



Cyprus 2015 Launch event and the presentation of first public opinion poll results, organized in the Goethe Institute (Ledra Palace Buffer Zone), Nicosia, 18 December 2009.

Photo credit: SeeD/ former "Cyprus 2015" initiative

Peacebuilding in Practice #2:

An innovation to engage people in peace processes:

Reflections from Cyprus



An innovation to engage people in peace processes: Reflections from Cyprus

All Rights Reserved, Interpeace, 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Interpeace and the Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) gratefully acknowledge the support of the following institutions for supporting and funding its wide reaching and multi-faceted efforts: The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) “Action for Cooperation and Trust”; the European Commission Representation in Cyprus; and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

Furthermore, SeeD also wishes to thank the leaders of the two communities, negotiation teams, United Nations Good Offices, UNFICYP, numerous policy makers, officials, academics, experts, and professionals from both communities who added substance and relevance to the participatory polling processes in Cyprus.

The ideas, reflections, and commentaries contained herein are the exclusive responsibility of Interpeace. Total or partial reproduction is authorized provided attribution to the source document is properly acknowledged.



Diplomatic Community event - Presentation of Cyprus 2015 poll results at the EU House - European Commission Representation, Nicosia, 19 January 2010.
Photo credit: Seed/ former "Cyprus 2015" initiative

Peacebuilding in Practice # 2: An innovation to engage people in peace processes: Reflections from Cyprus

Background

Since 1974, Cyprus has been a divided island between the Greek-Cypriot community in the South and the Turkish-Cypriot community in the North. Although the Cyprus conflict has been addressed over the past four decades by dozens of UN Security Council resolutions and countless conflict-resolution efforts, all have thus far failed to resolve the problem. During the latest round of negotiations that commenced in February this year, slow but significant progress is being reported by the two sides and by the UN Good Offices mission. If negotiations are successfully concluded, the communities

«Only a genuine effort to include and engage citizens in the peace process can generate momentum and mutual trust to break the pattern of deadlock»

will be called upon to ratify the settlement deal through simultaneous, separate referenda on both sides of the Green Line. Yet, over decades the respective communities have not been adequately prepared for or encouraged towards a political culture that promotes conditions for sustainable peace in Cyprus.

In April 2004, people in Cyprus were called upon to vote on a peace plan known as “Annan Plan” to reunite the island. Whatever the merits or weaknesses of the particular blueprint, the process failed to engender trust or societal participation. Hence, the ultimate result was inevitably unacceptable to wide cross sections of the Cypriot public. 65% of Turkish Cypriots voted in favour of the Plan, 76% of Greek Cypriots voted against it. This revealed that any peace process that does not take public opinion into account is doomed to fail: If the opinion of the two Cypriot communities is not taken into account and the future political compromise ignores the voice of the people, any reunification plan will remain a ‘hard sell’ regardless of the specific agreements achieved on the negotiation table. Although there is renewed optimism this year with the resumption of the peace talks, especially given the strong support of the international community, the lack of public engagement in the process remains a major concern. Therefore, it becomes particularly important to understand the public opinion since only a genuine effort to include and engage citizens in the peace process can generate momentum and mutual trust to break the pattern of deadlock.



Discussion on the public opinion survey results at a public presentation in Limassol, 2 March 2010
Photo credit: SeeD/ former "Cyprus 2015" initiative

Our work

This peacebuilding in practice issue presents the innovative methodology called "Participatory Polling", that Interpeace's partner, the Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) has developed. Moreover it demonstrates the potential impact and added-value of participatory polling based on its universal applicability in divided societies and peacebuilding contexts.

SeeD is a peacebuilding think-tank with a regional scope. It uses participatory research to make effective and sustainable policy recommendations aiming to enable societies at all levels to make informed decisions, based on the values of inclusivity, accountability and democracy (UNSG Ban Ki-moon's report S/2012/149). SeeD's mission is to promote knowledge and inclusivity as the basis for policy decisions while raising awareness of citizens so as to increase civic participation, responsibility

and multi-perspectivity. Its main domain of intervention includes policy-advisory services, focusing mainly on nations/states recovering from/or vulnerable to destabilizing conflict. In practical terms, SeeD's services include assessing public opinion, supporting participatory policy-making and/or reconciliation processes that have captured stakeholders/citizens voices with clarity and transparency, and providing leaders with platforms to receive the messages of the people and formulate policies that resonate and are understood by the people.

SeeD was officially established in September 2012 and grew out of Interpeace's Cyprus 2015 Initiative, which was launched in May 2009 with the intention to create a bridge between public opinion and the policy level of the Cyprus peace process. Thus, this locally owned bi-communal project turned into a fully-fledged independent institution. SeeD continues its close strategic partnership with Interpeace, drawing on best practices from around the world.

«SeeD highlights how polling can not only gauge public opinion, but shape it in a way that can contribute to peace processes»

What is Participatory Polling?

Participatory Polling is an innovative action research methodology through which the general public is consulted on policy issues, using a questionnaire that has been designed with the contribution of societal and political stakeholders. The results of the poll then serve as a basis for public dialogue and policymaking process. Participatory Polling not only captures public opinion, but also serves a communicative and democratic function: It opens up avenues of communication between society at large and policy-makers. Often these avenues are blocked due to the realities of political life, even in representative democracies. More specifically, Participatory Polling can contribute towards the fulfilment of the following objectives:

Bridging the Gap between policy-makers and society at large: Participatory Polling carries the voice of ordinary citizens to societal and political leaders in much greater sophistication than is usually achieved through conventional polling. It supports and enables the functions of leadership in terms of setting the policy agenda and identifying salient issues.

Enhancing the awareness and acceptance between different groups in conflict:

Participatory Polling in divided societies foster understanding between groups and communities in conflict settings. By putting each group face to face with the views and opinions of the other groups, stereotypes are dismantled and a more realistic foundation for dialogue on the basis of the underlying concerns and priorities of each group becomes possible.

Development of consensus proposals:

Participatory Polling makes it possible to compare the level of acceptance for several competing proposals on any relevant policy issue. A policy proposal tested in a participatory poll that proves to be acceptable to all groups involved, may then form the basis for bringing all the parties around the same table to elaborate on the proposal and enable implementation.

How has Participatory Polling been carried out in Cyprus?

The Center for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development, SeeD, proposes that its novel methodology called Participatory Polling would qualitatively affect the negotiation process by getting the voices of ordinary citizens to be heard and taken into consideration



by the negotiators in the Cyprus peace process.

Being inspired by significant work done by Dr. Colin Irwin on peace polling¹ as part of the Northern Ireland peace process, SeeD acknowledges how polling can not only gauge public opinion, but shape it in a way that can contribute to peace processes. Dr. Colin Irwin explains "peace polling" as "asking communities and people what they would accept in exchange for peace—can build confidence among the parties, and give the public a sense of ownership in the peace process." SeeD modified and adopted a more inclusive version of the "peace polling" where not only the negotiators but also the societal and political stakeholders take part in design of the poll questionnaires.

1. Irwin, C. (2012). *The People's Peace: Pax Populi, Pax Dei - How Peace Polls are Democratizing The Peace Making Process*. CA: CreateSpace.

Between 2009 and 2011, SeeD (formerly Cyprus 2015 Initiative) conducted three public opinion polls², examining several dimensions of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot public opinion (including underlying values and attitudes, perceptions and expectations of the peace process, hopes and fears, as well as public evaluations of policy options over the critical negotiation dossiers of Security / Guarantees, Property / Territory, and Governance / Power Sharing). In practical terms, Participatory Polling methodology suggests that public opinion polls are designed in collaboration with the actual negotiating teams to discover areas of over-lapping consensus at a grass-roots level and calibrate the final settlement accordingly. Therefore, for the design of these polls, the Cyprus 2015 team has liaised closely, both with the office of Mr. Alexander Downer, the Special Advisor to the UN Secretary

2. Cyprus 2015 (2009) *Investigating the Future: An in-depth study of Public Opinion in Cyprus* / Cyprus 2015 (2010) *Next Steps in the Peace Talks* / Cyprus 2015 (2011) *Bridging the gap in the inter-communal negotiations*.

«There are several indications that results from participatory polls are influencing policy decisions»

General, and with the offices of the two Leaders, as well as other relevant stakeholders such as the political parties and civil society organizations. The poll findings were used for developing a road map for the constructive engagement and participation of the wider public in the peace process, in a way that will enhance the sense of societal ownership – and by extension the long-term viability – of any future political settlement. Thus, SeeD utilized polling as a means of communicating to the broader public and with the respective leaderships. Later in March 2012, SeeD published its fourth poll³, which provided a comprehensive analysis of how the public could be effectively engaged in the peace process. It acted as a guiding model for the factors influencing support or opposition to the peace process such as risk-aversion, materialism, religiosity and the cost-benefit analysis of reaching a political settlement on the island.

Results

- **Influencing political decisions:** There are several indications that the public opinion poll results are influencing policy decisions, particularly on the need to address, in the political negotiations, key public concerns that were not so

evident beforehand, such as those regarding the security issue. During a presentation of the findings, Alexander Downer, the former UN Special Advisor to the Secretary-General said:

"The United Nations really appreciates the work you [SeeD team] have been doing. We think it is an enormous help to the negotiations".

- Through the participatory element of the polls, SeeD was able **to engage all three tracks of society, the leadership, the broad civil society and the general public** both as producers of information, through polls, and as consumers of information, through the media. Surveys were designed in consultation with the leaders' representatives (Track 1) and the relevant stakeholders (Track 2). Findings were disseminated publicly, through wide media coverage (Track 3) but also through direct presentations to the leaders and the relevant stakeholders.

- **Engendering political trust and social participation:** In terms of demonstrating the impact of Participatory Polling, it is very useful to also look at the implications where Participatory Polling was not implemented. People in Cyprus were called upon to vote on a peace plan known as "Annan Plan" to reunite the island almost ten years ago, with the majority of Turkish Cypriots

3. Cyprus 2015 (2012) Understanding the Public Dimension of the Cyprus Peace Process



voting yes, and the majority of Greek Cypriots voting no. Whatever the merits or weaknesses of the particular blueprint, the process failed to engender trust or societal participation since negotiations on the Cyprus issue were conducted without reference to the public of either community. Therefore, people felt that they were neither consulted nor informed about decisions, which would affect their lives, leaving open the possibility that they would be presented a fait accompli, over which they had little choice. With such challenges in mind, one of the aims of the Participatory Polling methodology is to support the development of a public atmosphere that is receptive to the technical and political solutions that might be achieved through the direct negotiations, and prevent the repetition of a rejection in the future.

- **Phrasing conflicting issues through a promising lens:** The poll questionnaires are designed in a way that aims at facilitating com-

promise and fostering acceptable solutions. This allows an easy identification of policy proposals that have the potential of becoming consensual solutions that are acceptable to all groups involved become readily apparent. In practical terms, the Participatory Polling methodology highlights "marginalized moderate voices" in each community and assists participants to integrate these into "generally accepted moderate voices". This process generates information on the different aspects of key issues, highlighting elements of convergence and agreement, and assisting participants to integrate these into more constructive visions and proposals. These positive elements are then disseminated to the wider public so that they can inform the public agenda in both communities and generate a public atmosphere conducive to constructive dialogue.

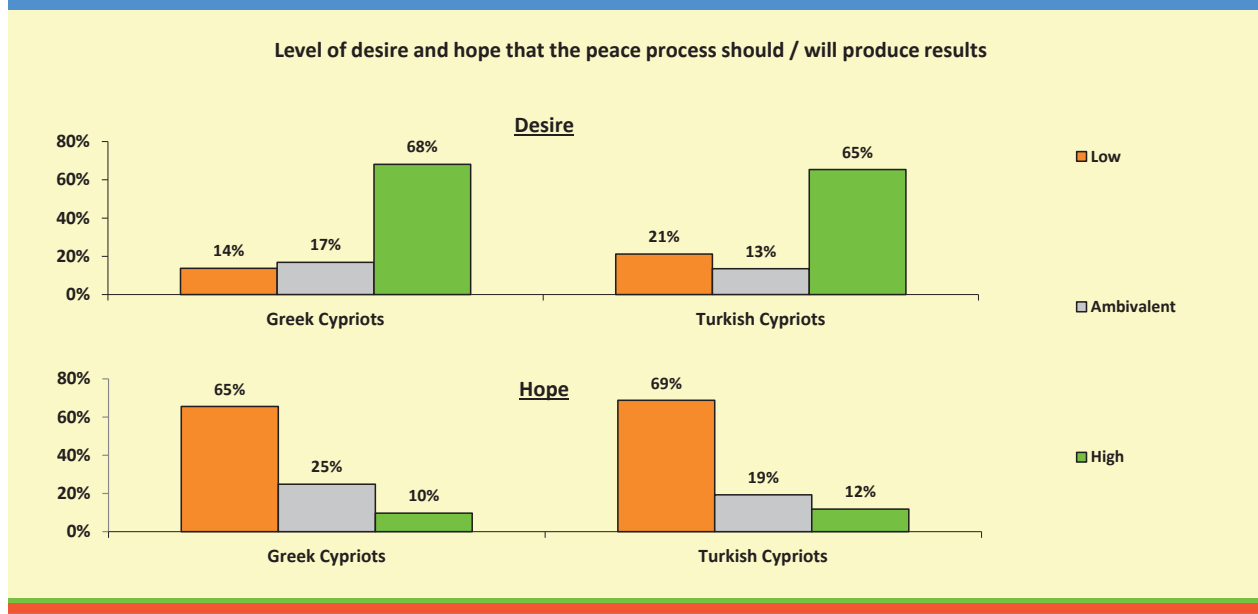
- **Inspiring other Interpeace partners:** There has been an interest from partners from So-

«Sustainable peace does not only require political agreement but also grassroots support. Inclusive and participatory peace processes enhance the chances of sustainable solutions»

maliland, Mali and Israel on this methodology for a variety of reasons. For Israel, for example, the local team is considering using participatory polling to open up windows of understanding between groups and communities in conflict. By putting each group face to face with the views and opinions of the other groups, stereotypes are dismantled and a more realistic foundation

for dialogue on the basis of the underlying concerns and priorities of each group becomes possible. In other cases, such as Somaliland, it serves as a means of measuring the perceptions of the people, determining the new programme interventions, informing specific public policy direction and enhancing public participation in policy decision making.

Level of desire and hope that the peace process should / will produce results



Is there desire that the Peace Process should succeed?

A majority of the Greek Cypriot community would like to see the peace process being concluded successfully and leading to a Comprehensive Settlement while a majority of Turkish Cypriots similarly espouses the same goal. However, respondents have very little faith that there will be a breakthrough. Hence, the high level of desire in both communities legitimizes the need for peace negotiations, whereas the low level of hope indicates the need for redesigning the peace process.



Gaining recognition:

These are some selected quotes that demonstrate the interest generated by the results of the Participatory Polling processes in Cyprus.

By influential actors:

• ***"Ahead of the January 2012 meeting at Greentree, Cyprus 2015, a civil society group and partner in United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Action for Cooperation and Trust in Cyprus (UNDP-ACT), shared a targeted policy brief with the two negotiating teams, which informed them about the state of public opinion on the issues under discussion and suggested ways forward in the peace process, including ensuring greater public ownership. The United Nations continues to encourage civil society engagement in the process."***

Paragraph 14, 'Assessment report of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on the status of the negotiations in Cyprus', 12 March 2012, S/2012/149.

• ***"The project [Cyprus 2015/SeeD] became the only genuine gauge of ordinary Cypriots' opinions of their leaders' management of peace negotiations, and while negotiations were taking place, it was the only channel providing the leaderships with evidence-based analysis of constituents' reactions to their respective negotiating positions."***

'Citizen Peacemaking in Cyprus: The story of co-operation and trust across the Green Line' - UNDP-ACT Report, 2013.

• ***"I support in principle the basic Interpeace philosophy of creating research-based objective information which could be valuable to the two leaderships in Cyprus, should they choose to benefit from it."***

Letter of support to the Cyprus 2015 Programme, by Former Turkish Cypriot leader Mehmet Ali Talat, December 2007.

• ***"The importance of public opinion in the solution of the Cyprus problem is huge, for purposes of approval as well as for purposes of implementation of the agreed settlement. The greatest***

value of this survey is that it gives simultaneously the views of the public opinion within both communities."

Nikos Nikolaides, Member of Parliament, Republic of Cyprus, March 2010.

• *"Based on the findings of the impeccably organised research perspective, our opinions can be developed, contributing creatively to a long-term and viable future of our country, for the main issues concerning everybody."*

Yiannos Lamaris, Member of Parliament, Republic of Cyprus, March 2010.

• *"The island-wide public opinion poll (with sample size of 2,000 people) conducted by the Cyprus 2015 Initiative reveals an important fact about the opening of Varosha. According to this poll, the majority of both Turkish-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots consider opening up Varosha under the auspices of UN and EU acceptable. It is very important and promising to see that both communities support the opening of Varosha."*

Mustafa Ongun, an influential Turkish Cypriot academic and activist, in an article titled: "Isn't it time to see the truth of Varosha?" Gaile Newspaper⁴, July 2012.

• *"Discussion panels on political and social issues in television programmes, for example, still only rarely include civil society professionals. A recent exception was the Cyprus 2015 project which, in delivering a series of population surveys on the key aspects of the political problem, attracted considerable media and public attention."*

Research Briefing Paper by the International NGO Training and Research Center in Cyprus (INTRAC) "Cyprus civil society: developing trust

and cooperation" by Norman Gillespie, Vasiliki Georgiou, and Sevinc Insay, November 2011

By the media:

• During the implementation of the participatory polling project (between 2009 and 2012), there were approximately 140 media mentions of the public opinion poll results (both on local and international media).

• Poll results were covered on front-pages of the leading local newspapers (including Turkish Cypriot daily newspaper Kibris, Greek Cypriot daily Phileleftheros), as well as several editorials and exclusive interviews.

• This media exposure led to further analysis, questioning and interpretation by opinion-makers in the society: For instance: I) a well-known Turkish Cypriot journalist, Mehmet Moreket, made his own analysis based on the team's poll findings and provided his own perspective in his daily column published in Havadis newspaper (22/09/2012), emphasizing the importance of support by the general public to the peace process; II) Journalist Tom Lawrence concluded an article in a leading Greek Cypriot newspaper (20/02/2011), Politis, mentioning that the poll findings of the team are key in understanding the fears of the two communities. He urged his readers to look at the poll results carefully because, according to him, the only way to understand the other side is by understanding their fears and if they don't understand each other there is no way that peace will be achieved.

4. Online link of the article: <http://alternatifim.org/2012/07/31/>

- **International media coverage** included BBC London, Al Jazeera International, ABC Spanish TV, The Daily Tribune, Deutsche Welle and Le Soir among others. This wide international coverage demonstrates the credibility, recognition and acknowledgement the poll results have for the Cyprus peace process.

Impact at large:

Sustainable peace does not only require political agreement but also grassroots support. Inclusive and participatory peace processes enhance the chances of sustainable solutions that allow conflict to be channelled through democratic and legal institutions. SeeD has been contributing to the ongoing peace process in Cyprus through Participatory Polling. This case study demonstrates the utility of Participatory Polling in Cyprus and points to the promise it holds in other contexts.

Take away box

- **Cyprus peace processes** will have much better chance to progress positively if it is redesigned to engage the wider public.
- **SeeD's Participatory Polling** has created avenues for communication between the peace negotiators and the society which made it possible for them to evaluate compromises for peace proposals.
- **Participatory polling is a relevant tool for democratization**, peace and reconciliation efforts because of its proven added value for increased public participation and informed dialogue between opposing groups.