

# The impact of information framing during EU public consultations

Diana-Maria Danciu

Wim Marneffe

## *Abstract*

Impact Assessments still focus mainly on the analysis of the economic impacts of the proposed Policy Options. Less tangible impacts, such as trust, are not yet routinely integrated in the analysis, even though they affect a broad range of stakeholders. To investigate how relevant these impacts are for one specific group of stakeholders – the citizens – , and whether the relevance assigned to such impact can be altered by the information presented to the public, we carry out a cross-country vignette experiment where we divide the participants (n=587) into three groups with each group receiving different information about the issue at stake. We then survey the participants to elicit their preference with respect to the most relevant impacts to be analysed. Our research highlights three main findings: (1) intangible impacts are regarded at least as important as more tangible impacts such as monetary costs; (2) the vignette effects are limited and (3) the effects of the vignette are mediated by the country-of-origin – we find between-country variation in the responses of the participants dependent on the vignette to which the participant has been assigned. This shows us on one hand that the one-size-fits-all character of the EU public consultation does not have the same effect in all Member States and that the analysis of the results of public consultations could benefit from more tailored approaches. On the other hand we see that the inclusion of impacts in IAs can be influenced by the public information. This requires more caution in designing the information shared with the public to avoid biased contributions.

*Keywords:* Impact Assessment, European Union, public consultation, cross-country experiment, multi-criteria analysis, intangible impacts, trust.