

Two-way street: Involving politicians in a deliberative mini-public

Politics of Co-creation seminar, University of Helsinki,
12th of February at 13:15 – 14:45

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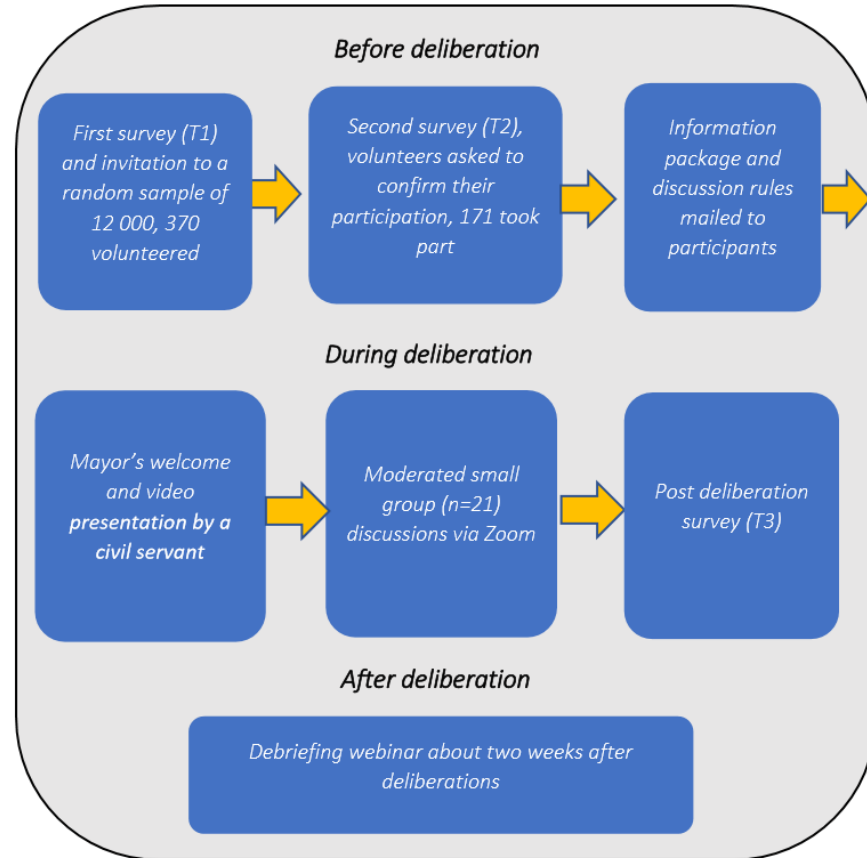
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Turku deliberates, 7-14 May, 2020

- *Turku deliberates* -citizens' panel was an example of deliberative mini-publics, where a randomly selected group of lay people come together to learn and discuss policy issues
- Aim was to produce an informed public opinion on the development of traffic arrangements in the city center
- Linked to the New master plan 2029 -process and consultant scenarios "Slow change", "Rapid change" and "Major change"
- Scenarios: Slow change, Rapid change, Major change

Recruitment

- Participants recruited through a mailed invitation letter to **random sample** of 12 000 people living in Turku
- Together with the invitation a **survey** measuring opinions on traffic policy and democratic attitudes as well as sociodemographics
- **2463** people responded, out of which **172** volunteers participated in deliberation
- Participants received an **information package** on traffic scenarios and **discussion rules** beforehand



Procedure

- Small group discussions (21 groups, 8 people / group) were organized in Zoom over 6 days.
- Each group had a discussion moderator and technical moderators.
- Discussion started with a video where mayor Minna Arve welcomed participants and manager Juha Jokela told about alternative scenarios for traffic planning.
- Each group discussed for 3 hours.

- Participants represented the residents fairly well
 - Slight overrepresentation of elderly people, men and highly educated
- Participants filled in a post-deliberation survey where they also "voted" for their preferred scenario
- By comparing answers of pre- and post-deliberation surveys we are able to study real changes in opinions, attitudes and knowledge



Involving politicians

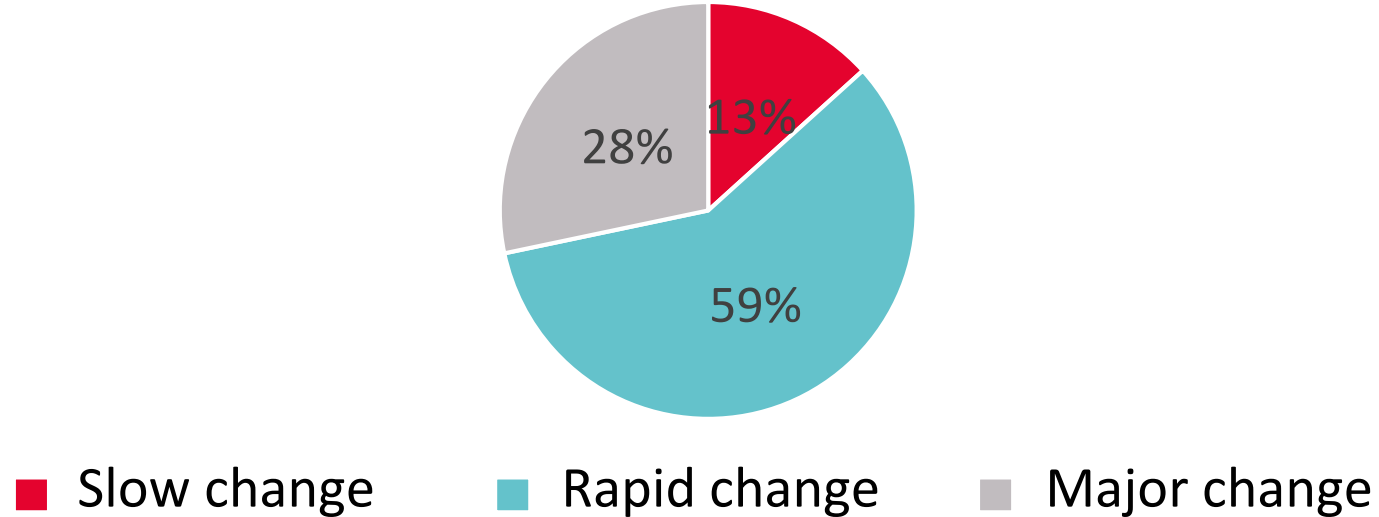
- The aim of the Turku deliberates was to study the influence of involving politicians in mini-public deliberations.
- Politicians' involvement may be an obstacle for realizing the goods of citizen deliberation, because politicians are more skilled discussants and they hold more issue and process knowledge than average citizen.
- Politicians may also use the deliberation to promote their personal or political goals.
- On the other hand, involving politicians may help in the uptake of mini-public recommendations in political decision-making.

Involving politicians II

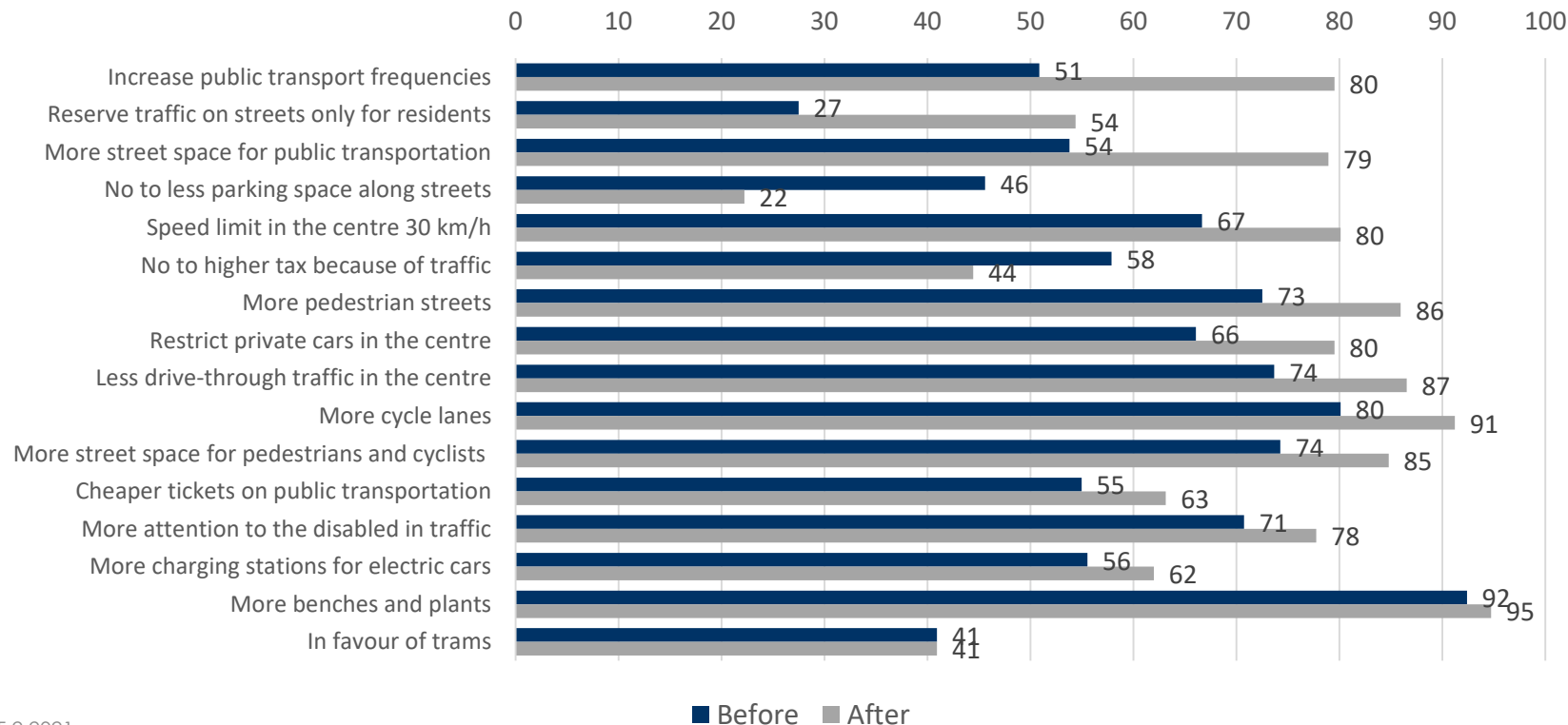
- Participants were randomly assigned to groups with citizens only (10 groups) and mixed groups with 2 politicians and 6 citizens (11 groups).
- Party quotas were determined based on the share of seats in the city council.
- Parties determined their representatives.

Results 1: Citizens' opinions

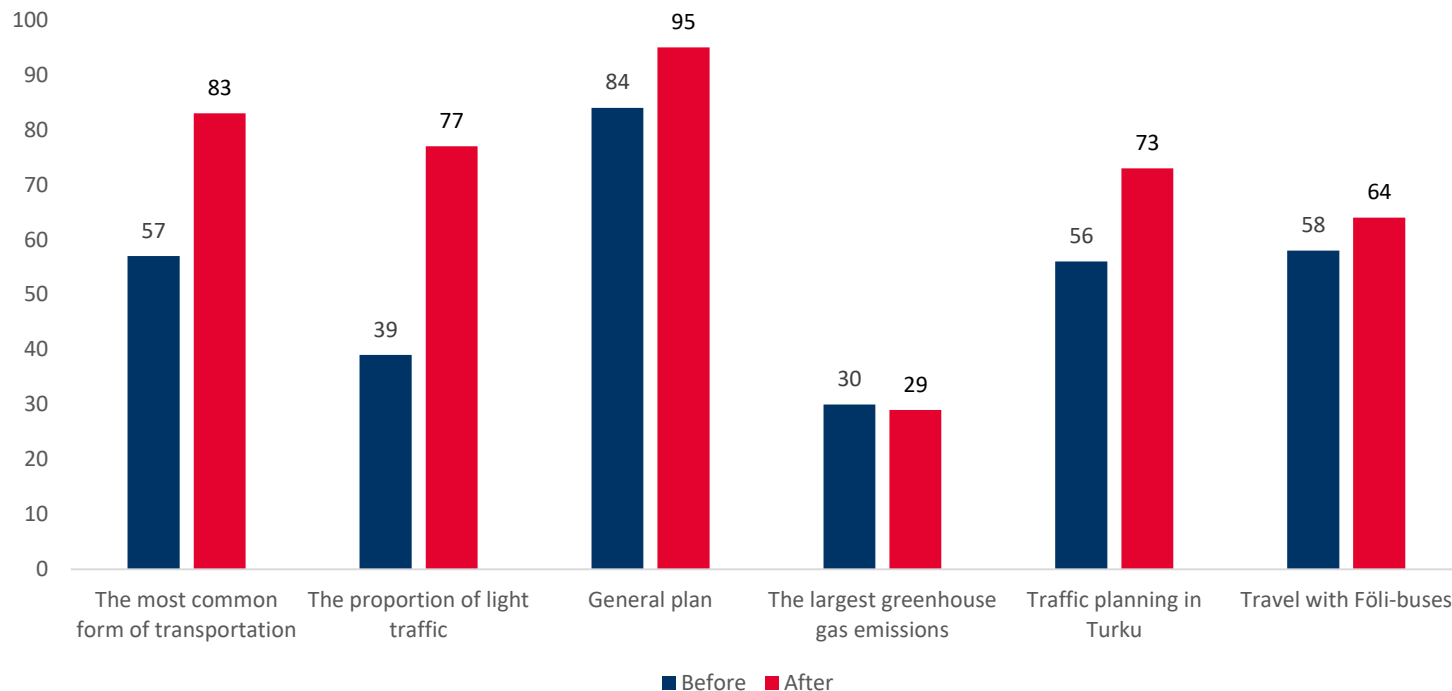
Citizens' panel's support for traffic arrangement scenarios (n=171)



Participants' opinions on the transportation system before and after deliberation, percentage of those who agree with the statements (N=171)



Knowledge before and after deliberations, percentage of those who answered correctly (N=171)



Results 2: Politicians' view and influence

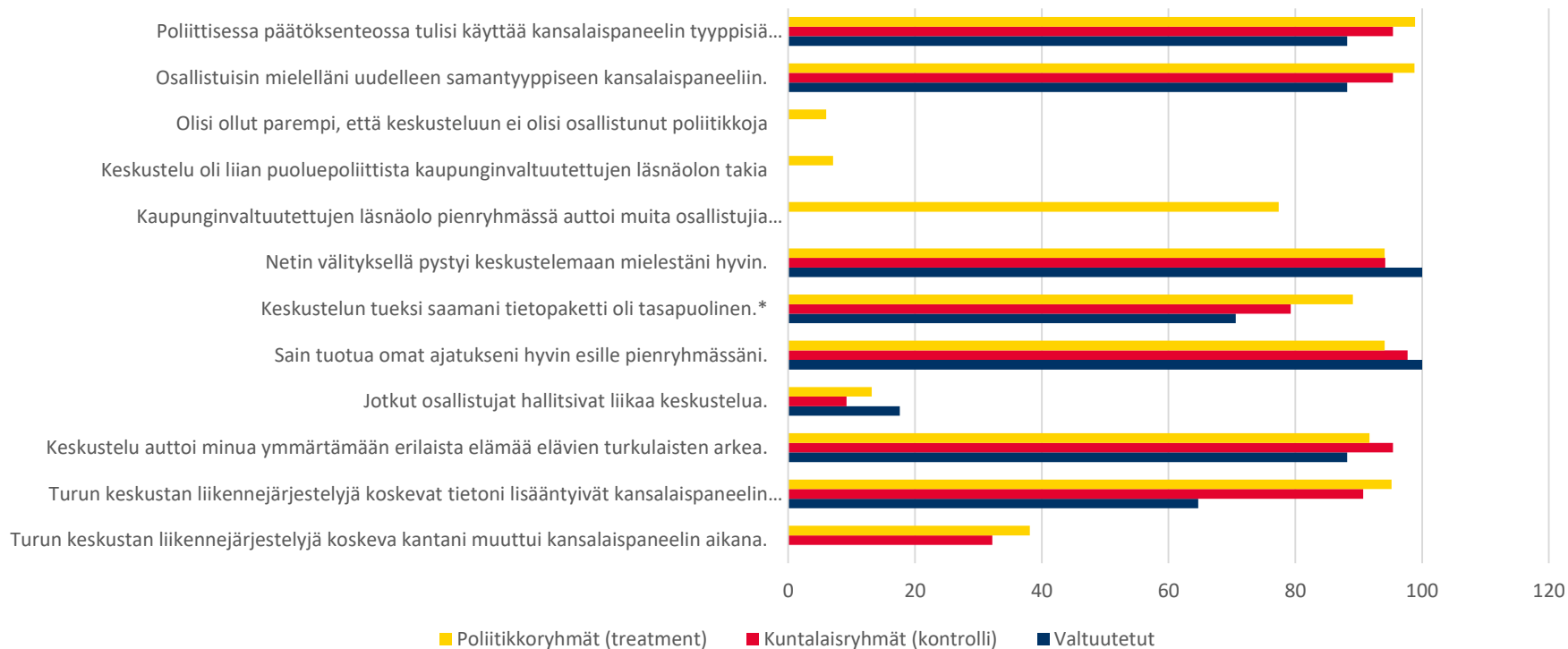
Politicians' motives for participation (N=17)

Interested in traffic planning.	16
Wanted to hear citizens' opinions.	15
Wanted to participate in decision-making.	13
Wanted to participate in the development of new forms of participation.	13
Wanted to promote party goals.	8
Wanted to participate in scientific research.	7
Wanted to share the views of my voters.	5
Wanted something to do.	0
Other, what?	2

Results from interviews

- Deliberations helped politicians to understand in a more holistic manner which issues are important to citizens and what kinds of policies they want.
- Councillors said they will use the information they got from participating in deliberation to strengthen their own political message.
- Participation in deliberations increased councillors' understanding and appreciation of citizens' local knowledge and competence.
- The councillors felt positive about using mini-publics in the context of democratic decision-making, even as a mandatory exercise.
- *"Mä olen yllättynyt sen keskustelun onnistumisesta. Siel oli selkeesti perussuomalaista ajattelua ja vihreetä ajattelua ja kuitenkin kaikki tuli toimeen aika hyvin yhdessä ilman, et siit olis tullu mitään kovin ilkeää keskustelua. Kaikki oli hyvin maltillisia kuitenkin."*
 - Turku keskustelee –kansalaispaneeliin osallistunut valtuutettu

Councillors' and citizens' opinions on the citizens' panel process, % who fully agree or agree



Politicians' concerns

- Some of the interviewed politicians thought the timing of the citizens' panel was poor because some of the important decisions had already been taken in her/his view.
- Some interviewees were doubtful in terms of the panel's impact on decision-making, especially if the voting result is not very clear.
- Some councillors were also worried about representativeness of the panel in relation to the city's residents at large.

Conclusions

Conclusions I

- Citizen deliberation based on thorough learning and reflection of diverse viewpoints can be conducted online.
- Scenarios can be a good starting point for deliberative mini-publics, but they also restrict the agenda and small-group discussions
- Background information and small-group discussions had a significant impact on participants' opinions and subjective assessment of their issue knowledge

Conclusions II

- Local councillors in some of the small-groups were a source of additional information for citizens.
- Politicians' involvement did not distort small group deliberation and dynamic.
- Both councillors and citizens who took part in the citizens' panel would like to see more similar participatory processes in local decision-making.
- Participation in deliberations increased councillors' understanding and appreciation of citizens' local knowledge and competence.

Thank you!

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