degree responded that they intended to vote (82,27 per cent intended to vote, 9,8 per cent not to vote) in the EP elections than the control group (65,18 per cent intended to vote, 20,18 per cent not to vote). We can only speculate on the reasons for this difference, but it is not unlikely that this may be an attribute of relatively higher education and the specific class belonging of participants. As such, it seems that self-selection has created a certain bias in EuroPolis towards individuals that on average are more politically engaged; both in terms of choosing to participate in a political event like the deliberative poll and in terms of electoral participation. As a consequence one should be cautious with accepting a seamless link between the scientifically derived authority of deliberative polling and its democratic status in a public sense.

The distribution across nationalities was clearly more representative than in terms of class. There were no major deviations from the control group, except for a slight under-representation of most of the larger member states. Nationality is important for the representativity of the EuroPolis deliberative poll as the idea of its transnational character was to reflect the diversity of the democratic

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<sup>7</sup>'Level of education' was measured in terms of 'age of completion'.



constituency of the EU. Here, EuroPolis succeeded in giving the different member states more or less the same standing in relative terms. The question remains, however, whether this effort has contributed to a solution regarding the establishment of a transnational constituency for democratic will-formation in the EU. Does upholding the ‘unity in diversity’ slogan of the EU suffice in order for the representativity condition to having been met? Or are additional criteria needed in order to constitute transnational deliberation in the EU setting?

The claim for scientific authority of deliberative polling is, however, not simply grounded in the statistical representativeness of actors. Random sampling is rather used as a method to arrive at public judgment. As such, deliberative pollsters link the method directly to the wider democratic status of the experiment. Concretely, the claim is that the experiment has a revelatory function related to what would be the considered judgment of European citizens in European elections. In this view the deliberative microcosm ‘represents’ public judgment, not actors. The crucial claim of proponents of deliberative polling is that the results of such experiments in lay citizen deliberation reflect what people speak, not what people are (Fishkin 2009). It can be questioned, however, whether one on the basis of deliberative polling can claim that the citizens assembled in the poll *represent* the people of Europe as a well-established democratic constituency. Although the polling experiment relates in a number of ways to the context of European Parliamentary Elections, its participants do not represent the European electorate but rather deviate from it in a number of significant ways. As such, it can be argued that they constitute an ‘alternative public’, which, in contrast to the actual choices by the electorate, arrives at collectively expressed positions on substantial policy issues, on the EU polity and on European political parties. Most importantly, these positions on European integration are not pre-given but shaped through considered deliberations. They thus take the shape of public opinion and not of individual attitudes (as, for instance, measured by Eurobarometer). It has therefore been argued that the opinions expressed and the choices made by citizens after deliberation have a higher legitimacy than the actual voting results (Fishkin 2009: 137).

The idea of a seamless link between the micro of deliberative polling and the macro of deliberative democracy should by now be clear. In the logic of deliberative polling, the microcosm of European citizens is linked to political representation not simply in terms of actors that constitute it. Random sampling of citizens is rather seen as a scientific guarantee to ‘represent’ the informed opinion of European citizens. Through careful experimental design, the deliberative poll is introduced as a method to combine moral and expert judgment and it is only this combination, which grounds the claim for

scientific authority regarding the representative status of the experiment. Democratic legitimacy in terms of inclusion could thus be approached by designing the deliberative poll in such a way so as to ensure that every European citizen had an equal chance to participate and that the sample represented the whole population of Europe in a statistically significant way (see e.g. Fishkin and Luskin 2005: 287).

Through this combined scientific and democratic programme, democratic legitimacy in terms of epistemic value of deliberation could be achieved through providing unbiased information to the participants and scientific monitoring of the event. As is customary for deliberative polls, in the case of EuroPolis, balanced briefing materials were used to pre-structure the discussions. Group discussions of the event were steered by trained moderators who encouraged the plurality of voices and opinions. The moderators also ensured that all major proposals and counterproposals were addressed. Through this approach, the moderators thus facilitated opinion change and convergence. In other words, the deliberative poll is structured so as to strengthen deliberative ideals of equality and non-domination.

Opinion formation (and transformation) was further facilitated by experts and politicians who responded to questions by the participants. Finally, deliberative polling also generally aims at pre- and post- event publicity to spread the results and the opinions generated during the event among the population at large and to discuss its validity. Through publicity, the deliberative poll is meant to offer a mirror for citizens. By 'looking in the mirror, citizens consider themselves as ideal citizens. Moreover, this mirror image serves the important role of indicating the policy choices of an informed citizenry to the politicians. Media broadcasts are therefore seen as a:

helpful adjunct to the design – a way of motivating both the random sample and the policy experts and policy makers to attend, of educating the broader public about the issues, and, perhaps, of nudging public opinion in the direction of the results.

(Fishkin and Luskin 2006: 184)

While deliberative polling may be carefully designed scientifically speaking, it is important to keep in mind that that statistical indicators are not innocent, i.e. legitimate per se, but need to be justified. Validity in a scientific sense does not at the outset create a 'perfectly' representative 'mini-public'. There are also many possible reasons for groups (or particular members of the groups) to deviate from equal representation of all as guaranteed by random sampling. Deliberative polling rests on the idea of coherence between population and the

sample of citizens that take part in the experiment. This claim to representativity overlooks the fact that scaled systems of representation are typical for federal systems, in which group rights or territorial representations play a more important role than the equal representation of individual citizens. Inequality in representation is, then, not necessarily understood as unjust or undemocratic. Deviations from the ideal random distribution of citizens are also frequently applied in representative democracy, for instance through minority rights or quotas for women. In the EU, a multilevel system of political representation through experts, stakeholders, national and European parliaments, governments of the member states and the EU bureaucracy has developed, which is based on a fragile balancing of citizens and group rights as well as social, sectorial and territorial interests and which cannot easily be subjected to a regime of unitary representation (Benz 2003, Crum and Fossum 2009). The upshot of this is that one cannot extrapolate democratic qualities from the bare bones of scientific methods alone.

We argue that democratic politics is more than the sum of its parts, which in the context of deliberative polling are the randomly selected participants that take part in the deliberative experiment. This links up with arguments regarding the constitution of democratic constituencies and practices of representation in modern politics. In this regard, one important argument holds that the forum of citizens that is selected by random representative sampling is not legitimate *per se*, but needs to be authorized by the broader constituency (Brown 2006). Authorization comprises several components: the selecting agents, the selection procedure and the results. Not only the participants of public deliberation must be recognized as legitimate speakers, also the selection agents (in this case the scientists) and the deliberative setting must be recognized as appropriate by a broader constituency (Rehfeld 2006: 7). In classical representative theory authorization usually takes place through elections. Participants of citizen forums that stand for public deliberation, could, in principle, also be elected but this would open a selective process that ‘distinguishes’ elected representatives from the lay public.

The ‘distinctiveness’ of elective representation is, however, exactly what the method of random sampling is meant to avoid. It is, therefore, usually defended not by an explicit consent of the constituency but as a universally valid procedure authorized by science. The micro-macro link is, then, not understood as contingent on the mediation of small-scale deliberation to the wider sphere of democratic politics. Indeed, random sampling is not only seen as the more accurate procedure to represent ‘lay publics’, it also further helps to *depoliticize* the setting, does not create majorities and minorities and thus guarantees high degrees of acceptance of the citizens. In the view of

proponents of deliberative polling, random sampling also has the additional advantage that it is not limited by social scale: 'It does not make any appreciable statistical difference whether the same size sample is representing a town, a city, a small nation, or the entire European Union' (Fishkin 2009: 96). The claim here is that the randomly sampled citizens have a type of lay authority, they are legitimate precisely because they are not experts or persons distinguished by the preference vote of their fellow citizens (ibid.: 98).

Although they are selected through procedures of random sampling, participants in deliberative polls are not separated from political representation. Moving beyond random sampling as an alternative mechanism of selections to elections<sup>8</sup>, participants in the deliberative experiment are encouraged to take on the role as representatives of the larger citizenry. In this way, political representation and accountability comes back in through what Mansbridge (2003) calls anticipatory representation. Accountability in citizens' forums is not meant in the sense that single participants are formally hold accountable for their opinion but in the sense of 'giving an account' to the broader public and to the scientists that accompany the event (Brown 2006: 210). The onus is rather on 'acceptability'. The participant must argue in a way that is acceptable to the other participants or, in the case of conflict within the group, position themselves and seek to formulate positions agreeable to others. Experts or like-minded politicians, for instance, can be used as a yardstick to measure the representativeness of the opinions expressed by the participants. This requirement of acceptability is added to by the requirement of justification when moving from the micro-setting of the experiment to the macro-politics of public deliberation. If sufficient publicity of the deliberative polling event is guaranteed, participants of deliberation also need to contest for the recognition as representatives through *public* justifications that can be accessed and weighed by the broader audience. In public deliberations, participants weight their arguments by anticipating possible acceptance of a broader public. The publicity condition is thus crucial to defend the democratic legitimacy of deliberative polling in relation to political equality and representativity of the opinion expressed.

## Publicity

Establishing a tentative European 'public' over a weekend in Brussels can, as we have seen, generate lively debate, respectful dialogue, reasoned deliberation, and opinion change among the participants. Yet, even if the

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<sup>8</sup> Selection by lot is not unprecedented in the history of democracy, and indeed was the preferred mode of Athenian democracy to select representatives from the body of citizens (Manin 1997).

validity of the scientific design of deliberative polling is accepted, we argue that some doubts remain with regard to the normative conclusion about the representative status of the polling experiment. We argue that the transnational setting has affected the conditions for meeting two central criteria of *public* deliberation. First, the criterion that the general validity of arguments and opinions has to be defended; and second, that political equality has to be justified as the inclusion of all potentially affected citizens in public will formation. In a public sense, these criteria can only be met when the mirror that is created through statistical representativeness also reflects back. Without the creation of public resonances within the wider audience of citizens that ‘reflect’ about the validity of the propositions made in the specific mini-public, the democratic status of the experiment remains in doubt.

In this light, we argue that equating the scientifically derived internal validity of the democratic experiment with democratic legitimacy can lead to serious misreading of the status of deliberative polling in relation to democracy. If the assumption that deliberative polling arrives at a more accurate and scientifically grounded representation of public judgment is taken further in political terms, one is easily led to the supposition that they should also replace general elections as the more legitimate expression of the collective will of the people. Moreover, this could lead to arguments for de-politicization on scientific grounds. As a consequence of the claim of scientific authority it is possible to conceive the representative judgment of the microcosm as a substitute of the judgment of the whole. We could then perfectly imagine deliberative polling as a scientific tool to arrive at public judgment while the whole body of citizens no longer need to bother to deliberate at all (Brown 2006: 216), thus leading to the potential abandonment of deliberative democracy from mass democracy (Chambers 2009).

Against this purported ‘scientification’ of democratic legitimacy one can argue that the legitimacy of the public judgment expressed through deliberative polling is only *insufficiently* grounded in statistical representation. To become legitimate it needs to be recognized through a broader process of public will formation, bringing with it the problem of how the ‘representative opinion’ of the microcosm of the experiment can be amplified within the broader public sphere. If citizens’ deliberation ‘represents’ a combination of the best epistemic and moral judgment available, they need to be mediated to and conceived as a contribution to on-going societal deliberations. This continuity between citizens’ deliberations in the experiment and societal deliberations is arguably more difficult to achieve in a European setting than in local or national politics. One way to approach this aim consists in selecting only the most salient topics during election campaigns. The planners of deliberative polling

will however face difficulties to prognosticate what will become topical in future elections and, in addition, have to pay tribute to the varieties of campaigning styles and contents between the member states.

In EuroPolis, the 'representativeness' of issue selection was safeguarded by three criteria: a) issues had to be object to EU legislation and shared authority between the EU and the member states; b) issues had to be addressed by party manifestos and had to be controversially discussed along a left-right cleavage with the possibility to build cross-national alliances and to arrive at common European problem perceptions and solutions; c) issues had to raise public attention and concern in all member states over a consistent period of time (as documented by Eurobarometer). The two issues selected, immigration and climate change, guarantee high degrees of salience and contention in all member states and can build on a common history of debate that forms the knowledge of European citizens. Although they have not been hot campaigning topics during 2009 election campaigns, both topics were regularly raised in public and media debates and became the object of partisan contestation.

EuroPolis clearly had ample opportunity to address this *public* aspect of deliberation. The event was purposely situated just before the 2009 European parliamentary elections in order to enhance its public relevance. This would prove not to have significant effects in terms of actual media coverage and the spreading of results to the wider public. In disseminating its results and informed opinions at the level of mass political communication, the event encountered a couple of hurdles that need to be discussed in relation to the specifics of the transnational setting. The first problem relates to the character of EP elections as 'second order elections' (Marsh 1998; Reif and Schmitt 1980). The EuroPolis experiment evoked an imaginary EU constituency, for which EP elections would purportedly take a new meaning as *first* order elections. This is contrasted by the debates held at the level of mass politics in Europe with low degrees of contestation, a main focus on national topics and actors, and finally the spread of Euroscepticism in interpreting the relevance of the EU.<sup>9</sup> In this light, EuroPolis created an idealized contrast image of a European public sphere, which, following the dominant logics of mass political communication, cannot simply be amplified by national mass media. The topics addressed by the deliberative poll were obviously of transnational political relevance, but could not, it seems, be easily reconnected to the non-substantial and personalized debates that often dominate national debates.

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<sup>9</sup> This is based on findings from a parallel analysis of online media debates at the level of mass communication of the 2009 EP election campaigns in 12 member states (Michailidou and Trenz 2010).

The second problem relates to the fact that EP campaigning is generally not focused around policy issues and solutions but around politics in terms of party competition and the images of candidates. Moreover, party cleavages were made less salient in the topics of debate chosen for the polling experiment, which rather required the agreement on global solutions and the expression of consensus that ‘something needs to be done’. This is exemplified by one crucial component of the experiment which consisted precisely in cutting the participants off from the ‘imperfect’ world of political communication at the level of mass media communication. By blending out parallel lines of conflict, the likelihood to express consensus on single issues is enhanced. At the same time, it can be argued that the issues selected laid the ground for ‘soft deliberation’, in which self-interests are not part of the process of exploration and clarification.<sup>10</sup> Immigration and climate change were discussed as topics that required collective choices and that invited the single participants to speak as a ‘we’ in defence of collective goods and not of personal interests.<sup>11</sup> It does then come less as a surprise that the discussion of green issues turns participants ‘greener’ with a tendency to change voting preferences for Green parties.<sup>12</sup>

The point to be made here is not to question the validity of the experimental design as such, but rather to emphasize the discrepancy between an idealized deliberative public (micro level) and the structural weaknesses and fragmentation of the general public at the level of mass political communication (macro level). This fragmented character of a European public and media sphere constituted the main hurdle for publicizing the event and claiming general legitimacy. Symptomatically, the transnational deliberative poll did not receive substantial public and media attention. On the two press

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<sup>10</sup> See (Mansbridge et al. 2010) for a general critique of blending off self-interest from deliberation.

<sup>11</sup> Consider the framing of information material around two competing collective good problems (economic growth versus environmental sustainability and free movement versus security respectively). Also in responding to the questionnaire, the participants are not asked what is at stake for them but how they think the topic affects their community of belonging: ‘Some people think that immigrants have a lot to offer to [COUNTRY]’s cultural life. Suppose these people are at one end of a 1-7 scale, at point 1. Other people think that immigrants threaten the [NATIONALITY] culture.’ ‘Some people think we should do everything possible to combat climate change, even if that hurts the economy. Suppose these people are at one end of a 1-to-7 scale, at point 1. Other people think that we should do everything possible to maximize economic growth, even if that hurts efforts to combat climate change’.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/eu/> under the heading ‘Results’ for data on voting intentions before and after the deliberative poll. [Last accessed July 4<sup>th</sup> 2013]

conferences held before and after the event, the Brussels-based media correspondents were difficult to mobilize.

Moreover, EU correspondents clearly have limited impact on EP election campaigning, which is mainly reported by domestically based journalists. This latter group was even more difficult to reach, since no systematic media contacts could be built at member states level (e.g. through decentralized press conferences or press releases in several languages). The upshot of this in theoretical terms is that while the internal validity of bounded deliberative settings can more or less be controlled *ex ante* through specified procedures and statistical sampling of participants, the conditions for the *ex post* transmission of its results at the level of mass political communication will remain contingent. The scientific validation of representativeness in the micro-setting of deliberative polling does not translate automatically into democratic legitimacy in macro-political terms. In other words, one should not confound the validity of the experiment with democratic legitimacy. The latter is generated through the *public* deliberation and testing of the generalized validity and representativeness of the results of the polling experiment. For that objective to be achieved, publicity needs to be created through the intermediation from the 'strong public' of 348 randomly selected citizens to the general public of some 500 million Europeans.

In this paper, we have thus raised some serious doubts whether the imposition of scientific authority can really justify the gap between the deliberative opinion of the microcosm and non-deliberative opinion of the mass publics. Social scientific instruments can only safeguard the internal validity but not the public legitimacy of deliberative polling. Scientific authority alone is not sufficient to generalize the validity of the results of the experiment and defend them as publicly legitimate. The problem is that statistical representativeness might well be universally applicable but nevertheless be contested in practice. Ruling out such contestations as 'undesired' or 'inappropriate' elements of public deliberations does certainly not resolve the issue.

It also makes a significant practical difference whether the microcosm of citizens is recruited from a relatively homogeneous group of local citizens or whether it shall represent the many populations of Europe. One argument frequently brought forward in the debate on the applicability of European deliberative democracy is precisely that the underlying entity is too heterogeneous and dispersed. The people of Europe cannot be properly identified and described by socio-structural indicators that could form the basis of statistical analysis. Yet, both random selection and authorization rely on a pre-existing constituency. The dynamics of deliberation in the



transnational setting are however rather about the constitution of constituencies. The people of a European democracy is invented, imagined and mobilized as part of the on-going deliberation process about the future shape of democracy in Europe (Fossum and Trenz 2006). How can deliberative polling deal with such fundamental contestations about the constitution of constituencies? Such contestations will ultimately also challenge the ‘scientific choices’ taken to demarcate the underlying constituency of deliberative democracy in Europe. To define such resistances against the universal validity of science by default as ‘illegitimate’ and thus to prevent the scientific design of the setting from being contested by the participants or by a third party does not seem practicable.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have argued against the ‘scientification’ of democratic deliberation and its emphasis on the epistemic value of argumentative exchanges and reason-giving among formally equal participants. Democratic deliberation in bounded and experimental settings is not to be equated with deliberative democracy (Chambers 2009). The latter is to be measured not only in the epistemic quality of deliberation in terms of knowledge formation, respect and informed opinion among the participants but in the realization of political equality, which needs to be justified in broader terms as the inclusion of all potentially affected citizens in political will formation. In short, we argue that *science* cannot substitute *politics*.

To distinguish more neatly between the internal or *scientific* validity of deliberations and the generalized validity of legitimacy claims raised *politically* in the public sphere, we have proposed that equal participation and informed opinion-making as general indicators for the measurement of discursive quality of deliberative mini-publics need to be discussed in relation to the generalized claims of deliberating citizens to represent public judgment and/or the broader citizenry (the representation condition) and to expose their arguments to public discourse (the publicity condition).

The experience and results from the EuroPolis deliberative poll with regard to approaching these four criteria of democratic legitimacy were remarkable. Lay citizens from all member states and from all strata of society were engaged in a process of collective opinion and will formation, increased their knowledge and attitudes on specific policy issues and on the EU in general and were more likely to vote in the subsequent European elections. This was perhaps all the more surprising as EuroPolis took place under pluri-lingual and multicultural conditions. These results from the bounded deliberative venue of EuroPolis

could, then, be seen as a possible panacea to the problem of democratic legitimacy of the EU. To engage ordinary citizens through deliberative experiments could be one answer to the conundrum of public discontent with EU policies and institutions. This can be argued to be especially salient in a time when EU politics are more politicized than before, yet still also more contested. EuroPolis gave citizens the opportunity to engage in real debate on actual political issues. Previously, the EU institutions have sought to mobilize citizens through media campaigns and public relations exercises. The platitude of such campaigns clearly find an antidote in deliberative polling which offers opportunities to voice opinion, engage in respectful dialogue and to raise awareness of decision-making and democratic legitimacy. In short, EuroPolis has provided a microcosmic European 'public'. However, as we have argued in this paper, the democratic legitimacy of deliberation is ultimately dependent on the public transmission of its bounded opinion-formation to have an impact on the will-formation of the general public.

Our analysis of the EuroPolis deliberative poll based on group observation and questionnaire data has highlighted that there is no straightforward process from group deliberation to public deliberation. There were relatively high hopes for the media impact of the event and thus widespread dissemination of its purpose, design, and results. The news value of the deliberative experiment was, however, drowned out by the nationalized debates of the European parliamentary elections. In this sense, EuroPolis – despite its merits in bringing citizens together – was not less 'secretive' than, say, deliberation in the comitology system of the EU. This is important as publicity through mediation from strong publics to general publics is a general condition for the generation of democratic legitimacy (Fraser 1992, Habermas 1996). To clarify these issues deliberative democratic theory needs to relate back to international comparative media analysis, which has highlighted the cultural and system specificity of public deliberation cultures (Esser and Pfetsch 2004, Hallin and Mancini 2004, Wessler 2008).

We have shown in this paper that despite the promise of facilitating cross-cultural deliberation in a pluri-lingual setting, the EuroPolis experiment also exhibited serious limits of mini-publics as solutions to the problems of EU democracy. In particular, the European setting requires us to rethink the conditions for fostering general public debate and claiming democratic legitimacy in response to multiple sectorial and territorial constituencies. As political conflict and dissent with national and EU institutions is on the rise in Europe, it is unlikely that there are 'easy' solutions to the problems of EU democracy. Public spheres remain in many respects nationally oriented, also in debates over supranational politics. Bounded deliberation in settings like

EuroPolis informs us about the potential for *facilitated* deliberation between lay citizens. Such experiments are, however, not automatically mediatized and publicized. This is true for ‘national’ ones, and especially so for the European experiment. Political culture and media are yet to be Europeanized to the extent that an experiment like EuroPolis would not meet additional hurdles in the quest to become disseminated to deliberation in the public. Deliberative mini-publics cannot on their own trigger such transformations and stand, as such, in danger of remaining relevant *only* to participants engaged in micro-deliberation without the requisite macro-consequences needed for a link to democratic legitimacy. We conclude, therefore, on a cautious note. Democratic reformers should not stare themselves blind at the potential ‘cures’ that deliberative polling may provide to long-standing issues such as the democratic deficit of the EU. This is especially important to highlight as long as citizens’ deliberations are not supported and amplified by a broader communicative infrastructure of the public and media sphere.

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