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Security Cafés: A deliberative democratic method to engage citizens in meaningful two-way conversations with security authorities and to gather data

Alisa Puustinen & Harri Raisio & Vesa Valtonen

Abstract

The Security Café is a deliberation and data collection method developed for security authorities and researchers to access the opinion of the general public on issues of importance to their safety and security. It is based on the ideals of deliberative democracy, and the method derives from Citizens' Juries and World Cafés. A Security Café typically lasts for three to five hours and involves receiving information, facilitated small group discussions, and the use of idea rating sheets, or pre- and post-deliberation attitudinal surveys. This study examines three projects conducted in Finland and concludes that the method has both intrinsic and extrinsic value: it empowers ordinary citizens and gives them an opportunity to engage in the construction of safer and more secure societies. At the same time, it offers authorities the opportunity to inform the public, and most importantly to harvest the opinion of the public. For researchers, the method offers a feasible way to gather extensive reliable qualitative data quickly and effectively.

Keywords: deliberative democracy, mini-public, Security Café, security authorities, resilience

1. Introduction

The Security Café is an adjusted deliberative democratic method deriving from the ideals of deliberative democracy and deliberative mini-publics. Elstub (2010) and Ercan and Dryzek (2015), among others, consider that deliberative democracy currently dominates the theory of democracy. Although this theory development is not yet so visible in practice, in a recent article in *Science*, a large number of deliberative scholars optimistically point out that “[t]he real world of democratic politics is currently far from the deliberative ideal, but empirical evidence shows that the gap can be closed” (Dryzek et al. 2019: 1144). One promising example of the spread of deliberative ideals is the proliferation of deliberative mini-publics. In this article it is, however, pointed out that the use of deliberative mini-publics is not yet common within the domains of safety and security. It might be, for example, that questions of safety and especially (national) security call for secrecy and swift and determinate authoritative action, thus becoming barriers for wider citizen participation and deliberation (see

Torfinn, Sørensen & Røiseland 2016). The Security Café model is one example of how deliberation could potentially be implemented also in the domains of safety and security.

As a parliamentary republic the Finnish society sturdily rests on the traditional ideals on representative democracy. Representative democracy is strong both on national and on local levels of government. Thus, traditionally citizen participation has been channelled through the formal structures of government, such as local committees and city councils. An alternative route to citizen participation has always been the third sector, mostly in the form of voluntary associations.

On the other hand, *comprehensive Security* is a Finnish preparedness model (a whole-systems approach) in which the vital functions of society are secured through cooperation between the public authorities, the business community, non-governmental organizations, and individual citizens (see Aaltola & Juntunen 2018). These various societal actors form a network of comprehensive security in which the sharing of information, setting of joint objectives, and cooperation can take place in a flexible manner. The latest *Security Strategy for Society*, a government resolution which harmonises national preparedness principles and guides preparedness in the various administrative branches, emphasizes the role of individual citizens in enhancing the resilience of Finnish society. In order to build a sense of community, citizens are encouraged to contribute to the construction of a resilient society by actively fostering safety and security both at home and in their neighbourhood. The approach is also supported by educational and cultural services that help to improve citizens' knowledge and their ability to act in a changing society. At the same time the strategy instructs security authorities to include citizens in the local preparedness planning (Security Committee 2017).

In addition to actions such as developing personal preparedness, the strategy calls for agile, and flexible models to engage large numbers of citizens in deliberations on safety and security issues, so as to encourage citizens to become "policymaking partners", that is, preparedness planning becomes something that is done along *with*, not *for* the citizens (Schoch-Spana 2012: 82). The Security Café was developed as one such model of collaboration.

The Security Café model was originally developed as part of a Finnish project called the Role of Civil Society in National Defence (funded by the Scientific Advisory Board for Defence, operating in the administrative branch of the Ministry of Defence), which sought ways to engage ordinary citizens in discussions about their own role as part of the Finnish Model of Comprehensive Security (Raisio et al. 2017a). Subsequently, the Security Café model was tested in two projects. First, it was used as a

deliberation and data collection method in a study funded by the Ministry of the Interior seeking to analyse the views of citizens on asylum seekers and asylum seeker policy in Finland (Puustinen et al. 2017). In addition, it was applied as a data collection method in a project funded as part of the Finnish government's analysis, assessment, and research activities, which examined the role of the third sector in supporting public authorities' security functions (Jalava et al. 2017). A total of 16 Security Cafés were run during those projects.

This methodological article briefly describes the roots of the Security Café. It also introduces the underpinnings of Security Cafés and the preconditions for their successful operation, and particularly demonstrates how the Security Café can be organized and applied in different contexts. Finally, we reflect upon experiences of the use of the method in the different projects mentioned above and how it might be developed further and applied also in different contexts as part of the methodology of security studies.

Two authors of this article (HR & AP) were involved in the implementation of all three projects and 16 Security Cafés. The third author (VV) observed the projects as a member of the Finnish Security Committee's Secretariat, and in the third project was part of its advisory board. The intention in this article is to combine these different research-based and practice-based views in order to foster a deeper understanding of the prospects of and challenges facing Security Cafés in the domains of safety and security.

2. Roots in the ideals of deliberative democracy and deliberative mini-publics

Deliberative democracy is a form of democracy that values discussion, reflection, and consideration over simply voting (Chambers 2003). Among others, the absence of power, and the presence of mutual respect, reason giving, sincerity, orientation to the common good, and equal opportunities for influence are seen as defining features of deliberation (Mansbridge 2015). In addition, prior research emphasizes the epistemic goals of deliberation ("truth-tracking") as a new standard of deliberation (e.g. Min & Wong 2018). It should be noted that deliberation does not refer to ordinary everyday discussions. According to Mansbridge (2015: 29) and Dryzek (2002) deliberation is instead, at a minimum, "mutual communication that involves weighing and reflecting on preferences, values, and interests regarding matters of common concern". Fundamentally, deliberative democracy is a normative theory and a transformative project. As such, it is not so much a theory explaining and describing

political reality (i.e. *what is*), as a theory determining desirable political activity (i.e. *what ought to be*) (Ercan & Dryzek, 2015; Elstub & Böker 2015).

Deliberative democracy is often seen as an umbrella term for a wide variety of innovative deliberative democratic processes (e.g. Nabatchi 2010). These are commonly called *deliberative mini-publics* (Grönlund, Bächtiger & Setälä 2014). Ideally, such mini-publics should be inclusive of stakeholder populations; meaning that those participating in the deliberations should as far as possible represent different societal views. Mini-publics should be deliberative, to allow participants to thoroughly consider the topics and weigh different options and the values underlying decisions; they should have influence, to be a genuine collaboration with decision-makers; in other words, they should influence policy (Carson & Hartz-Karp 2005). Examples of such deliberative democratic processes include *Citizens' Juries* (e.g. Scuffham et al. 2016), *Deliberative Polls* (e.g. Fishkin 2009) and *Citizens' Assemblies* (e.g. Carson et al. 2013).

Ryan and Smith (2013), however, consider mini-publics a contested field and distinguish three different categories of mini-publics in an attempt to clarify the concept. The first category encompasses mini-publics of *restrictive definition*. Such mini-publics (Deliberative Polls) emphasize statistical representation and the strict conduct and analysis of pre- and post-deliberation attitudinal surveys. Mini-publics in the category of *intermediate definition* (e.g. Citizens' Juries and Citizens' Assemblies) often use quasi-random sampling techniques and end with the production of collective recommendations. Finally, mini-publics in the *expansive definition* category are deliberative processes that have clear elements of self-selection, that is, they are open to all citizens; *World Cafés* (e.g. Carson 2011) and *Participatory Budgeting* (e.g. Stolzenberg & Wampler 2018) seem to fit in this last category.

The use of deliberative mini-publics is not yet widespread within the domains of safety and security; although there are some examples of such activity. One such example is a Citizens' Jury that took place in Finland in October 2014 and was part the Pirkka14 emergency preparedness exercise (Raisio & Virta 2016; Raisio & Ehrström 2017). The fictional scenario for the exercise was an increasingly tense international situation and subsequent cyber-attacks with broad ramifications. The parameters of the Citizens' Jury were delimited by the abovementioned scenario. The issues deliberated upon included citizens' preparedness for an emergency, community resilience, major disruption to the electricity supply, and the improvement of emergency and disaster communications. This Citizens' Jury involved 16 jurors and the jury process consisted of five hours of deliberation per day for three days

and a subsequent press event. Jurors watched a video where the scenario was described, asked questions of the expert panel, observed a specific accident simulation in the field, participated in facilitated deliberations and, finally, composed a declaration representing the opinion of the jury, which included 20 suggestions for improvement ranging from wider visions to more concrete action plans. Detailed responses of various quality were received in due course from nine relevant stakeholders, including the Finnish Defence Forces, the National Police Board, and the Regional State Administrative Agency of Western and Inland Finland.

The value of deliberative democracy and deliberative mini-publics has been discussed in several publications (e.g. Grönlund, Bächtiger & Setälä 2014; Curato et al. 2017). In the context of emergencies and disasters, the following positive aspects have been raised (Schoch-Spana et al 2007; Shane 2012): Through public deliberation of preparedness policy, leaders can tap into the collective wisdom of the citizenry; citizens can then help set policy priorities; and especially importantly, inform value-laden policy decisions. Moreover, inclusive citizen participation initiatives contribute to making contingency plans more robust, feasible, and accepted than they might be without any citizen input, as they would include lessons distilled from local experiential knowledge. Trust between public authorities and communities may also be improved and citizens become more interested in and knowledgeable about safety and security matters. In addition, public deliberation may have a positive impact on the development of community resilience and also work as a “protective mechanism against conflict and division in recovery” (Millen 2011: 16). Wilson (2009: 22) scrutinized the deliberative planning for disaster recovery in New Orleans and concluded that: “Not just feel-good by-products of public deliberation, social trust and social healing are important dividends of deliberative democracy, especially in communities on the road to recovery from natural disaster”.

Similarly, various obstacles have been identified that hinder the delivery of high-quality deliberative processes in the safety and security domains. Virta and Branders (2016) highlight the risk that deliberation over security strategies and governance processes loses its political meaning, that is, “Citizens’ Juries and other participation and deliberation events and forums are recast as capacity-building and preparedness training forums rather than places for true deliberation”. If that happens, then the critical transformative project of deliberative democracy becomes questionable, as radical and revolutionary thoughts, as well as alternative options for action, become mere contingencies to be tamed. On the other hand, state-level-oriented security strategies, such as the Security Strategy for Society, aims merely to enhance deliberative democratic collaboration at local and regional levels, where a continuous dialogue is possible.

Lee Jenni et al. (2015) raise the issues of transparency and information sharing. The tradition of providing information only on a “need-to-know basis” and the need to protect operational security affects the way citizens understand the many perspectives on issues deliberated upon (including operational needs and objectives). In addition, the representativeness of deliberative mini-publics can cause issues in that their composition has been rather homogenous in that they tend to attract relatively affluent and security-oriented members of the public (Raisio & Virta 2016). One must also bear in mind that the use of security information and open forums creates a potential risk for the authorities. Citizen efforts need to be legitimized and authorities must understand the logic underpinning the civil society in order for it to yield benefits rather than creating confusion or establishing pseudo-participation (Valtonen 2010).

3. The Security Café – Form and Modus Operandi

The Security Café is a combination of the abovementioned Citizens’ Jury and World Café methods (see Table 1) and as such, can be positioned between the intermediate and expansive definition categories of deliberative mini-publics (Ryan & Smith 2014). In comparison to World Cafés, which are generally open events, Security Cafés aim to assemble a large number of enrolled people and to choose a diverse group of around 25–30 participants. In addition, participants at Security Cafés receive extensive information and participate in facilitated discussions on pre-selected topics. The main difference to the more developed deliberative mini-publics, such as Citizens’ Juries, is the duration of the event. Instead of several days, the whole event generally lasts only between 3 to 5 hours. Similar to Citizens’ Juries, the Security Café method emphasizes a direct linkage to decision-making. Relevant security authorities are involved in the implementation of the Security Café from planning to conclusion. The authorities also take a visible position in using the outputs of Security Cafés. The aim is to achieve genuine two-way interaction between citizens and authorities, and to produce input into the decision-making processes.

Next, the different phases – the planning, recruitment, execution, and impact – of the Security Café method are discussed. The phases are described by reference to the three projects and the 16 Security Cafés implemented in Finland. Table 2 presents a summary of the projects and the Security Cafés implemented at the end of the following section, which as a whole is based on the research reports of the three projects (Raisio et al. 2017a; Puustinen et al. 2017; Jalava et al. 2017).

Table 1. Features of Citizens' Juries, Security Cafés, and World Cafés.

	Citizens' Jury	Security Café	World Café
Steering	Extensive advisory committee	Compact advisory committee	Conveners decide on the issues to be addressed
Participant selection	Stratified random sampling; scientific polling techniques	Diverse group chosen to participate from larger enrolled number	Usually open to all
Number of participants	16–24	25–30	From 12 to 100s
Compensation	Often offered, e.g. 50 € per day	Can be used, e.g. 20 € / café	Usually none
Duration	3 to 5 days	3 to 5 hours	Generally, 2 hours
Information	Expert witnesses and / or written material	Expert witnesses, present for the whole duration	Usually none; participants are familiar with the topic
Facilitation	Highly skilled and neutral facilitators; various facilitation techniques	Each small group has a neutral facilitator; participants stay in the same groups for the whole duration	Self-facilitated; small groups select "hosts" among themselves; participants move between groups
End result	Written declaration of the jury, presented in news conference	Collective view emerging through idea rating sheets	Insights are shared in a whole group conversation; visual aids may be used
Impact	Relevant decision-makers respond to the recommendations made by the jury	Relevant decision-makers respond to the recommendations made by the café	Conversations have an intrinsic value; however, opportunities for action may emerge

3.1. Planning phase

The Security Café method was originally developed in Project 1. The starting point for the project was to develop a more agile version of the previously described Pirkka14 Citizens' Jury. The requirement necessitated work on the planning phase, as there was no model to pilot at the time. The basic principles for the Security Café were drawn up in cooperation with researchers from three universities (the University of Vaasa, the University of Tampere, and the National Defence University). More specific planning took place in each of three pilot Security Cafés. Although the project had a strong research focus, each café was structured to address a real-world issue. Each café then recruited a compact advisory committee to advise on setting the questions to be deliberated upon and on choosing the expert witnesses. In addition, the members of the advisory committees committed to participating in the whole process and establishing the impact of the Security Café.

The advisory committee of the first pilot Security Café consisted of representatives from the Finnish Immigration Service (the main collaborator), the Lapland Police Department, the Jaeger Brigade from the Finnish Defence Forces, and the Finnish Red Cross. With the guidance of the advisory committee members, the theme of the Security Café was set as the establishment and operation of the registration centre for asylum seekers that was opened in the centre of the city of Tornio during the 2015 European refugee crisis. The centre processed 32 000 asylum seekers during its period of operation. The aim was to collate the experiences of local residents and suggestions for development for the future. The second and third Security Cafés were initiated in a similar fashion. The main collaborator in the second café was the Regional State Administrative Agency of Western and Inland Finland and in the third café, it was the Guard Jaeger Regiment from the Finnish Defence Forces. The second pilot café dealt with the roles and tasks of public authorities and citizens in the face of various emergencies and disaster situations. In addition, crisis communication was deliberated upon. The focus of the third café was on the topical theme of hybrid threats.

The Finnish Ministry of the Interior became interested in the Security Café method, which led to Project 2. The objective of the project was to obtain as comprehensive a picture as possible of the experiences and opinions of the Finnish people relating to the asylum seeker situation. The project also sought ideas for developing activities in the future. The project was then policy-oriented and linked to ongoing work on internal security strategy. Five café events (called Citizen Forums in this project to convey neutrality) were planned with representatives from the ministry, the Finnish Immigration Service, and the Emergency Services College. In this case no specific questions were set for deliberation in any of the café events, the premise being that participants could choose to debate those

issues they themselves considered important in relation to the asylum seeker policy (as such it was a bottom-up approach). Project 2 also included an electronic citizen survey (n = 1047), conducted before the café events. The survey and the outcomes from the cafés were utilized as two separate datasets.

Project 3 was part of the Finnish government plan for analysis, assessment, and research, and as such was both policy and research oriented. The objective of the aforementioned government plan is to ensure a strong and horizontal knowledge base to support decision-making in Finnish society. The government invited ministries to suggest topics for projects and Project 3 under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior was one of the projects that attracted funding. The project analysed the role played by the third sector in supporting public authorities' security functions. Eight Security Cafés then played a part in extensive data gathering. The advisory group for the project included representatives from the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of the Defence. The theme was similar in each café (the role of the third sector), but there were some local specifics such as operating in remote and scarcely populated areas or in the archipelago region. The project also included many traditional interviews with representatives of the public authorities and third-sector organizations.

The research team's experience indicates that the presence of the relevant public authorities, from local, regional, and national level (depending on the theme and focus of the Security Café) is of utmost importance to the success of the cafés (see also Setälä 2017). The more engaged the public authorities are in the planning phase, the better they engage both in the actual operational phase and afterwards in the use of the input from the cafés. Participants in the Security Cafés also value the presence of public authorities very highly.

3.2. Recruitment phase

Open door settings or mini-publics is one of the dilemmas in public participation design raised by Bobbio (2018). Instead of being open door arenas, each Security Café was designed to gather together as diverse a group of people as possible, but the selection criteria and methods varied. In Project 1, the cafés were promoted in local newspapers, on street billboards, and in social media. The aim was to recruit 30 participants for each café. The participants were chosen from those who enrolled via email, phone, or a website, and the selection was guided by the desire that each Security Café would be as heterogeneous as possible. The third café was the most successful in this regard; it had 72 people enrolled. The selection criteria included various demographic (e.g. age and gender) and attitudinal factors (e.g. attitude towards national defence).

In Project 2, a private company offering services to assist research was used to recruit the participants. This was mainly due to a tight project schedule. The company was tasked with recruiting a heterogeneous group of 25 participants for each café based on age, gender, education, societal activity, and two predefined measures of attitude to the then current asylum seeker policy. In an effort to increase the diversity of the participants, 20-euro gift vouchers were offered to incentivize participation. The recruitment drive was successful for each of the five cafés. The number of people enrolled ranged between 51 and 83 people.

Project 3 had a distinct recruitment profile because its purpose was to harvest the viewpoints of local and regional public authorities and third-sector representatives. Public authorities were asked to nominate representatives for the Security Cafés, and third-sector representatives were approached through key persons such as the heads of preparedness of the Finnish Red Cross and via associations' websites and social media channels. The aim was to form a heterogeneous group (e.g. by age and gender) of 25 participants for each café. If, in the course of the recruitment process, it appeared that, for example, women did not sign up, contact persons were asked to convey the invitation especially to women. The target of 25 (or nearly 25) participants was achieved in seven cafés. The exception was the smallest municipality in terms of population (in Northern Lapland), that ultimately assembled only 15 participants. The composition of the cafés was engineered so that approximately two-thirds of the participants represented the third sector.

The most successful project with regard to recruitment was Project 2 where an external operator was hired to manage the recruitment of participants and the associated cafés had the most diverse participant groups. In addition, the recruitment of the third-sector representatives in Project 3 was achieved with ease, because the candidates were already societally active and welcomed the chance to have their voices heard. The most challenging was Project 1, where direct local advertising was used. It was difficult to communicate to potential participants what the Security Cafés were about. Deliberative methods in Finland are still relatively unknown and it can be challenging to overcome strong prejudices (see also Raisio, Ollila & Vartiainen 2011).

3.3. Execution phase

The execution phase of the Security Café can be summarized as taking place over four different steps. The *first step* is to create a welcoming and safe environment for the deliberations to take place (see Carson 2011). In each Security Café, conveners welcomed each participant personally before using a welcoming presentation directed at the whole group to explain the background to each project and the Security Café method, the schedules of the evenings, and the deliberation guidelines (such as respecting the opinions of others and contributors justifying their own views). Finally, the conveners addressed any questions that arose. Next, the events continued to *step two*, receiving information. Participants in Security Cafés should have access to the essential facts and figures (see Fishkin 2009), which as a general rule is provided by way of expert briefings. However, written material may be used as a supplement. For example, in Project 1, three to four experts in the relevant topic – referred to as expert witnesses – delivered a 10-minute-long presentation after which the participants were invited to ask questions. As an example, in the Security Café focused on the issue of a registration centre, the expert witnesses were from the police, the Red Cross, the Defence Forces, and the Immigration Service. A special feature of the Security Café method is that experts are present throughout the event. This means that during the small group deliberations participants can invite an expert witness to advise the group on issues relevant to that expert's specialism. In Project 3, the participants were themselves experts on the deliberated topic, so it was the project researchers who gave a brief presentation (summarizing relevant research) at the beginning of the event.

Most of the café event is occupied with small group deliberations. In this *third step*, participants were allocated in advance to heterogeneous groups of six to eight people. Each group had a trained facilitator to ensure there was a safe environment for deliberations and well-functioning group dynamics. The facilitator is a neutral actor who does not express his / her own views or opinions on the subject (see Dillard 2013). However, facilitators can often call upon pre-prepared questions to guide the deliberations and to ensure they remain focused. In the 16 Security Cafés, each small group deliberation lasted for 120 minutes. An important part of the Security Cafés is the use of *idea rating sheets* (see Zhang, Wang & Hanks 2016). However, in Project 2, pre- and post-questionnaires were used instead of idea rating sheets (to be able to analyse whether the participants' views changed during the deliberations). During the small group deliberations, in Projects 1 and 3, participants usually had ten blank idea rating sheets available in each small group. Each time an idea emerged that they wanted the whole café to evaluate, they wrote it on the sheet (see Figure 1). At this point, nothing else was written on the sheet. As described by Diceman (2014: 4):

“Idea rating sheets are a simple method for recognizing points of agreement among a large number of people. Participants write down ideas on specially designed paper forms called idea rating sheets [...] and use pens to fill in one dot per sheet, recording their levels of agreement. The result is a graph-like visual representation of the group’s collective opinion”.

During the *fourth step*, idea rating sheets are collected and spread on tables or affixed to walls so the participants can evaluate them. Idea rating sheets follow the basic logic of a SWOT analysis, in that each participant should be able to comment on each sheet, write about the opportunities and strengths plus the weaknesses and threats related to the presented idea and sign the sheet. Generally, 20 to 30 idea rating sheets are generated during the café event. The event usually ends with a speech by one of the experts reviewing the ideas presented in the idea rating sheets. To illustrate the schedule of Security Cafés, the schedule of cafés implemented in Project 1 is given in Figure 2.

3.4. Impact phase

The impact of deliberative mini-publics is a contested issue. Usually a distinction is drawn between binding and consultative deliberations (e.g. Mansbridge 2015; Bobbio 2018). Security Cafés are more consultative in nature; for example, in Project 1, the conveners of the cafés (researchers) prepared a report on each café summarizing the background to the café being implemented, the implementation process, and the results (including transcribed idea rating sheets). Those reports were sent to relevant stakeholders (especially those on the advisory committee) who promised to give the outcomes of the cafés serious consideration and also to draw up detailed responses. In Project 1, 13 written responses were received and published. The public authorities commented on the outputs of the Security Cafés and stated how the ideas from the cafés could be taken into account in the future. All responses were forwarded to the café participants via email: It is extremely important that participants are empowered by being updated on the impact of the café they participated in.

The media also has an important role in this impact phase, especially in informing the wider public of the results of the deliberations (see Raisio & Carson 2014). In Project 1, individual cafés were reported in regional newspapers and on local radio. In Project 2, the results from the five implemented cafés (and the electronic citizen survey) were collated into a final report (Puustinen et al. 2017) and a major media event was held in The Government Palace, the headquarters of the Council of State of Finland. Project researchers presented the results, the Minister of the Interior commented on those results, and then members of the press given an opportunity to ask questions. The results were widely reported in the mainstream media. In Project 3, the results of the project were presented at a seminar to which relevant stakeholders were invited. The results were also set out in the project's final report (Jalava et al. 2017) and in publications intended for professional communities (e.g. Norri-Sederholm, Puustinen & Raisio 2018). A summary of all the three projects and Security Cafés implemented is included below in Table 2.

	Project 1	Project 2	Project 3
Purpose	To analyse the suitability of deliberative mini-publics in increasing the two-way interaction between the Defence Forces and the citizens.	To obtain a comprehensive a picture of the experiences and opinions of the Finnish people relating to the asylum seeker situation and ideas for developing activities in the future.	To analyse the extensive role played by the third sector in supporting public authorities' security functions.
Timeline	1/2016–12/2016	12/2016–3/2017	3/2017–12/2017
Funder	The Scientific Advisory Board for Defence	The Ministry of the Interior	The Finnish government's analysis, assessment, and research activities
Participant recruitment	Cafés were promoted in local newspapers, on street billboards, and in social media.	A private company offering assistance services for research recruited the participants.	Direct contact with public authorities and associations. Social media was also used.
Participant profile	Ordinary citizens	Ordinary citizens	Public authorities and third-sector representatives.
Number of participants	Three cafés, 78 participants	Five cafés, 123 participants	Eight cafés, 188 participants
Theme(s) of the cafés	Café 1: Operation of the registration centre for asylum seekers. Café 2: The roles and tasks of public authorities and citizens in different emergencies and disaster. Café 3: Hybrid threats.	Asylum seeker policy; same theme in each café	The role of the third sector in supporting public authorities' security functions; same theme in each café, though slight variations related to the region, e.g. a sparsely populated area
Duration of the cafés	4 hours 30 minutes	3 hours 30 minutes	3 hours
Format of output	Idea rating sheets	Pre- and post-deliberation surveys; in addition, small group deliberations were recorded	Idea rating sheets; in addition, small group deliberations were recorded
Impact	Thirteen written responses received from public authorities; various news stories	A major media event; wide discussions in society	Important data to the research project; idea rating sheets were transcribed for the use of the café participants

Table 2. Summary of the three projects and Security Cafés implemented

4. Experiences and reflection on the Security Café method

In project 1, pre-filled idea rating sheets were used to collect data, and in Project 2 similar questions were included in a post-deliberation survey. The questions included: “I was able to bring my own opinions into the discussion” and “I would participate again in a similar kind of citizen forum”. In Project 1, additional interviews were conducted with the café participants (n = 16) and with public authority staff who participated in the cafés (n = 17). In addition, in Project 2, ideas generated in the group discussions were coded from the recorded discussions and sent back to the participants for evaluation in electronic form. The questionnaire included an opportunity to give qualitative post-event feedback on the deliberative method applied. In Project 3, no café-specific data was gathered, hence the analysis of that project is based on the reflections of the researchers.

Data from Projects 1 and 2 illustrate a generally positive attitude to the cafés, as is often the case with deliberative mini-publics (e.g. Fishkin 2009). For example, in the Security Cafés on asylum seeker policy, an emotive topic, 86 % of the participants reported that discussing in the group was a pleasant experience (figures include those who fully and partially agreed); 88 % of the participants felt they were able to express their opinions in the discussions; 96 % of the participants would participate again in a similar kind of a citizen forum. Similarly, 96 % of the participants felt that similar kinds of citizens’ forums should be used to support societal decision-making. A large majority of the participants (83 %) reported that participating in the café had boosted their knowledge of asylum seeker policy and 34 % stated that their perspective on the issue had changed. For the cafés implemented in Project 1, the views were very similar (See Raisio et al. 2017; Puustinen et al. 2017).

Participants in all of the Security Cafés emphasized how the café brought security authorities closer to the public. The informal deliberation and safe, respectful environment in a way freed the authorities from their uniforms. As one of the café participants in Project 1 commented, “*it gave an impression that [security authorities] are normal people, just like one of us*”. Similarly, a café participant in Project 2 stated that “*the people from the Finnish Immigration Office looked like ordinary human beings, and not mere ‘machines’ talking nonsense on behalf of their organizations*”. Participants also pointed out that the cafés offered an opportunity to meet representatives of public authorities who were rarely involved in the café participants’ everyday life and who they would be unlikely to meet at other public events.

The staff from the public authorities interviewed in Project 1 also appreciated the encounter with ordinary people. This informal coming together seemed to narrow the perceived differences between authorities and civil society. A representative of the Defence Forces commented that the cafés offered them an opportunity to improve their image, to tell the people “*that we are here for society, not the other way around*”. The opportunity to engage in lengthy, in-depth discussions with citizens was seen as a rare one. This is well illustrated by the following comment from a representative of a public authority: “*After all, it is really extraordinary that we can actually hear the opinions of the citizens, and we were essentially calmly discussing [in the café] and not getting opinions through ‘shouting’ in social media or via emotional e-mails*”. The Security Café participants became aware that it was a general challenge that the public debate often showcases extreme opinions and welcomed the fact that voices were heard other than those who shout loudest at the opposite extremes.

The café participants assessed deliberating in small groups to be safer than deliberating in large groups, as might be the case in traditional public meetings. It was also easier to pose questions to the authorities or experts because they could be invited to speak to individual small groups. The conversation was said to be sincere, with almost no political colour to it. The participants felt the atmosphere was safe enough for them to be able to express their opinions freely – even when those opinions differed from those of the authorities or from the anticipated norms. Some participants felt the informal set up of the Security Cafés contributed to the construction of a safe environment, as noted by one of the participants in Project 1: “*When I got there, the atmosphere was relaxed, and everyone was in good spirits. It was not too formal. And I got the feeling that everyone would dare to participate and have their say*”. In Project 2, even though the theme of the deliberation – the asylum seeker policy – was more delicate, the reported experiences were largely similar. As one of the café participants commented: “*This was a very good and interesting way to get involved in the discussions [on asylum seeker policy]. In the event I had the courage to speak out, without fear of stigma*”. It should be noted, however, not every person in every small group felt they had been fully heard, as was seen in the statistics above. For example, one participant in a more polarized small group stated the following: “*It was interesting to attend [the café]. Somehow it just felt like I did not get my own voice heard in my group. Perhaps it was the other extreme [i.e. anti-immigration] that quieted me*”. Nevertheless, participants in Project 1 and 2 often reported that they felt empowered after the cafés. They commented that their personal views really mattered during the cafés:

“*I felt myself important. That my opinion really matters*”. (Project 1)

“*It was very enjoyable, and I felt that finally the Finnish people are listened to!*” (Project 2)

“*Great event and great ideas. Thankfully people’s opinions are now heard*”. (Project 2)

Participation in the Security Cafés also influenced the participants' feelings of safety and security, that is, how safe they view society as being and how their own actions matter as part of the whole. One participant from Project 1 commented, *“it made me realize that a lot of things are done [by the security authorities] all the time, that [security authorities] don't just sit and wait for something to happen”*. This increase in trust and understanding of the security authorities' functions and resources seemed to enhance the feelings of safety. The participants also reported that they began to better understand the various threats and that they heard about issues that they would normally never hear about. The influence of the participation in the cafés was also reflected in the level of participants' own activity and awareness. This was depicted for example in the following comments, made by participants from Project 1:

“This [café] activated me and made me think that I am able to participate more”.

“Participation may have increased my level of awareness on these issues. [...] I now keep my eyes open and I am more interested in news, for example, looking for things that are related to the issues we discussed”.

In Project 3, a data-gathering project, one of the key values for the participants themselves seemed to be the networking between the actors. In the cafés implemented as part of this project, public authorities and third-sector representatives sat at the same tables deliberating on issues that mattered to all of them. During the evenings spent in the cafés these different actors got to know each other. They started to plan cooperation and, most importantly, the staff from public authorities became aware of what kind of third-sector actors were active in their own area and obtained information on how to contact them. The Security Café thus acted in a sense as a platform for developing common language and common reality for security authority and third-sector representatives. This can be understood as a spin-off effect of the data-gathering project.

Using Security Cafés also offers value for researchers, in that doing so gives access to data otherwise unobtainable in many research projects. Conducting an extensive number of interviews is very time consuming and it is often difficult to attract a feasible number of interviewees. The Security Café offers an economic way to quickly gather the opinions and ideas of a large number of people. A researcher participating in a Security Café could easily obtain the opinions of around 30 people in a couple of hours, and hence, five cafés could give a researcher access to 150 interviewees. In addition to the number of participants, the quality of data often differs from that delivered via individual interviews. In our experience, people in facilitated group discussions express their views and ideas very openly and also encourage each other to, for example, justify their opinions. This was most obvious in Project 2 on the asylum seeker policy, where both an electronic survey of citizen's opinions and

the Security Cafés were utilized in the same project. Group discussions that were recorded in the cafés afforded access to data normally unavailable when applying only a survey method. Using a survey can deliver the raw opinions of a large number of citizens, which provides a skeleton, or an estimate of the opinion of the larger society, that is, surveys merely gather, “static snapshots of public opinion” (Atlee 2004: 98). Data from the Security Cafés adds meat to the bones, giving access to the reasons, thoughts, fears, and feelings of people behind the quantitative data often reported only as facts and figures.

The most prominent problem in the cafés was that of ensuring they were representative. The insufficiently varied representation in some Security Cafés led, among other things, to an insufficient number of dissenting opinions. This was particularly evident in Project 1 when participants were recruited mainly by using social and traditional media to attract the public’s attention to the events. In Project 1, the café participants were rather homogenous and safety-oriented. One interviewee from a public authority described the participants as, “*devout believers in security [authorities and policies]*”. For this reason, in Project 2 an external recruiter was used to populate the Security Café on asylum seeker policy. This resulted in more heterogeneous groups, and also in more vibrant discussions in the cafés. One café participant for example considered that the Security Café was “*[an] excellent way to obtain ordinary people’s view regardless of their background. It is a comprehensive and good way of getting information and for different sexes and different ages to be heard*”.

The impact achieved is the second major challenge for Security Cafés. Although the participants in the cafés viewed the act of participating very positively, they questioned the actual impact of their participation. The participants wondered whether their thoughts would be taken into account and whether the authorities would really translate their ideas into action. Café participants hoped that the authorities would screen the most feasible ideas and implement them in the future, because otherwise it would be like “filling a bucket with a hole in it.” As a minimum, the participants considered that if the authorities did not act on the ideas generated in the Security Café, they should justify why not, which would make it possible to continue the deliberation. Representatives of the public authorities also worried about the impact of the cafés, and one of them commented in an interview, “*it will dilute the whole idea of the cafés if the ideas and opinions of the participants are not acted upon, if they just come to chat and have coffee, without any real influence*”. Weaknesses in their impact were seen as having the potential to compromise the entire concept and core idea of the Security Cafés.

5. Discussion

In an environment where complexity is on the rise and psychological and hybrid influencing is becoming an increasingly normal way to affect the minds of people (see e.g. Treverton et al. 2018; Aaltola & Juntunen 2018), the role of individual citizens in the safety and security domains is becoming ever more important. Ordinary citizens are not only objects of security actions and policies, but active subjects securing their own environment and the resilience of the larger society. Based on our experiences from the three projects, Security Cafés could offer a way to increase both the knowledge base of citizens and their involvement in the matter at hand. Knowledge and active involvement could help counteract the offensive uses of hybrid influence, such as disinformation, and hence increase the resilience of the whole society. These aforementioned features, especially the citizens' shift from object to actor (or the subject) and information sharing are recognized in the current national Security Strategy for Society. Therefore, Security Cafés could offer a means of identifying ways to implement the national comprehensive security model. The method does seem effective, despite some curable weaknesses.

The advent of social media has meant people can express their ideas anonymously, which seems to increase the polarization of opinions. Our experience of Security Cafés in Finland indicates that they can provide a forum for people with differing views to come together, to deliberate over emotive issues, and most importantly, to listen to the views of others respectfully. This could be one way to enhance empathy in people, merely by ensuring they encounter people from different demographics and encouraging them to understand and respect different opinions (see also Morrell 2010). Having said that, one needs to be careful when addressing the most delicate so-called wicked issues in society. After the project on asylum seeker policy, the results of the project were actively questioned, even purposefully twisted, by various groups and communities, even within academia (see Raisio et. al. 2017b). When not handled properly this can worsen the situation. In the case of highly sensitive topics, taking advantage of the different types of deliberative mini-publics might offer an opportunity to progress. For example, Security Cafés could be used to assemble a larger group of people to participate in deliberations around the country after which the results of the cafés could be further processed in a well-executed Citizens' Jury or Citizens' Assembly, increasing the legitimacy of the process (see Carson et al. 2013)

There is also the risk of Security Cafés becoming just one more educational event among others, where security authorities express their own views, without listening to those of the people present

(see Virta & Branders 2016). By definition, deliberative methods should always include the opportunity to express even the most critical views and those running counter to the norm, and also those questioning the status quo. This is ultimately a question of balance between the critical transformative project of deliberative democracy and the secrecy and opacity of the safety and security domains.

We have been tracking the potential uses of the Security Café method after the three projects described in this article. Currently it is planned to be used in at least two research projects to facilitate data gathering (the projects will involve the fire and rescue services and military sociology) and as a deliberation method in one development project (The National Defence Training Association of Finland). Two Finnish towns have also taken up the challenge of organizing Security Cafés in their region to enable their citizens to participate in the planning and development of the safety and security of their own neighbourhoods. The Security Café is also recognized as a valid method in the research methods training at the Emergency Services College, where all Finnish fire and rescue personnel are trained. Additionally, the Security Café is piloted at the National Defence University as a pedagogical tool.

It would seem that the method is applicable in different contexts, and also feasible both as a method for deliberation and as a data gathering method. Flexibility is a key element of the method in the sense that every municipality, county, region or country has its own security ecosystem. This must be taken into account in the execution of the different phases of the method. As long as the minimum requirements for deliberation are met, the method is sufficiently flexible to meet the varying needs evident in the safety and security domains and contexts. What is still missing in the cases presented in this article is the involvement of private sector businesses. The national Security Strategy for Society acknowledges the private sector as an essential part of the building of a resilient society, yet the sector has no discernible presence in the deliberative processes.

The experiences gathered from three different projects indicate that in Finland, where the comprehensive security model is applied throughout society, Security Cafés function rather well. The model highlights the vital role of citizens as actors in the production and safeguarding of a secure society. Security authorities themselves are both willing and able to participate in such forums, because there is strong support in the government for interaction between citizens and authorities. In the future, the model should be tested in societies where the divide between security authorities and ordinary citizens is greater, and where support for cross-sector collaboration on the part of the policy makers and governments is not so evident.

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