Participatory Democracy in the European Union: From Theory to Case Study

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Abstract

The European Union (EU), spurred in part by the recent rejection of the proposed EU constitution and by more long-standing criticisms of its alleged democratic shortcomings, has recently invested in participatory democracy. It has helped fund, among other projects, the European Citizens' Consultations (ECC)—an attempt to bring together citizens from the 27 member states and involve them in deliberations and discussions about the future of Europe. This paper draws upon normative theory and empirical data to demonstrate the importance of participatory democracy in the EU, and then evaluates the ECC as a concrete example thereof. While the evaluation of the ECC is partial and qualified, it suggests that participatory democracy in the EU is both possible and potentially effective as a governing mechanism. It may also help to address some of the EU's alleged democratic deficiencies as a transnational political system.

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1.

Introduction

The development of transnational political systems has placed stress upon traditional governing arrangements in advanced industrial democracies. Prominent among these traditional arrangements is representative democracy, which, until recently, has been "unchallenged" (Hirst 1990, p.1) because of how it has coped with the size of the modern day nation state (Dahl 1998, ch.8) and provided for adequate means by which elected leaders could legitimately pursue the interests of their territorially defined constituents (Held 2000, p.18). Now, national governments are increasingly bound to and dependent upon other governments and non-state actors to address shared policy concerns (Scharpf 1998). This interdependence has meant a delegation of powers to transnational institutions that are seen as more capable of solving cross-border problems. In the process, however, citizens have been further removed from decision-making processes, their avenues for participation reduced, and their chances to influence political outcomes through representative means diminished (Dahl 1994, p.26). As Østerud (2004) sharply remarks, "global and transnational conditions devalue the political purchasing power of the national ballot" (p.179). Representative democracy, it seems, is not what it used to be.

The wide recognition of the limits of representative democracy in transnational environments has been a shot in the arm for advocates of participatory democracy. Simply defined as the direct involvement of citizens in making policy decisions, participatory democracy dates back to the assemblies of ancient Athens (Ober 2000). Today, it is experiencing somewhat of a renaissance and is practiced in a variety of forms in a number of countries. Advocates see participatory forms as allowing citizens to express their concerns in more detail than voting allows (Barnes et al. 2007, p.59), generally enhancing the ability of

citizens to voice their concerns effectively and meaningfully (Fung & Wright 2003, p.15; Magnette 2003, p.1; Newman et al. 2004, p.204). Participatory democracy has found firm roots in both normative (public participation is good in itself) and practical (public participation leads to better policies) grounds. As such, the catch phrase "voting is not enough" has received a considerable amount of scholarly elaboration in recent years. This academic attention parallels an increasing effort on the part of many governments to solicit the views of, and involve their citizens more directly in, the task of governing by using participatory forms (Rowe & Frewer 2004, p.514; OECD 2001).

Only recently, however, has the interest in participatory democracy transcended local and national boundaries to become a discernible strand within European Union (EU) studies. Scholars bent on understanding and enhancing democracy in the EU have traditionally focused their efforts on the weaknesses of EU parties or low participation rates in EU elections (Ferrara & Weishaupt 2004; Schmitt 2005), the lack of accountability of national executives in the Council of Ministers (Follesdal & Hix 2005, pp.4-6), or the poor level of transparency of EU institutions (Héretier 2003; Curtin 1999). Some (Grote & Gbikpi 2002) have researched public participation within the EU, but have focused on organized non-state actors, rather than citizens themselves. To the extent that citizen participation in the EU *has* been studied, it has generally been limited to the proposed use of EU-wide referenda (Papadopoulos 2005) or restricted to theoretical analyses (Dahl 1994). Few (*e.g.*, Magnette 2003; Giorgi et al. 2006) have tackled the subject of active citizen participation in the EU square-on.

Now, the tide may be turning. In the wake of the failed constitutional referenda in France and Holland—a turn of events described as a "crisis" by the European Commission—the notion of participatory democracy in the EU has enjoyed a surge of interest (Commission 2005a, p.3). Specifically, there has been an increasing recognition that debates about Europe

need to include those who are not traditional stakeholders and political leaders (Commission 2005a, p.3). To this end, the Commission granted €4.5 million in 2006 to support civil society projects aimed at promoting participatory democracy in the Union (Walström 2006b, p.6). As this interest is so recent, no case studies have been conducted on these projects, and no attempt has been made to link them to the literature on participatory democracy and the EU's democratic shortcomings. This analysis attempts both. By evaluating the largest of the Commission-backed projects—the European Citizens' Consultations (ECC)—and connecting it to the alleged benefits of participatory democracy in the EU's unique governmental structure, the following seeks to answer the following questions:

> *What are the theoretical/normative bases upon which the case for participatory democracy in the EU rests? Why is it important to develop mechanisms of public participation in the EU?*
>
> *What do the ECC, as a leading example of public participation in the EU, reveal about the potential and limitations of participatory democracy in the EU?*

A. Why Choose to Evaluate the ECC?

The ECC have been chosen as a case study for a number of reasons. First, they have not yet been studied in depth, as they have only recently concluded. Second, the ECC are the largest and most ambitious of the civil society projects supported by the Commission in the name of participatory democracy. They involve over 1,800 citizens in both intra-national and international deliberations in all 27 member states. Third, they prospectively consider a wide range of policy issues from social welfare to immigration to the environment, making them the most comprehensive attempt to bring together a host of policy issues in the same civic forum. Similar transnational participatory exercises in the past have been limited to more discrete policy issues (*e.g.*, Meeting of Minds 2006). Fourth, the European Commission itself has recognized their importance by lending financial and verbal support. Indeed, Commission

Vice-President Margot Walström has stated her hope that the ECC and other such projects will "help revitalize democracy" in Europe (2006a).

Evaluating the ECC has both general and specific value. In general terms, it is worthwhile to evaluate the ECC just as any other public participation exercise. In addition to determining whether the exercise was money well spent, evaluations are also important for practical and ethical reasons (Rowe & Frewer 2004, p.516). In practical terms, it is important to know what worked well and what did not so that future exercises in transnational participatory democracy can be adjusted accordingly. In ethical terms, it is important to establish fair representation and ensure that participants know how their activities have an effect on policy (Rowe & Frewer 2004, p.516). Evaluating the ECC may shed some light on these general areas.

On a more specific level, evaluating the ECC is important for what it reveals about participatory democracy in the EU. There are well-founded concerns about the democratic legitimacy of the EU, including limited public control, an underdeveloped public sphere, psychological distance from EU institutions, and weak representative systems. Evaluating the ECC as a participatory mechanism is relevant to and may even address some of these concerns. Additionally, appraising the ECC is relevant to the discussion on participatory democracy in transnational institutions generally. Although there is significant skepticism among some scholars that transnational institutions other than the EU can be effectively opened to public participation (Dahl 1994), others (Giorgi 2006, p.28; Murray 2005, p.31) argue that it is necessary to look to ways to strengthen democracy at *all* levels of government. And strengthening democracy inevitably implies looking for avenues of effective and meaningful public participation.

One assertion will be made at this time regarding the benefits of public participation. It is adapted from the principal finding of Delli Carpini et al. (2004, p.320) in their influential

review of deliberative procedures in the United States. Quite simply, public participation has the proven potential to lead to numerous benefits. However, it remains entirely context-dependent, resting on, among other things, the subject matter at hand, the participants involved, the design of the process and procedures used, and the connection to decision-makers. In other words, the success of public participation is far from guaranteed and exercises must be keenly evaluated. It is with this qualified endorsement that this analysis proceeds.

B. Definitions

Public participation, as it is used here, involves the direct participation of citizens in making policy decisions, not the representatives for whom they vote or the interest groups whom they support. Along similar lines, the following does not use the phrase "participatory governance." Defined by Schmitter (2002) as "the regular and guaranteed presence when making binding decisions of representatives of those collectivities that will be affected by the policy adopted," participatory governance is typically used by scholars to refer to EU activities that involve stakeholders who have significant vested interests and can ensure the compliance of their followers and clients (pp.56, 60; see also von Homeyer 2006). It is not about citizens themselves. Therefore, the phrase "participatory democracy" is used here because it encompasses public participation mechanisms that place citizens at the fore and is distinct from "consultations" as they are commonly practiced by the Commission. Using the phrase participatory democracy, which is commonly applied to liberal democracies, does not imply that the EU can or should be compared against conventional liberal democratic models. It only acknowledges that public participation, once contained neatly within local, regional or national spheres, is now an inchoate transnational phenomenon.

In addition, the term "democratic deficit" is used instead of "accountability deficit," a phrase preferred by some (*e.g.*, Grote & Gbikpi 2002). Once again, to speak of the democratic deficit is not to compare the EU to national models of democracy; it is only to note that the EU faces legitimacy challenges, some of which are unique to the fact that it is neither an entirely inter-governmental nor federal political system. In any case, the specific contours of the democratic deficit germane to public participation are clearly outlined in chapter three.

C. Methodology and Roadmap

The methodology (exclusive of the theoretical chapters) is restricted to chapter four, the evaluation of the ECC. In this section, the ECC are evaluated from both a process and potential-to-impact standard using a variety of instruments (*i.e.*, measurement tools). A chart summarizing all of the criteria is attached as Appendix A. The process-based criteria relate *only* to the Synthesis Event, the last stage of the ECC, which the author attended in May of 2007. Here, the most highly used instrument was direct observation—"one of the most powerful methods for assessing and understanding the processes of participation" (Abelson & Gauvin 2006, p.33). Other instruments were employed, however, including unstructured interviews with participants and organizers, as well as document analysis. For the potential-to-impact criteria, the ECC are evaluated in their entirety. Here, the instruments used include document analysis, context analysis, and interviews.[1]

Whenever possible, two or more instruments were used to assess each effectiveness criteria. The combination of two or more instruments to measure one criterion—called "triangulation"—is often used in order to clarify meaning, and increase the validity of the

[1] The author interviewed European Commission officials in the Directorate-General Communication, organizers at the King Baudouin Foundation of Brussels (the primary organizer of the ECC) and organizers from member states ("national partners"). All interviews were conducted in May and June of 2007.

findings themselves and of the instruments used (Stake 2003, p.148). That is to say, if the same result is obtained with multiple instruments, then confidence in and clarity of the findings increases (Rowe & Frewer 2004, p.546). Its usage in evaluations is commonly suggested, if not urged (Abelson & Gauvin 2006, p.33).

This work is divided into four subsequent chapters. In the next chapter, the concept of public participation is introduced, as well as its alleged practical benefits and normative strengths. Brief criticisms of public participation are also advanced, though only insofar as they may relate to the ECC. The third chapter presents a theoretical basis for participatory democracy within the EU, paying particular attention to the democratic shortcomings of the EU and how they might be addressed, at least in theory, through more direct citizen involvement. The fourth chapter brings the discussion into more concrete terms by first outlining the ECC and then evaluating them along a number of effectiveness criteria. The fifth and final chapter posits what can be learned about the prospects for participatory democracy in the EU from the ECC evaluation.

2.

Understanding Participatory Democracy

A. What is Public Participation?

Broadly defined by Ober (2000) as the "rule of and by a socially diverse citizenry," participatory democracy is both direct and participatory (p.27). It is direct because citizens are directly involved and participatory because citizens make decisions through involvement in "agenda-setting, decision-making, and policy-forming activities" (Rowe & Frewer 2004, p.512). In this sense, participatory forms contrast sharply with representative forms that place responsibility for policy decisions on the shoulders of elected politicians. Unlike in representative forms, there is no expectation that those involved have any political experience or special knowledge (Catt 1999, p.40), and no need for citizens' interests to be mediated through another party. Participatory forms, thus, are citizen-centered.

As participatory democracy is such an expansive concept, the OECD (2001) has divided participation into three classes: information, consultation, and active participation (p.23). Information (*e.g.*, freedom of information acts) is a one-way process by which the government makes information about its activities available to the public. Consultation (*e.g.*, Eurobarometer surveys; EU-wide referenda) is a two-way process by which the government asks policy questions and solicits feedback from the public.[2] And active participation (*e.g.*, the ECC) is a "relation based on a partnership with government, in which citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy-making" (OECD 2001, p.12). It is this last and most robust form of public participation into which the ECC fall. Even within the subcategory of active participation, however, there is a wide array of forms. The task of

[2] Though the OECD (2001) does not explicitly include referenda under its "consultation" category, this placement accords with its definition of consultation, wherein the government sets the policy questions, provides any necessary information, manages the process, and defines how it will be guided by the results (p.23).

describing the ECC and locating them within the active participation subcategory is reserved for the fourth chapter.

B. The Case for and against Public Participation

Proponents defend public participation by citing its pragmatic and normative appeal, as well as by pointing to the weaknesses of representative models. On pragmatic grounds, participation is thought to increase the quality of decisions by taking into account the judgment and experience of those whom public decisions affect. Governing is a complex endeavor that requires much more than the knowledge of experts to be successful (Dahl 1989, ch.5). Participants not only serve as fertile sources of policy-relevant ideas (OECD 2001, p.20), but also render important ethical and moral judgments that are beyond the professional capacity of experts to provide (Dahl 1998, pp.71-74). Decisions are more likely to be an accurate reflection of the wishes of citizens (Carson & Martin 1999, p.99) and therefore more sustainable. For proponents, public participation simply produces "better" decisions.

Yet public participation also enjoys strong normative support from democratic theory. Decisions arising from public participatory mechanisms may not only be better, they may be *seen* to be better. Decisions may be viewed as more legitimate when are taken closer to home—that is, when they draw on the lay or experiential knowledge of citizens and not just the advice of experts (Barnes et al. 2007, p.34). Yet some theorists go even further: public participation is not only about projecting legitimacy but about strengthening democracy in general. Pateman (1970) argues that "the major function of participation…is…an educative one" (p.41). Barber (1984) confirms, writing that "democracy is best taught by practicing it" (p.235). Proponents see participation as a virtuous cycle whereby the more one participates, the more able one gets at doing so. Thus, participatory exercises lead not just to policy influence and decisions but also to the development of individual social and political

capacities (Pateman 1970, p.42). From freedom of information policies (OECD 2001, pp.28-35) to iterated referenda (Franklin 2002, p.755) to active participatory exercises like the ECC, public participation is often supported because of its educative potential.

Active public participation finds much of its normative support in deliberative democratic theory because of its capacity to create spaces for "public argument and reasoning among equal citizens" (Cohen 1997, p.72). In an ideal deliberative environment, participants offer rational arguments based on what they think might be considered a good reason to others involved (Cunningham 2002, p.165). In the process, citizens' preferences are shaped and transformed through their interactions with their peers (Elster 1998, p.1). When possible, participants' preferences converge towards consensus over common goods (Cunningham 2002, p.165). Deliberation, of course, does not predict or determine whether actors actually change their preferences; it only describes a form of interaction in which such change is facilitated (Neyer 2004, p.28). Given these characteristics, it is clear why advocates of public participation often look to deliberative theory for the ideals towards which to strive. Active public participation (as opposed to the less ambitious forms above) eschews voting and bargaining wherever possible, instead focusing on open, equal, and reciprocal interactions among citizens in order to cope with moral and political disagreement. Decisions resulting from these deliberative processes are inherently imbued with more legitimacy than other forms of collective decision making (Gutmann & Thompson 2000).

Finally, public participation is endorsed by those who are critical of representative forms. While some (Barber 1984) embrace participatory democracy because they see representative forms as incompatible with freedom and equality, others (Dahl 1994) are less radical, noting that traditional forms of representation are simply less viable in transnational environments, or in national environments confronted with external pressures. In any case, many agree that representative democracy in any context is simply "insufficient as a means of

reconnecting citizens with governing institutions" (Barnes et al. 2007, p.27). That is, in a system of representation, people are necessarily removed from the institutions that represent them, and exercise public control only through voting (Hirst 1990, p.30), an exercise that does not allow citizens to express their views on questions of detail or make a true contribution to the policy process (Barnes et al. 2007, p.59). Participatory democracy is a means of connecting people to their governing institutions by empowering them to make their own decisions; it is an additional form of political control. Theoretically, participatory and representative forms are not conflictive (Barnes et al. 2007, p.42), and the former may even strengthen the latter (Niemelä 2005, p.26). However, when trying to employ participatory forms, there may be resistance from elected representatives (Newman et al. 2004, p.210). For this reason, practitioners and supporters of participatory forms typically cast their efforts as supplementing, not supplanting, representative democracy. This is surely the case with those interviewed at the European Commission, who view the ECC and similar initiatives as complementary to the representative functions of the European Parliament (Husz 2007).

Of course, public participation is not without its skeptics. And while the critiques are varied (see, *e.g.*, Shapiro 1999 and citations by Delli Carpini et al. 2004, p.321), only three of the most prominent ones will be mentioned here because of their particular relevance to the ECC. First, both advocates and critics of active participation commonly cite the "problem of scale." Dahl (1998) explains that "the more citizens a democratic unit contains, the less that citizens can participate directly in government decisions and the more that they must delegate authority to others" (p.109). Thus, while active participatory techniques can be employed effectively on the local level, they are seen by some as entirely impractical at higher levels. Not only do they involve large amounts of citizens, but they will not deal with issues of "strong local resonance" to citizens, like school reform or land use (Friedman 2006, p.5).

Thus, engaging citizens in national or (in the case of the ECC) international deliberations may be too abstract for meaningful participation.

Second, some caution that public participation exercises, if they have no ultimate effect on policy and are simply and end in themselves, "degenerate into a socio-psycho-therapeutical exercise for the satisfaction of participatory needs" (Dieter Wolf 2002, p.39). If this is the case, public participation is no more than propaganda. Rather than empowering citizens or enhancing political control, participatory exercises become the agents of politicians who want to "legitimate decisions or to give an appearance of consultation" (Rowe & Frewer 2004, p.14). That is, those with power either seek to justify what they have already decided or create the veneer of a consultation without actually binding themselves to what citizens decide. The danger here is not so much that citizens will not be able to see through this façade, but rather that they will grow skeptical of and less receptive to genuine participatory efforts in the future (Friedman 2006, p.18).

And finally, there are many who strongly defend the virtues of representative democracy. Representative democrats as far back as J.S. Mill have noted that, given the large size of territorial units, representative democracy is simply the only workable democratic option. Participatory democracy, though certainly acceptable, should be reserved for local assemblies. Others have noted that representative democracy also copes effectively with the problem of time: most citizens simply do not have time to engage themselves in the task of governing and must delegate that task to full-time representatives whom they hold accountable through elections (Beetham 1993). Active participation, therefore, is limited by both space and time. Further, there is evidence that representative democracy in advanced industrial democracies is politically responsive in the sense that there is a connection between the choices that citizens express in voting and the formation of governments (Powell 2000). Voting is not an empty act; it directly influences that shape of government. And

representative democrats caution that voting itself should not be underestimated as a participatory act. "The vote casts a long shadow in front of it," writes Beetham, meaning that though requiring only a small amount of time, voting obliges representatives to account continuously for their actions or else risk losing reelection (1993, pp.63-64). Thus, representative democrats generally highlight the practicality of the representative form as well as the degree of political control that it affords.

It is not the purpose here to weigh the relative merit of representative and participatory forms. Suffice it to say that participatory forms promise a host of benefits, some of which are particularly relevant in the EU context. As the next chapter details, the EU is faced with a variety of democratic challenges, opening the window for the contemplation of participatory forms.

3.

The Theoretical Case for Participatory Democracy in the EU

The previous chapter outlined some of the practical and theoretical arguments in favor of public participation in general. The present task is to demonstrate that the EU, given its institutional contours and lack of a common political identity, is particularly ripe for increased public participation. In so doing, the following draws upon the normative, theoretical and empirical research on the current state of democracy in the EU and takes a critical view thereof. Whether or not public participation methods like the ECC are possible or effective is reserved for chapter four. Here, the objective is to make a concise theoretical/normative case that the EU is particularly in need of enhancing citizen participation to address some of its democratic shortcomings. Thus, only those features of the "democratic deficit" that relate directly to public participation are discussed.

A. Background

Brussels has become powerful. "It is uncontested that the European Union is progressively taking over state functions and plays an increasing role in terms of regulation" (Giorgi 2006, p.30). In the process, decisions that are made in Brussels are increasingly and perfunctorily adopted into national legislation. For instance, the German Ministry of Justice estimates that 84 percent of national legislation passed between 1998 and 2004 came directly from Brussels rather than Berlin (Herzog & Gerken 2007). *Prima facie*, this delegation of power does not pose a problem. And indeed, some scholars (Moravcsik 2002) maintain that a powerful Brussels does not raise serious democratic questions because EU institutions are effectively balanced against one another and controlled by citizens who vote for MEPs as well

as their national executive who form the Council of Ministers (pp.610-613). Other scholars (Crombez 2003) have shown that EU policy outcomes are consonant with that of the median voter. That is to say, the EU does what citizens want it to do.

These arguments, however persuasive, are challenged by EU institutions, other scholars, and by the behavior and opinions of citizens themselves. First, the Commission itself has noted in numerous white papers and communiqués the need to involve citizens more directly. In the White Paper on a European Communication Policy, the Commission called for "more access points for citizens" (2006, p.2). In its Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate, the Commission recognized the need for citizens "to actively participate in the decision making process and gain ownership of the European project" (2005, p.3), and devoted millions of euros to that end. Finally, the European Council itself in 2006 noted that means should be committed to "reinforce[] dialogue with the citizens" (p.1). The reasons for which some EU institutions have become more interested in and supportive of participatory democracy go beyond the mere rejection of the proposed Constitution. They reflect deeper concerns that have been well-documented by scholars and confirmed by public opinion.

B. Input Legitimacy and its Contours

It has become increasingly common to adopt Scharpf's (1998) concept of input and output legitimacy when discussing democracy in the EU and its member states. For him and many others, the justification of a ruling authority requires both output *and* input legitimacy (Lord 2004; Dieter Wolf 2002). Output legitimacy measures whether the policies adopted comport with the wishes of citizens; it gauges policy performance. Input legitimacy, conversely, is a measure of the level and nature of participation; it measures the extent to which non-state actors contribute to and influence decision-making. In the delicate balance that must be struck between the two, the EU has generally favored the output side of

legitimacy (Heinelt 2002, p.97). Thus, while citizens may be largely pleased with policy outcomes from Brussels, "direct engagement by citizens in European issues is largely absent" (Ward 2004, p.6). This imbalance between input and output legitimacy constrains the EU's democratic potential. Albeit broad and bold, this claim is qualified and supported by citing specific areas in which the EU evinces weak input legitimacy—areas that may allow room for remediation through public participation.

i. Representative Democracy in the EU

Elections to the European Parliament, heavily studied and analyzed on a regular basis, are perhaps the most-cited element of input legitimacy or lack thereof. Here, the task is only to demonstrate the basic problems that the EP faces as the world's only transnational representative body, thereby providing an indirect justification for other forms such as participatory democracy.

Elections to the European Parliament have long been considered "second-order." In other words, they are "perceived to be less important [than national elections] because less is at stake" (Schmitt 2005, p.651). In EP elections, politicization and electoral mobilization are lower than in national elections (Schmitt 2005, p.657). This lack of mobilization is reflected among citizens themselves: while 63 percent of EU citizens are interested in the national politics of their country, only 47 percent are interested in EU politics (Eurobarometer 2006a, p.13). This relative disinterest in European politics and weak mobilization has contributed to consistently poor voter turnout in EP elections. In fact, voter turnout European elections is lower than in national elections, and has been on the decline since the first elections in 1979 (EurActiv.com 2004). When voters *do* cast a ballot, they often use it as a chance to express their feelings about national, rather than European, politics (Lord 1998 p.67; EurActiv.com 2004). Low turnout and second-order status has continued despite the powers the EP has

been granted in recent years (Mulvey 2003). European issues also have low salience in national elections, and fail to serve as an impetus for mobilization (Lord 2006, p.679). Effectively, then, European issues do not figure greatly into citizens' voting behavior at either the national or European levels. As long as European issues continue to have low salience among voters, it will continue to be the case that voters do not use elections to exercise significant political control over the EU, either *ex-ante* or *ex-post*—thereby weakening an important element of input legitimacy (Lord 2006, p.679).

The persistence of these problems makes it plain why both the EP and the Commission have devoted resources to increasing electoral participation among voters and enlivening the public debate in Brussels by supporting party politics (Walstöm 2006b, Annex 1, p.3; The Economist 2007, p.34). At the same time, these problems also help explain why the Commission has supported public participation as a complementary means of increasing citizen engagement with European issues. It also helps to justify the role that active public participation may serve as a supplementary method of public control, especially when representative democratic means falter. Increased public participation may allow EU citizens to express their opinions (in a more comprehensive manner than public opinion surveys) and give policy direction to political leaders (in a manner more detailed than voting).

ii. Institutional Distance & Excessive Delegation

EU citizens do not necessarily see EU institutions as undemocratic (Eurobarometer 2006a, p.23); they see them as distant (Mugica-Inciarte 2007b). This institutional distance is typically traced to a lack of knowledge and understanding of what the EU does and how it works. Eurobarometer consistently confirms low levels of knowledge about basic facts of the structure and functions of EU institutions (2006a, p.15), a finding that is often traced to the EU's extraordinarily complex political system. With a higher degree of deliberative

fragmentation and diffused responsibility than typically exists in national governments (Magnette 2003, p.9), the EU's decision-making procedures are tough to grasp, and it is difficult to assign blame or award credit for decisions. Simply put, EU government is hard to understand and hold accountable. Importantly, lack of knowledge and understanding is related to representative democracy, because those who have less knowledge about a political system are less likely to vote (Magnette 2003, p.9).

Exacerbating the lack of knowledge about and distance from EU institutions is the fact that there are multiple layers of delegation in Brussels. The Council of Ministers is composed of government ministers and thus involves at least two layers of delegation: citizens vote for members of national parliaments, who delegate powers to national ministers that serve in the Council. Decision-making in the Commission is at least three steps removed from citizens, as Commissioners are appointed by national governments (Crombez 2003, p.114).[3] Thus, officials in both institutions are far removed from their citizens and not bound directly by electoral pressure—an attenuation that is characteristic of transnational institutions (Dahl 1994, p.27). The EP, of course, is directly elected and thus involves only one step of delegation. However, it suffers from the "second-order election" symptoms described previously.

The connection between the alleged benefits of public participation and the "distance and delegation" problems described above are not hard to draw. In terms of a lack of knowledge about EU institutions, active public participation creates environments wherein citizens learn from experts and from each other about their governing institutions. It serves, as noted in the previous chapter, as an educational tool as much as a method of self-government. And while it may not be possible or desirable to simplify the EU policy-making

[3] Crombez (2003) carefully notes that, although the EP now has considerable say in the appointment process, it is national governments that "still dominate" the process (p.114).

structure, it may be possible to educate citizens more about EU policy-making through public participatory exercises. At the same time, public participation involves *no* layers of delegation in the sense that citizens voice their concerns directly. Of course, citizens' suggestions are still processed through existing EU representative mechanisms. Yet the point remains that public participation exercises directly involve citizens in the decision-making process, rather than delegating decisions solely to officials twice and thrice removed.

C. Public Sphere

In addition to the lack of input legitimacy in the EU, there is a wide body of literature that speaks of the lack of a European *demos*—a community of citizens linked to each other by democratic bonds, "pressing to acquire a measure of effective control through formal or informal means over government" (Warleigh 2003, p.109). A *demos* is a sense of 'we." It is characterized both by a shared sense of political community with other members and a strong sense of identification with the government itself. A *demos* is required so that dissatisfaction with a particular policy outcome does not lead to disaffection with the entire governing system (Warleigh 2003, p.109). Most nation states take their *demoi* as a given. The EU, as a transnational body, cannot.

Foremost among the evidence of a weak European *demos* is the lack of European public sphere—spaces where private persons come together to form a public (Habermas 1989, p.231). Partly due to Europe's multicultural, multilinguistic and transnational character, there are few spaces where citizens "come together to discuss and debate issues of common or public concern" regarding Europe (Crowley & Giorgi 2006, p.5). Discussing and debating European matters, even among one's nationals, is further inhibited because media coverage of European issues remains intermittent and incapable of capturing the continued attention of the public (Lord 2006, p.676). The emerging interest that does exist in European matters remains

"fragmented across countries or policy making institutions" due to the lengthy European decision-making process and lack of a focused political agenda (Giorgi 2006, p.38; 2004, p.15).[4] At the same time, only a minority of Europeans participate in "European activities," including interacting with people from different member states, reading something in another European language, or traveling within Europe (Eurobarometer 2006a, p.10). Many who study the *no demos* thesis question whether it is even possible to address the democracy concerns of the EU when there exists as yet no shared sense of political culture and identification (Giorgi 2006, p.40). The creation of a *demos* through the cultivation of nascent public spaces, then, is given top priority among many reform-minded theorists who realize the limits of mere institutional reform. Democracies do not simply need procedures; they need members as well (Lord 1998, p.107).

Given Europe's diverse linguistic and cultural character, a *demos* probably cannot be built upon on ethno-cultural terms. It also will not likely rest purely on shared interests, because grounding a sense of "we" in common interests would be unstable and transient; as soon as interests change, the "we" would dissolve (Lord 1998, p.117). Rather, a *demos* must be created along civic or political lines. This is where public participation has an important role to play, because a sense of shared political identification can be created through political participatory elements. Giorgi (2004, p.16) elaborates this idea, writing that

> [i]f people are given procedures that enable them to be genuinely citizens, then they will tend to act as citizens and feel themselves to be truly members of a political community. Intuitively, a public sphere or space is one in which genuine citizenship is possible. Adequate democratic procedures would thus promote a sense of identification, and vice versa, leading to a virtuous cycle of truly European citizenship.

[4] Ironically, the failed EU-wide referenda on the EU constitution may have been one of the first times that considerable public debate was raised throughout Europe on the same issue. Some (Parsons 2006, pp.184-188; Husz 2007) note that the debate stimulated by the constitution was a positive development, irrespective of the outcome.

According to Giorgi and others who view political identity as mutable, rather than strictly derivative of and dependent on the nation-state,[5] the task is to create procedures and structures through which European citizens can engage in self-government *together*. Active public participation exercises are simply one of many "adequate democratic procedures" that can help to build a genuine sense of civic and political identity. Importantly, this understanding of political identity is not synonymous with the symbolic accoutrements of citizenship (flags, anthems, passports), but rather reflects a deeper and more sustainable sense of belonging (Giorgi 2004, p.16). This sense is not imposed from without but developed through deliberation and practical experience (Lord 1998, p.122).

Thus, participatory exercises do not only provide educative fora and means of political control. They also serve to nurture the development of a shared political identification where none existed before. It is for this reason that they are potentially so valuable in the EU—where the *demos* is weak and the current opportunities for participation are so few (Warleigh 2003, p.117; Parsons 2006, p.187). The next chapter partially evaluates one attempt at public participation, the ECC, and then attempts to show whether the alleged benefits of public participation can be realized on a practical level.

[5] The claim here is of course not that a pan-European identity would replace national political affiliations or entail a transfer of loyalty to Brussels in line with classical neofunctionalism. Rather, it assumes that citizens can hold *multiple* identities simultaneously, of which affiliation with the EU may be one (see Marcussen et al. 2001; Niemelä 2005, p.21).

4.

The European Citizens' Consultations: A Partial Evaluation

After outlining the general benefits of public participation and their specific relevance in the EU, it is clear that there is a strong normative and theoretical basis for participatory democracy in the EU. The current question is whether such attempts are practical or effective in the transnational EU environment.

To venture an answer, this chapter considers one attempt at a participatory practice in the EU—the European Citizens' Consultations. After describing briefly the structure of the ECC, an evaluative framework, summarized as Appendix A, is elaborated and applied. The evaluative framework has been developed with both the design of the ECC and the focus of this research project foremost in mind. Unfortunately, despite its widely-acknowledged importance, as noted in the introductory chapter, and "despite years of documenting public participation experiences, the practice of public participation evaluation is still in its infancy" (Abelson & Gauvin 2006, p.v). The practice is still in early stages of development for a host of reasons, the most prominent of which is that there is no agreement on what constitutes an "effective" exercise, or how to measure effectiveness (Nicholson 2005, p.44). This lack of agreement has made comparative analysis difficult. Fortunately, however, some "toolkits" have been proposed and developed in recent years (*e.g.*, Rowe & Frewer 2000; Rowe et al. 2001), and include a variety effectiveness criteria—the grounds upon which an exercise in public participation can be judged effective or not.

Importantly, the evaluative framework used below is not meant to be exhaustive;[6] rather, it draws together various effectiveness criteria developed by academics and

[6] The eight criteria are chosen for their particular relevance to the ECC, their support in the literature, and their practicality, given the time and resource limits of this project. Other relevant criteria could be used in addition to those selected by the author.

practitioners in the field in order to build a coherent basis upon which to evaluate the ECC. That is to say, this evaluation attempts to show some of the strengths and limitations of the ECC in addressing some of the democratic concerns of the EU. In so doing, it is hoped that this evaluation can inform other attempts at transnational participatory democracy, especially within the EU.

A. Describing and Classifying the ECC

The ECC are a form of "active participation" as classified in chapter two—meaning that "citizens actively engage in defining the process and content of policy-making" (OECD 2001, p.12). To support this classification, the ECC are described below. However, even within the active participation category, the number of named public participation exercises is large and growing, and unfortunately, at present there is no accepted and widely used typology at present to map the various exercises with any precision (Rowe & Frewer 2004, pp.547-548). As such, evaluators have taken to describing the procedures of the exercises in detail, drawing out their most important characteristics. Although a second-best solution, this approach is required if the body of comparative literature on public participation exercises is to be developed. This approach is also warranted as the ECC is a multi-stage process (see below), ill-suited for a one-size-fits-all classification.

i. Background of the ECC

After the failed constitutional referenda in France and Holland, in 2005 the European Council declared a "period of reflection" to reassess its goals and public support. The European Commission's contributions to this period of reflected are contained in its *Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate*, a "listening exercise so that the European Union can act on the concerns expressed by its citizens" (Commission 2005, p.4). Under Plan D, six

civil society projects dedicated to improving democracy in the EU and dialogue among its citizens were awarded funds to the tune of €4.5 million.[7] The European Citizens' Consultations (ECC), a project proposed by the King Baudouin Foundation of Brussels, was granted €1.9 million. The ECC was the largest of the projects funded by the Commission under Plan D, and the Commission's grant comprised almost 70 percent of its budget (Mugica-Inciarte 2007a).[8]

ii. The Process of the ECC

The ECC bills itself as providing "the first-ever opportunity for members of the public from all 27 Member States to debate the future of the European Union across the boundaries of geography and language" (ECC website). In total, it involves about 1,800 citizens from all 27 member states at different stages of the process. The participatory parts of the ECC proceeded in three[9] major stages.

First, 200 randomly-selected citizens from the EU-25 participated in an Agenda Setting Event in Brussels where they defined the policy areas around which the ECC would revolve. Their random selection was controlled for age, gender and socioeconomic status. Participants, with the help of simultaneous translation, facilitators, and electronic voting, chose to focus future discussions on the following topics: (1) energy and environment; (2) family and social welfare; and (3) the EU's global role and immigration.[10]

[7] For a list of the six projects and their descriptions, see http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/1327&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en

[8] The ECC was also co-funded by a group of sponsoring partners. For a complete list of funding partners, see http://www.european-citizens-consultations.eu/18.0.html.

[9] "Citizens juries" were used after the Agenda Setting Event and before the national consultations. However, these were largely internal events in order to prepare for the national consultations and took place only in Berlin and Budapest. Therefore, they are excluded from this analysis.

[10] More information on the Agenda Setting event can be found in this report http://www.european-citizens-consultations.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/ECC_ASE_European_Citizens__Agenda.pdf

Second, each of the 27 member states held national consultations in which randomly-selected citizens deliberated with their compatriots in groups of 30-60 for an entire weekend. Focusing on the three areas defined in the agenda-setting event, participants in each member state worked together to produce a succinct report capturing citizens' views on each issue and the role that they believed the EU should play.[11] Each citizen was provided with brief fact sheets on each of the three policy areas in order to furnish them with a neutral and brief background on current EU policy competencies.

Lastly, one citizen from each member state who had participated in the national consultation was invited to Brussels for a "Synthesis Event" in order to combine all of the national reports into one document. Each citizen was accompanied by a national partner from the sponsoring organization in the member state. The final document, entitled the "European Citizens' Perspectives on the Future of Europe," was handed to decision makers in the Commission, Parliament, and Council of Ministers.[12] This last stage, outlined in more detail in chapter four, is the subject of the process-based analysis.

Policy experts were involved at each stage of the ECC. However, they were instructed not to share their opinions, but only to serve as a resource for citizens and answer their questions. Their role was not as prominent as in other participatory exercises, where experts representing many perspectives are formally and continuously questioned by citizens as part of the deliberative process. Rather, in the words of one organizer from the King Baudouin Foundation, experts in the ECC served as a "reality check"—telling citizens if their suggestions fell inside or outside current EU competencies but making no value judgments as to the merit or likelihood of pursuing their suggestions (Dupont 2007).

[11] Individual country reports are available at http://www.european-citizens-consultations.eu/9.0.html
[12] The final report is available at http://www.european-citizens-consultations.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/ECC_Fin_Con_Media/ECC_Fin_Con_Perspectives_FINAL_1_.pdf

B. The Evaluative Framework

Before applying the evaluative framework to the ECC, a few primary matters must be settled. First, the criteria used, in line with current literature, are either process or impact-based. Process-based criteria examine the process of the exercise itself, for instance measuring the participation rate of citizens or the quality of their deliberations. Conversely, an impact-based criterion measures the final result of the exercise by asking what effect the exercise has on its participants or on the policy issue at hand (Abelson & Gauvin 2006, p.12). Impact evaluations are harder to conduct, because "impact" is hard to measure, and may involve analyzing policy or interviewing participants years after the exercise. To address this difficulty, a common approach, and the one adopted here, is to combine process and impact-based criteria (Nicholson 2005, p.45). The only modification made for the purposes of the ECC is that impact criteria are chosen not for how they affect policy or participants, but for their *potential* to do so.[13]

Second, the effectiveness criteria are classified as "universal," "local," or "specific" (Rowe & Frewer, pp.540-541). Universal effectiveness criteria are those which could be applied to any and all active participation exercises. Local effectiveness criteria are applicable to a subgroup of exercises (say, all types of town meetings). And specific criteria are applicable only to the particular exercise at hand. In essence, each class represents a level of comparability, and is suggested in the literature in order to facilitate future comparative study.

It bears repeating that the Synthesis Event is evaluated with respect to the process criteria, while the ECC in their entirely are evaluated along the potential-to-impact criteria.

[13] The time limitations in this project are constraining here. As the ECC process is still ongoing, it is not possible to conduct an impact evaluation at this time. Indeed, one organizer noted that she would need "a year or more" to know whether the ECC had their intended policy effects (Dupont 2007).

Further, as was described in chapter two, the Synthesis Event involved combining all of the national reports into one final document. In order to do so, organizers prepared a draft report in advance of the Synthesis Event which they thought represented the most prevalent areas of agreement and disagreement among the national reports. Nearly every sentence in the draft was followed by country references so that identifying which member states supported which idea was easy and transparent. The job of the participants was to compare their national report with the draft synthesis report and identify errors and suggest additions or deletions. The organizers then incorporated these additions and deletions. It is this collaborative editing process that concerns the process-based criteria below.

C. Evaluating the ECC: Process-Based Criteria

i. Task definition and clarity of procedures

One of the simplest and most important criteria for a public participation exercise is clarity. In order for the exercise to function as intended, participants must understand the reasons for the exercise and its expected output. There should also be as little confusion as possible on the part of participants as to the procedures of, and their specific roles in, the exercise (Mansbridge 2006, pp.15-16; Rowe & Frewer 2000, p.16). Clarity is a universal and process-based criterion.

From the beginning of the Synthesis Event, participants were very well informed about both the aim of the Synthesis Event and their specific roles therein. The session began with an overview of the entire ECC process, which served to contextualize the Synthesis Event within the overall ECC framework. Then, participants were guided through a preview of the two-day schedule. Finally, participants were told how their results would be delivered at the end of the second day to the European Commission and Parliament. Though brief,

these introductory remarks were crucial in explaining both the Synthesis Event itself and how it was hoped that the final report would influence policy.

Shortly thereafter, participants were given specific instructions about the editing task before them. Participants were clearly told that this exercise would be different from previous ones in that it was *not* consultative. To clarify the task, the Director posed simple guiding questions such as, "Can I find what my fellow citizens decided?" in the draft report and "Did we did a good job" in our summary? Although a handful of citizens admitted that they were confused about their task at the beginning, or said that the concepts were hard to grasp, facilitators proactively answered questions and re-explained the procedures. Therefore, it was unlikely that any participants were left in the dark. On the whole, the Synthesis Event deserves high marks on this effectiveness criterion.

ii. Time

Another straightforward and common criterion deals with time. It asks a simple question: was ample time provided for the participants to complete their task? (Abelson et al. 2003, p.244). Time is a universal, process-based criterion.

Participants were required to edit on both days of the Event. On the first day, participants were given roughly three hours (though more time was given if necessary) to read through the entire draft report and make changes. On the second day, they were given less than one hour, under tighter time constraints, to read the updated version of the draft report and make any final changes. While participants were able to complete their tasks, many felt pressed for time. One citizen remarked that he was "a little bit stressed" because of time constraints. Another citizen admitted to bringing the draft synthesis report and his own national report back to his hotel room, comparing them late into the night. Some national partners echoed the concern that there was simply not enough time provided for citizens to review and suggest changes to the draft synthesis report, especially on the second day.

The lack of time was exacerbated by the fact that the vast majority of citizens were not working in their native language. Some citizens also noted that the concepts contained in the draft synthesis were "broad" and "difficult for a normal citizen to understand." Others wished they had access to the draft synthesis report beforehand, so that they could have gotten a jump-start on the editing process, or at least been familiar with the structure and layout of the report. In all, reviewing a dense text laden with references proved a time-consuming process, and though participants accomplished their task, more time would probably have been useful.

In summary, the Synthesis Event probably did not furnish citizens with enough time to effectively and thoroughly complete the task before them. Some participants and national partners commented that more structure would have helped in time management. Instead, participants were given three hours to edit in all three areas, rather than moving in a structured manner from one editing station to the next. Therefore even if it was not possible to given participants more time, a more structured editing process may have improved time management.

iii. Atmosphere

Atmosphere is, like time and clarity, a universal and process-based criterion. Yet it is somewhat more difficult to measure because of its inherent subjectivity. Generally speaking, a positive atmosphere is described as a space where participants are comfortable to express freely their opinions, though not too informal so as to impede the progress of the exercise. In other words, a sense of gravitas must be maintained within a comfortable and open environment (Mansbridge 2006, p.14-15).

On most accounts, the Synthesis Event scored well on this criterion. In his opening remarks, the Director struck a balance by reminding citizens that they were to represent faithfully the conclusions of their compatriots while also telling them that the process was informal and that they should take their time. And though citizens were sharing their opinions

with organizers who were editing the draft (rather than with fellow citizens), they freely spoke their minds. It was easy to overhear citizens making direct statements, such as "we have a problem here" in the draft report. The comfortable atmosphere between citizens and the organizers reinforced the collaborative environment that was necessary in the editing process. Some national partners noted that, occasionally, an organizer was too resistant to citizens' suggestions. This resistance is a problem because if citizens' suggestions are not readily inputted, citizen ownership over the final product is diminished. This was the exception, however, as participants were typically able to insert their changes without resistance.

One of the organizers, in charge of helping citizens edit one of the issue areas, enhanced the atmosphere by conducting a brief introductory activity before beginning the editing process. Prior to coming to Brussels, participants did not know each other, and the organizer conducted a short ice-breaker to increase the comfort level of the group. A similar activity could have been done in each small group at the beginning of the two-day period to further stimulate a friendly and open environment.

iv. Representativness

In public participation exercises, pains are often taken to include a representative sample of participants. Representativeness is important for both methodological reasons (if one wishes to gain the true opinion of the public) and for practical reasons (if one wishes to reduce the perception of bias in sampling) (Rowe & Frewer 2000, p.13). Representativeness may also be important to decision-makers who want to know whether all subpopulations were adequately represented in the exercise (Steyaert & Lisoir 2005, p.88). It is a universal, process-based criterion.

As the Synthesis Event involved only 27 participants, representativeness of all subpopulations was impossible. Thus, the goal was not "representativeness" per se but rather to pool a diverse mix of Europeans. By this metric, the ECC was a success. The organizers

achieved a diverse range of ages, occupations, and political backgrounds. Males and females were equally represented. All participants were randomly selected from those who participated in the national consultations. And random selection is, at its core, about eliciting as many views as possible (Carson & Martin 1999, pp.90-91).

The only concern with representativeness at the Synthesis Event was that all applicants were required to have strong English language skills. To the extent that the ability to speak English as an additional language can be positively associated with education level, the group as a whole might have had higher than average education levels. Even if this is the case, however, the use of random selection enabled the organizers to achieve an impressively diverse mix of participants across many indicators.

D. Evaluating the ECC: Potential-to-Impact Criteria

As has already been detailed, impact-based evaluations are harder to employ than those that are process-based. Once again, the following four, non-exhaustive, criteria attempt to measure the ECC's *potential* to have an impact on the policy process, rather than their actual impact. It is important to include impact, as well as process-based criteria, because citizens may be less likely to participate if they feel that their views will have no effect on policy (OECD 2001, p.36), and so that the exercise does not lose its potential to offer political control (see *supra*, p.12). Additionally, it is important to try to measure impact because, irrespective of whether the process was deemed effective or not, someone at some point will chose either to incorporate or ignore the results of the ECC (Abelson & Gauvin 2006, pp.13-14). Once again, these impact criteria consider not just the Synthesis Event, but the ECC in general.

i. Access to Higher Authority

The potential for a public exercise to affect the policy process is obviously in

part determined by who is listening—which people and what organizations (Abelson et al. 2003, p.244). Although it is still too early to determine the effect, if any, on policy, one requisite to political influence is access to decision-makers. In this regard, the ECC scores well.

The ECC and the five other civil society projects supported are a priority to Commission Vice-President Margot Walström, according to Dora Husz, a Commission official familiar with the projects (2007). Walström herself was present at both the launch of the ECC in October and at the Synthesis Event in May. At the press conference concluding the ECC, Walström remarked, "I understand that it falls upon me and the Commission to do as much as we can" to incorporate the results of the final report into policy (2007). She said that her fellow Commissioners were aware of the ECC process and would be made aware of the results of the final report. Walström was joined by two members of the European Parliament, one of whom was a Vice-President, who also expressed their intention to incorporate the report. Although the legislative heart of the EU, the Council of Ministers, was not represented at the press conference for the Synthesis Event, a handful of prime ministers have expressed that they would like to see Brussels act on the concerns raised by their citizens in the ECC (McGreevy 2006 [Ireland]; EurActiv 2007 [Belgium]). The ECC, at least on the surface, enjoy a high degree of access to the relevant authorities.

ii. Timing

There is consensus among many academics that "public participation should occur as soon as is reasonably practical" (Rowe & Frewer 2000, p.14). Indeed, the first steps are often the most important in shaping policy choices and decisions (Magnette 2003, p.7), and citizens may understandably reject a proposal or decision if they are consulted too late in the process (OECD 2001, p.20). According to these standards, the ECC fare very well simply because they are a prospective participatory activity. Even the title of the final report "The Citizens'

Perspectives on the Future of Europe," suggests a forward looking bent. Indeed, the final report was intentionally completed prior to the European Council Summit in June of 2007. Some Commission officials (Mugica-Inciarte 2007b) concede that the results may have better resonance when all of the Commission-sponsored civic activities are completed, meaning at the Council Summit in December of 2007. In either case, the fact remains that the ECC are well-timed to guide future policy direction, not reflect upon past performance.

iii. Effect on Citizens

Though there is some debate in the literature about how much weight citizens' own views of their experience in a participatory process should have in the evaluation (Abelson & Gavin 2006, p.15), this criteria is of especial relevance in the EU context. Given the weak public sphere surrounding European issues, it is important to examine how citizens related to one another and to the process itself. It is important, that is, to gauge levels of citizen satisfaction.

Although the author did not have the ability to formally survey the citizens, the author did observe one national consultation (Hungary) as well as the Synthesis Event itself. At the Synthesis Event, all unstructured interviews with citizens yielded the same result: all citizens expressed satisfaction. The high levels of satisfaction accord with the positive atmosphere, both formal and informal, that was observed by the author (see *supra*, pp.29-30). Here, the direct relation between atmosphere and reported citizen satisfaction—and therefore between process and impact criteria—is obvious but important: in a positive atmosphere, the more likely that citizens report a satisfactory experience. Additionally, the solid level of satisfaction at the Synthesis Event is matched by a high level of satisfaction at the national consultations: 97 percent of citizens who participated in the national consultations said that they would do it again if given the opportunity (ECC final 2007, p.13). Thus, it is clear that citizens both reported and exhibited signs of high levels of satisfaction.

iv. Political Control

It is one thing to claim that the ECC enjoy access to EU decision makers or that their timing is favorable; it is another to take stock of *how* the ECC may influence policy. Doing so requires examining how the results of the ECC will be disseminated to both national and European authorities. Thus, the ECC did not stop with the close of the Synthesis Event in May. Since the final report has been published, organizers in Brussels and member states have embarked upon disseminating the results.

Although the dissemination process has just begun, *each member state* has in place formalized follow-up activities to ensure that the ECC results are made available to both lawmakers and the public at large. A list of planned follow-up activities at the national and EU level has been made available by the King Baudouin Foundation.[14] Here, the heaviest burden falls upon the national partners. Their activities range from the traditional (press conferences, briefings, public debates) to the creative (additional participatory activities, public speaking contests). The activities seek to publicize the national consultation results as well as the ECC final report. Interestingly, some of the most active national partners include those from both traditionally pro European (*e.g.* Ireland) and traditionally Euro-skeptic (*e.g.*, Austria) member states (Kehoe 2007; Bohle 2007).

Of course, it is too early to tell whether the dissemination of results will have any effect on policy. What is clear at this point is that the close of the participatory process does not mark the close of the ECC. The efforts of organizers in Brussels and in member states to publicize and promote the ECC are still ongoing.

[14] For a complete list of follow-up activities, see http://www.european-citizens-consultations.eu/42.0.html#c633

E. Synthesizing the Evaluation

On the whole, the ECC fared well along both process and potential-to-impact criteria. On the process level, the Synthesis Event received generally positive marks in terms of task clarity, time for discussion, atmosphere, and representativeness. The event was citizen-centered, conducted efficiently, and well-organized. Of course, there is room for improvement, especially with regard to the time given to participants and the relative lack of structure during the editing process. Nonetheless, it is clear that there are few process-based hurdles that the ECC did not surmount, at least with respect to the Synthesis Event.

On the potential-to-impact criteria, the ECC as a whole also score very well. In terms of access to higher authority, timing, and citizen impact, the ECC have demonstrated their merit. While these elements are fairly easy to measure, it is the remaining criterion, political control, which remains somewhat elusive. As the process of disseminating the results and attempting to guide policy has just begun, it is not possible to give the ECC a ringing endorsement just yet. However, the fact that follow-up activities have been completed and are planned for the future is a promising sign.

This general endorsement of the ECC process and its potential to affect policy should be qualified by the limits of this research project. First, the national consultations were excluded from analysis. Second, potential to impact (rather than simply impact-based) criteria were used as a second-best solution. And third, additional evaluative criteria, given more time and resources, could be used to supplement (or even contradict the findings of) the criteria used here. However, bearing these qualifications in mind, this partial evaluation of the ECC has shown that it is possible and (potentially) effective to conduct a transnational participatory democracy project involving all member states in the EU.

5.

Conclusion

This analysis began by outlining the arguments for participatory democracy in general and in the EU in particular. Participatory democracy, it was claimed, conferred a host of benefits, from more effective policy-making to a better-educated citizenry. It was also argued that participatory democracy could compensate for some of the shortcomings of representative democracy—a form that is under increasing pressure given the internationalization of some policy realms. At the same time, it was argued that the EU, with its current democratic characteristics, is an environment particularly ripe for active public participation. Brussels is seen as distant and elite by its citizens, representative democracy in the European Parliament suffers from a variety of weaknesses, and citizens know little about and exercise little control over EU policy. Additionally, there are few spaces where citizens come together to discuss issues related to the EU: there is a weak and fragmented European *demos*. Finally, chapter four partially evaluated the ECC, and gave a qualified endorsement along both process and potential to impact lines. But what are the implications of evaluating the ECC positively as a form of participatory democracy in the EU? And what are some of the challenges that remain for participatory processes in the EU?

A. Implications

First, and perhaps most obviously, the positive evaluation of the ECC is evidence that participatory exercises involving thousands of citizens from all member states are possible in the EU. Transnational coordination, though difficult, is feasible. On a deeper level, however, there remains the contention that participatory exercises are best used to deal with local politics and local government (see *supra*, pp.11-12). "Scaling up" is challenging because it is

difficult for citizens to deliberate genuinely about non-local (and presumably less salient) issues. Indeed, one organizer shared this concern, confiding that she was worried that citizens would not have anything to say when asked to deliberate. However, after the exercises, she found that "when you give people space to speak out, they take it" (Dupont 2007). Citizens were able to engage in part because they *chose*, in the Agenda Setting Event, issues that were important to them: family, environment, energy, migration. That the issues were broad and even international in focus did not dissuade citizens from engaging with one another on their particulars. The ECC have thus provided preliminary evidence that there *is* interest among citizens about European issues—even if voter turnout in European elections would suggest otherwise. This finding comports with that of the politically neutral National Forum on Europe (2007, p.5), which states in its most recent Chairman's Report that "people will engage in discussion on European Union issues if they are given the opportunity to do so and if the debate is geared to both inform them and to take their views into account." European citizens, that is, are ready to talk about Europe.

Second, the success of the ECC may help persuade decision-makers both in Brussels and in member states that active participatory exercises are worthy of further investment because they have been shown workable. One organizer noted that the demonstrative effect of the success of the ECC should not be underestimated (Bohle 2007). That is to say, decision-makers may be convinced that the ECC *process* was genuine and practicable. Friedman (2006, p.7) writes of the expressive function of successful exercises:

> …[A]ggregated local work can be an effective way to broaden engagement and amplify its impact. *It also demonstrates to leaders who observe and benefit from the process that citizens can, under favorable conditions, deliberate constructively and effectively*, which plants seeds of democratic optimism among leadership that should not be discounted in its potential to improve the political culture over time" (emphasis supplied).

Of course, this is not to say that decision-makers will automatically be convinced that the information provided by the ECC or other participatory activities was valuable. It is only to assert that seeing the success of participatory projects may render decision-makers more receptive to them over time.

Third, the successful process of the ECC shows how participatory projects can be helpful in addressing some of the EU's democratic shortcomings. It is quite clear from the ECC process that citizens of all stripes discussed and deliberated over EU issues, thus aiding, in a small way, the development of a European public sphere. An Irish pensioner conversing with a Bulgarian teenager about EU energy policy is not yet a common occurrence, but the ECC demonstrate that bringing Europeans together can create a nascent sense of common identity simply through the shared act of civic engagement. Giorgi's point bears repeating here: "[i]f people are given procedures that enable them to be genuinely citizens, then they will tend to act as citizens and feel themselves to be truly members of a political community" (2007, p.16). The ECC provided a venue that European citizens both to feel and act like European citizens.

In this respect, the ECC brought citizens together, albeit on a small scale, in ways that transnational representative democracy is simply not designed to do. Simultaneously, the ECC brought complex and distant EU policy debates closer to its citizens—one of the principle goals of participatory forms. As one organizer remarked about participants, "maybe their opinions did not change, but they know now that Europe is not as far away" (Dupont 2007). This implication does not deny the necessary role that representative democracy continues to play, especially given that public participation has logical limits in terms government functioning and citizens' time and interest. It is not possible, of course, to have a "town" meeting with all EU citizens. But the goal of public participation is not to involve citizens in all aspects of all decisions. Rather, it is to provide for direct participation on some

aspects of some issues that citizens care about (Friedman 2006, p.25). This more modest level of participation—exemplified by the ECC—is more practical both in terms of the functioning of government and the time and interests of its citizens.

B. Remaining Challenges

Despite their success, the ECC and similar participatory exercises still face significant hurdles, especially in terms of attempting to incorporate the results into policy. Though the ECC have been evaluated well in terms of their potential to affect policy, there are a number of questions that must be addressed if participatory forms like the ECC are to become elements in the EU policymaking process.

First, there is the possibility that results derived from participatory exercises and survey data are conflictive. There are at least some cases in which this is true in the case of the ECC. For instance, in the final report, 22 national panels urged that the EU promote "the use of clean energies" (ECC Final 2007, p.9); the role of member states was not mentioned. However, the latest survey data indicate that a majority of European citizens believe that it is national governments, not the EU, that should make decisions regarding energy challenges (Eurobarometer 2006b, p.4). Thus, there is at least an apparent contradiction between the ECC results and survey results. When two forms of public participation (active participation versus consultation) yield seemingly incongruous results, how are policy makers to weigh or reconcile them? This dilemma will be partially broached in the fall of 2007, when the first-ever pan-European Deliberative Polling event takes place.[15] Participants' opinions will be surveyed before and after intensive deliberation to gauge how their opinions change on European issues. However, if participatory democracy techniques continue to be employed in

[15] See Tomorrow's Europe at http://www.tomorrowseurope.eu/

the EU, there will continue to be some conflicting results. How and why these results occur—and how to incorporate them into policy—will be challenging obstacles to surmount.

Second, one of the most-cited concerns among both participants and organizers was that the results of the ECC are too general to push policy-makers in a particular direction. It is hard to imagine an MP or MEP disagreeing, for instance, that "improving the social and economic conditions for families" should not be a policy priority (ECC Final 2007, p.4). One organizer noted that even the more specific ECC results may be open to significant interpretation by policy makers (Blazinsek 2007). However, despite the generality of some of the ECC results, they are still valuable. The results (and even the selection of the three issue areas in itself) provide European decision-makers with an idea of the topics that resonate with EU citizens *after* they have debated and deliberated over them. In this sense, the ECC, while at times failing to yield much in the way of specific or novel policy guidance, do serve as an additional source of information for decision-makers. Indeed, this is the "primary objective" of the ECC as envisioned by its creators (Rauws & Oldenburg 2007). Future participatory exercises could tackle more discrete policy issues, and would perhaps yield more actionable and specific results.

Third, and perhaps most seriously, the largest hurdle still faced for participatory democracy in the EU may be the EU itself. As Walström has noted, "the success of the dialogue with the citizens ultimately depends on the EU's *capacity and willingness* to listen, and to subsequently deliver better policy results" (Walström 2006c, p.1, emphasis supplied). The EU has demonstrated its willingness to support participatory democracy, at least in monetary terms. What remains to be seen is whether the institutional structure is able to incorporate the direct voices and opinions of citizens in a sustainable and efficient manner. As Commission official Husz remarked, the EU "still needs to come to grip with how to use" direct citizen feedback (2007). Not only may the results be overly general or border on the

redundant, but they may, even if sufficiently specific or novel, fall upon the deaf ears of decision-makers scattered throughout the highly fragmented EU political environment. The link here between institutional design and participatory structures is clear: the extent to which participatory exercises actually affect policy is limited by how the political system can take them into account. Here, it may be the case that the ECC process is more developed than the EU's capacity to make use of the results thereof.

Further, citizens' support for participatory forms is typically based upon the expectation that those in power will listen. If the EU cannot learn how to incorporate the results of participatory activities, it is unlikely that citizens will seek to engage with Brussels in the future in a manner other than voting. This challenge is complicated by the fact that citizens view voting in EP elections as by far the best way to ensure that their voices are heard by EU decision-makers (Eurobarometer 2006a, p.47). As representative democracy in the EU continues to be the most familiar form of political control acknowledged by its citizens, and makes practical sense given the grand size of the European population, creating a growing and self-sustaining "market" for participatory activities will be difficult. Moreover, the success of future participatory projects will require political support from Brussels. Commissioners, prime ministers, and MEPs change—and with them, so do political priorities. Whether participatory democracy in the EU will continue to benefit from current levels of political support is thus unclear.

What is clear, however, is that the ECC, as the most ambitious example of transnational participatory democracy ever attempted in the EU, furnished a venue for citizens from all member states to discuss and debate the future of Europe. In the process, the EU was brought closer to some of its citizens and some of its citizens to one another. If the EU is serious about overcoming some of the democratic criticisms that plague it, embracing such participatory forms is a good step. An even better step may be a concerted effort to find

sustainable and efficient ways to feed the results of such participatory exercises into the policy process. In this way, participatory democracy might prove itself worthy of being a permanent feature of EU government.

(12,111 words)

Appendix A - Evaluation Chart for the ECC

Process-Based Criteria					
	Criterion	**Measurement Question**	**Measurement Tool**	**Source**	**Classification**
1.	Task definition and clarity of procedures	*Was there as little confusion and dispute as possible regarding the scope of a participation exercise, its expected output, and the mechanisms of the procedure?*	Direct observation; citizen interviews	Mansbridge et al. 2006, p.15; Rowe and Frewer 2000, p.16	Universal, process
2.	Time for discussion	*Was adequate time provided for the discussion?*	Direct observation; citizen interviews	OECD 2001, p.75; Abelson et al. 2003, p.544	Universal, process
3.	Atmosphere	*Were the atmosphere and structure conducive to achieving the task*	Direct observation; citizen interviews	Mansbridge 2006, pp.13-15	Universal; process
4.	Representativeness	*Did the participants fairly represent the population? Geographic, demographic, political*	Direct observation; document analysis; interviews with organizers	Abelson et al. 2003, p.244; Rowe and Frewer 2004, p.540	Universal, process
Potential-to-impact criteria					
5.	Access to higher authority	*Who is listening and ultimately responding to the public?*	Interviews with Commission officials; direct observation	Rowe & Frewer 2004, p.536; Abelson et al. 2003, p.244	Universal, potential to impact
6.	Timing	*At what point in the policy process was the exercise conducted?*	Context analysis	Steyaert & Lisoir 2005, p.9; Rowe & Frewer 2000, p.14	Universal, potential to impact
7.	Political control	*What are the ways in which political control will be exercised, beyond access points?*	Document analysis; interviews with national partners	Abelson & Gauvin 2006, pp.13-14; OECD 2001, p.36	Universal, potential to impact
8.	Effect on citizens	*Did citizens view the event positively?*	Citizen interviews; direct observation	Rowe & Frewer 2004, pp. 525, 532	Local, potential to impact

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