

A Song for the Deaf?

The Effects of Public Arbitration in a Polarized Atmosphere

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Research Interest: Effects of the 'Stuttgart 21' (S21) Arbitration



- S21: large scale, billion Euro reconstruction of central station
- Planned since 1994; Start of construction: 2010



- Rise of demonstrations with start of demolition of the old train station
- Highly polarized conflict about costs, risks, and legitimation of the project



- Tipping point Sep 30th: over 100 demonstrators injured in clashes with police
- Consequence: public arbitration to de-escalate and objectify the conflict

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The S21 Arbitration

- 8 discussions to “clarify numbers, data and facts” (joint fact finding) and pacify the city
- Participants: Representatives of supporters and opponents of S21, neutral arbitrator Heiner Geißler
- Highly discursive structure to exchange arguments and evidence
- All discussions broadcasted live on television and internet
- Huge media attention

Research Question

RQ

Did the prototype public arbitration help to resolve the conflict between citizens who oppose S21 and the project's supporters in politics and business?



Can the S21 arbitration be a role model for future conflict resolution efforts (in conflicts about infrastructure projects)?

Theoretical Framework

Assumption: Arbitration as a special type of Alternative Dispute Resolution and as deliberative discussions

(cp. Delli Carpini, Cook & Jacobs, 2004; Ehrmann & Stinson, 1999; Innes, 2004; Mendelberg, 2002; Menkel-Meadow, 2006)

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Knowledge of S21

(cp. Gastil, 2000; Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Andersen & Hansens, 2007)

Opinions on S21

(cp. Fishkin, 1999; Fishkin & Luskin, 1999; Gutmann & Thompson 1996; Luskin, Fishkin, & Jowell, 2002; Vinokur & Burnstein, 1978)

Relationship with supporters of S21

(cp. Beierle & Cayford, 2003; Chambers, 1996; Gaertner et al., 1999; McCombs & Reynold, 1999; Yankelovich, 1991)

Possible restrictions to hypothesized positive effects

- Polarizing effects of deliberative processes (cp. Stasavage, 2007; Wojcieszak, 2011)
- Consequences of selective information exposure and processing (cp. Iyengar et al. 2008; Knobloch-Westwerwick & Jingbo, 2009; Sears & Freedman, 1967)
- Restriction due to the incomplete design of the S21 arbitration most importantly: 'televised deliberation/dispute resolution'

Hypotheses

H1

Knowledge of S21

H1a: More satisfaction with availability of information on S21

H1b: Learning of arguments for S21

H2

Opinions on S21

H2a: Less negative evaluation of S21 as a whole

H2b: Less firm rejection of arguments for S21

H3

Relationship with supporters of S21

H3a: Less negative evaluation of supporters as a whole

H3b: Less negative evaluation of S21 representatives

H3c: Less negative evaluation of their communicative behavior

Method (1)

Design

- Two-wave panel survey right before and after the arbitration discussions
- Non-representative online access panel of inhabitants of the city and the region of Stuttgart
- 1039 panel members were addressed, 558 respondents finished first questionnaire (58%), 447 respondents finished second questionnaire

Sample

- Subsample of 191 respondents who identified themselves as opponents of S21
- 59% female; Age $M = 38.13$ years ($SD = 15.14$)
- 63% of respondents with general qualification for university entrance (Abitur)

Method (2): Measures

H1

Knowledge of S21

reported satisfaction with publicly available information on S21;
self-reported learning of arguments for and against S21

H2

Opinions on S21

global rating of Stuttgart 21; mean index of eight factual
arguments for S21 (Cronbach's α : t1 = .74; t2 = .81)

H3

Relationship with supporters of S21

Evaluation of the supporters of S21 as a whole and of political
and business representatives during the S21 disputes; 4-item-
scale 'communicative behavior' (Cronbach's α : t1 = .70; t2 = .76)

All items measured on 7-point-scales from -3 to +3

Results

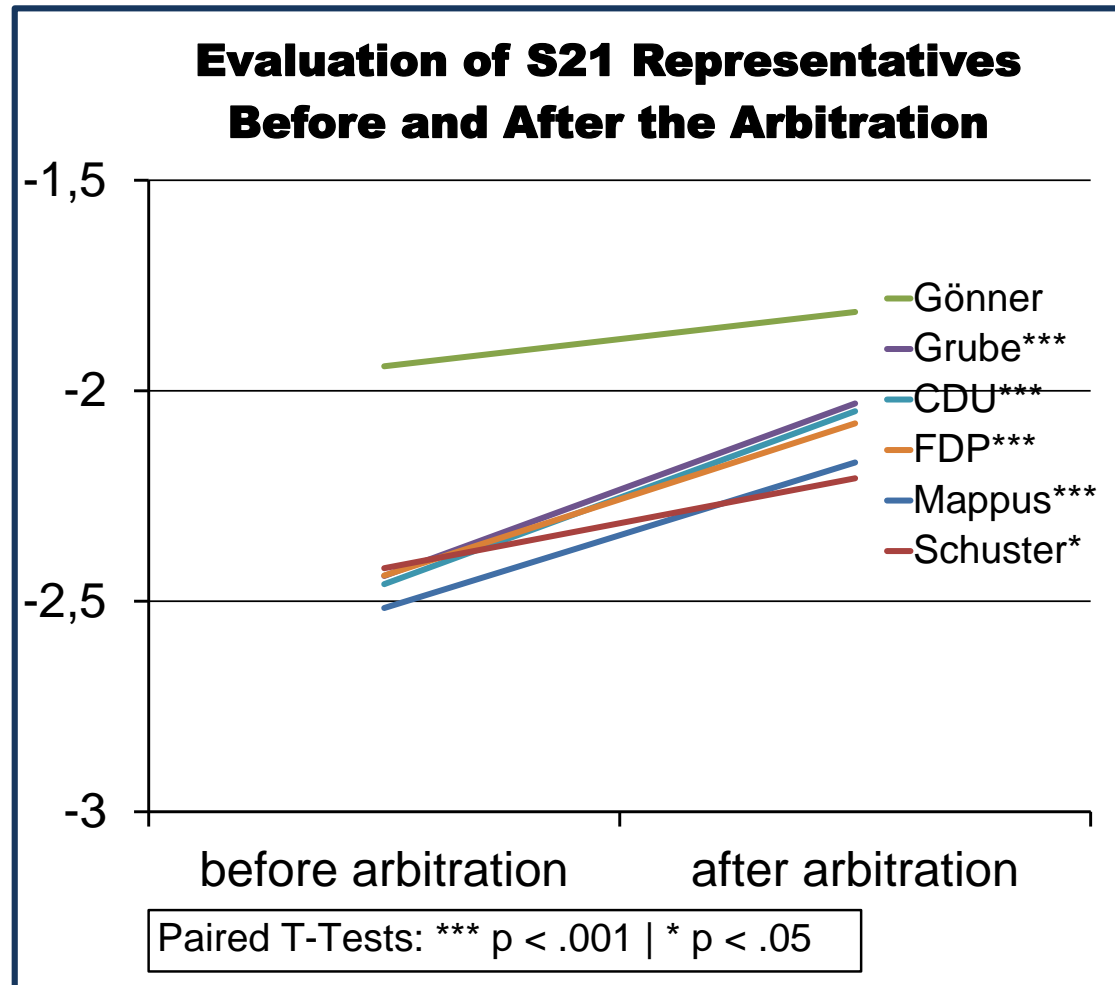
	Change $t_1 \rightarrow t_2$ <i>M (SD), p</i>	Result	
H1a	+1.26 (2.59), $p < .001$	Higher satisfaction with available information	✓
H1b ^A	-2.22 (2.82), $p < .001$	Learning of arguments against S21	✗
H2a	+0.48 (1.30), $p < .001$	Less negative evaluation of S21	✓
H2b	+0.08 (0.87), $p = .201$	Unchanged rejection of arguments for S21	✗
H3a	-0.06 (1.56), $p = .606$	Unchanged dislike of supporters of S21	✗

Notes

Results from paired T-Tests; Positive changes indicate changes in the direction predicted by the hypotheses

A Difference between learning of arguments for and against S21 (asked after the arbitration)

Results – H3b



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H2b	+0.08 (0.87), $p = .201$	Unchanged rejection of arguments for S21	✗
H3a	-0.06 (1.56), $p = .606$	Unchanged dislike of supporters of S21	✗
H3b	cp. figure	Less hatred of representatives of S21	✓
H3c	+0.29 (1.31), $p = .003$	Somewhat less negative evaluation of their communicative behavior	✓

Notes

Results from paired T-Tests; Positive changes indicate changes in the direction predicted by the hypotheses

A Difference between learning of arguments for and against S21 (asked after the arbitration)

Discussion



- The arbitration helped to normalize the relationship between the opposing citizens and the supporters, moving the focus back to the substantive aspects of S21.
- The arbitration raised the satisfaction with available information on S21.



- The arbitration did not resolve any factual disputes about the various aspects of the project.
- The higher satisfaction is likely caused by biased perception towards the 'own' arguments.
- Small magnitude of changes



- Under the specific circumstances of S21: Arbitration partly successful as pacifying intervention, but factual conflict unresolved
- Limited effects as consequences of selective perception of a 'televised deliberation/dispute resolution' and of further limitations inherent in the arbitration's design

Implications for future conflict resolution efforts

- Dilemma for conflict resolution efforts with large numbers of affected citizens (→ most infrastructure projects): Discussions of representatives may have little effects, but are there alternatives?
 - Call for new conflict resolution designs
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- Discussions of representatives should be combined with measures that actively involve common citizens (town halls, online discussions?)



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