

Make Your Brussels Mobility citizen panel

Presentation of data collected from the participants before and after the panel
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In June 2017, the Parliament of the Brussels Capital Region decided to organize a citizen panel about mobility issues in and around Brussels. This “Make Your Brussels Mobility” citizen panel was made of 40 randomly selected citizens who met four times in the Brussels Parliament, on 21 and 28 October (only in the morning) and on 18 and 19 November (the whole day)¹. At the end of its four meetings, the panel submitted to the Parliament a “citizen resolution”², containing a list of demands and recommendations, that was handed over to a special parliamentary commission in December 2017, which adopted a “parliamentary resolution”³ supporting the citizen resolution and asking the regional parliament to consider it⁴.

The participants in the panel were invited by the scientific committee set by the Parliament to fill in a short survey before and after the citizen panel. Participants’ perspectives are important sources of information to evaluate citizen panels. This short report presents the data that was collected in two surveys: before the citizen panel took place, and one afterwards. Both surveys asked similar questions, but the pre-survey aimed at shedding light on the expectations of the participants, while the post-survey investigated how the participants assess the citizen panel. In the beginning of each survey, a small explanation was given about the purpose of the survey.

In both surveys, the participants are asked to give their opinion on certain statements, using a scale from 0 (totally disagree) to 10 (totally agree). The statements concern aspects of the quality of participation and of deliberation, the impact of the citizen panel, the trust the participants have towards political institutions, the different visions of democracy and also opinions regarding mobility in Brussels. Below the results of the surveys are presented in three categories: questions concerning the citizen panel, politics and citizen participation, as well as mobility in Brussels. For each question, we give the actual number of respondents (i.e. the frequency and not the percentage) for each value, before (PRE) and after (POST) the citizen panel. It should be noted that the respondents – and their number – are not necessarily the same in the two surveys and hence one should be careful in comparing both.

Questions concerning the citizen panel

The first category contains questions about the citizen panel itself. This allows to compare the participants’ expectations about the citizen panel with their actual

¹ The Brussels Parliament dedicated a page of its website to this citizen panel:

http://www.parlement.brussels/panel_citoyen_fr/.

² The content of the citizen resolution is available on the website of the Parliament:

http://www.parlement.brussels/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Résolution-citoyenne-191117_FR.pdf.

³ The resolution of the special committee can be found here:

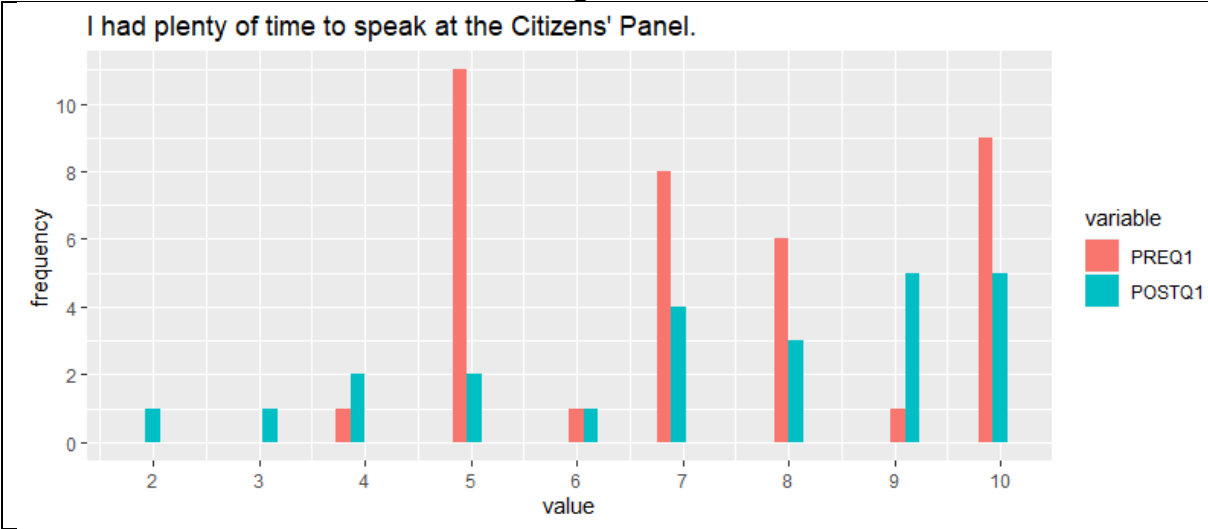
<http://www.weblex.irisnet.be/data/crb/doc/2017-18/134912/images.pdf>.

⁴ For more information, several publications have looked at different facets of the “Make Your Brussels Mobility” citizen panel (Devillers, Vrydagh, Caluwaerts, & Reuchamps, 2020, 2021; Vrydagh & Caluwaerts, 2020; Vrydagh, Devillers, Talukder, Jacquet, & Bottin, 2020).

experience of the citizen panel. In terms of democratic legitimacy, these questions search for the quality of the participation and the quality of the deliberations. The results of the “pre”-survey are presented in orange, while the results of the “post”-survey are presented in blue/green.

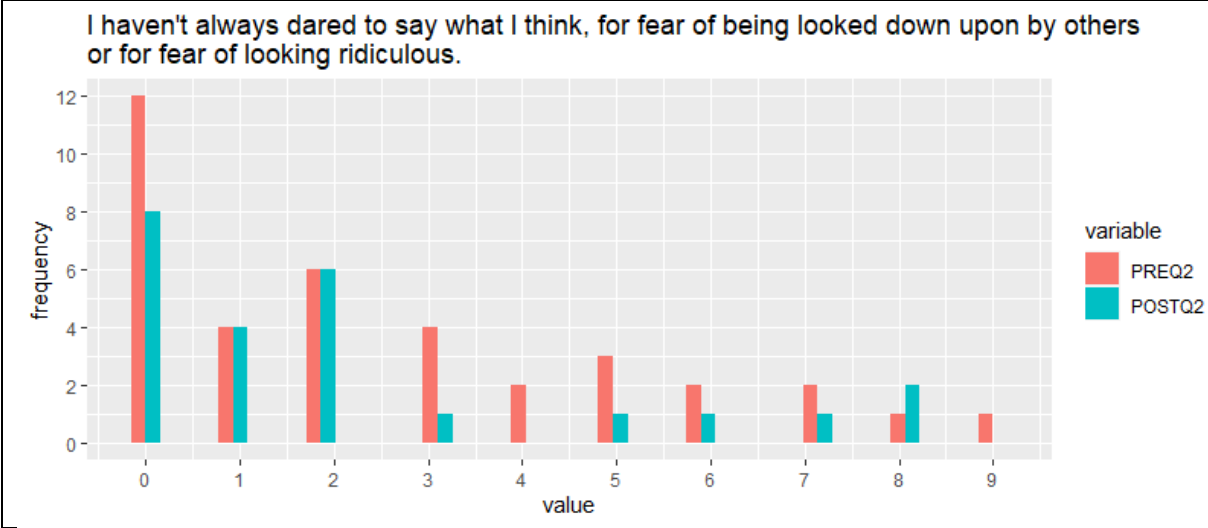
In citizen panels, it is key to provide enough time for participants to give their opinions. As Figure 1 shows, the participants did not know what to expect (the largest group answered ‘5’ in the pre-survey) or were rather positive (with a majority who chose ‘10’, ‘7’ and ‘8’). When we look at the actual experience, it is quite diverse. Whereas there is a majority who answered from ‘7’ to ‘10’ on this question, meaning that they had enough time to participate, a couple of participants indicated that they did not have enough time.

Figure 1



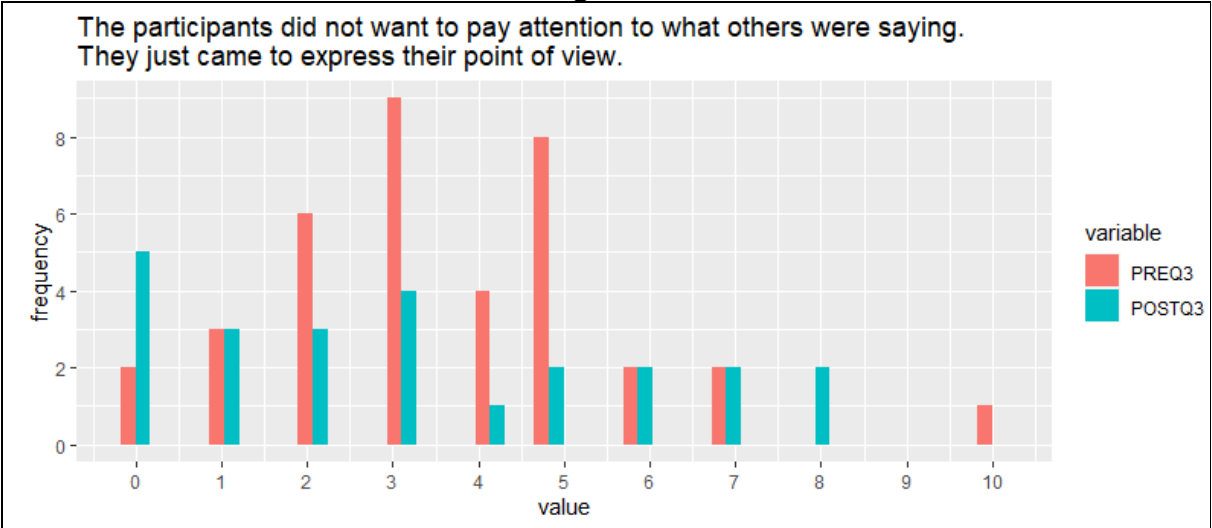
Next to the time dimension, it is also relevant to evaluate whether the participants felt comfortable to speak and share their opinion. As Figure 2 shows, the expectations and the experiences were very similar. The participants seem not to be rather afraid to share their opinion. An active role of the facilitators could also explain the open atmosphere. This increases the quality of the participation.

Figure 2



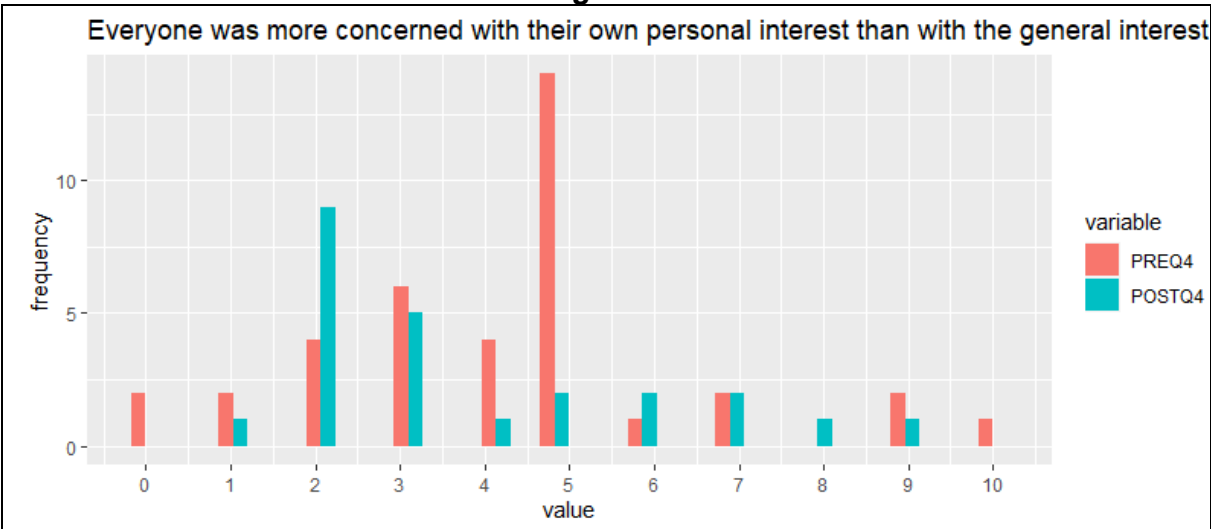
In order to have a qualitative deliberation, it is important that participants listen to each other's arguments. As Figure 3 shows, a large majority of participants hold a positive view (i.e. they do not agree with the statement that the participants do not pay attention to each other), and it is even a bit stronger after the citizen panel. Only one participant expected that there would be no attention for each other's opinions beforehand. Afterwards, it should be noted that six participants experienced little attention for one another.

Figure 3



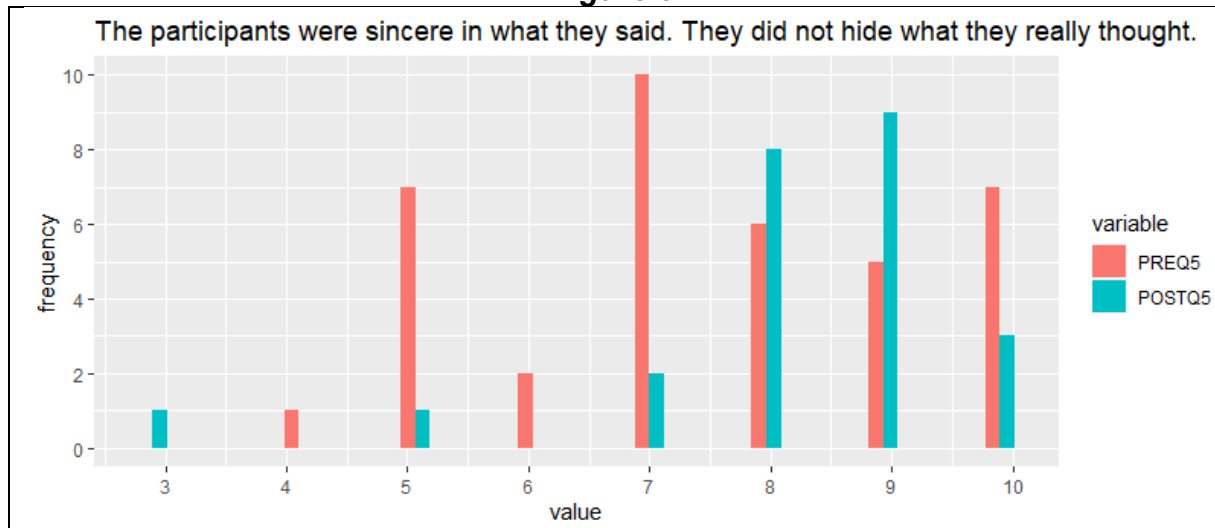
Also, openness to rational persuasion is a necessary element of a deliberation. This implies that if every participant focuses on its own interest, rather than on the general interest, the deliberation risks to lose quality. From Figure 4, it is clear that the largest group of participants did not know what to expect concerning the focus on the general interest. However, as the result of the post-survey indicates, the largest group of participants have a positive opinion, as they disagree with the statement that there would be a larger focus on their own interest than on the general interest.

Figure 4



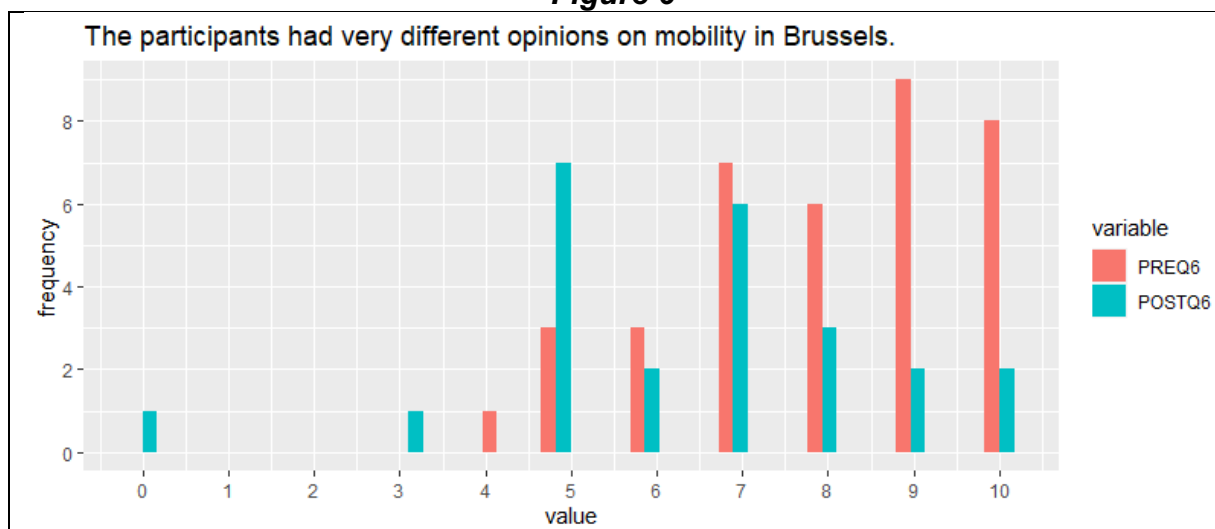
As it is often the case in group discussions, peer pressure may play a role in deliberations as well. Participants can be tempted to hide their opinion when they wish to gain respect in the group, in order to show socially desirable behaviour. However, honesty is important to include all opinions in the deliberation. Figure 5 shows that most participants had a positive experience on this dimension, somewhat more than they had expected.

Figure 5



When participants in a deliberative process all have similar opinions, there is a risk of enclave deliberation, where the group tends to radicalize. Therefore, a good deliberation requires a diversity of opinions in order to guarantee its epistemic quality. In Figure 6, one can see that the expectations concerning the diversity of opinions were more optimistic than the actual experience. A large majority answered '9' and '10' in the pre-survey, agreeing with the statement that there would be a large diversity of opinions. In the post-survey, the largest group of participants answered '5' and '7', with fewer people choosing '9' and '10'.

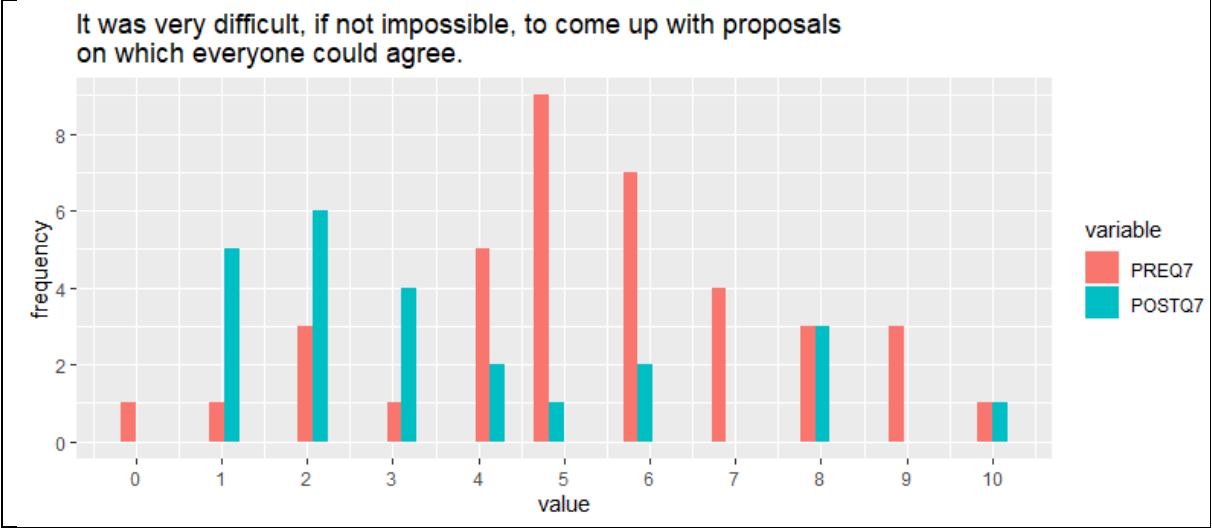
Figure 6



Deliberative processes often try to reach consensus to make a decision where every participant feels included. That takes a lot of time to deliberate intensely but allows to

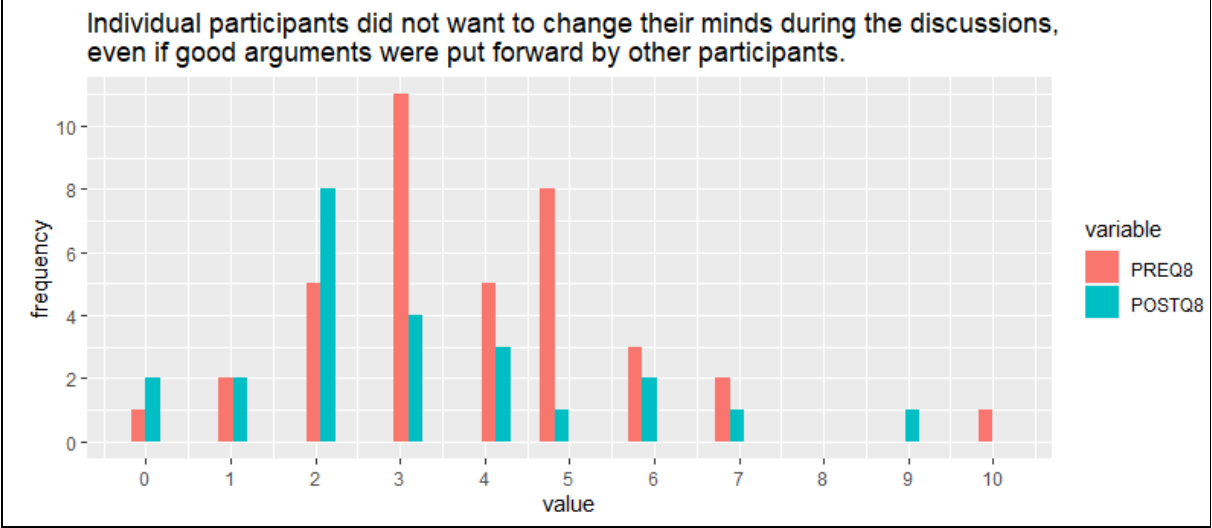
reach a balanced and inclusive decision. Figure 7 indicates that the two surveys show different results: participants expected it to be more difficult to reach consensus than that they have experienced it.

Figure 7



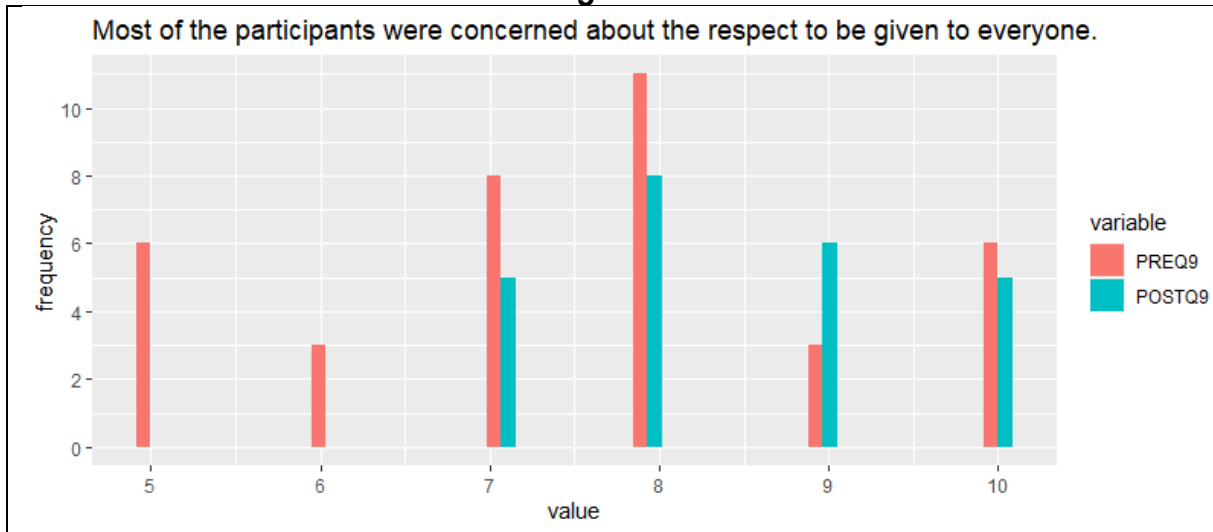
As mentioned above, openness to rational persuasion is a key ingredient to a good deliberation. This means that participants should be open to change their opinion when they are confronted with arguments that counter their opinion. The participants' expectations concerning their openness towards rational persuasion seem relatively similar to their experiences in the citizen panel, as Figure 8 shows.

Figure 8



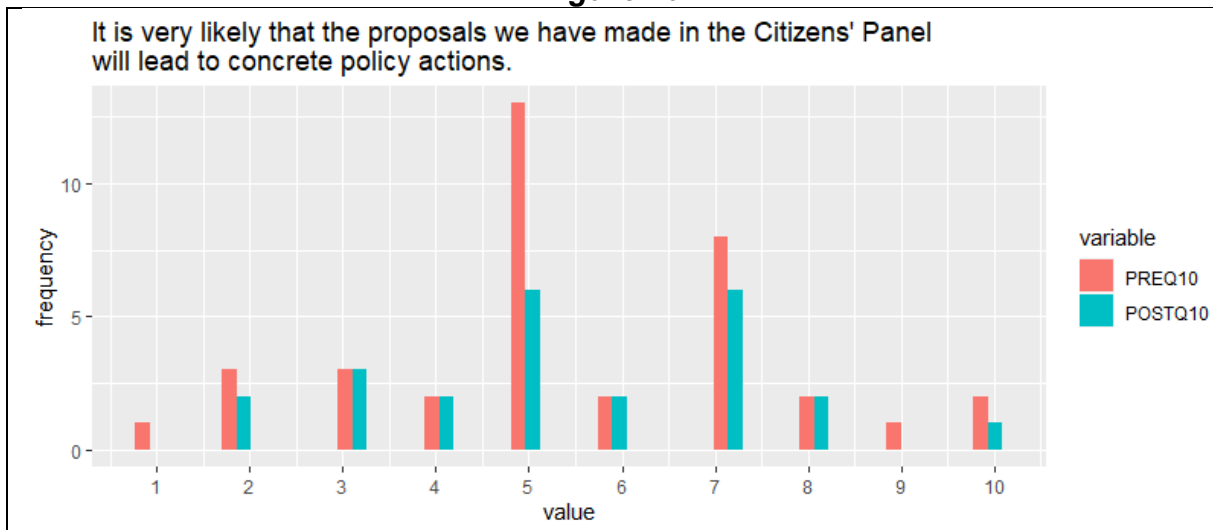
As important as openness towards rational persuasion is respect towards each other. A good deliberation relies on respect for others. Before the panel, the expectations of the participants were diverse from '5' to '10'. After the panel, Figure 9 show that there was respect towards one another, with '7' as the lowest score.

Figure 9



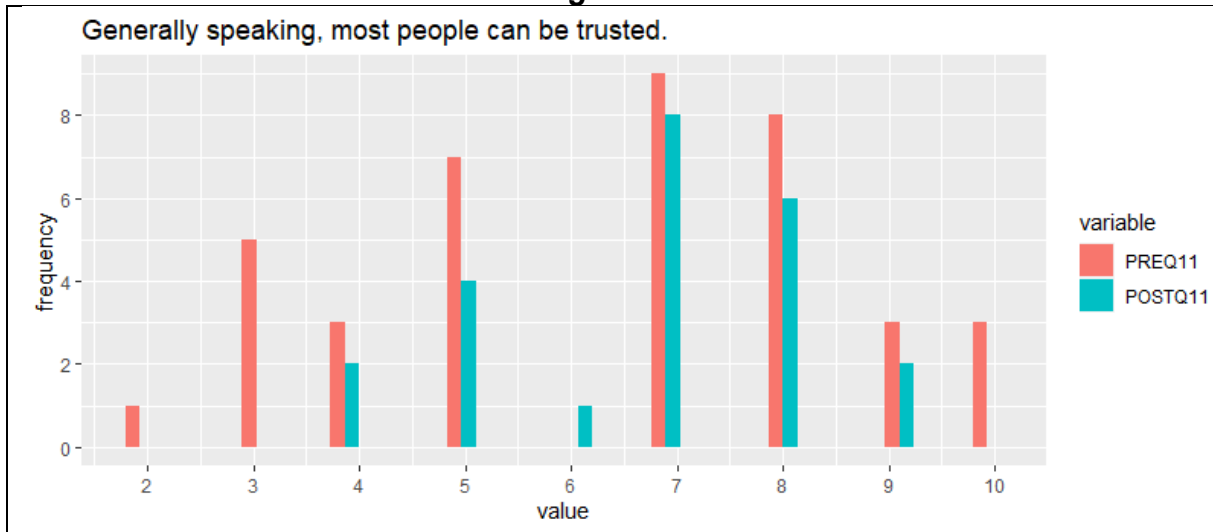
Another important asset of citizen panels is expectation management: participants should know the procedure, including the possible political impact of their work in the citizen panel. A lot of frustration can occur when participants have different expectations than reality. Figure 10 shows that the participants' expectations concerning the political impact are similar with their experience after the citizen panel.

Figure 10



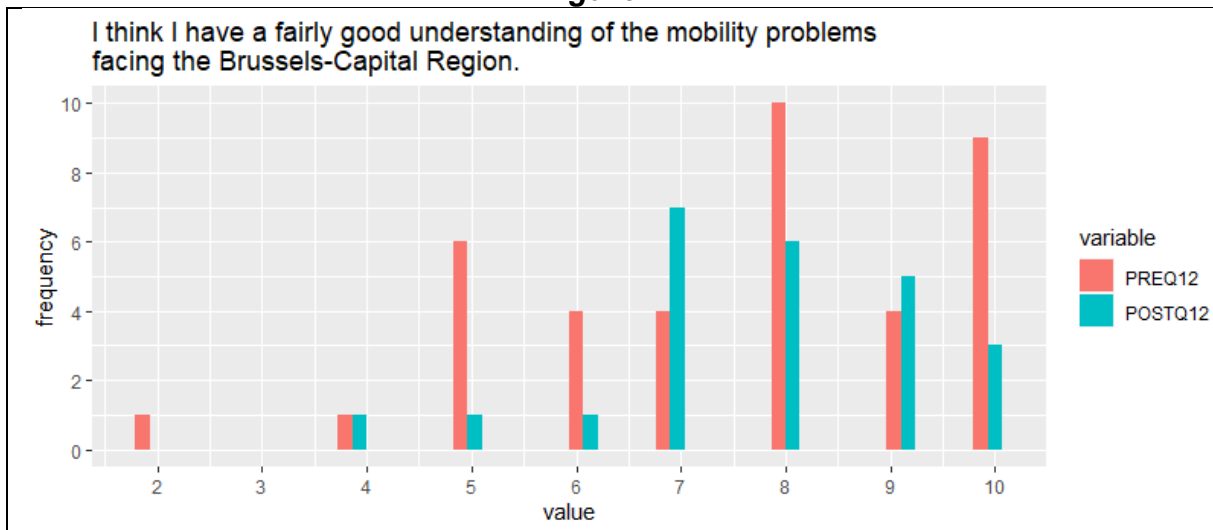
A similar value as respect in citizen panels is trust and confidence in each other. When participants distrust each other, they are unlikely to be open for rational persuasion, which will decrease the quality of the deliberation. Figure 11 shows that the expectations concerning trust towards each other are similar to their actual experience in the citizen panel.

Figure 11



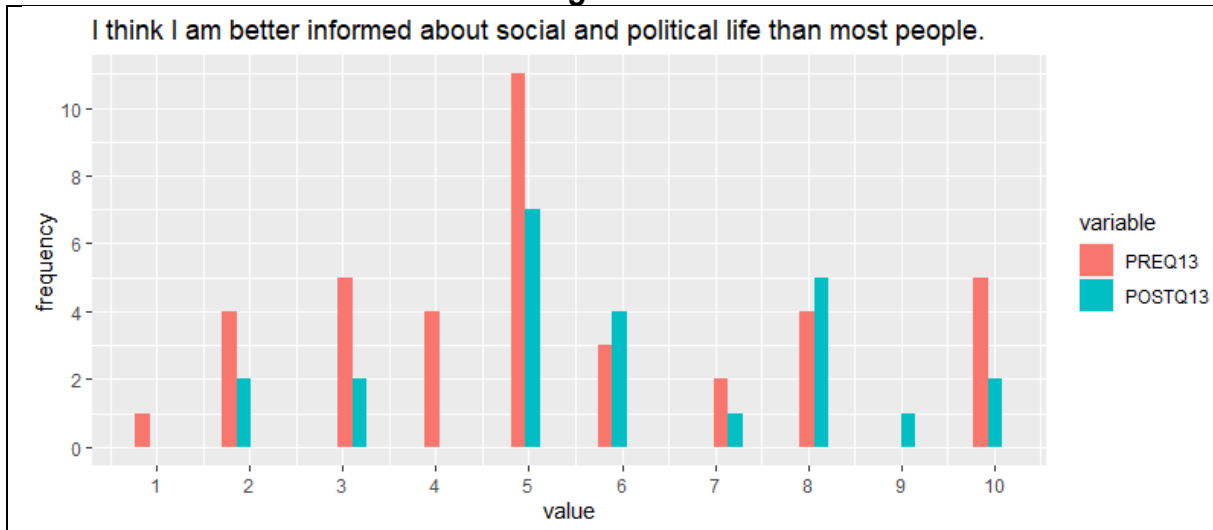
Additionally, it is good to have an idea of the participants' understanding – or at least feeling of understanding – of the topic discussed in the citizen panel. Figure 12 shows that the participants before the citizen panel were had diverse feelings: from '2', for one person, to '10' for nine of them. After the panel, the respondents' understanding has move around '7' and '9'.

Figure 12



A last element is the participants' perception of their knowledge compared to that of others. Figure 13 shows that before the panel the participants did not necessarily feel better informed. In fact, the largest group of participants answered '5'. After the panel, a majority of the participants feel somewhat more informed.

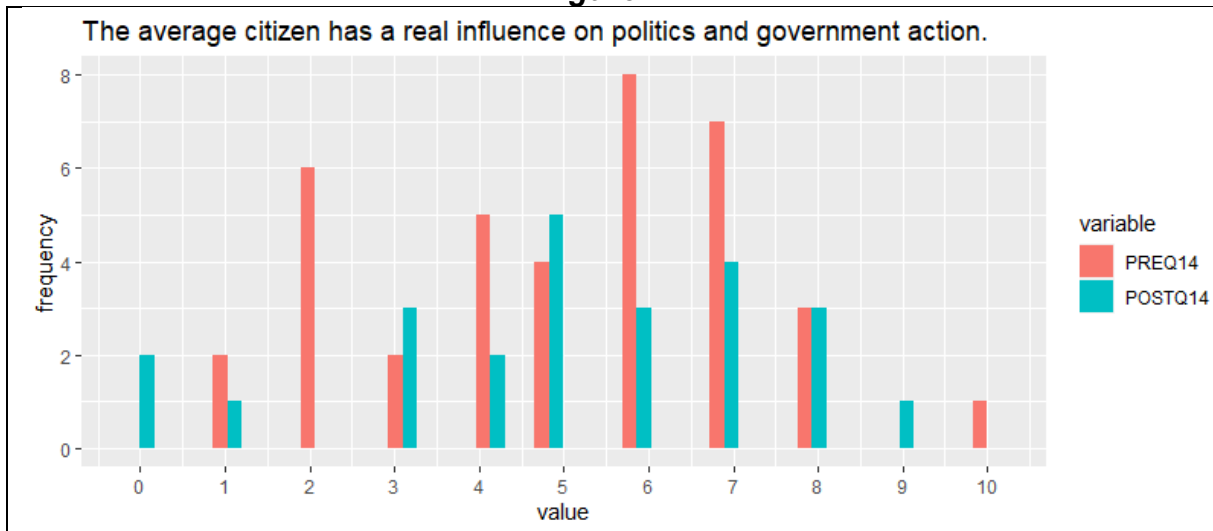
Figure 13



Questions concerning politics and citizen participation

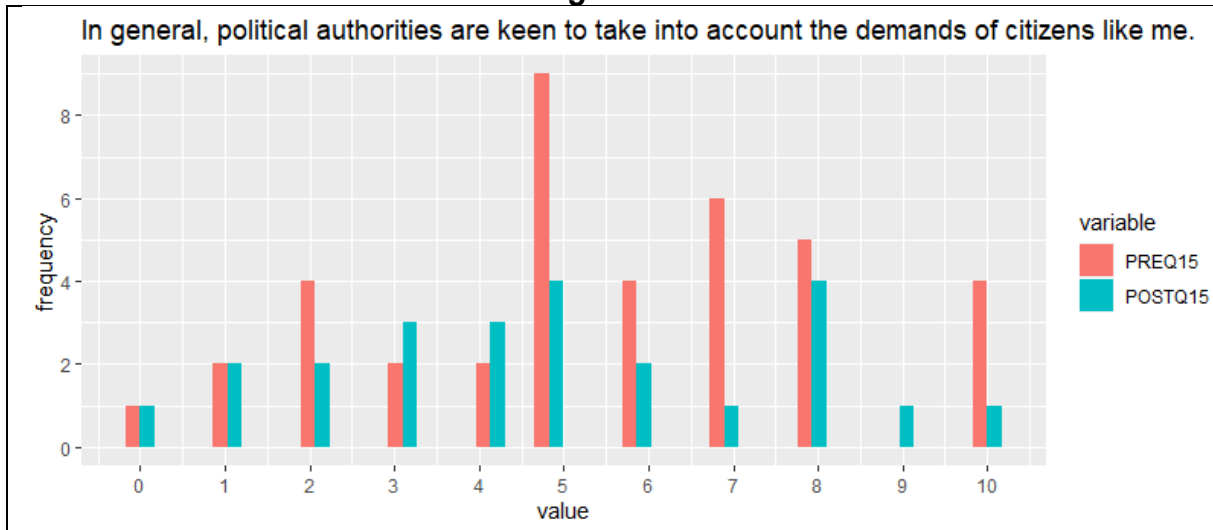
An introductory question is whether citizens have the feeling to – have – influence on political institutions. Figure 14 shows that the feelings of the participants are mixed on this question. What's more, the participation in the panel did not really change this at the aggregate level. It should indeed be reminded that, because the respondents – and their number – are not necessarily the same, one should be careful in comparing both pre- and post-survey.

Figure 14



The following question was more specific as it targeted the Brussels institutions. Before the panel, the expectations of the participants were quite diverse but with a majority of respondents choosing a value above '5'. After the panel, one can note that the mean decreases.

Figure 15



The first two questions put the emphasis on citizens. The next one concerns the role of experts. Figure 16 shows that the participants disagree on the idea of a government composed of experts. And one still finds these diverging opinions after the citizen panel.

Figure 16

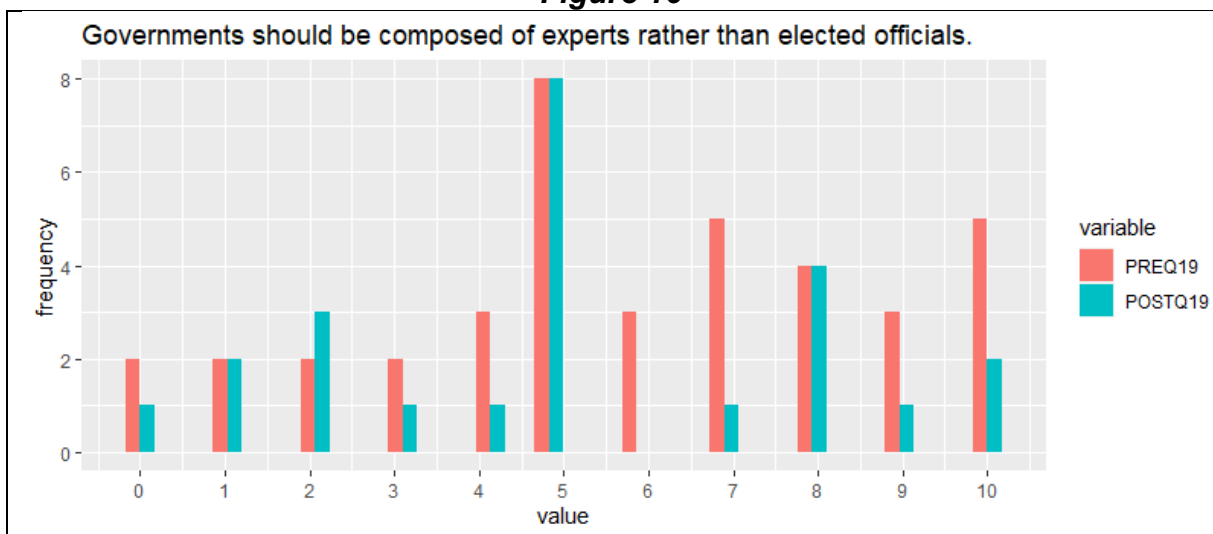


Figure 17 examines the support for a parliament composed of a mix between randomly selected citizens and elected representatives. Here, too, we find mixed opinions and we cannot really see any difference between before and after the citizen panel, even if beforehand a majority could be found around the values '8 to '10'.

Figure 17

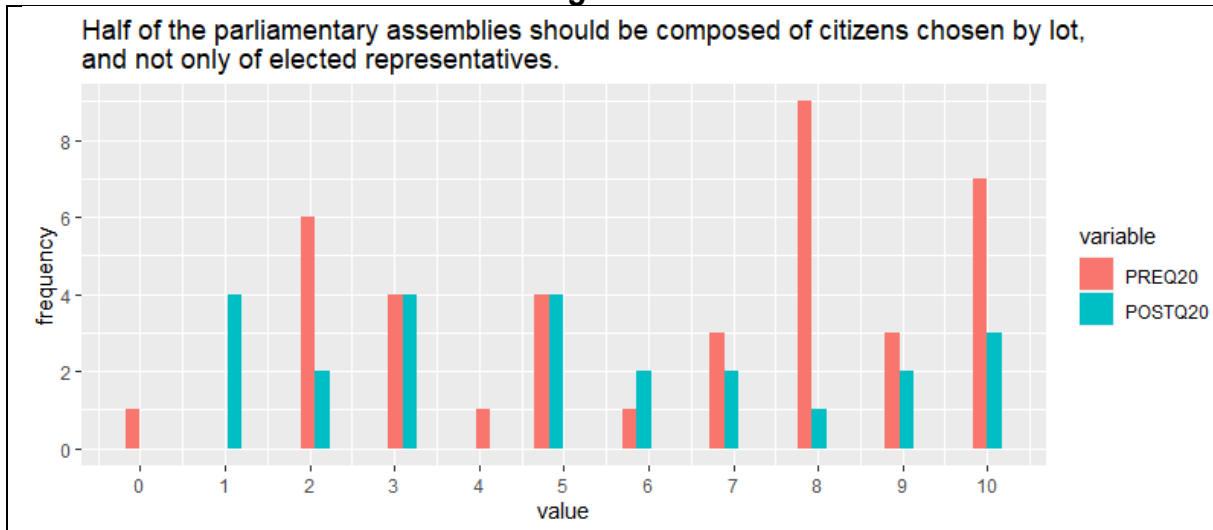
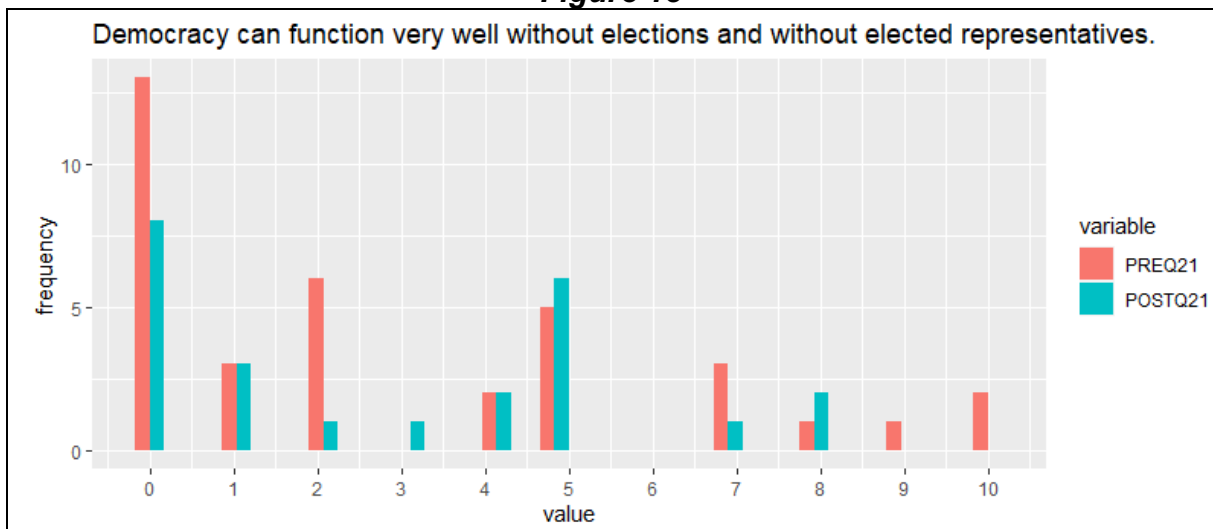


Figure 18 shows little difference between the pre- and the post-survey. Most participants are not in favour of a democracy without elections.

Figure 18



Another reason that is often given to implement democratic innovations is a decreasing trust in political institutions. Figure 19 shows the average trust that the participants have towards the Brussels Parliament, the Brussels' Government, the police, the judiciary, political parties and politicians, respectively.

Participants seem to trust the Parliament and the police the most, while they distrust political parties and politicians (with a mean below 5, out of a 0-10 scale, where 10 means fully trust). For all institutions, the trust slightly increases after participating in the citizen panel, except for trust in political parties and the court, which decreases. Yet, it should be noted that the difference is small and above all the respondents are not necessarily the same. Hence, the comparison between pre- and post-survey should be made with great caution.

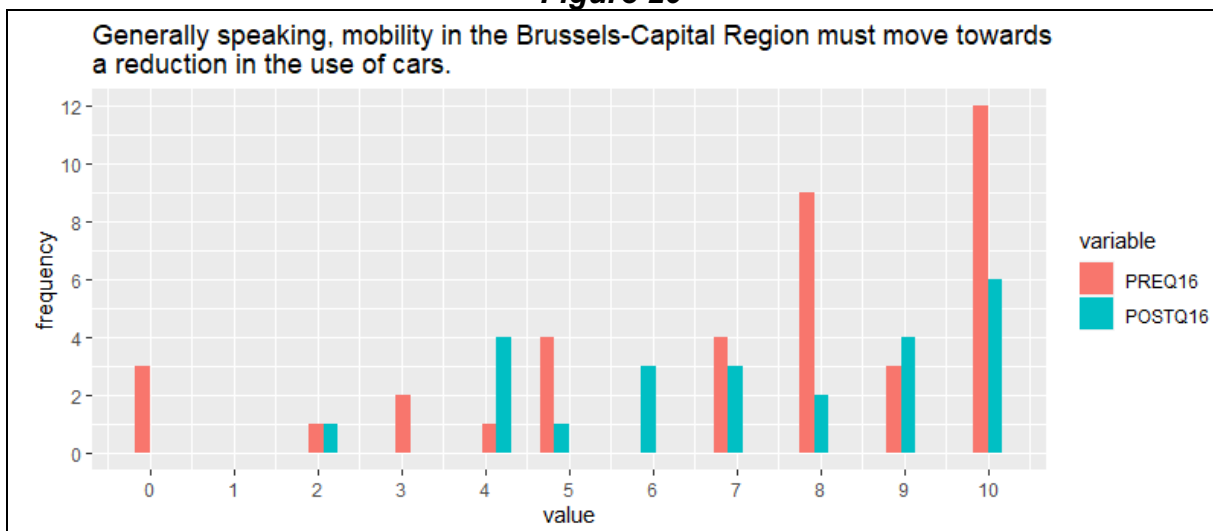
Figure 19

	PRE	POST
Brussel's Parliament	6.64	7.25
Brussel's Government	5.86	6.35
The police	6.74	7.04
The court	6.31	6.08
Political parties	4.69	4.13
Politicians	4.89	5.25

Questions concerning mobility in Brussels

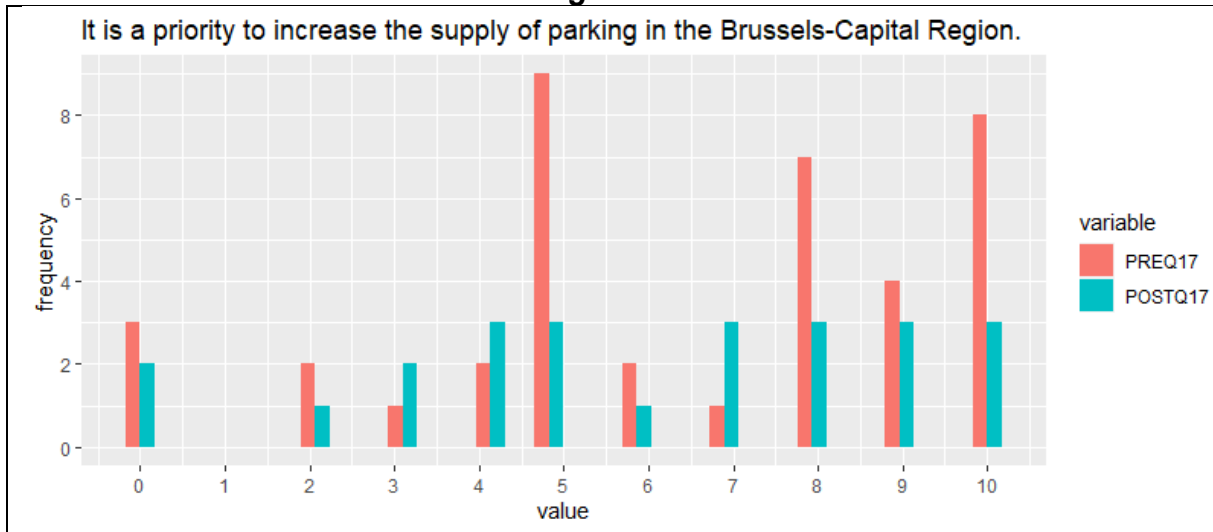
The last category concerns the opinions of the participants in the topic at stake, that is mobility in Brussels. These questions have a twofold interest: on the one hand, it becomes possible to see whether the panel is composed by a diversity of ideas or not and, on the other hand, whether the citizen panel brings about big changes. However, for the latter, it should be reminded that the results are presented at the aggregate level and not a comparison before and after for the same respondents. For the first statement presented in Figure 20, it can be noted that there is no agreement on a reduction in car traffic, and even probably less so afterwards.

Figure 20



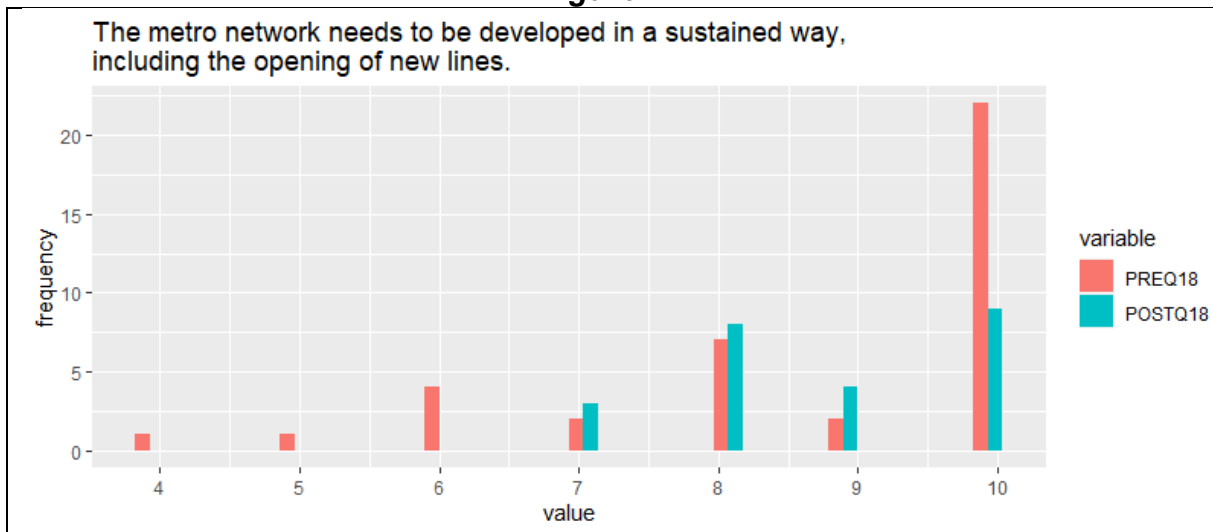
We can make the same analysis about another current issue in Brussel's mobility: the parking offer. Figure 21 clearly shows that the opinions became more diverse after the citizen panel than before. This might indicate that the participants have learned about the complexity of politics and mobility in Brussels.

Figure 21



A third issue in Brussels' mobility concerns the subway network. Figure 22 shows that the opinions on this issue were not very diverse initially (with a majority of '10') and that they did not change significantly between the two surveys.

Figure 22



Conclusion

This report aimed at summarizing the data collected from the participants of the "Make Your Brussels Mobility" citizen panel in Brussels. All the participants were invited to respond to a short questionnaire before the citizen panel and then a second time after the citizen panel. In the pre-survey, 37 participants filled it in. In the post-survey, 25 did so. We presented in this report the results for each question (PRE and POST) in an aggregate level on the same figure, but it should be kept in mind that the comparison should be treated carefully. The results, however, give an interesting overview of their opinions on several dimensions related to the citizen panel: their evaluation of the participation and of deliberation, the impact of the citizen panel, their trust towards political institutions, their visions of democracy and also their opinions regarding mobility in Brussels.

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