

Mini-Public De-Brief and Write Up

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November 2017

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Introduction

The mini-public methodology rests on the idea that traditional institutions of state, government and civil society have lost their connection with citizens. The 1990s was a significant period for what is termed the ‘deliberative turn’ (Goodin and Dryzek 2006 p. 219). Sociologists and political scientists have witnessed the demise of public participation raising profound concerns for the loss of value of traditional institutions and demise of community (Putnam 2009). A new set of radical methodologies that aimed to increase public engagement were developed in response to these problems, the mini-public was an important vehicle in addressing the growing feeling of isolation and detachment felt by citizens. One way of understanding a mini-public is given here:

These are designed to be groups small enough to be genuinely deliberative, and representative enough to be genuinely democratic (though rarely will they meet standards of statistical representativeness, and they are never representative in the electoral sense) (Goodin and Dryzek 2006 p. 220).

The democratic principles that underscore mini-publics allow them to engage different levels of citizen participation. Fung (2006) argued that mini-publics provide a space in which political life could be explored. Fung’s four part categorization of mini-publics is useful to consider and he proposed different forms the mini-public could take, each designed to increase citizen action and collaboration :

educative form that aims to create nearly ideal conditions for citizens to form, articulate, and refine opinions about particular public issues through conversation with one another

participatory advisory panel [...] aims not only to improve the quality of opinion, but also to align public policies with considered preferences.

participatory problem-solving collaboration [...] envisions a continuous symbiotic relationship between the state and the public sphere aimed at solving particular collective problems.

participatory democratic governance, is more ambitious than the other three. This flavor of mini-publics seeks to incorporate direct citizen voices into the determination of political agendas (cited in Ryan and Smith 2014 p. 14).

REELER's use of the mini-public could be more aligned with Fung's *educative form* and *participatory advisory panel* as the former is about using the mini-public as a forum to increase public knowledge about the ethics of robots, and the latter to transfer the concerns and issues of the public in their deliberations into deliverables, reports and papers by REELER to the European Commission, academic community and political representatives.

Preparation

A mini-public is a methodology developed in the political sciences as a tool to increase public engagement with politics and government. In preparation for the mini-public I carried out a literature review on the area. There were few academic papers on mini-public that gave detailed instructions of how to run one. I contacted several well established academic groups that organize mini-publics including the UCL Constitution Unit (Professor Meg Russell and Dr Alan Renwick¹) and the Citizen Participation Network (Dr Oliver Escobar²).

The use of the mini-public and other citizen participation methodologies are supported by a number of universities, and these centres run workshops. I wanted to get a sense of how mini-publics were run and was able to get attendance as an observer at a Citizen's Assembly (on the topic of Brexit) run by The Constitution Unit at UCL. Further support for the preparation of the REELER mini-public methodology was given by political scientists, Dr Arianna Giovannini³ at DMU.

Mini-public methodologies rely on giving citizens 'the stage' and putting the professional experts on the margins. Experts have particular kinds of knowledge and expertise that is crucial, but experts and non-experts do not come to the table with equal resources, knowledge or confidence. In order to shift power to the participants, the invited experts have well defined roles throughout the mini-public process. Experts were also invited to be observers to events, but to not engage with the participants. An observer's gallery was set up for experts. Experts are instructed to stay in their roles throughout the day, even if their specific segment is completed. Mini-public recruitment must target and support the participation of a cross section of the public. Additionally, time must be factored into the mini-public event which allow for the participants to reflect on issues.

I used an online ticketing system called Eventbrite as one of the methods to recruit participants. Eventbrite is a free service for non commercial events. In total 19 tickets were sold.

¹ The Constitution Unit, UCL <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/people>

² Citizen Participation Network <https://oliversdialogue.wordpress.com/tag/mini-publics/>

³ Dr Arianna Giovanni, DMU profile <http://www.dmu.ac.uk/about-dmu/academic-staff/business-and-law/arianna-giovannini/arianna-giovannini.aspx>

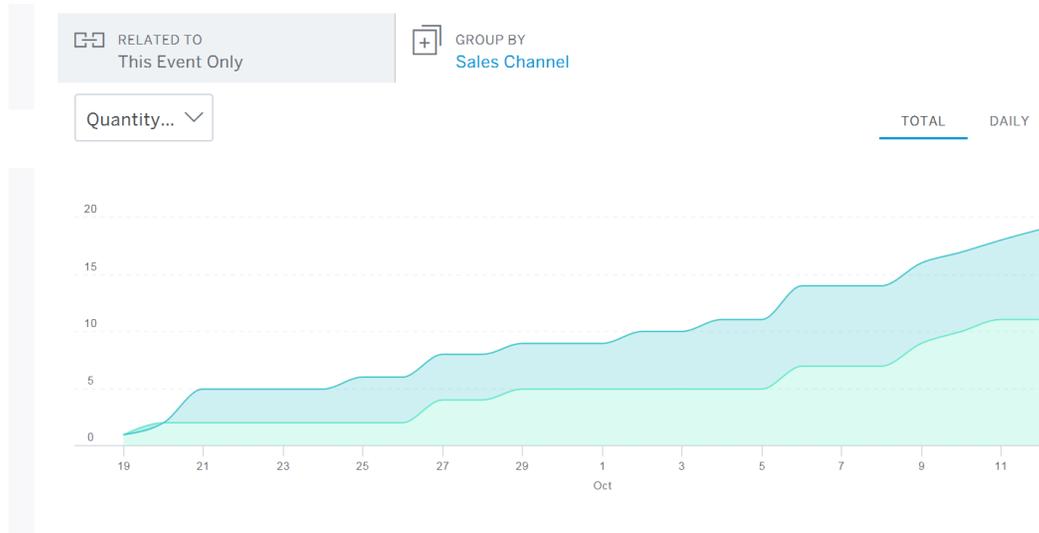


Figure 1

Eventbrite Sales Figures: 19 Tickets Sold. Ticketing opened on 26th September and closed on 11th October 2017.

Of the 19 tickets sold, 13 participants attended who has registered on the Eventbrite list. One participant had contacted me separately by email. In total 14 attended the mini-public.

Recruitment

We wanted our sample of participants to reflect diversity in age, sex and ethnicity. We prioritized the participation of ageing members of society as it is these groups that often framed as the users of these new technologies. With the support of research assistant we leafleted and engaged in an extended period of public recruitment that included:

- Leafletting and putting up posters in local venues in Cambridge (including charity shops, cafes, local libraries, residential homes, hospitals and clinics)
- Contacting businesses in the local area with an interest in the issues (including medical technology companies as Cambridge business parks, pharmacies, local medical centres, crèches, charities).
- Emailing relevant organizations and individuals (including academics at two main universities in Cambridge – Cambridge University and Anglia Ruskin University).
- Using social media – particularly twitter to reach out to organizations. Using twitter as a means to contact groups, individuals and organization. Over a 100 tweets were tweeted to support recruitment.
- Using local radio media to promote the mini-public to local citizens.

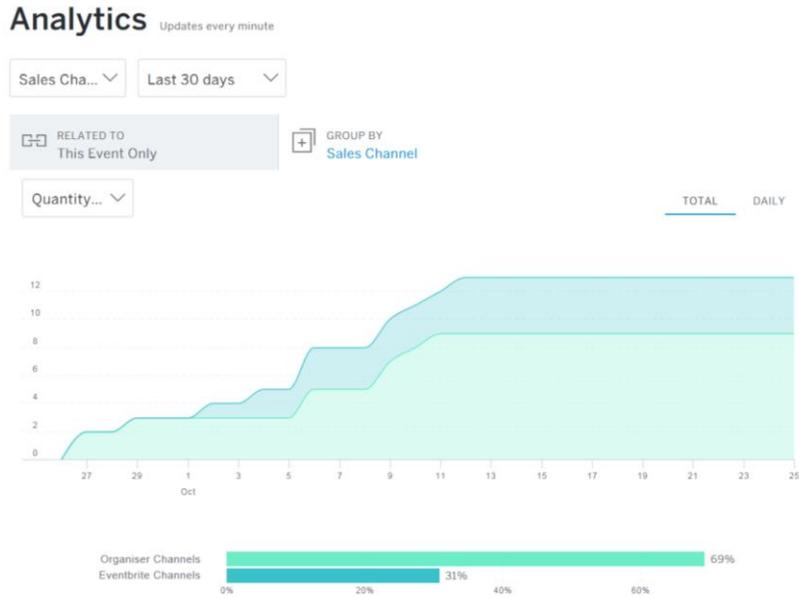


Figure 2
Eventbrite Analytics 69% activity via publicity and recruitment of organizers.

Mini-publics Schedule

The mini-publics schedule is a methodological process with attention paid to the process of voting, deliberation and judgement. We asked participants to vote around the question: Where should we draw the line for robots working with vulnerable populations?

Participants were then invited to rate their answer along a Likert scale. The Likert scale is a psychometric scale used to represent people's attitudes towards a particular topic. The Likert options are presented below in the graphic:

Code:


REELER MINI PUBLIC VOTE

Where should we draw the line for robots working with vulnerable populations?

NO ROBOTS LESS ROBOTS NEUTRAL MORE ROBOTS NO LINE

Please choose one option



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 731726

Figure 3

The mini-public voting slip. Each attendee was assigned a code (see top left hand corner of the voting slip), and this code was then reference in each vote to observe if views had shifted over the course of the day.

The day was organized in the following way:

Arrival and registration – participants are welcomed and given a voting slip, assigned a code, consent forms, and necessary expense claims forms. Participants were also provided with an overview of the REELER project, as well as a list of speaker profiles.

Explanation of Event (REELER) – the facilitator welcomed participants and described the purpose of the REELER project and the goals of the day.

Ground Rules – in group scenarios ground rules can alert participants to standards of behavior desired in group collaborations. The ground rules come from the group and not the facilitator.

Voting – The main facilitator invites the participants to vote. The participants must also add their code to their voting slip.

**FIRST VOTE:
WHERE SHOULD WE DRAW THE LINE FOR ROBOTS WORKING WITH VULNERABLE
POPULATIONS?**

Expert presentations and Information sharing – to support our participants’ deliberation on the issues we invited three speakers to give non-biased, factual based talks on three aspects of healthcare robotics: the social, economic and technological issues. All presenters were briefed to provide a neutral presentation, avoiding jargon and presenting their talk in non-biased language. We encouraged participants to interrupt the speakers for clarification if necessary. Each talk was ten minutes only.

Deliberation process begins – Participants were encouraged to write down questions through the presentation process and hand these to the table facilitators. After all three information sharing presentations were completed, the participants were encouraged to reflect on the issues the experts had raised. Experts were then invited to visit each table for 20 minutes and be available to answer questions. The experts were only in the role of providing information and are not expected to shape opinions of the participants, but to offer a range of ways of making sense of the ethics of robots in healthcare.

After the deliberation period, another vote was called:

**SECOND VOTE:
WHERE SHOULD WE DRAW THE LINE FOR ROBOTS WORKING WITH VULNERABLE
POPULATIONS?**

Break for lunch.

(During lunch the facilitators will collect all the sticky notes and organize them into themes on a specially created wall and categorize the issues people raise).

RESUME – Participants are invited to the wall to look at themes that have been raised.



Figure 4

The table facilitator organizes the group responses during the deliberation process and discusses the issues with participants.

For and Against Talks – We briefed two experts to give for and against arguments for healthcare robots and ethics. The afternoon speakers were invited to make the strongest case possible for a position either for or against.

Table deliberation – Participants are invited to reflect on the strong statements provided by the experts, and consider their arguments.

Final voting – Participants voted for one final time. Three votes were cast during the mini-public.

Public discussion – For most of the day the groups worked at tables with their table facilitators. At the end of the day, after the final vote was cast, a public discussion was held. The public forum was supported by the facilitator.



Figure 5
Group discussion

Mini-publics allow the presence of non-participating experts and other invited guests in the role of observers. Observers are spatially separated from the group by a row of chairs that mimic a viewing gallery. The observers can be present during proceedings but are discouraged from active participation. This is to ensure the balance of power is not in their favour.

Observers might be academics, or other interested parties with an interest in shaping the debate in a particular way. Observers are also discouraged from talking to participants. The mini-public methodology allows for, where possible the neutral imparting of information to support the deliberation process. Experts have an important role in the mini-public as guests but the emphasis must be on the participants, and their views, perspectives and opinions.

Results of the Vote

At the end of the day we were able to present the results of the mini-public votes back to the participants. Most participants had not shifted in their choices throughout the day. On closer scrutiny of the results, most participants favoured robots in healthcare to do the monotonous or heavy work, while leaving personal contact and care to people.

The three votes by participants were taken a graph was created of the responses.

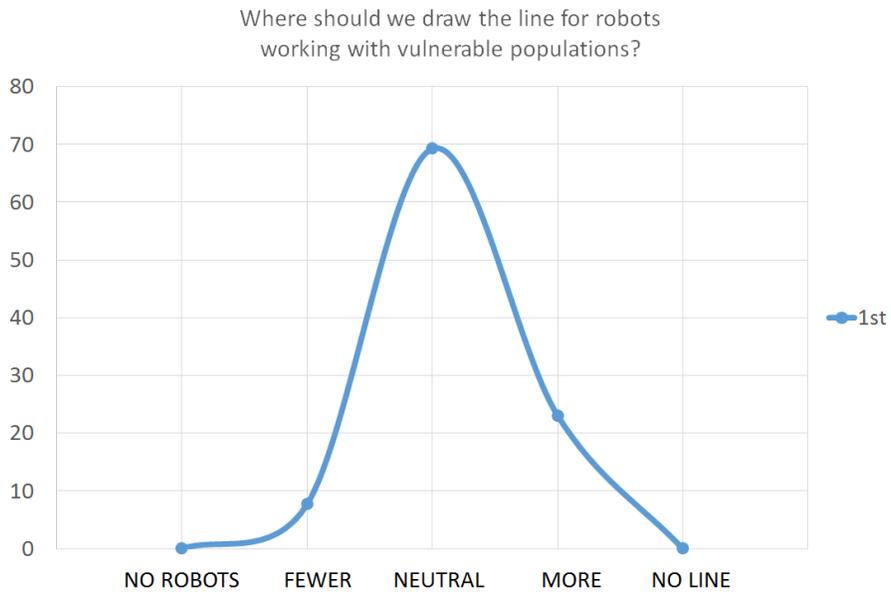


Figure 6
Results of 1st Vote shows 7 participants were neutral

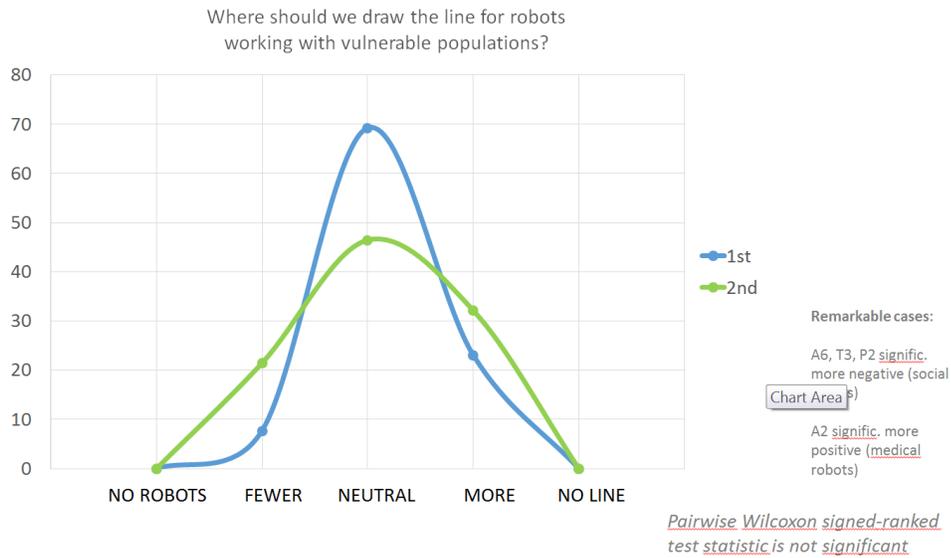


Figure 7
 Results from vote 1 and vote 2 shows the spread of voting with less participants holding neutral positions.

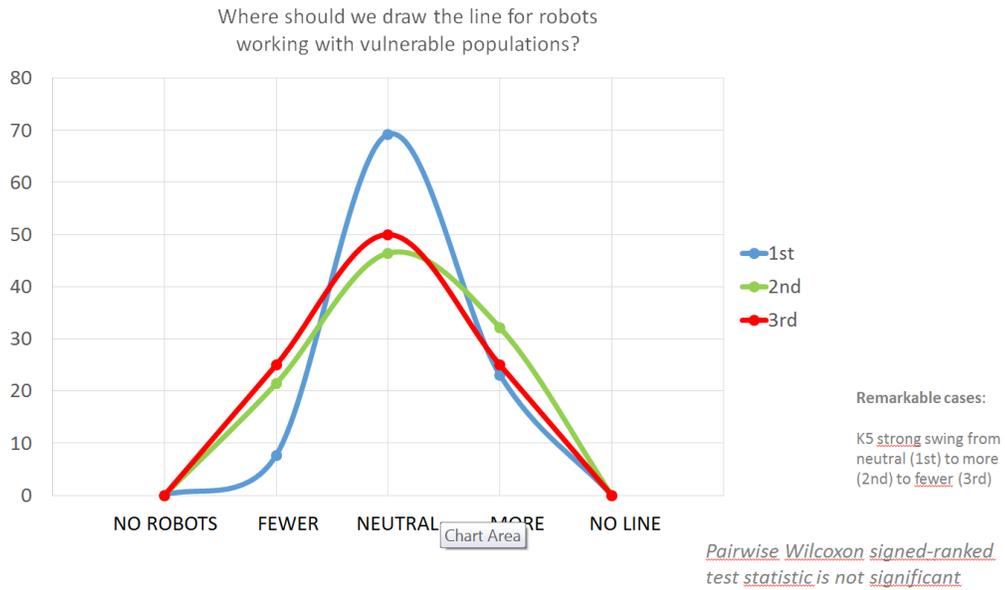


Figure 8
 From the second and third vote there was little shift in opinion.

Three main findings

A need for more knowledge about human-robot interaction

Though the mini-public attendees all had an interest in the topic, i.e. robots in healthcare, they also expressed lack of knowledge and lack of information about the use and characteristics of robots in healthcare; what type of tasks do they solve? What type of robots are currently in healthcare? To what extent are they being used? And what is a robot? The opportunity to receive factual, unbiased information about the topic from different perspectives, such as economic issues, technological and social issues, was very welcomed.

“Well, we’ve learnt a quite wide definition of robot today that seems to be as much a camera that looks at your gut under somebody’s control as—”

“I think that’s one of the problems, yeah. You said about defining, sorry, you said about defining robots, very important.”

“Shall I just put one down? I mean I don’t understand the question but shall I put one down? ... But we don’t know how much interaction there is anyway.”

Type of robot matters

Another main finding was that the type of robot and type of service the robot is expected to provide greatly affected the attendees’ attitude to Human-Robot Interaction in healthcare. Much concern and skepticism was expressed toward the use of social robots in the (health) care of vulnerable people, whereas other types of robots, such as surgical robots and rehabilitation robots, were much more welcomed and were regarded ethically less challenging/provocative.

“So it was the use of healthcare robots with vulnerable people. ... I think if you differentiate between social robots and other robots then the risks are different. They’re not necessarily any greater or worse, greater or less. But the risks you’re thinking about are different. So although technically I circled the same thing at the beginning of the morning and just then, the reasons why are different.”

“So I started off voting quite positively. And then – but not really for any reason, but just like a general mood, a positive attitude towards it. I’ve moved to neutral for the last couple because I think with the sort of practical medical tooly robots, it seems ultimately beneficial. But I’m much more wary of the social side of it. And in particular people who might not know that they’re interacting with a robot, be aware of that. And something to do with the interdependence of different people on each other, just made me feel like I should be a bit more wary about some things.”

A strength in brining policy-makers/decision-makers and citizens/practitioners together

An important goal for the REELER project is to align roboticists, stakeholders and policy-makers/decision-makers’ visions and understandings of robots and the role of robots in everyday

work life. A mini-public appears to be an important tool in achieving this goal as it provides an arena where decision-makers get to meet and talk with ordinary people about their experiences, imaginations but also fears or concerns about a future with robots.

During the deliberations at the mini-public, a number of participants expressed concern that the citizens' only way of expressing their opinion might be through consumerism; i.e. either buy or refrain from buying robot technology. Thus, the participants seemed to appreciate and felt acknowledge when they learned that the Programme Officer of the European Commission - DG Connect – robotics was present. Likewise, hearing the thoughts and concerns of ordinary people, who might not be custom to working with and thinking about robots, proved to be useful for decision-making activities in this area:

“... it was really interesting for me to hear your views as citizens and as practitioners. And I came and I had to vote the first time in the morning and I said more robots because I'm terribly excited, that's the reason why I'm doing the job I'm doing. And I went to neutral. Because listening to all your questioning, all your concerns, all your fears, I kind of felt less confident that we knew exactly where we are going. ... I can guarantee you as a – presenting a kind of public administration, that we are not going – our plan is certainly not to impose anything on anyone. It's really to develop something which is of use for citizens. That's what I wanted to make clear, and that's why I will go back home with those questions.”

Reflections and recommendations

- Experts sometimes failed to take on the role brief and had not committed to the role brief as intended. For example, some experts shared preferences rather than neutral views or did not present confident opinions when presenting in the case for healthcare robots. This shows how personal bias is a serious problem for mini-public organizers.
- Participants felt the voting question was too vague and thought it depended on the robot in question – most participants felt comfortable with robots carrying out heavy work but nearly all participants expressed the value that care should be done by people and not by robots.
- Participants are invited to regroup in early 2018 for a follow up discussion.
- Mini-public results will be further analyzed by REELER and presented in a deliverable in 2018.

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Appendix

Other interesting quotes (– unedited, and to be elaborated):

The right to choose

M: But I think also we can't avoid the fact of choice because you have to be able to give the end user the choice of whether they want to be able to use a robot, because some people in the system don't have any support regardless of, you know, whether it be family or anything. And then you've got the issue of cost, and some people may not be able to afford carers. I mean that's what's discussed at the moment, the cost of care homes, how they're all closing up because they can't afford to continue. So there is a cost. There is a choice there and also the cost implication. So you can't take away choice from the end user. It has to be their choice, whether they want to have either a person or a machine. And some people might not have that choice because they don't have that option of having family or any kind of support.

Technology seduction?

F: I feel like in lots of these arguments that potential human solutions are overlooked because techno solutions are so exciting. Like we can make a technological solution, then we won't be reliant on humans. And actually a human solution is far more organic and like is more holistic so you won't have problems of unemployment as well as ...