Does intergroup deliberation foster intergroup appreciation?
Evidence from two deliberative experiments in deeply divided Belgium

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In recent years, democratic theory has witnessed the rise of a new paradigm. The deliberative turn in political philosophy, as it came to be known, opposes the aggregative accounts of democracy, and advances a radically new mode for democratic decision-making (Dryzek 2000). The quality of democratic decisions is no longer considered a function of mere compliance with aggregation rules. Instead, it is determined by extensive argumentation about political choices before voting on them. Deliberative democracy therefore takes a talk-centric approach to decision making which sharply contrasts with the vote-centric focus of earlier models (Gutmann & Thompson 2004).

One of the main reasons why deliberative democrats shifted attention from voting to talking is that genuine deliberation is believed to have important transformative effects (Dryzek 2000; Barabas 2004). Through talking to each other, citizens learn about others’ opinions. They come to see different perspectives, and they come to understand the reasons why their fellow citizens look at the same problems from different angles. Thus, talking about political issues, according to deliberative democrats, instigates a more considered judgment; it allows citizens to hear different perspectives to a problem and to broaden and question their own opinions (Bohman 1996).

As such, the process of reflecting on opinions and arguing back-and-forth adds to the value of democracy by enhancing the consideredness of public opinions (Wyatt, Kim & Katz, 2000, p. 87); it shows citizens what their true preferences are in light of better arguments, or should be in light of the common good. It is through political talk that citizens find out what they value themselves and what is acceptable to others (Barber 1984, p. 185).

However, these kinds of transformative effects do not come easy. In order for people’s minds to change, the discussion between them has to live up to the standards of the deliberative ideal type (Steiner 2009), and these are very strict standards. Genuine deliberation has to be

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1 This paper is a very first draft and it is based on very preliminary data. Please do not quote without the permission of the authors.
inclusive, respectful, rational and sincere, and it has to advance the common good (Steiner et al. 2004). It is only under these circumstances that deliberants will engage in an open process of arguing back-and-forth in which nothing is taken for granted anymore, and in which everyone is able and willing to yield to the “forceless force of the better argument” (Habermas 1996, p. 305). And such a situation of perfect communicative symmetry opens up the way for preference, opinion and attitude transformation.

In this paper, we set out to determine whether the link between deliberation and transformation (or between process and outcome) is as straightforward as deliberative democracy assumes. More specifically, our research questions are (1) whether a high quality of deliberation does indeed lead to changes in attitudes, and (2) whether a high quality of deliberation can lead to a higher appreciation of the members of the outgroup. We thus want to push the research on the transformative effects a little further and see whether these effects can also take place in deliberation between diametrically opposed groups. Our aim is thus not only to test the link between deliberation and transformation, but also to see whether deliberation can have its transformative effects in high conflict settings.

Based on findings from two deliberative experiments organized in deeply divided Belgium, we argue that the quality of deliberation (and the perceived quality of deliberation) are only weakly linked to changes in outgroup attitudes, and that the main variable explaining shifts towards more positive outgroup feelings is actually the group composition. Participants who are confronted with the other side are less likely to hold more negative views of the outgroup after the deliberation.

Hereafter, we first discuss the relation between deliberation as the process and attitude change as the outcome. We highlight some empirical findings from the Deliberative Polls and other deliberative experiments. Afterwards we highlight the challenge that a deeply divided public sphere can pose for the occurrence of these transformative effects. Thirdly we discuss the substance and methodology of our two studies and report on the results of these experiments. And finally, we discuss our findings and link them back to the theory.

1 Deliberation as attitude transformation

When democratic deliberation lives up to the Habermasian ideal type, it is expected to generate strong shifts in opinion and attitudes. Because of their deliberative capacities and the openness required to yield towards better arguments, deliberative citizens are – theoretically – expected to be able to change opinions (Miller 1993). Interestingly, many studies have hitherto been
successful in empirically demonstrating that deliberation does indeed have important transformative effects, and that citizens are not deterred from changing opinions simply by the fear of appearing inconsistent.

The most significant contribution to understanding the dynamics of social learning and opinion change through deliberation has been made by the research on Deliberative Polls (Fishkin & Luskin 2005). The researchers behind the Deliberative Polls start from the assumption that regular opinion polls rarely reflect the informed preferences and attitudes of the public, and that the element of deliberation can contribute to the consideredness of public opinions. They thus explicitly design their events to measure opinion and attitude changes through pretest and posttest questionnaires, and the findings from the Deliberative Poll endeavour are strong. The researchers consistently find changes in opinions after citizens have had the opportunity to look at information booklets and talk to each other: citizens become better informed and as a consequence hold different opinions than before. They also become more tolerant of different and opposing opinions and they tend to find common ground where there was conflict before (Luskin, Fishkin & Jowell 2002; Luskin & Fishkin 2002).

However, one critical remark is appropriate because very little of the research on Deliberative Polls has attempted to explicitly link the quality of deliberation to the change in attitudes. It is often assumed that the changes between posttest and pretest are caused by what happens in-between, i.e. the deliberation, but the effect of intermediate step on opinion change is all too often implicit (Depauw 2007).

However, recent research has pointed out that it is necessary to scrutinize this implicit relationship between deliberation and its transformative effects. Based on data from a Finnish experiment, Himmelroos & Christensen (2012, p. 17) conclude that “the results did not substantiate that deliberative competence is a central factor in explaining whether or how people change opinions as a result of deliberation. The indicators of discourse quality and activity were not able to account for the observed changes in a satisfactory manner”. The link between the process and outcome of deliberation is thus not guaranteed, and it should be an issue of explicit reflection. Despite this critical reflection, we will still follow the theoretical assumption underlying deliberative democracy and hypothesize that:

**H1:** A high quality of deliberation will lead to changes in attitudes, and more specifically in outgroup attitudes.
Besides the consistent finding that putting citizens together to discuss political issues leads to changes in opinions and attitudes, Gastil, Bacci and Dollinger (2010) make additional claims about the direction of these changes. Based on their review of 65 Deliberative Polls, they argue that attitude changes in deliberative experiments are rarely neutral, and that participants in deliberative experiments “tend to move toward more cosmopolitan, egalitarian and collectivist value orientations” (Gastil et al. 2010, abstract). During deliberation, participants tend to incorporate others’ views and set aside particularistic or nationalistic rationales (Gastil et al. 2010, p. 5). This is of course highly relevant when deliberation deals with contentious issues that deeply divide certain societies.

In this regard, a particularly relevant experiment was organized in Finland in 2006. Using data gathered in a deliberative mini-public on nuclear energy, Grönlund, Setälä and Herne (2010) show that deliberation does indeed increase a number of civic virtues. For instance, they find that deliberation increased the participants’ trust in political institutions, and that there are slightly higher levels of other-regarding attitudes after deliberation (Grönlund et al. 2010, p. 109). These findings are much in line with Min’ argument that both face-to-face and online deliberation are capable of changing people’s civic attitudes and democratic values for the better (Min 2007).

Based on these studies, we hypothesize the following:

\[H_2: \text{A high quality of deliberation will have directional effects, and will lead to more pro-social (and in this case more: positive outgroup) attitudes.}\]

2 The challenge of intergroup deliberation

Despite the very positive findings that deliberation actually leads to the development of more pro-social and pro-democratic attitudes, previous research was based largely on experiments in low conflict settings, even if it was in some instances on a politically hot issue. The question remains, however, whether deliberation can resort its transformative effects even when deep identities and interests are at stake, and when the personal investments of the participants are much greater (Wojcieszak 2011). In high conflict settings, when deliberation takes place between diametrically opposed groups in society, the dynamics of deliberation – and the process of attitude transformation – is bound to be different.

However, this need not be a change for the worse. Recent research on intergroup deliberation (Caluwaerts forthcoming) has shown that confrontation between deeply divided groups can actually be of higher quality than in homogeneous groups. In intergroup settings,
discussion can lead to understanding, and understanding can lead to respect. In a similar vein, we can also hypothesize that intergroup deliberation should not necessarily lead to a deepening of mutual distrust and an exacerbation of negative outgroup feelings. Rather, contact between members of opposed groups might even lead to a more positive regard for members of the outgroup.

This hypothesis finds support in social psychological research on intergroup contact (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp 2006). Allport’s so-called “contact hypothesis” has had a major influence on psychological theories of intergroup relations from the 1950’s onwards. It acknowledges that stereotypes and prejudices form the basis of intergroup conflict, but it also stated that contact between competing groups could reduce intergroup tensions and distrust. To be successful, however, intergroup contact has to occur under certain conditions. First, the groups had to have an equal status during contact. Privileging one of the groups through the contact would only result in conflict exacerbation. Furthermore, the groups had to depend on each other in order to attain common goal. Pursuing a common goal immediately reframes the discussion from an intergroup conflict into a search for a mutually beneficial solution. And finally, the contact should be long enough for personal ties and mutual recognition to arise. Brief interactions do little more than heighten tensions (Dovidio et al 2003; Pettigrew 1998).

The hypothesis also finds empirical support. It is in line with findings from communication studies. These studies generally agree that discussing political issues with diverse others fosters greater trust and tolerance for disagreements (Mutz 2002). Through deliberation people come to see the rationales and merits behind other opinions, and they develop respect for the differences that exist (Mutz 2006).

Moreover, in 2007 a Deliberative Poll was organized in Northern Ireland (Fishkin et al. 2009), a region that repeatedly fell hostage to outbursts of hostilities and violence. In this experiment, Catholics and Protestants were gathered to discuss issues in education policy, which is generally a very contentious issue in deeply divided societies. However, despite the long history of civil strife between the groups, and despite the initial doubts about the trustworthiness of the other side, the participants were able to engage in constructive deliberation with each other, and they changed their opinions on education policy. Most importantly in light of our research question, however, is that their attitudes towards the outgroup did tend to shift and that they became significantly more convinced of the trustworthiness of the outgroup. Combined with the insights from the contact hypothesis, this experiment thus allow us to hypothesize the following:
H3: Deliberative encounters in a divided group can effectively foster a change towards more positive outgroup feelings.

3 Evidence from two deliberative experiments

Testing these hypotheses requires of course the observation of communicative interactions between citizens from both sides of the linguistic divide. Due to their highly segmented nature, however, divided societies are characterized by a limited number of contacts across divides. Political life, and hence political discussion, takes place within the confines of one’s own subgroup (Sinardet 2012). This inherent limitation explains why we rely on data gathered in experimental settings. More specifically, we rely on data from two deliberative experiments organized in 2010 and 2011. These events were organized in Belgium, a society that is deeply divided along ethno-linguistic lines, and which in recent years has known a surge of nationalist public discourse (Deschouwer 2009). This makes it an excellent case for studying the transformative potential of intergroup deliberation.

3.1 Study 1: A mini-public on the future of Belgium

The first experiment was a mini-public on the future of Belgium, in which we gathered Belgian citizens from both sides of the linguistic cleavage. The question we presented them was as simple as it was controversial: “how do you see the future of Belgium?” At a moment when the negotiations on the state reform stranded, and early elections were in sight, this deliberative experiment dealt with issues that went to the heart of the Belgian political deadlock.

3.1.1 Methodology

Given that the aim of this first experiment was to determine the impact of the group composition, we gathered nine groups of ordinary citizens to deliberate. Three of them were homogeneous Dutch-speaking and three others were homogeneous French-speaking groups. These homogeneous groups were considered a control condition, whereas a divided group composition, in which both linguistic groups were represented, constituted the treatment condition. Theoretically, all of these groups consisted of ten persons, ensuring a gender balance, and a balance between the linguistic groups in the divided experiments. Such small groups ensure

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2 In practice, however, we did suffer from last-minute drop out. In total 83 out of 90 invitees actually attended, which is very good given the fact that the experiments were organized on a Saturday morning in Brussels, an unknown territory to most participants.
that exclusionary tendencies are not built into the design because large groups risk to be dominated by those with the best communicative capacities (Young 2000). In the divided groups, finally, simultaneous translation was provided.

The participants were recruited by sending out a pretest questionnaire. The sample was random but disproportionately stratified to ensure the equal presence of both Dutch and French-speakers in the participant pool. Due to time and financial restrictions, however, these samples were drawn from an existing panel with over 110,000 individuals rather than official census lists, but the panel closely resembles the socio-demographic composition of the Belgian population.

The random selection was not paralleled by a random assignment of the participants to the groups. Given the small group size, random assignment has a high chance of generating groups that are internally homogeneous (Caluwaerts & Ugarriza 2012; Coote & Lenaghan 1997). This is not desirable from a theoretical point of view (Thompson 2008), nor in light of our research question. After all, we are interested in the question whether citizens change their attitudes towards the outgroup through deliberating with each other. As such, we needed citizens with both positive and negative feelings towards the outgroup, and such a diversity is unlikely to be included using random sampling. The participants were therefore assigned to the groups based on heterogeneity sampling, which ensures that a wide diversity of outgroup feelings was included in each group.

3.1.2 Measuring deliberation: the Discourse Quality Index (DQI)

In order to measure the impact of deliberation on opinion change, we coded the discussions using the Discourse Quality Index (DQI), which has been used before to determine the deliberative quality of parliamentary discourse (Steiner et al. 2004). Because the initial DQI was developed for measuring parliamentary deliberation, we needed to adapt the DQI to the specificities of the experimental setting, which is in line with how Steenbergen and his colleagues (2003) see the DQI. Table 1 lists all of the dimensions we measured. Interruptions, respect for counterarguments, the level of justification and constructive politics all capture an essential dimension of deliberation, and they were all part of the original DQI. To this we added, the use

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3 Belgium consists of approximately 60% Dutch-speakers and 40% French-speakers. A proportionately random sample would thus lead to groups with a six-to-four composition in favour of Dutch-speakers, whereas we opted for a balance between the linguistic groups.

4 The technique of using an existing panel is not uncommon in deliberative research (see e.g. Price & Capella 2002, p. 307).

5 Older age groups and non-active citizens are slightly overrepresented in the panel, which shouldn’t be a problem because mostly these groups mostly drop out.
of respectful language and respectful listening, two dimensions that are crucially part of citizen deliberation. We also coded respect towards the ingroup and outgroup, and references to the common good, but these items showed less than five per cent variation, so that we had to exclude them from further analyses (Caluwaerts forthcoming).

Table 1: Factor analysis and reliability analysis of DQI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interruption</td>
<td>.309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful language</td>
<td>.526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful listening</td>
<td>.760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect counterarguments</td>
<td>.831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of justification</td>
<td>.709</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract principles</td>
<td>.323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive politics</td>
<td>.608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha (excluding interruption and abstract principles)</td>
<td>.739</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to move from the items to the index, we used a factor analysis. Table 1 reports that there is only one factor, on which five out of seven DQI items load well. Respect for counterarguments, respectful listening and the level of justification are the three strongest items, but they are completed by the use of respectful language and constructive politics, which have slightly lower factor loadings. All of these items refer to a way of presenting one’s arguments, and defending one’s position. The way in which speakers listen to others and react to them, and the respect they accord to their arguments reflects the same underlying structure as the efforts speakers put into defending their own ideas and their openness towards better arguments.

Given the positive results of the factor analysis, we created an additive scale. After we excluded interruption and abstract principles, the scale has a good internal consistency and reliability (Cronbach’s alpha of .739). Since each of the DQI items behaves empirically as we theoretically projected in a reliable manner, the index has high construct validity.

3.1.3 Results

Before trying to explain attitude change, we should know whether there is variation in the dependent variable (table 2). A first way of doing this is by looking at the raw changes in mean
scores. Here, we see that the participants in the pretest have an average of 6.61 out of 10, and an average of 7.56 out of 10 in the posttest questionnaire. There is thus an apparent change in feelings of almost one point, which is moreover significant, and in general the participants hold a more positive attitude towards the outgroup after deliberation.

However, it is generally known that mean sample changes can hide much attitude changes at the individual level. We therefore also took a more detailed look at the percentages of the participants changing their feelings towards the outgroup. 31.3% of all participants did not change their opinions about the outgroup in between T1 and T2. For them, the deliberation had no effect whatsoever on outgroup feelings. Moreover, the data show that more than half of the participants in the experiment held a more positive view of the outgroup than before, whereas 13.3% of them became more negative. Even though it is generally assumed that participating in democratic deliberation moves citizens in more pro-social directions, it is still remarkable to see that the participants in this event shifted so massively in favor of the outgroup.

Table 2: Changes in outgroup feelings (individual level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Pretest (T1)</th>
<th>Mean Posttest (T2)</th>
<th>Mean change (sign. paired samples t-test)</th>
<th>Percentage unchanged position</th>
<th>Percentage becoming more posit.</th>
<th>Percentage becoming more negat.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.61</td>
<td>7.56</td>
<td>0.95***</td>
<td>31.3% (N=26)</td>
<td>55.4% (N=46)</td>
<td>13.3% (N=11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even though the results in table 2 show that there has been some shift in outgroup attitudes within the deliberating group, we still have to test our hypotheses. Based on social psychological literature on intergroup contact, we hypothesized that those who are confronted face-to-face with the outgroup, i.e. those in the divided groups, would cultivate more positive outgroup feelings, and that a high deliberative quality and equality would foster a more positive outgroup attitude.

The central variables in this analysis are thus the group composition, and the characteristics of the deliberation. As control variables, we included gender, age, education and language. Gender was considered important because deliberation and its effects are generally considered to be stratified along the lines of gender (Sanders 1997). The speakers’ educational attainment was also included because the higher educated possess much more resources for deliberation in terms of political knowledge and verbal skills to formulate high quality rational arguments (Hooghe
Moreover, the higher educated are generally more knowledgeable on politics and are better informed, which means that their opinions and attitudes might already be well-considered and might thus be relatively steady. We therefore turned educational level into a dummy and distinguished between those who are higher educated (code ‘1’) and those who received secondary education at most (code ‘0’). The age of the speaker was also considered relevant because older generations were socialized in the turbulent post-war years in which the relations between the linguistic groups were very uneasy. Moreover, those who grew up in the 1970’s experienced severe political instability due to the heated tensions between the north and the south of the country, whereas the younger generations grew up in times of relative peace. And finally, because the Belgian conflict is a linguistic one, we also included the language the speaker uses on a day-to-day basis.

| Table 3: OLS regression predicting the change in outgroup feelings (T2 – T1) |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
|                                  | Model 1: Composition             | Model 2: Composition & deliberation | Model 3: Control |
|                                  | B (S.E.) Beta                    | B (S.E.) Beta                     | B (S.E.) Beta    |
| Constant                        | .683 (.209) .279 (1.470)         | -1.725 (1.937)                    |
| Divided group                   | .816 (.365) .233*                | 1.015 (.377) .288**              | 1.015 (.375) .259* |
| Average DQI                     | -.314 (.162) -.225*              | -.132 (.170) -.095 (n.s.)        |
| Deliberative equality           | .666 (.518) .143 (n.s.)          | .482 (.570) .104 (n.s.)          |
| Sex                             | .035 (.015) .266*                | .084 (.363) .025 (n.s.)          |
| Age                             | -.271 (.414) -.077 (n.s.)        | -.084 (.356) .062 (n.s.)         |
| Higher education                |                                 |                                  |
| French-speaker                  |                                 |                                  |
| Adjusted R²                     | 5.4%                             | 9.7%                             | 18.7%             |

N=83; Sign.: **p<.01; *p<.05

In order to test our hypotheses, we ran a stepwise OLS regression analysis predicting the change in outgroup feelings (table 3). In the first model we included the group composition. For including just one variable, the model has a relatively high explained variance of 5.4%. Moreover, the results show that a divided group composition is significantly related to changes in outgroup feelings. Citizens who participated in the divided groups, i.e. those who faced the outgroup, generally move towards a more positive feelings for that outgroup. Contact with the other side
thus leads to a much more favorable outgroup attitude, which seems to confirm the contact hypothesis: intergroup deliberation leads to intergroup appreciation.

This effect remains significant even after we control for the characteristics of the deliberation. The results of model 2 show that not only a divided group composition is significantly related to changes in outgroup feelings, but that also the quality of the deliberation matters. As we predicted, the higher the quality of the deliberation, the stronger the shift in opinions. However, the direction of the effect is contrary to what we expected: a higher deliberative quality leads to a less positive view of the outgroup. Even though it would have been interesting to see whether the effect of the DQI would have differed in the various group settings, we had too few cases to make any robust claims on this interaction effect.

However, when we look at the third model, we notice that the effect of the DQI is no longer significant. Neither the quality, nor the equality of the deliberation is significantly related to attitude change in this first study. What does seem to be the crucial factor in explaining changes in outgroup feelings, is the group composition. This is an important finding: even after including all control variables in the model, facing the outgroup is one of the most important predictors of attitude changes. This is largely in line with the contact hypothesis that states that facing the outgroup will lead to a more positive attitude towards that outgroup.

Besides the group composition, very few variables impact upon attitude changes. The usual socio-demographics have little effect, with the exception of age. Older participants show more change than younger ones. This is probably due to the fact that the younger participants were generally already more positive towards the outgroup, whereas the older ones started from a much more negative view of the other language group. The younger ones thus had little room for improvement of outgroup feelings.

3.2 Study 2: The G1000

The second deliberative experiment took place in 2011 in Belgium and under a comparable political firmament. After the 2010 federal elections, the government negotiations took more than 500 days. In this turbulent and highly unstable political vacuum, a citizens’ initiative called the G1000 was launched that attempted to gather 1000 Belgian citizens for one day in order to discuss three important political challenges: social security, immigration, and the financial crisis. Contrary to the first study, this was not primarily a scientific experiment, but rather a democratic experiment. The experiment was completely citizen initiated, the money came from crowd funding, and organization was in the hands of volunteers. Nevertheless, we were still able to
shape the methodology of the event and to administer pretest and posttest questionnaires to the participants and to gather data on the deliberation.

3.2.1 Methodology

As in the first study, we varied the group composition at the tables. Because of its normative and methodological appeal, the participants were recruited using random selection. The reason why randomization is so normatively appealing is because it gives every citizen an equal chance of being selected to participate. Moreover, randomization ensures that the multitude of public opinions is present in a group, and it thus “produces discussion among people who think and vote differently and would not normally be exposed to one another” (Fishkin, Luskin, & Jowell, 2000, p. 660).

This is also the reason why the G1000 project opted for random selection. Besides methodological soundness, the recruitment procedure aimed at maximizing the diversity of opinions among the participants, in order to avoid “informational inbreeding among likeminded citizens” (Huckfeldt 2001, p. 426). Citizens can, after all, only find themselves in a situation of genuine deliberation when they are faced with competing claims and opinions. When everyone at the table shares the same opinion, there is very little contestation within the group, and under such circumstances, deliberation does not lead to well-considered opinions and well-argued positions.

Because it proved very difficult, too lengthy and much too expensive for the crowd funded budget to draw a sample from official census lists, an independent recruitment agency (GFK Significant) was asked to contact participants through Random Digit Dialing. This technique generates random phone numbers for fixed and mobile lines and in Belgium has a penetration rate of 99%. Every inhabitant – who has a fixed or a mobile telephone – thus had an equal chance of being selected for participation in the G1000. However, for such invitations, the “yes” response rate is always very low: usually around 1%, so 100 phone calls for 1 yes. This figure may be surprisingly very low, but it should be qualified. Indeed, response rate for a telephone political survey ranges from 10% to 50% (on the Internet, it’s a bit higher because the respondents are slightly different from the overall population) and for such survey, no commitment is asked from the respondents. In the case of an invitation to participate to a deliberative experience, the commitment is much higher: ordinary citizens are asked to spend one (or sometimes more) free day to discuss topics for which they often have no clue and possibly no interest. So for the recruitment of the G1000 participants, we expected a normal response rate of 1%. In fact, it went up to 3% because the experience was quite well known. In addition to the phone calls by the
independent recruitment agency, we also organize a follow-up call by one of our many ambassadors, who were other citizens interested in the G1000 and willing to spend some of their free time in its organization. The task of the ambassadors was to answer the questions of the participants and above all to reintroduce a human face to the event.

In order to guard over the quality of the participant sample, the random selection was checked for certain predefined population quotas. More specifically, our selection guaranteed that the sample resembled the population with regard to gender, age and province. This last quorum was considered crucial in order to guarantee a proportional representation of both linguistic groups.

In the end, these quota seem to be well respected in the group of final participants. 52% of the participants was female, 48% was male, which is a perfect reflection of the gender composition of the population, and which was rather unexpected since women are found to be more likely to drop out of such deliberative events (Ryfe, 2005). Moreover, 61% of the participants were Dutch-speaking versus 39% of the French speakers, which is also an accurate reflection of the population. And there was a large diversity in age groups, with the youngest participant being 18, and the oldest one being 85.

Despite the careful process of random selection, however, we knew that there was possibly a stronger dropout among the groups who traditionally feel less at ease with politics, or who are less interested in the subject. Moreover, some people are simply much harder to reach which further contributes to self-selection effects. This consideration urged us to slightly expand our recruitment strategy. Because we valued the diversity at the table so much, and because we wanted to optimize the possibilities for social learning and creative thinking, we reserved 10% of the places to persons who were least susceptible to answering positively to our invitation. In order to reach these groups, we contacted numerous grass-root organizations dealing with socially vulnerable people such as homeless people or people from a foreign origin. The other 90% of the participants were selected by random recruitment.

This strategy of relaying our invitation through intermediary social associations is often suggested because of the bond of trust these organizations have with the underprivileged groups (Ryfe, 2005). Moreover, our strategy of recruiting specific target groups seems to have worked since the diversity at the tables was one of the main points of praise the G1000 project received from the international observers.

Despite all recruitment efforts and despite all the hard work of the volunteers to keep the participants motivated, we knew that it was very likely the G1000 would not reach its symbolic target of 1000 participants. As is common in deliberative practice, we experienced a dropout rate
of about 30% among the people who had confirmed their participation shortly before the event, with the final number of participants amounting to 704. This has to be put into perspective, however. Unlike many other events, the participants for the G1000 did not receive any financial compensation for their participation. For instance, in Deliberative Polls, which are comparable events, the participants receive a flat fee of up to 300 euro simply for attending the event. In the case of the G1000, we could only compensate the transportation of the participants by train. Moreover, the 11th of November was a very sunny holiday and there was a train strike, which was announced to last until 10 o’clock in the morning. This puts the dropout rate of 30% into perspective.

3.1.2 Measuring deliberation: the Perceived Discourse Quality Index (PDQI)

The central aim of this paper is to find out whether intergroup deliberation leads to a more positive attitude towards the outgroup. In the previous study, we could rely on codings from the transcripts of the discussions using the DQI. In this study, we will measure deliberation in another way, by focusing on the perceived quality of deliberation. There are of course pragmatic reasons for relying on the participants’ perception of the deliberation, but there is also a theoretical reason. Empirical research about the perception of deliberation has remained underdeveloped, whereas this perception might actually be more important to deliberating citizens than the actual quality of the interaction. After all, it might very well be that a discussion is high on deliberative quality, but if the participants don’t perceive it that way inclusion, respect, rational justification and sincerity might have little effect on reducing conflict. If the discussion is perceived as being very undeliberative, the participants might not be willing to open up to others’ arguments, which undermines the transformative effects of deliberation. This perception of deliberation might thus be an important factor in understanding the dynamics of conflict exacerbation or reduction in deliberation, rather than a second best for the effective DQI.

In order to get a full picture of the participants’ perception of the quality of the discussion, we put ten items in the posttest questionnaire, which were developed in cooperation with researchers from Bern University. Each of the items refers to some theoretical dimension of deliberation, so that the items have a high content validity. In order to test the presupposed unidimensionality of all of these deliberative items, we ran a factor analysis. Table 4 reports that there are in fact two factors, on which all ten DQI items load well. The first factor (PDQI 1) is reliable (Cronbach’s alpha = .699) and contains items referring to the way in which the participants perceive their own deliberative behavior and efforts. The second factor (PDQI 2) gives an appreciation of the deliberativeness of others in the group. It captures whether others
were respectful, truthful or open to convincing. This scale was also reliable (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.652), which allowed the creation of two additive scales each ranging from 0 to 10.

Table 4: PCA of the perception of deliberation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Loading component “PDQI 1”</th>
<th>Loading component “PDQI 2”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I did not bring up some of my ideas and viewpoints out of fear of being ridiculed (coded inversely).</td>
<td>0.806</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I had to hide my true beliefs (coded inversely).</td>
<td>0.791</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had ample opportunities to express my opinion during the discussion.</td>
<td>0.652</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No matter how hard I tried, the other participants seemed unwilling to listen to what I had to say (coded inversely).</td>
<td>0.535</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, people were treated with respect during the discussion.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most participants genuinely cared about the common good of all.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, I understood the arguments of the other participants.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, I think good arguments were formulated during the discussion.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, I feel that people expressed what was truly on their minds.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The other participants seemed willing to change their minds during the discussion.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha</td>
<td>0.699</td>
<td>0.652</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.3 Results

As with the first study, we first have to determine whether there is any variation in the dependent variable, i.e. whether actual shifts in attitudes have taken place. As table 5 shows, however, there have been no mean changes. The mean pretest and posttest scores were 7.26 and 7.21 respectively, and the difference between them is not significant. However, this lack of net mean change camouflages a significant amount of gross individual attitude change. About 37.7% of the participants did not report any change, whereas 31.5% of them became more positive of the outgroup, and 30.6% held more negative feelings after the deliberation.

We thus see that the percentage of participants becoming more positive is smaller than in the first study. This is probably due to the fact that the discussions in this mini-public did not explicitly deal with intergroup issues. Whereas the discussion in study 1 started with the question how the participants saw the future relations between the language groups in Belgium, the G1000 dealt with social security, immigration and the financial crisis. The linguistic issue was thus not the first heuristic that was activated during the discussion. In other words, even though these
issues have important implications for the linguistic groups, they are not explicitly framed as a linguistic issue, so that the beneficial effects on intergroup relations can be expected to be more modest (but also higher on mundane realism).

Table 5: Changes in outgroup feelings (individual level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean Pretest</th>
<th>Mean Posttest</th>
<th>Mean change (sign. paired samples t-test)</th>
<th>Percentage unchanged position</th>
<th>Percentage becoming more posit.</th>
<th>Percentage becoming more negat.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In general, how positive or negative are you with regard to [the other linguistic group]?</td>
<td>7.26</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>-.05 (n.s.)</td>
<td>37.7% (N=159)</td>
<td>31.5% (N=133)</td>
<td>30.6% (N=129)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To determine whether a high quality of (perceived) deliberative quality, and a divided group composition lead to a more positive attitude towards the outgroup, we will run the same analysis as in the first study. However, contrary to the first study, the normality assumption of the dependent variable was violated in this study. We therefore had to rely on other techniques than OLS regression to determine the direction and strength of the effects. In order to determine whether a high quality of deliberation and a divided group composition lead to a shift towards a more favorable attitude towards the outgroup, we trichotomized the dependent variable into those who became more negative, those who did not change their feelings, and those who became more positive.

Table 6 reports a multinomial logistic regression predicting the direction of the shift (positive or negative) and the reference category is those who did not shift their opinions. Before going into detail on the strength and direction of the individual predictors, we should look at the overall explained variance of the model. The $R^2$ squared is, however, relatively low, or at least much lower than the 18.7% in the previous study. In part this can be explained by the use of a multinomial logistic regression, which inevitably leads to a loss of richness in the data and which reduces the overall variation to be explained. But for the most part, we should keep in mind that the results of the first study were generated in a very controlled laboratory setting, in which all potential confounders were identified and isolated. For the second study, the scale of the experiment was much larger, and the group dynamics were much harder to control. It was thus higher on mundane realism but lower on experimental realism. It is therefore much more difficult to single out the crucial variables explaining the preference change, which leads to a lower explained variance of the same model.
Table 6: Multinomial logistic regression predicting the change in outgroup feelings (T2 – T1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More negative</th>
<th>More positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B (SE)</td>
<td>Exp β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group composition</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homogeneous (ref.)</td>
<td>,616 (.316)</td>
<td>,540*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divided</td>
<td>,159 (.149)</td>
<td>,853 (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDQI 1</td>
<td>,113 (.114)</td>
<td>1,121 (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDQI 2</td>
<td>,139 (.293)</td>
<td>1,149 (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men (ref.)</td>
<td>,114 (.347)</td>
<td>1,121 (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>,002 (.010)</td>
<td>1,002 (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower or secondary (ref.)</td>
<td>,448 (.312)</td>
<td>,639 (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>,14 (.347)</td>
<td>1,121 (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch (ref.)</td>
<td>,448 (.312)</td>
<td>,639 (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>,14 (.347)</td>
<td>1,121 (n.s.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reference category is “No change”. The coefficients are odds ratios.
Nagelkerke R² = 8.2%; N=440; Sign: *** p>.001 * p>.05.

The results in table 6 hint at the same trends as in the first study. Both the group composition and the quality of deliberation are significantly related to changes in feelings towards the outgroup. However, the story in this second study is more nuanced. First of all, the group composition is only significantly related to becoming more negative. This means that the group composition matters very little to those who don’t change opinion or those who become more positive. However, being confronted with the outgroup, according to the results, can be considered a good buffer against becoming more negative. Table 6 suggests after all that the odds of becoming more negative are about half as large for participants at divided tables. People seated at divided tables thus have a much smaller chance of becoming negative than those seated at the homogeneously unilingual tables. This is a very interesting finding suggesting, much in line with the results of the first study, that direct confrontation and interaction with the outgroup does effectively reduce the chances of attitude extremization.

The second interesting finding is that the group composition is not significantly related to becoming more positive, but that the perception of deliberation is. However, just as in the first study, the direction of the effect is the inverse of what we would expect. Participants who have a higher regard for the quality of the deliberation, have a lower chance of becoming more positive towards the outgroup. More specifically, those who have a high appreciation for their own role in
that deliberation are more likely to stand by their initial attitude and not to change. Further analyses (not shown here) indicated moreover that the effect of the two PDQI scales on attitude shifts did not vary across group composition.

And finally, with regard to background variables, we see that age, education and language also play a significant role in predicting whether the participants will hold a more positive attitude towards the other linguistic group after the deliberation. As in the first study, the older participants have higher odds of becoming more positive, mainly because their initial feelings were quite negative. The higher educated also have a higher chance of becoming more positive, whereas the French speakers are significantly less likely of becoming more positive, and this effect is even quite strong.

4 Conclusion

In this paper, we set out to determine whether outgroup deliberation leads to outgroup appreciation. More specifically, our aim was to find out whether a high quality of deliberation can foster changes in attitudes towards the outgroup, and whether a divided group composition would lead to a shift towards more positive outgroup feelings. This paper took stock of two deliberative experiments in Belgium, a deeply divided country, where participants from both sides of the linguistic divide were gathered to discuss highly contentious issues in Belgian politics at a moment when nationalist tendencies were at a historic high.

The findings from our two studies are interesting yet nuanced. First of all, both studies show that opinions do tend to shift during deliberation, and they can even shift dramatically. Even though the average mean in the second study did not differ before and after the deliberation, we did find that more than 60% of the participants reported some kind of a shift in a more positive or negative direction.

Furthermore, the first study, which was a laboratory setting with a very high level of experimental realism, showed that the group composition did play an important role. Participation in a divided group, the data suggested, is a good predictors of the shift towards a more positive outgroup attitude. However, contrary to the expectations, the effective quality of the deliberation did not have a significant impact upon attitude changes, but we should keep in mind that this study was based on a small number of observations.

Finally, in the second study we found a second piece of evidence that a divided group composition does in effect impact upon the shift in outgroup feelings. After all, the participants at the homogeneous tables were shown to have a higher chance of becoming more negative
towards the outgroup. Also, this second study showed that the perceived quality of deliberation is also related to an attitude shift, but that the direction is the inverse of what we would expect. People with high levels of perceived deliberative quality are mostly the ones whose opinions remain unchanged. Future research should clarify this relationship, but it might simply be due to the fact that these participants are more self-confident.

The results of these two studies yield some support for our hypothesis that intergroup deliberation fosters intergroup appreciation, or at least that intergroup deliberation avoids a shift towards more negative feelings. In other words, gathering members of two conflicting groups does not automatically have to lead to the exacerbation of negative outgroup attitudes. On the other hand, a high level of deliberative quality does not have to lead to strong shifts in opinion. The effective quality of deliberation is not related to attitude shifts, and a high level of perceived deliberative quality only leads to a status quo. This means that the transformative effects that deliberative scholars take largely for granted, are not that self-evident. The link between communication and transformation is not that straightforward, and further research should try to unravel the intricate relationship between the process and outcome of deliberation.

References


