UDK: 316.625 (497.11 Beograd)
https://doi.org/10.2298/FID2201072D
Original Scientific Article
Received 25.01.2022. Accepted 11.02.2022.

PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIETY
VOL. 33, NO. 1, 1–278

To cite text:
Đorđević, Ana; Vasiljević, Jelena (2022), "The Effects of Deliberation on Citizen Knowledge, Attitudes and Preferences: A Case Study of a Belgrade Deliberative Mini Public", *Philosophy and Society* 33 (1): 72–97.

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THE EFFECTS OF DELIBERATION ON CITIZEN KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PREFERENCES: A CASE STUDY OF A BELGRADE DELIBERATIVE MINI PUBLIC[1]

ABSTRACT
Participation in deliberative arenas is often lauded for its transformative impact on citizens' attitudes, sense of agency and ability to formulate concrete policy proposals. The focus of this paper is the first ever deliberative mini public in Belgrade, centred on the topic of expanding the pedestrian zone and rerouting traffic in the city core. By relying on a set of qualitative and quantitative data collected before and after the deliberation, we aim to explore the effects of the public deliberation on the participants' knowledge, attitudes and preferences. Our hypothesis was that participation in this deliberative process led to *better understanding (enhanced knowledge) of the discussed topic and change in attitudes and preferences regarding its realization*. The scope of this study is limited, given the non-experimental design and small sample. Overall, the results indicate that participants` knowledge on the topic of deliberation is enhanced, becoming more precise, elaborate and encompassing different perspectives. As for the attitudes and preferences, in most cases, around two-thirds of the sample changed their positions, while about a third of the sample changed sides, mostly agreeing less with the expansion of the pedestrian zone. The findings support the conclusion that, on a local level, deliberation has the capacity to inform and enhance competence for greater political participation.

KEYWORDS
deliberation, deliberative mini publics, citizen participation, pedestrian zone and traffic, Belgrade, knowledge, attitudes, preferences, local politics

1 The paper is based on research conducted within the framework of the Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Network: Active Citizenship: Promoting and Advancing Innovative Democratic Practices in the Western Balkans.

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1. Introduction

The central tenet of deliberative democratization is that deliberative capacity does not reside solely in electoral institutions, but can also be found in various other, less formal, arenas and fora (Dryzek 2009). In addition to their acknowledged positive impact on resolving political issues, deliberative processes, therefore, can yield democratizing effects on micro-levels as well. This arguably leads to two positive effects. One is that such deliberative exercises can scale-up and improve the whole political system (Parkinson, Mansbridge 2012). The other one, on which this paper focuses, is that participation in deliberative fora like citizens' assemblies and deliberative mini publics improves political learning, promotes individual opinion change and increases a personal sense of political efficacy (Fishkin, Luskin 1999; Luskin et al. 2002; Suiter, Farrell, O'Malley 2016). Empirical evidence supporting such claims has propelled numerous recent initiatives across the globe to organize citizens' assemblies and similar deliberative formats around various political issues (Lacelle-Webster, Warren 2021). The opportunity to be involved in a direct and sustained exchange of arguments with groups of citizens holding different, sometimes opposing views – especially an opportunity to gain direct insight into arguments and positions held by disadvantaged groups, like minorities or persons with disabilities – potentially increases our sense of empathy and understanding of different views. It strengthens collective capacity to reach optimal decisions with various interests taken into consideration (Suiter, Muradova, Gastil, Farrell 2020). Exposure to different arguments is seen as an essential element of deliberation, as a corrective factor for biased argumentation we might hold, being surrounded, most of the time, by like-minded citizens (Mutz 2006). Discussion in which alternative opinions are suggested is a necessary condition not only for individual transformation but also for expression of reasoned opinion (Habermas 1984), Taking part in deliberation can thus be effective not only in reaching common decisions around polarizing issues, but can also impact citizens' attitudes, personal assessment of political knowledge and ability to formulate concrete proposals and participate in political decision-making.

It is precisely this influence of deliberation on one's knowledge, attitudes and preferences that is the focus of our analysis. Our case study is a deliberative mini-public that took place in Belgrade, on November 21st 2020, on the topic of rerouting traffic in city core.[2] More specifically, the circumstances that framed and brought about this deliberative meeting were the official city plan to reshape the city core by expanding its pedestrian zone, by closing some additional twenty streets to motorized traffic. The plan met with opposition by several citizen initiatives, as well as by some experts, who claimed that the existing city infrastructure could not support such rerouting of traffic, that residents

2 To make the concept of deliberative mini-public more understandable, the research team used the term *Citizens' Assembly*, throughout the communication with the participants.

in the city core would be cut off from main traffic routes, and, above all, they objected the lack of transparency and public debate concerning the plan.[3] The main research question of our analysis is: *Has participation in this deliberative process changed participants' a) knowledge and level of information about the topic; b) attitudes toward it; c) personal preferences regarding its realization*?

While the national and local political context remains beyond the scope of our analysis,[4] a couple of observations need to be made. Deliberative mini publics and other deliberative fora can be organized and are indeed organized in different national and political contexts. However, there is evidence to suggest that the political climate and wider institutional setting, including the level of trust in public institutions, are important factors shaping the quality and results of deliberations (Jiang 2008; Curato, Hammond, Min 2019). Favourable circumstances for good-quality deliberation include functioning democratic institutions, relatively high levels of trust in institutions, expert bodies and decision-makers. In this respect, the political climate in Serbia represents a significant challenge. Both expert reports that monitor the state of democracy (Shadow Report-State of Democracy in Serbia 2021, Internet; Freedom in the World 2021, Serbia, Internet) and recent scholarly analyses (Bieber 2018; Castaldo 2020) suggest that Serbia should perhaps no longer be considered a democratic state, given the sharp rise in authoritarian rule and state-capture mechanisms. Additionally, citizen trust in public institutions is worryingly low (Fiket, Pudar Draško 2021). All this represents a challenge for organizing a deliberative mini public, one the organizing committee was aware of and took into consideration when preparing the material and the logistics so that the deliberative process could meet all the requirements of a good-quality and open debate. It equally represents a factor to be considered for qualitative analysis of the discussions that took place within the plenary sessions. However, in this paper we will not analyse the content and the dynamic of the discussion groups (for a qualitative content analysis of the topics discussed, see Janković in this volume). Our research goal is to analyse the *effects* of participation in the deliberative mini-public on participants, based on their reported answers regarding knowledge, attitudes and preferences *before* and *after* the deliberative mini-public took place. We did this using a non-experimental pretest-posttest design. Our hypothesis is that, regardless of the unfavourable democratic political climate in Serbia, participation in deliberative mini-public held in Belgrade, led to *better understanding (enhanced knowledge) of the topic under discussion and change in attitude and personal preference regarding its realization*.

3 For more information about the research design and organization of this mini public, as well as the choice to include grassroot movement representatives as participants, alongside ordinary citizens: see the introductory chapter to this volume by Fiket and Đorđević.

4 For a detailed account of specific challenges of organizing a deliberative mini-public in a hybrid political regime, such is the current one in Serbia, see Fiket and Đorđević and Fiket, Ilić and Pudar Draško in this volume.

2. Methodology

Participants

Research on the effects of deliberation is usually done on a representative sample of participants (Mansbridge 2010, Steiner 2012). However, in this study, because we focused on a very specific local issue, we applied purposive sampling, with the aim to include not only citizens who live and work in the relevant area, but additionally, those who are specifically affected by the problem of (traffic) mobility in Belgrade's city core. The sampling criteria sought to accommodate the principal goal of having at least one person from the following categories in each discussion group: people who own businesses or whose place of employment is located in the affected area; workers and managers of cultural institutions in the affected area; local residents with physical disabilities; senior local residents; local residents who are parents of small children (up to 12 years old).[5] The sample consisted of a total of 32 participants, with 25 'regular' citizens and 7 'active' citizens, i.e., members of citizens` initiatives involved in the public debates surrounding the project of rerouting traffic in the city core (see the research design described in the introductory chapter).[6] Participants were of both genders (W=59%), diverse age (with 56% in the age range 31-60) and various education levels. Most participants were highly informed (84% followed the news every day for one to two hours).

Procedure

The participants were recruited by trained recruiters via snowball method, through pollsters' network. They were thoroughly informed about the project within which the study was conducted, the aim of the deliberative mini-public, the organizers and collaborators. After they agreed to participate, they were given the questionnaire via CATI technique[7] by trained interviewers (28 October to 11 November 2020). Between the first survey and the deliberative mini public (11 to 17 November 2020), all participants received carefully balanced

5 The purposive sampling procedure was applied to include not only persons who represent the population living in the affected areas in socio-demographic terms, but also citizens in some way affected by the public issues under discussion. Hence, the sample included citizens who depend on easy access to public transportation (senior citizens or citizens with physical disabilities), and employees of cultural institutions situated in the affected area (because they raised their voice in the public that the announced project will affect the approachability of their institutions) etc.

6 Those citizen initiatives were '*Pešaci nisu maratonci*,' (Pedestrians Are Not Marathon Runners) '*Ministarstvo prostora*' (Ministry of Space) and '*Ulice za bicikliste*' (Streets for Cyclists).

7 CATI stands for Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing. The participants were administered a questionnaire about their general attitudes, policy preferences, level of knowledge on the debated issue, their general political orientation, participation and interest in politics and finally their standard socio-demographic data.

informative materials, with which to familiarize themselves with different sociopolitical perspectives and attitudes regarding the topic. The materials were prepared by the researchers from the scientific board of the study. Inclusivity of different perspectives within the materials was achieved by sending them to relevant actors – citizen initiatives, experts, and decision-makers – for reading and commenting, before they were distributed to the participants. All comments that arrived were accepted and included in the final version of the informative materials. The material consisted of information on the project of expansion of Belgrade's pedestrian zone in the city core, as well as the problem of traffic in the same area, with highlighted arguments pro et contra. Before the deliberative mini-public, held on 21 November 2020, the participants were sent the agenda for the event and the link for online participation. After the event, they were again given the same questionnaire, again via CATI. For their participation in the survey and the deliberative mini-public they received a voucher.

In sum, all participants filled in the questionnaire twice: once (T1) two weeks before the deliberative mini-public and the second time (T2) shortly afterwards.

Instruments

The questionnaire consisted of several subgroups of questions. The basis of our analysis in this paper are answers given in T1 and T2 to the subgroups pertinent to three categories of information: participants' knowledge about the topic of expanding the pedestrian zone, their attitudes toward it and their preferences regarding its realization.

Knowledge about the topic was measured by four questions, of which the first two, 1.1 and 1.2 (one closed [binary choice] and one open-ended), were only asked in T1, given the expectation that participants became familiar with them by T2. The other two open-ended questions (1.3 and 1.4) were asked both times. The questions were the following:

1.1 *Are you informed about the adoption of the Plan for sustained urban mobility that anticipates an expansion of the pedestrian zone in the central part of Stari Grad?*[8]

1.2 *If YES, do you know what it specifically calls for?*

1.3 *Are you familiar with citizen initiatives or groups who oppose the implementation of the pedestrian zone expansion in the central part of Stari grad?*

1.4 *Do you know what specifically these initiatives and groups oppose?*

The *attitudes* toward the topic – the expansion of the pedestrian zone and rerouting of traffic in the city core – were measured by several 5-point Likert

8 Municipality in downtown Belgrade.

scales (from 1– I do not agree at all to 5 – I very much agree). The questions were the following:

2.1 *The expansion of the pedestrian zone in the city core will lead to traffic problems:*

a) *Greater difficulty of movement for seniors and less mobile persons.*

b) *More frequent traffic jams in the lower part of Dorćol.*[9]

c) *Poorer access to emergency services.*

2.2 *The advantages to the pedestrian zone expansion in the city core outweigh the disadvantages.*

2.3 *The expansion of the pedestrian zone makes sense only with the construction of an underground railway.*

2.4 *The expansion project is a significant opportunity for the development of city tourism and economy.*

2.5 *The expansion of the pedestrian zone will not contribute to solving ecological problems.*

2.6 *Opponents of the pedestrian zone expansion are guided by personal and not public interest.*

The construction of items measuring attitudes toward the topic followed the logic of balanced pro et contra arguments, so as to secure the participants' non-biased responses.

Finally, the *preferences* regarding the realization of the project were also measured by 5-point Likert scales (from 1– I do not agree at all to 5 – I very much agree). The items were the following:

3.1 *The pedestrian zone in the city core should be expanded.*

3.2 *The pedestrian zone in the city core should be expanded along with the construction of the underground railway.*

3.3 *First, there should be a public debate, and only then an acceptable solution should be adopted.*

3.4 *The current state of the city core should be preserved.*

3.5 *The pedestrian zone in the city core should be expanded, but the trolleybus lines should be kept.*

3.6 *The pedestrian zone in the city core should be expanded, but not at the expense of green areas.*

3.7 *The current state of the city core should be preserved, but more bicycle lanes should be introduced.*

These items were constructed with regard to sets of preferences *for or against* the expansion project, as well as conditions to be met if the project

9 The affected neighbourhood in the Belgrade municipality.

were to go forward. Finally, all the items and questions on the topic of the deliberative mini public, which are the subject of this paper, were constructed in congruence with the information material citizens read before the event.

Data analyses

The obtained data were analysed with the purpose of examining the effect of participation in the deliberative mini public on participant knowledge, attitudes and preferences regarding the project. For participant *knowledge*, qualitative data analysis was conducted in order to detect changes in answers provided before and after the participation. Data on *attitudes* and *preferences* were quantitatively analysed by simple descriptive statistics in T1 and T2 (mean, standard deviation and frequencies), crosstabs, and paired samples t-test for each of the items. Given the small size of the sample, the purpose of the analyses is not to conclusively infer based on statistical significance of the changes, but rather to inspect changes in frequencies within certain answers, thus revealing tendencies in the data. The scope of this study is limited, given the non-experimental design and small sample. However, it presents some of the preliminary results of a pioneering study about the capacity of an organized deliberative forum to inform and equip citizens in Serbia for more competent involvement in political decision making.

3. Results

The results will be presented in three sections, with respect to the three explored aspects described above. The results on participant knowledge before and after the deliberative mini-public will be given in the form of interpretation of changes, based on the comparison of answers given in T1 and T2. The results on attitudes and preferences will be presented by each item (15 in total), in order to inspect the changes in each attitude and preference. Information will be given on the changes in the mean value from T1 to T2, the results of t-test of statistical significance of the change, frequencies for each answer in T1 and T2, and crosstabulation of frequencies. Such a peculiar analysis, given the small sample of the study, is intended to bring insight into *tendencies* in attitudes and preferences. More general interpretation of the changes in these two aspects will be presented in the discussion and conclusion.

Citizen knowledge about the city's plan to expand the pedestrian zone and reroute traffic in the city core

This is the only part of our analysis where we used qualitative analysis of the data provided to three open-ended questions and one closed, binary choice. The first two questions were asked only in T1, as they pertained to participants' general acquaintance with the project of expanding the pedestrian zone and were thus obsolete in the questionnaire sent after the deliberative mini public took place (T2). Those questions were the following:

1.1 Are you aware of the adoption of the Plan for sustained urban mobility that calls for the expansion of the pedestrian zone in the central part of Stari grad?[10]

1.2 If YES, do you know specifically what it consists of?

Answers given to those questions provide us insight into participants' general knowledge about the topic of the deliberative mini public prior to being given information or participating in deliberation. Of the total sample, 12.5% answered negatively to question 1.1, meaning that they had no prior knowledge about the city's plan to expand the pedestrian zone and amend the traffic in that part of the city. *Of those who answered affirmatively* to question 1.1, almost one third (29.6%) could only say that they heard about the plan, but knew no further details about it ('don't know anything specific'; I don't know any details, it's about expanding the pedestrian zone'). Almost half (48%) could provide some details in answering question 1.2, but none of the answers contained integral information about the project; rather, participants stressed some particular aspect of it: 'cycling lanes and an attempt to improve traffic in the city centre'; 'there will be more pedestrian and bicycle mobility, less parking space'; 'renovation of the city centre, rearrangement of the sidewalks, bicycle lanes, greenery, closing of traffic'. An interesting detail is that 22.4% of those who were informed about the plan answered question 1.2 by expressing their attitudes towards the project, even though it was not implied by the question. Of the 6 answers in total, 2 contained moderately positive evaluation of the project ('all I know is that streets where my kids go to school will be car-free'; 'the traffic jams in this area are constant, we would all love this to become a pedestrian zone, I hope this is what the plan contains'), while 4 expressed negative attitudes ('... I don't think this is the smart way to do it'; '...it's not guided by good examples'; 'Belgrade has no infrastructure for such a thing, people will be in a ghetto').

The open-ended questions asked both in T1 and T2 were:

1.3 Are you familiar with citizen initiatives or groups who oppose the implementation of the expansion of the pedestrian zone in the central part of Stari grad?

1.4 Do you know what specifically these initiatives and groups oppose?

Regarding question 1.3, the level of knowledge about the subject matter was even lower in T1 in comparison to limited knowledge expressed in answers to 1.1 and 1.2. 60% of the sample answered it in the negative, meaning that they were not familiar at all with the existence of opposition to this plan. The remaining 40% of the sample had some awareness of it, but most were able to name only one actor (including very vague answers like 'local residents are objecting', or wrong answers like 'those connected with the Parking service'); '*Pešaci nisu maratonci*' (Pedestrians are Not Marathon Runners) – the citizen

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initiative most publicly vocal about its opposition to the project was listed in 19% of the participants' answers.

Similarly, in answering the question 1.4 in T1, 54% of participants answered with a simple negation. Other participants stated the following reasons (some of them provided more than one): problems with parking for local residents (6), difficult access of emergency services (3), bad traffic planning (3), negative impact on commerce and cultural life (1), opponents are guided by personal interests (1), negative impact on green spaces (1), the way the plan was adopted (1).

Answers to 1.3 and 1.4 in T2 showed significant changes in the participants' knowledge about the actors opposed to the plan and reasons for their opposition. After the deliberative mini public, 5 participants (15.6%) answered question 1.3 with 'I can't remember'. Four participants provided vague answers ('citizen initiatives'; 'people who live on those streets'), while 23 participants, 71.8% of the sample, showed that they are now familiarised with particular initiatives opposing the project. Most interestingly, answers to 1.4 in T2 were in average longer and much more elaborate than in T1. Compared to 54% answering with a simple 'no' in T1, there were only 5 'I don't know' answers in T2 (15.6%). Most of the reasons stated in T1 were repeated in T2, but with additional arguments attached ('they don't want to be cut off from the traffic and from traffic communication with other parts of the city and they're fighting for access to streets'; 'not enough access for delivery and emergency services, including garbage disposal; 'long walking distances to reach public transport'). An interesting novelty, which most certainly stems from the exposure to the arguments put forward in the deliberation, is the appearance of two new reasons to question 1.4: impact on senior citizens and citizens with disabilities, and lack of a participation and consulting ('nobody asked them about the plan'; 'not enough transparency'; 'impact on certain groups of citizens, like people with disabilities or pregnant women').

Citizen attitudes towards the city's plan to expand the pedestrian zone in the city core

2.1a: The expansion of the pedestrian zone in the city core will lead to traffic problems: greater difficulty of movement for seniors and less mobile persons.

Table 1: Frequencies of answers to item 2.1a in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	9	1	9	3	8	30
T2	7	0	10	4	11	32

Note: 1 – I do not agree at all; 2 – I agree only a little; 3 – I agree to some extent; 4 – I agree rather much; 5 – I very much agree.

Citizens moderately agreed that the expansion of the pedestrian zone would lead to more difficult movement for seniors and less mobile persons in T1 (M=3.00; SD=1.58); this changed towards slightly more agreement in T2 (M=3.40; SD=1.57). However, the change is not statistically significant (t=-1.25; p=.22). Despite that, based on Table 2, we can observe that 63% of participants changed their position, and almost half of the sample changed side[11] (43%), from not agreeing to agreeing (26%) or vice versa (17%).

Table 2: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 2.1a in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	4	0	3	0	2	9
	Only a little	0	0	1	0	0	1
	To some extent	2	0	2	2	3	9
	Rather much	0	0	0	1	2	3
	Very much	1	0	2	1	4	8
	Total	7	0	8	4	11	30

2.1b: The expansion of the pedestrian zone in the city core will lead to traffic problems: more frequent traffic jams in the lower part of Dorćol.

Table 3: Frequencies of answers to item number 2.1b in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	5	1	4	9	12	31
T2	2	1	7	9	13	32

On average, citizens mostly agreed that the extension of the pedestrian zone would increase traffic jams in the lower part of Dorćol (M=3.71; SD=1.44). This general attitude was even stronger in T2 (M=3.90; SD=1.16), although the change was not statistically significant (t=-.86; p=.39). Based on cross tabulation, we calculated that 61% of citizens changed their position, but only 26%

11 Change of position is any change of chosen answer and change of side is a change from not agreeing to agreeing or vice versa. The percentage of those who changed their position is calculated first by calculating the percentage of those who did not change their position (the sum of the grey diagonal) and then by extracting that percentage from 100. In a similar way, the percentage of those who changed sides is calculated by extracting the sum of those who changed sides from those who changed only position, and then calculating the percentage.

changed sides in both directions evenly (13%). Most people (around 19%) kept their position of strong agreement.

Table 4: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 2.1.b in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	2	0	2	1	0	5
	Only a little	0	1	0	0	0	1
	To some extent	0	0	0	3	1	4
	Rather much	0	0	1	3	5	9
	Very much	0	0	4	2	6	12
	Total	2	1	7	9	12	31

2.1c: The expansion of the pedestrian zone in the city core will lead to traffic problems: poorer access to emergency services.

Table 5: Frequencies of answers to item number 2.1c in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	7	2	8	3	11	31
T2	7	4	4	6	11	32

In T1 citizens moderately to strongly agreed that the expansion of the pedestrian zone would lead to poorer access to emergency services (M=3.29; SD=1.57). This general value remained the same in T2 (M=3.29; SD=1.62). Further analysis of changes in frequencies showed that 71% changed their position, half of whom changed sides (35%) in both directions evenly. This means that even though the average opinion did not change, the participation in deliberation led to more than a third of the sample to change their side. Table 5 does not show any conspicuous finding, except that the number of those who *agreed to some extent* decreased, while the number of those who agreed *rather much* increased. Table 6 shows that most participants (16%) kept their position of *agreeing very much* with the statement.

Table 6: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 2.1c in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	3	1	2	1	0	7
	Only a little	1	0	1	0	0	2
	To some extent	2	1	1	1	3	8
	Rather much	0	0	0	0	3	3
	Very much	1	2	0	3	5	11
	Total	7	4	4	5	11	31

2.2: The advantages to the pedestrian zone expansion in the city core outweigh the disadvantages.

Table 7: Frequencies of answers to item number 2.2 in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	9	3	10	1	8	31
T2	9	6	6	9	1	31

On average, citizens moderately agreed with this item in T1 (M=2.90; SD=1.56). However, in T2 they agreed less (M=2.63; SD=1.27), although the change is not significant (t=1.05; p=.30). Cross tabulation of frequencies supports this finding: 63% changed their position, but only 27% changed sides, and 17% to a lesser agreement. 20% of participants *did not agree at all* in both T1 and T2. On the other hand, while in T1 26% of participants *agreed very much*, in T2 the percentage of those fell to 3.2% (see Table 7). However, this fall can be attributed to those who softened their attitude from 5 to 4, that is, from *agree very much* to *agree rather much* (as the latter increased from 1 to 9, Table 8).

Table 8: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 2.2 in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	6	0	0	3	0	9
	Only a little	0	1	1	0	0	2
	To some extent	2	5	2	1	0	10
	Rather much	0	0	0	1	0	1
	Very much	0	0	3	4	1	8
	Total	8	6	6	9	1	30

2.3: The expansion of the pedestrian zone makes sense only with the construction of an underground railway.

Table 9: Frequencies of answers to item number 2.3 in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	6	6	9	4	6	31
T2	9	5	8	5	5	32

On average, in T1 citizens agreed moderately with the statement that the expansion of the pedestrian zone makes sense only with an underground railway system (M=2.94; SD=1.39). In T2 this inclined toward agreeing less (M=2.77; SD=1.45). This change, however, is not statistically relevant (t=.50; p=.62). Again, around two-thirds of the sample changed their position in T2 (61%), and 42% changed sides, with slightly more participants agreeing less (23%) than more (19%). Most participants have kept their position of agreeing *to some extent* (13%).

Table 10: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 2.3 in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	3	0	1	0	2	6
	Only a little	2	1	0	2	1	6
	To some extent	3	2	4	0	0	9
	Rather much	0	1	1	2	0	4
	Very much	1	0	2	1	2	6
	Total	9	4	8	5	5	31

2.4.: The expansion project is a significant opportunity for the development of city tourism and economy.

Table 11: Frequencies of answers to item number 2.4 in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	8	6	3	6	8	31
T2	8	8	4	6	6	32

Participants *agreed to some extent* with the statement that the expansion of the pedestrian zone would be significant for city tourism and economy (M=3.00; SD=1.59). Their attitude did not change much in T2 (t=,.93; p=.36), although it inclined toward less agreement (M=2.84; SD=1.51). Most participants held their position (52%), and only 10% changed sides – mostly toward less agreement (7%). However, the biggest number of participants kept their strongly negative attitude, expressing doubt that the expansion of the pedestrian zone would improve the city's tourism and economy.

Table 12: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 2.4 in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	6	1	1	0	0	8
	Only a little	0	4	2	0	0	6
	To some extent	1	2	0	0	0	3
	Rather much	1	0	1	2	2	6
	Very much	0	0	0	4	4	8
	Total	8	7	4	6	6	31

2.5: The expansion of the pedestrian zone will not contribute to solving ecological problems.

Table 13: Frequencies of answers to item number 2.5 in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	8	0	5	8	10	31
T2	4	5	4	4	15	32

Participants on average agreed that the extension of the pedestrian zone would not contribute to solving ecological problems (M=3.39; SD=1.58). This attitude became stronger in T2 (M=3.68; SD=1.54). Again, the change is not statistically significant (t=-.92; p=.36). Based on cross tabulation, we can infer that around two-thirds of the sample changed their position (61%), while one-third changed sides (32%), with slightly higher inclination towards agreement (19%) than disagreement (13%). Most participants *agreed very much* with the statement in both T1 and T2 (22%). Of those who had *agreed rather much* in T1, most shifted to *agreeing very much* in T2 (50%).

Table 14: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 2.5 in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	2	2	1	1	2	8
	Only a little	0	0	0	0	0	0
	To some extent	1	1	1	0	2	5
	Rather much	0	1	1	2	4	8
	Very much	1	1	0	1	7	10
	Total	4	5	3	4	15	31

2.6.: Opponents of the pedestrian zone expansion are guided by personal and not public interest.

Table 15: Frequencies of answers to item number 2.6 in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	8	2	9	2	6	27
T2	16	1	3	4	8	32

The attitude of low to moderate agreement that the opponents of the pedestrian expansion were led by personal interest in T1 (M=2.85; SD=1.51) became slightly, but not significantly weaker in T2 (M=2.70; SD=1.81; t=.38; p=.71). However, the results of cross tabulation are interesting: 67% changed position, but 52% changed sides, evenly distributed to those who began to agree more, and those who began to disagree (26%). Therefore, even though the average value remained practically the same, there was some disturbance in the attitudes. Most participants who did *not agree at all*, kept their attitude in T2. Those who changed their attitude of *agreeing to some extent* in T1 were split evenly towards a strong negative or strong positive attitude in T2 (around 12%).

In T1 30% did *not agree at all* with this statement; in T2 the number grew to 50% of the whole sample (see Table 15).

Table 16: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 2.6 in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	5	0	2	0	1	8
	Only a little	1	1	0	0	0	2
	To some extent	4	0	0	1	4	9
	Rather much	0	0	0	1	1	2
	Very much	3	0	0	1	2	6
	Total	13	1	2	3	8	27

Preferences of citizens regarding the expansion of the pedestrian zone in the city core

3.1: The pedestrian zone in the city core should be expanded.

Table 17: Frequencies of answers to item number 3.1 in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	7	3	4	5	12	31
T2	9	4	5	10	4	32

On average, before the deliberative mini public, citizens moderately agreed that the pedestrian zone should be expanded (M=3.39; SD=1.63). This preference changed *towards less agreement* in T2 (M=2.90; SD=1.47), and the change *is statistically significant* (t=2.14; p<.05; Cohen's d=.38). 55% of participants changed their position, only 23% changed sides, but 17% began to disagree in T2. Table 17 shows that the number of those who *agree*d *very much* with the expansion of the pedestrian zone decreased by a factor of three. Table 18 shows that participants still agree with the statement, but not as strongly, since most who chose *very much* in T1, chose *rather much* in T2. A further very important finding is that most participants *did not agree at all* in both T1 and T2 (around 19%) – in other words, the deliberative mini public had no impact on the attitudes of those who already strongly disagreed with the project in T1, while it influenced the attitudes of those who agreed moderately to strongly.

Table 18: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 3.1 in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	6	0	1	0	0	7
	Only a little	1	0	1	1	0	3
	To some extent	1	1	1	1	0	4
	Rather much	0	1	1	3	0	5
	Very much	1	1	1	5	4	12
	Total	9	3	5	10	4	31

3.2: The pedestrian zone in the city core should be expanded along with the construction of the underground railway.

Table 19: Frequencies of answers to item number 3.2 in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	7	4	7	2	11	31
T2	9	4	5	7	7	32

Moderate agreement in T1 with the statement that the pedestrian zone should be expanded on the condition of the construction of an underground railway system (M=3.19; SD=1.60) inclined towards lesser agreement after the deliberative mini-public (M=2.97; SD=1.58), but not significantly (t=.83; p=.41). Around half of the sample changed their position (48%), half of whom changed sides (26%), mostly towards agreeing less (16%). Again, the biggest number of participants kept their position of *not at all* agreeing with this statement, but it is inconclusive whether this is because they are against the specific proposition or against the project as a whole. Some of the participants who had *agreed very much* in T1, agreed less in T2 (7 out of 11, which is 64%).

Table 20: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 3.2 in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	6	0	0	1	0	7
	Only a little	1	2	0	0	1	4
	To some extent	1	0	3	2	1	7
	Rather much	0	0	0	1	1	2
	Very much	1	2	1	3	4	11
	Total	9	4	4	7	7	31

3.3: First, there should be a public debate, and only then an acceptable solution should be adopted.

Table 21: Frequencies of answers to item number 3.3 in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	0	0	3	4	24	31
T2	0	0	1	1	29	31

Answers to this question provide the clearest position regarding the participants' preferences: T1 already showed a strong preference for a public debate prior to the adoption of any solution (M=4.73; SD=.58). After the deliberative mini public, the average increased to almost unified opinion (M=4.90; SD=.40). This change is marginally significant (t=-1.98; p=.06; Cohen's d=-.36). 87% of participants did not change their position, stating that they agreed very much with this preference, with only 3% (one person) changing sides.

Table 22: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 3.3 in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Only a little	0	0	0	0	0	0
	To some extent	0	0	1	0	1	2
	Rather much	0	0	0	1	3	4
	Very much	0	0	0	0	24	24
	Total	0	0	1	1	28	30

3.4: The current state of the city core should be preserved.

Table 23: Frequencies of answers to item number 3.4 in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	4	2	7	7	10	30
T2	2	2	6	5	16	31

On average, participants agreed in T1 that the current city appearance should be preserved (M=3.52; SD=1.38). This opinion grew stronger in T2 (M=4; SD=1.28), although not statistically significantly (t=-1.85; p=.08). Around

two-thirds of the sample changed position (62%), half of whom changed sides (31%), mostly agreeing more (24%). Based on Table 23, it can be observed that the number of those who *very much agree* grew from 10 to 16, while most of the participants already *agreed very much* with this preference (24%; Table 24).

Table 24: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 3.4 in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	1	1	1	0	1	4
	Only a little	0	1	0	0	1	2
	To some extent	1	0	0	2	4	7
	Rather much	0	0	3	2	2	7
	Very much	0	0	1	1	7	9
	Total	2	2	5	5	15	29

3.5: The pedestrian zone in the city core should be expanded, but the trolleybus lines should be kept.

Table 25: Frequencies of answers to item number 3.5 in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	5	1	11	6	8	31
T2	4	1	4	7	16	32

Citizens mostly agreed with the proposition to expand the pedestrian zone as long as trolleybus lines were preserved (M=3.35; SD=1.35). The average preference increased in T2 to *agree rather much* (M=3.94; SD=1.41). The change is not statistically significant (t=-1.74; p=.09). 68% of participants changed positions, and as many as 45% changed sides, mostly agreeing more (32%). Based on Table 26, we can observe that half of the sample *agrees very much* with this preference after the deliberative mini public, most of whom arrived there from some other position (12/16).

Table 26: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 3.5 in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	2	0	0	2	1	5
	Only a little	0	0	0	0	1	1
	To some extent	0	0	3	2	6	11
	Rather much	0	1	0	1	4	6
	Very much	2	0	1	1	4	8
	Total	4	1	4	6	16	31

3.6: The pedestrian zone in the city core should be expanded, but not at the expense of green areas.

Table 27: Frequencies of answers to item number 3.6 in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	2	1	5	3	20	31
T2	5	0	3	1	23	32

On average, citizens strongly agreed in T1 that the expansion of the pedestrian zone should not be implemented at the expense of green areas in the city core (M=4.23; SD=1.23). This preference stayed the same in T2 (M=4.13; SD=1.52; t=.35; p=.73). Only 39% changed their position, but 29% changed sides, about the same number in both directions. More than half of the sample already *agreed very much* with this preference in T1 , and this number increased in T2 (Table 27).

Table 28: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 3.6 in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	2	0	0	0	0	2
	Only a little	0	0	0	0	1	1
	To some extent	0	0	1	0	4	5
	Rather much	1	0	1	0	1	3
	Very much	2	0	1	1	16	20
	Total	5	0	3	1	22	31

3.7: The current state of the city core should be preserved, but more bicycle lanes should be introduced.

Table 29: Frequencies of answers to item number 3.7 in T1 and T2.

	Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	5	2	7	3	14	31
T2	6	2	2	8	13	31

Participants moderately to strongly agreed in T1 that the current city appearance should be preserved, except for the addition of bicycle lanes (M=3.63; SD=1.54). This general preference stayed the same after the deliberative event in T2 (M=3.60; SD=1.58; t=.14; p=.89). Around half of the sample did not change their position (48%), 20% changed sides, and 13% began to disagree. Most participants have kept their position of *agreeing very much* (30%), but 10% went from 'to some extent' to 'rather much', indicating a slight tendency towards more agreement with the preference after the deliberative mini public.

Table 30: Cross tabulation of frequencies of answers to item number 3.7 in T1 and T2.

		T2					
		Not at all	Only a little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much	Total
T1	Not at all	4	0	0	1	0	5
	Only a little	0	1	0	0	1	2
	To some extent	2	0	1	3	0	6
	Rather much	0	0	0	1	2	3
	Very much	0	1	1	3	9	14
	Total	6	2	2	8	12	30

4. Discussion and Concluding Points

In this paper we sought to examine the impact of the first ever deliberative mini public in Belgrade. We looked at the effects of this event on the participants' knowledge, attitudes and preferences regarding the expansion of the pedestrian zone in the city core and changes to traffic plans in the very heart of Belgrade. Relying on the literature on transformative and democratizing effects of deliberation on participants' opinions and attitudes, our research hypothesis was that participation in this deliberative mini public would lead to *better understanding (enhanced knowledge) of the discussed topic and change in attitude and personal preferences regarding the plan's implementation*.

Our analysis was based on a set of qualitative and quantitative data collected from the questionnaires the participants answered before and after taking part in the deliberative process (T1 and T2). Regarding the participants' *knowledge*, qualitative data analysis was conducted to detect changes in answers provided before and after the participation. Quantitative data on *attitudes* and *preferences* were analysed by simple descriptive statistics in T1 and T2, crosstabs, and paired samples t-test for each of the items. Given the fact that our case study had a non-experimental design and relied on a small sample, our analysis could only reveal tendencies in data. They are, however, observed in relation to each other, which, together with other outputs from the deliberative mini public – like reports on discussion groups and plenary sessions – provides a basis for tentative interpretation of the main findings.

Regarding the citizens`knowledge and possession of information about the topic of the deliberation, we can safely conclude that participation in this deliberative mini public yielded concrete results. While in T1 60% of the sample expressed no knowledge about citizen initiatives opposing the plan, in T2 71.8% of the sample was aware of them. More interestingly, citizens became aware of the concrete reasons for opposing the plan, and were able not only to list them but also elaborate their rationale. In T2 there was a notable presence of two listed answers absent in T1: the impact of the proposed project on seniors and citizens with disabilities, and the absence of a participating and consulting process. This can be attributed to the presence of senior citizens in the discussion groups during the deliberative mini public, as well as to the fact that the invited representatives of the citizen initiatives took the opportunity to highlight the non-participatory and non-transparent process by which the city officials devised and adopted the plan.

In analysing the quantitative data regarding citizens' attitudes and preferences about the project, as already explained, we were not relying on statistically significant changes only, due to the small size of the sample, but sought changes in frequencies, in order to understand the tendencies of the data. For example, we observed that on average, two-thirds of the sample changed positions, and one-third changed sides in answers provided in T2. Therefore, we paid special attention when that percentage was higher or lower.

For instance, in expressing their attitudes toward the statement *The expansion of the pedestrian zone will lead to ... greater difficulty in movement for seniors and less mobile persons*, almost half of the participants changed sides while 26% changed from not agreeing to agreeing with the statement, which is the biggest change we found among data on attitudes. The tendency towards higher recognition of problems that less mobile citizens would face, should the project of expansion be implemented, can be interpreted in terms of slightly higher sensitivity towards such persons. Namely, less mobile and senior citizens were included in the deliberative mini public and were therefore in a position to provide their fellow citizens with their distinctive perspective on the topic.

Another finding that also indicates the impact of the deliberation on participants' attitudes is the change in T2 responses to the statement: *The advantages*

to the pedestrian zone expansion in the city core outweigh the disadvantages. Whereas the percentage of those who *did not agree at all* remained the same, the percentage of those who *agreed very much* fell from 26% to 3.2%. This is most likely the result of the fact that participants had the chance to hear and discuss the negative consequences of the project. As further findings indicate, the deliberative mini public had greater impact on those participants who were moderately to strongly *in favour of* the project, rather than those who were *opposed to* it. In other words, those who expressed their objection to the expansion of the pedestrian zone kept their position, while those who were initially in favour of the project changed their views based on new information they collected during the deliberation. This could be put in the context of the current political climate, mentioned in the introduction. In general, the public in Serbia had very little opportunity to find relevant information about this project, let alone to be informed about opposition to it. We could observe this fact even while preparing the informative material for the deliberative mini public, and subsequently confirmed it by looking at answers given in T1 (in particular regarding information about opposition to the proposed plan). Organized deliberation proved to be the arena for presentation and elaboration of such arguments, and it clearly yielded some effects.

Further confirmation of this starting standpoint could be found in changes of attitudes toward the statement: *Opponents of the pedestrian zone expansion are guided by personal and not public interest.* Again, most participants who did not agree at all did not change their attitude in T2. In T1 30% did not agree at all with this statement; in T2 this number grew to 50% of the whole sample. 52% of participants changed sides. This finding indicates that after the deliberative mini public more participants became less convinced that the opponents of the project were solely led by personal interests. Since each of the four discussion groups within the deliberative mini public included one or two representatives of the citizen initiatives opposing the project, it is reasonable to assume that their arguments were convincing; in other words, participants became more receptive to the attitudes of the project opponents.

In examining the findings of changes in participants' *preferences*, we can again detect trends corroborating our starting point. There was *statistically significant* decrease in numbers of those agreeing with the statement, *The pedestrian zone in the city core should be expanded*. Again, most participants *did not agree at all* in both T1 and T2 (around 19%), while the number of those who very much agreed with the expansion of the pedestrian zone decreased by three times. In other words, the deliberative mini public had no influence on the attitudes of those who already strongly disagreed with the project in T1, but it did influence the attitudes of those who agreed with it moderately to strongly.

The overall trend in the participants` preferences after the mini public was more *opposed* than in favour of the proposed expansion of the pedestrian zone. The only meaningful exception to this were statements *in favour* of the project on condition the green areas and trolleybus lines be kept intact. Half the sample were firm, both before and after the mini public, in their preference

for keeping the green areas should the project be implemented. Regarding the preference of realizing the project on condition of keeping the trolleybus lines, participants tended to agree strongly, especially after the mini public. Based on these findings, we can assume that for the citizens affected by the project of the expansion of the pedestrian zone, ecological concerns are of very high importance.

Finally, the last item to be taken into consideration here is the one without any major change between T1 and T2, but still of significance for the overall analysis. Agreement with the statement, *First, there should be a public debate, and only then an acceptable solution should be adopted* was already very high in T1, yet after the deliberative mini public, the average agreement increased to a nearly unified opinion. The participants' appetite for deliberation and inclusion in public debates is further confirmed in their evaluation of the deliberative mini public: 100% of the sample confirmed that they would like to be included in similar initiatives in the future.

To conclude, our analysis mostly confirmed our research hypothesis: the deliberative mini public held in Belgrade did enhance the participants' knowledge about the topic, and led to some changes in the participants' attitudes and preferences.[12] The trends of change could not be observed in all the items pertinent to the participants' attitudes and preferences. Those that could be observed point to the conclusion that the deliberative process exerted influence on participants who were initially (before the deliberation) moderately or strongly in favour of the project, while the attitudes and preferences of those who were initially against it, practically remained the same. The exposure to arguments held by different categories of citizens (e.g., those with difficulties in mobility), as well as citizen initiatives and experts who were openly opposed to the project, slightly tilted the participants against the overall project. In evaluating the quality of the deliberative mini public, participants agreed from *rather much* to *very much*, that "other participants' responses to expressed opinions were appropriate" (93.5%), "opinions and attitudes of other participants seemed appropriate and justified" (84%), and "participation in group discussions deepened understanding of the issue" (77%).

Even though, given the small sample of the study, our findings could only detect trends, their significance lies in the fact that they represent some of the first results of a pioneering endeavour of studying the effects of an organized deliberative forum on knowledge, attitudes and preferences among the citizens in Serbia, country with a hybrid political regime. On a bigger sample, we could expect these tendencies to grow stronger, to the point of statistical significance and more generalizable findings.

12 Similarly, qualitative content analysis of the discussion groups suggests that deliberation had a positive impact on participants' knowledge of the topic, see Janković in this volume.

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Ana Đorđević i Jelena Vasiljević

Efekti deliberacije na znanje, stavove i preferencije građana: studija slučaja beogradske deliberativne mini javnosti

Apstrakt

Učešće u deliberativnim arenama često se pozitivno ocenjuje zbog transformativnog uticaja na stavove građana, na njihov osećaj moći delovanja i na njihovu sposobnost da formulišu konkretne predloge javnih politika. U fokusu ovog rada je prva deliberativna mini javnost u Beogradu, organizovana na temu proširenja pešačke zone i preusmeravanja saobraćaja u centralnom delu grada. Oslanjajući se na skup kvalitativnih i kvantitativnih podataka prikupljenih pre i posle deliberacije, cilj nam je da istražimo efekte javne rasprave na znanje, stavove i preferencije učesnika. Naša hipoteza je da je učešće u ovom deliberativnom procesu dovelo do boljeg razumevanja (produbljenog znanja) diskutovane teme, kao i do promene stavova i preferencija u vezi s njenom realizacijom. Iako je opseg studije ograničen, s obzirom na njen neeksperimentalni dizajn i mali uzorak, izvedeni rezultati pokazuju da se znanje učesnika o temi unapredilo, postalo preciznije, razrađenije i otvorenije za različite perspektive. Što se tiče stavova i preferencija, oko dve trećine uzorka je promenilo stav, po najvećem broju pitanja, dok je oko jedna trećina promenila stranu, uglavnom u pravcu manjeg slaganja s predlogom proširenja pešačke zone. Nalazi podržavaju zaključak da, na lokalnom nivou, deliberacija ima kapacitet da informiše učesnike i unapredi njihove kompetencije za šire političko učešće.

Ključne reči: deliberacija, deliberativne mini javnosti, učešće građana, pešačka zona i saobraćaj, Beograd, znanje, stavovi, preferencije, lokalna politika.