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Political Participation and Sustainability

Exploring Contemporary Challenges

Edited by

Sergiu Gherghina

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Political Participation and Sustainability: Exploring Contemporary Challenges

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Editor

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About the Editor

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Article

Participatory Democracy and Sustainability. Deliberative Democratic Innovation and Its Acceptance by Citizens and German Local Councilors

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Abstract: Political participation and sustainability seem to be closely intertwined. In the last few decades it can be shown that the topic of sustainability and ecological interest groups play an important role in citizen engagement, political participation, and democratic innovations at the local level. Using a participatory rhombus model of participatory democracy, different forms of participation and democratic innovations in the representative sphere, in direct democracy, in demonstrative participatory space, and finally in deliberative participatory instruments are important in the decision-making for sustainability policies. Here the paper tries to close the gap in empirical data on the perceptions of citizens and councilors on these participatory instruments. Citizens believe strongly in the importance of elections and referendums, but they extend their political repertoire and start protesting and demanding more deliberative democracy. Councilors positively perceive democratic innovations, and the councilors of the Green Party in particular strongly support new participatory instruments. However, citizens and councilors do not support all instruments in the same way.



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Keywords: participation; digitalization; local government; innovation; deliberation; sustainability

1. Introduction

The crisis of representative democracy triggered democratic innovations [1,2]. Endeavors for the qualification of democratic systems and democratic reforms are high on the agenda. Political participation plays an important role in democracies [3]. With the Rio conference in the 1990s, the Local Agenda 21 strategies strengthened a new trend towards more deliberative political participation, focusing on sustainability. It was also a trigger for social innovations and a wave of more civic engagement and communal self-help in the late 1990s. A broader participatory space with the democratic innovations as a “deliberative turn” [4] can be testified to in several new participatory instruments in the invited and invented space [5]. In the invented space, new participatory instruments are initiated by civil society (bottom up) often in the form of demonstrations. In the invented space, the state offers new channels to extend the participatory space often to include new interest groups and to put new issues on the agenda. Nevertheless, criticism of participatory democracy and demands for more elite-centered epistocratic governance and a stealth democracy also became louder [6,7].

The main focus here is on Germany. Germany will be analyzed as one of the frontrunners in two aspects. Since the 1980s in Germany, new parties (Green) have been highlighting policy issues such as sustainability and climate change, and new social movements have demanded new economic and infrastructural policies at the national, regional, and local levels [8]. Secondly, the German federal system highlights the role of multifunctional municipalities and attributes numerous decision-making processes to the local level [9]. Here democratic participatory innovation plays an important role.

In Germany, this is evident through the development of the Green Party, which took up the new cleavage in the 1980s, and its growing importance firstly at the local level and

later at the regional and national level. After the nuclear disaster in Fukushima 2011, the German Green Party gained more members of parliament and became part of government coalitions in different Länder. However, with the push by the Fridays for Future movement in the late 2010s, the Green Party has also been able to increase both its membership and its voters. The ecological transformation of society is deeply embedded in the Green Party manifesto. However, ecological issues also became relevant topics for most other parties, with the exception of the right-wing populists.

In the area of democratic innovations, another global trend has appeared. The local level in particular was often seen as a laboratory for new participatory instruments. German cities had implemented some participatory instruments on conflict resolution in the 1970s. With the direct election of mayors at the local level, new referendums, and new forms of participatory budgeting in most European countries, new deliberative participatory instruments were also high on the agenda. In Germany, this can be seen as a reaction towards political scandals (Barschel affair) as well as good experiences with round tables in the process of German unification. German cities in the 1990s were characterized by the implementation of new instruments such as referendums at the local level, new voting systems such as cumulative voting and panache voting, direct elections and recalls of mayors, and new advisory boards for particular interest groups involving elderly or disabled citizens. To mitigate strong protests against some infrastructure projects, such as the railway station “Stuttgart 21,” in the 2010s, a number of deliberative participatory instruments such as participatory budgeting processes were introduced in most large German cities. In the 1990s, Germany introduced and “imported” a number of democratic participatory innovations, reinvigorating the local representative democracy (see, for example, the participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre). In Germany in the 1980s and even more in the 2010s, demonstrations by large social movements such as Fridays for Future pushed most political parties towards a stronger focus on climate change and sustainability [10].

Political participation and sustainability, which means questions of ecological policies, climate justice, and change, are strongly intertwined. We will analyze where political participation focuses on sustainability topics. In the following, we will analyze the broad range of participatory instruments within the political system using the participatory rhombus model. After a short description of participatory instruments, we will concentrate on the deliberative participatory tools. It will be argued that ecological transformation is strongly related to new participatory instruments. Ecological transformation includes policies that reduce climate change such as the sharing economy, the development of renewable energy production, etc. For this transformation, on the one hand, broad legitimacy and support by the citizen seems to be necessary. On the other hand, the sharing economy, for example, must be based on innovative forms of community development. Both are dependent on participatory instruments and democratic innovations. How do citizens and local councilors evaluate these different forms of participation in democratic innovations? The councilors’ survey focuses on the question of the acceptance of these new participatory instruments in the field of sustainability.

2. Typology and Definitions

Political participation is defined as an individual and organized act to influence political decision-making. Democratic innovations focus on political participatory instruments, electoral reforms, etc. In contrast, civic engagement and all forms of communal self-help (for example, on climate change initiatives in the neighborhood) predominately concentrate on producing certain services (e.g., in a sharing economy) and, in general, do not include any decision-making competencies [11,12]. This social innovation is not primarily oriented towards the influence of decision-making, but focuses on civic engagement as co-production. Political participation and civic engagement are interdependent, but have to be differentiated. Nevertheless, political participation can have an essential social function, especially in social capital development (for social innovation see [9]). Furthermore, in the

field of ecological transformation, there seems to be an overlapping of political participation and civic engagement.

On the one hand, participatory instruments can be developed bottom-up by civil society to create an invented space as the political arena [5]. Participatory instruments can be implemented top-down by local, regional, or national governments to include citizens and open the invited space. They can have a binding role, such as in elections and referendums in “numeric democracy” (see [13]), and they can be more consultative and more discursive, for example, in open forums based on self-selection, in stakeholder conferences with organized interest groups, and in randomly selected citizen assemblies, or more expressive, for example, in demonstrations.

In the following, we divide online participation from offline participation. We often find a combination of online and offline participation, different types, and another sequencing of these tools (see the directly deliberative democracy (DDD) project). Instruments can be initiated by civil society (invited space) and top-down planning (invited space, which can be binding or not binding, formal or informal, and expressive or decisive [5].

The political arena is divided into different spheres: the representative participatory sphere, the direct democratic participatory sphere, the demonstrative participatory sphere, and the deliberative participatory sphere (see the participatory rhombus in Figure 1). These four spheres encompass all forms of participation. In the following part, we will define the instruments and show where sustainability became an important topic in political participatory instruments. In all these spheres, climate change and transformation in sustainability become more important on the agenda.

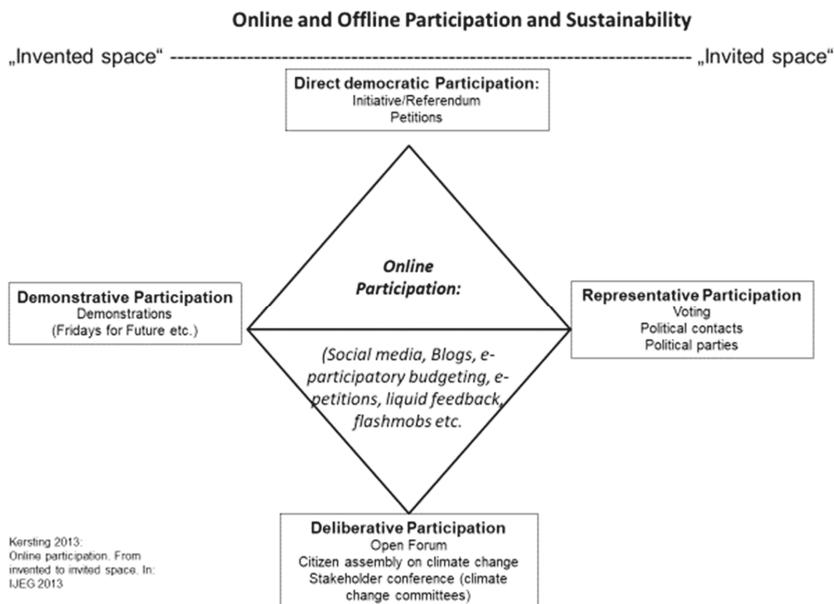


Figure 1. Participatory rhombus [4].

2.1. Representative Participation

In the representative sphere, participation encompasses elections and direct contacts with political candidates and political administration, predominately. In this area, it can be shown that new Green political parties have played a more and more critical role in many countries [14]. In Germany, the Green Party entered local, regional, and national parliaments in the early 1980s and became a coalition partner in a number of the local

and regional governments in the 1990s and 2000s. In particular, in the late 2010s, it can be shown that sustainability policies were more and more supported not only by the Green Party but also by most relevant political parties except the right-wing populist party.

2.2. Direct Democratic Participation

In the direct democratic sphere, referendums and petitions are important instruments of this numeric participation. Parliamentary petitions are used at the regional and the national level (e.g., Bundestags-Petitionsausschuss) [15,16]. Additionally, civil society organizations use online petitions, which focus on topics of sustainability, in the invented space (e.g., Change.org, MoveOn, Campact) [17].

In the 1990s, after Baden-Wuerttemberg, all other regions implemented local initiatives and referendums with different thresholds and somatic exclusions. Around 4107 referendums took place in Germany between 1956 and 2009 at the local level (another 4000 were stopped beforehand, but altogether there were 8100 processes) [18]. Most of the overall 8100 direct democratic processes were not implemented by citizens as citizen initiatives but rather by the council or the local administration. Therefore, over 50% took place between 2003 and 2019. Because of different legislation and thresholds, regional effects occurred. It can be shown that 40% of all processes took place in Bavaria.

Town planning was different in different regions because some regions have thematic exclusions and do not allow town planning issues in local referendums. Other ecological policies were often on the agenda, with 16.2% constituting traffic and transport issues, and economic projects such as new hotels, shopping centers, and wind parks (17.8%). In fact, most topics were high on the agenda except the area of social development and education (19.7%) and amalgamations in territorial reforms (9.7%), cultural projects (4.0%), and governance topics (2.4%). Most other local referendums had a strong influence on sustainability.

In some cases, there was an indirect effect, for example, when local tariffs for the duration of garbage collection were on the agenda. The results of these referendums in the area of “re-communalization” showed a positive effect on sustainability policies.

Nevertheless, all the results show a mixed picture. In general, referendums can be regarded as more “structurally conservative.” On the one hand, large new infrastructural projects such as airports, highways, etc., were often blocked. On the other hand, new green energy projects, such as turbines and wind parks, were stopped.

2.3. Demonstrative Participation

In Europe, ecological political parties often developed from strong social movements in the 1970s and early 1980s. This is quite obvious in the German case, where strong fundamentalist positions and even strategies characterized the Green Party, often as extra-parliamentary opposition (“Ausserparlamentarische Opposition,” APO). There was, and in certain regions there still is, a strong link between economically left-wing social groups and ecological parties [19]. In the early 1980s, the development of the Green Party was strongly connected to the peace movement and large demonstrations such as the one in 1982 against NATO decisions in Bonn. Furthermore, green parties firmly focused on direct and deliberative democracy.

In the following years, strong inclusion into the parliamentary system became apparent. In the 2010s, new social movements and protest were developing in larger European cities, such as “Anonymous” in Madrid [20]. In Germany, strong protest against infrastructure projects such as the railway station and shopping mall project “Stuttgart 21” took place. In the late 2010s, with the movement Fridays for Future, the younger generation, including striking pupils, became highly involved in politics. Their focus is on the World Climate Conference (COP-21) results in Paris in 2015, on the end of coal power stations, and on new regenerative energy. Here it can be shown that this movement strongly influences all political parties. Fridays for Future has highly decentralized but digitally connected branches, and it uses decentralized weekly demonstrations and online networks to influence local, regional, and national politics. The social movement is related to the protest against large

infrastructure projects to develop coal mining (in the late 2010 Hambacher Forst) and new highways (Highway 21: A47). Besides demonstrations, consumer boycotts, strikes, and digitally organized flash mobs, etc., are characterizing these social movements' activities. From a global perspective, these movements are robust in other European countries such as Sweden, France, the UK, and Italy, as well as in Australia, Brazil, etc.

2.4. Deliberative Participation

In the 1990s, new deliberative instruments were implemented. Here, already existing formal local council commissions and informal advisory boards were added, especially at the local level. This deliberative turn [4] brought three different types of deliberative instruments [21]. Already existing advisory boards were redeveloped. In neo-corporatist contexts, these informal instruments incorporated existing organized interest groups. They were predominantly administered by the local administration and chaired by the mayor or the town clerk. New modern advisory boards try to incorporate broader new social movements from civil society. These advisory boards predominantly focused on particular interest groups and topics. Furthermore, some of them were directly elected. They are chaired by a civil society representative, which is very important for agenda-setting and influence.

Therefore, child and youth parliaments, advisory boards for disabled citizens, and advisory boards for seniors or migrants have been implemented. In the area of sustainability, advisory boards for ecological topics were implemented in the new millennium. Some of them incorporated representatives from the already existing Local Agenda 21 groups, developed in the years after the Rio conference in the 1990s [22]. But in the 1990s, additional experts on climate change were directly included on these new stakeholder boards (local climate change committees).

In the 1990s, the new strategy incorporating civil society also opened to members of the public. In these open forums, ordinary citizens were invited to participate. It can be shown that citizen participation often mirrors the already existing inequality and the political participatory divide. Although anyone could take part in numerous offline participatory instruments, marginalized social groups with low levels of resources such as time, knowledge, and finances did not participate. These open forums often focus on important local ecological topics such as new transport systems within cities, town planning, traffic, and prominent infrastructural instruments such as wind turbines. In some of these participatory instruments, "Not in my backyard" attitudes became obvious. Affected citizens protested against these infrastructure projects. This conservative bias is similar to direct democratic initiatives. In fact, referendums can often be seen as a result of social movements and deliberative processes.

At the local level, after the reforms of the 1990s, more deliberative instruments as well as more digital instruments were implemented, particularly in the early 2000s. Starting in Puerto Rico, the participatory budgeting processes focused on the distribution of financial resources in sub-municipal contexts. This instrument became very popular in Brazil, in Latin America, and further on in Southern Europe, in particular in Spain and Italy [23]. It was also used in all larger German cities but with different characteristics. In Germany and in a couple of other countries, participatory budgeting was implemented slightly differently. In Germany in the 2010s, it was more a management tool and was predominantly a digital electronic suggestion box. Citizens were allowed to make suggestions for smaller projects, which were handed over to the administration. After an administrative evaluation and scrutinization, these instruments were transferred to the city council, which had the final say. Participatory budgeting processes in Germany did not have their own budget, but it was incorporated in the municipal budget decision-making process. Secondly in Germany, after some quite disappointing tests of face-to-face town hall meetings to discuss the budget, most administrations and mayors decided to run participatory budgeting predominantly as an online participatory instrument. Thus, individuals could make their suggestions online and then in the second phase they were evaluated online by members of the public before

they went to the administration of the city council. This hindered and stopped intensive deliberations but also led to number of smaller and less cost-intensive projects, because broader forms of planning were made impossible. In the following years, because of the local financial crisis, it was not even allowed to make suggestions for new projects anymore, only suggestions for saving financial resources. Because of this, participatory rates and turnaround in participatory budgeting processes became very low. In the following years, a couple of cities stopped participatory budgeting altogether. In some other cities it was revitalized by a slight change in its implementation. In some German cities, so-called “citizen budgets” were implemented. This instrument is more comparable to the original Porto Alegre participatory budgeting processes, because here a small but substantial budget is reserved for neighborhood projects.

In recent years an even older instrument experienced a renaissance. The first smaller test, with participatory instruments based on sorting and randomly selected participants, was implemented sporadically in the 1980s and 1990s [24]. Deliberative polls could be regarded as citizens’ assemblies [25]. With its best practices at the national level in Ireland and the local level in Belgium and other countries, citizens’ assemblies (mini publics, citizen juries, deliberative polls, Planungszelle) were implemented not only at the national level but also locally. Therefore, with the wave of citizens’ assemblies and with their new components (from mini public to citizen assembly) and changes, citizens’ assemblies could be regarded as real democratic innovation. At various weekend workshops, between 50 and 160 randomly selected members of the public were briefed by a neutral set of experts. The group discussed important topics before they voted on actions and suggestions for the legislative or executive body.

In France, following the Yellow Vest movement, a citizen assembly on climate change was implemented in 2019 at the national level. Similar processes followed this in Scotland, the UK, and other countries. In Germany, the federal parliament supported the first national citizen’s assemblies that focused on the future of democracy and governance role in the global context. Civil society groups demanded a focus on sustainability, but because of upcoming elections for the 2021 German Parliament it was denied. In May 2021 a citizen assembly (Bürgerrat) on sustainability was initiated by different civil society groups. At the local level, citizens’ assemblies mostly focused on areas of town planning and developed often detailed reports for the city council.

3. Citizen Perceptions of Participatory Instruments

It could be argued that the use of participatory instruments is related to its acceptance [11,26]. Low voter turnout is regarded as a dissatisfaction with representative democracy. Participatory instruments in the four participatory spheres are characterized by different rates of participation.

The “numeric democracy” instruments, such as elections and referendums, have by far the highest turnout (for numeric democracy, see [9]. Although the voter turnout in local elections is decreasing in most countries, it can be shown for Germany that there is still a relatively high voter turnout with around 50% of eligible voters. In local direct elections of mayors, the voter turnout can fall to one third of the eligible voters in cases where parallel elections are not taking place. In contrast, this turnout is even 10% higher in regional and 20% higher in national elections [27]).

In addition to the direct election of mayors, local referendums have been taking place in all German Länder since the 1990s. There is a widespread voter turnout depending on the size of the city as well as the importance of the topic. However, it can be shown that even where participation rates are low, more than one third of citizens still take part in referendums. Regional referendums are parallel to regional elections and have a voter turnout of around two thirds of the eligible voters.

In local demonstrations, only a small part of the whole population is involved (see Stuttgart 21). The biggest demonstration in Germany in the early 1980s had around 200,000 participants (for the peace movement, see [28]). Nevertheless, Fridays for Future

demonstrations in 2019 were held in different cities simultaneously and could motivate some thousands of participants in each city. Here the number of participants increased with online instruments. Nevertheless, demonstrative participation cannot enlist as many citizens as elections and referendums. This discrepancy and participatory divide are even higher when it comes to deliberative democracy. Open forums in some cities and suburbs only attracted a small number of people or a few hundred. When it came to stakeholder conferences, new advisory boards included in general between 10 and 50 people. Citizens' assemblies (mini publics) with randomly selected participants had between 50 and 150 participants [29].

Before the councilors' acceptance of participatory instruments is discussed, the attitudes of the citizens will be presented briefly (see Figure 2).

In a survey in 2019, 2000 citizens were asked about their opinion on participatory instruments in an online survey. The analysis showed that the data were representative in the important aspects of gender, education, and age groups' political party affiliations. The survey was a replication of the earlier telephone survey in 2014 in 27 cities in Germany with 2700 citizens [21,30].

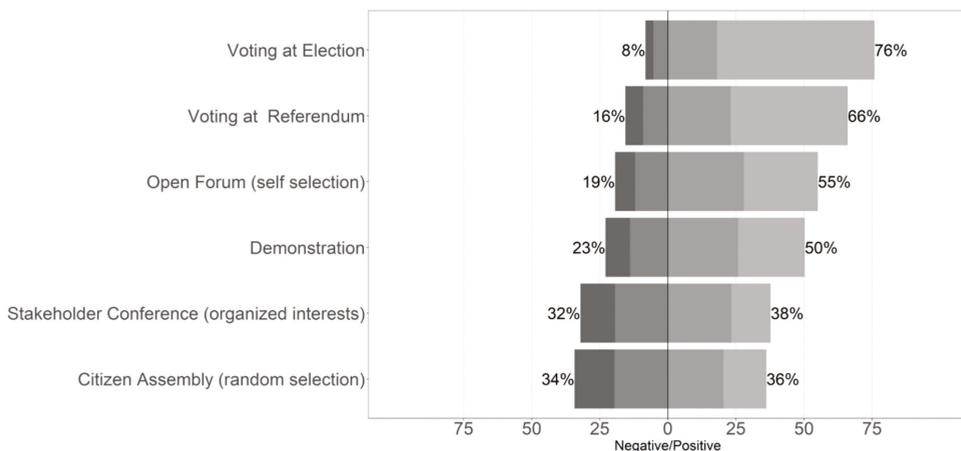


Figure 2. Citizens' attitudes to participatory instruments. Own data; N 2000; 5-point Likert scale: (very) positive, (very) negative, middle category not shown [31].

The evaluation focused on the process, its efficacy, and its legitimacy. At first glance it does not seem remarkable that more than 76% of citizens regarded local elections as most important for the decision-making process. Only 8% saw local elections negatively and a middle range of around 14% were indifferent. This is important regarding a lower voter turnout and a decrease at the local level.

Referendums were also seen as important, with two thirds of citizens supporting them, despite the low turnout and some controversial referendums (see referendum on schools in Hamburg, on Olympic Games in München, on Brexit in UK, etc.).

Demonstrations were lower on the list of preferences. Here half of the citizens regarded this as an important and influential positive instrument. Nearly a quarter of the citizens were critical of demonstrations, which were regarded as an unconventional participatory instrument in Germany for a long time [32].

When it came to the deliberative instruments, the three types of participation were evaluated differently. Open citizen forums such as town hall meetings based on self-selection were regarded as the most positive deliberative instrument. Here, more than half of citizens regarded these open conferences positively. A fifth of citizens viewed them critically.

Advisory boards for stakeholders were regarded positively by more than a third of the citizens. Meanwhile, nearly one third criticized these stakeholder conferences.

Citizens' assemblies are not well known among the general public as a whole. Nevertheless, it seems that these are seen more critically. More than a third of the population supports these new instruments, one third is indifferent, and one third is (very) critical.

Participatory instruments broaden the chance for participation, but it is often mentioned that citizens' demands are critical and too high. It is apparent that this is not just a wish list where citizens demand as many instruments and as much as possible. The list shows a clear differentiation.

Citizens seem to regard the binding decision in elections and in referendums much higher than the more consultative ones. Elections and referendums do not require a high investment of time and other resources (knowledge), but offer an influential vote. Traditional participatory instruments from the neo-corporatist system such as stakeholder conferences with influential representatives of organized interest groups are criticized because citizens are excluded. The same aspect applies to citizens' assemblies with a selection by a lottery. The chances of being selected are not very high, although these instruments are regarded as a stimulator and incubator for broader discussions.

4. Acceptance of Participatory Instruments by the Councilors

Turnout and the rate of representation can be regarded as one indicator of the acceptance of participatory instruments. Acceptance includes the evaluation of the process (input legitimacy) as well as satisfaction with the results (outcome, impact, output legitimacy). In the following, the acceptance of the different participatory instruments within the local politicians is analyzed. In a survey in June/July 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and three months before the local elections, local councilors in the biggest German "Land," North Rhine-Westphalia, were asked to evaluate local participatory instruments (see Figure 3). In this survey all cities over 100,000 inhabitants were included, as well as the same number of medium-sized cities (20,000–10,000) and small-sized cities (<20,000). The response rate was 25% and altogether 1800 people responded. The evaluation concentrated on the participatory process itself as well as its effects. The survey was a replication of the earlier survey in 2014 [30]. In the following, participatory instruments from the different participatory spheres are analyzed. The research question concentrates on the general acceptance by the councilors as well as different opinions in small and large cities, in different age and gender groups, as well as in different partisan groups.

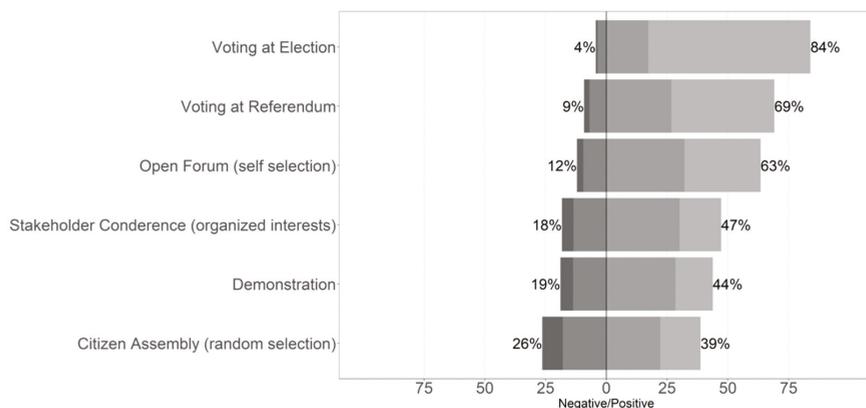


Figure 3. Local councilors' attitudes on participatory instruments. Own data 2020; N 1800; 5-point Likert scale: (very) positive, (very) negative, middle category not shown [33].

When it came to elections, it is obvious that more than 84% of the councilors strongly highlighted the importance of local elections for the decision-making process. Only 4% saw local elections negatively. The middle range of 12% was indifferent. Analyzing the different political parties, it is obvious that especially the more established parties had a slightly stronger focus on local elections. Nevertheless, all councilors regarded local elections as highly important.

Local referendums were also supported by more than two thirds of the councilors. A total of 69% regarded local referendums as (very) positive, whereas only 9% had more negative attitudes towards local referendums. There were significant differences between the different political parties. In the conservative party (CDU), only 61% regarded local referendums as positive and around 11% as negative, whereas in the Green Party more than three-quarters (79%) supported local referendums. At the local level there was strong support for direct democracy within the Green Party.

Demonstrations were seen positively and as a positive and effective instrument by only 46% of all councilors. There was a big discrepancy between the political parties. In the conservative party (CDU), only a minority (23%) saw demonstrations as positive and a majority (32%) as negative. The supporting group was much bigger in the Social Democratic Party (SPD), where 51% saw demonstrations positively and only 13% critically. In the Green Party, as many as 70% evaluated demonstration as (very) positive and only 7% evaluated them negatively.

In the deliberative sphere, the acceptance of the three different types of deliberative participation, i.e., open forums, stakeholder conferences (advisory boards), and citizens' assemblies, varied among the parties (see Figure 4). Deliberative instruments with open access and self-selection such as open forums, future search conferences, town hall meetings, and sample conferences were highly accepted. Two thirds (63%) of the councilors in general supported these instruments and only 12% rejected them. However, within the Green Party, as many as 76% strongly supported these open dialogical participatory instruments. This support was much lower (55%) in the conservative party (CDU).

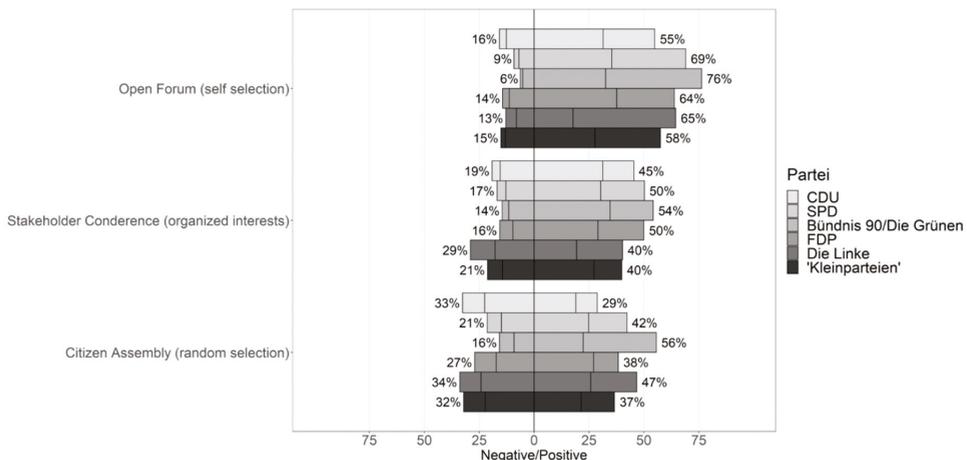


Figure 4. Local councilors' attitudes on deliberative participatory instruments. Own data 2020; N 1800; 5-point Likert scale: (very) positive, (very) negative, middle category not shown [33].

Participatory instruments for stakeholders such as roundtables or advisory boards and commissions for particular interest groups were supported by 47%. Meanwhile, 18% saw them as not very effective or positive. Here political parties were more similar in their evaluation. A total of 54% of councilors in the Green Party and 45% in the conservative party (CDU) saw them very positively.

Finally, the citizens' assemblies (mini publics, citizen juries, Planungszelle) using random selection and sortition was supported by the majority. A total of 39% saw this relatively new instrument positively, and 26% criticized it. However, there were strong party discrepancies. Within the Green Party, 56% supported citizens' assemblies and only 16% evaluated them negatively. In the conservative party (CDU), only 29% supported citizens' assemblies and 33% rejected them.

5. Conclusions

Since the last millennium, it can be shown that two important political megatrends have been visible. On the one hand there is a strong tendency towards democratic innovations and new forms of participatory instruments. On the other hand, climate change, sustainability, and ecology policies have been pushed tremendously since the 1980s. In all spheres of participatory instruments in Germany (representative, direct democratic, demonstrative, and deliberative), sustainability is high on the agenda and the climate change movement, political parties, and individual actors play an important role in demanding more democratic innovations and more direct and deliberative forms of participation. Germany was one of the frontrunners in the development of green political parties. However, it was late in the implementation of new instruments (participatory budgeting), but is learning participatory innovations from the Global South and from other European countries.

In the representative sphere, green political parties are playing an important role. Direct democratic instruments are used by civil society groups as well as ecological parties. Referendums are related to critical infrastructure such as power stations, wind turbines, and highways. Demonstrations such as Fridays for Future are important channels to express protest, and in the deliberative sphere all three types of participatory instruments can be seen: open forums with self-selection, citizen assemblies based on sortition, and stakeholder conferences that focus more on sustainability and include organized ecological interest groups. Deliberative participatory instruments (round tables) focus on big, highly criticized infrastructural projects such as railway stations (Stuttgart 21).

Our empirical research shows that citizens want more of a say in the decision-making process. They highlight the representative democracy and elections. However, there is a high demand for direct democratic referendums as well as for deliberative participatory instruments. Here open forums are preferred by a clear majority. Only a smaller majority supports stakeholder conferences as well as randomly selected citizen assemblies. Further research in more countries is needed to analyze whether this is related to different chances to participate in these instruments.

In the late 2010s, only a few local councilors were resistant to and critical of new participatory instruments that give broader power to the direct participation of the general public. The surveys show that in general, the majority of the councilors regarded most of these instruments much more positively and saw them as a kind of add-on for local representative democracy. However, local elections and referendums were regarded as the dominant, most important instrument by the majority of all councilors. Most councilors supported more deliberative forms of participation as well as even more unconventional involvement such as participation in demonstrations, etc.

However, a significant correlation between party membership and the evaluation and acceptance of participatory instruments is obvious. Younger local councilors, particularly female councilors, seem to be more open to new forms of local participation and the new deliberative participatory space. This includes not only the invited space implemented by local administrations in order to channel local protests. It also encompasses the bottom-up, more informal participatory instruments within the invented participatory space. The new instruments also have a strong political party bias. Our survey data show that more councilors from the Green Party strongly supported more deliberative and direct democratic instruments. In the conservative parties (CDU/CSU) there was also a majority in favor of the new participatory instruments, but there was still a group of often older councilors who rejected this kind of participatory democracy at the local level.

All councilors in all political parties saw the dominant and important role of voting in elections and referendums. When it comes to the other participatory instruments it becomes clear that the acceptance of the instruments differs from party to party. Political demonstrations were strongly supported by the Green Party and rejected by a majority within the conservative parties, whereas the Social Democratic councilors were split. Within the deliberative participatory instruments open forums found the greatest acceptance. Roundtables for stakeholders were also high on the agenda, and in third place—and often not well known—were the new instruments of randomly selected citizens’ assemblies.

It can be argued that political parties have, over the years, learned how to engage in new forms of participatory instruments. Although political parties still play the most important role in the elections, they often play a relevant role in referendums. Sometimes they use these instruments as a kind of second channel or a last resort in the decision-making process. Some referendums are implemented by political opposition parties in cooperation with civil society groups. The same strategic engagement can exist in deliberative participatory instruments. It can be shown that political parties play an important role in local open forums and townhall meetings, where they often dominate the discussion. The relatively new instrument of randomly selected members of civil society in citizens’ assemblies can significantly reduce the influence of political parties, because neither every citizen nor every politician may be selected. Because of sortition, members of the political parties are not directly included in this process. Members of political parties may be invited as experts to show their political positions, but they are not part of the group developing a final report. It could be argued that this is a general reason for the high skepticism of councilors towards citizens’ assemblies.

Finally, it can be concluded that different forms of participation are closely related to sustainability. Germany has learned from other countries and in particular from the Global South (e.g., Brazil). However, in Germany, these participatory processes are strongly related to the local level. Cities have become a laboratory for an innovative participatory space. In other countries, such as Ireland, France, the UK, Belgium, Italy, and Portugal, new participatory instruments play a more important role at the regional and the national level.

New participatory instruments get support from citizen and politicians. All these instruments may be important for legitimate ecological transformations and mobilizing civic engagement in the field of sustainability.

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Article

The Importance of Context and the Effect of Information and Deliberation on Opinion Change Regarding Environmental Issues in Citizens' Juries

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Abstract: Citizens' juries have become a popular method for engaging citizens in deliberation about complex public policy issues, such as climate action and sustainable development. Empirical evidence routinely indicates that jurors change their minds throughout the process. What is less clear is when and why this occurs and whether the causes are consistent across juries that consider the same topic but are situated within different contexts. We present evidence of opinion change in citizens' juries through a natural experiment, contrasting three local contexts of onshore windfarm development in Scotland; viz. existing, planned, and absent. Jurors' individual opinions of climate change, wind energy, and windfarms were measured through questionnaires at four time points: the start, following information-giving, reflection, and deliberation. Statistical examination of jurors' responses, through paired sample *t*-tests, Wilcoxon sign-tests, and Generalised Least Squares regression, reveals to what extent substantive changes were associated with different phases and locational contexts. In all three juries, opinion change occurs throughout the process, on different topics, and to different degrees. While the information phase consistently influences jurors' opinions the most, jury composition affects the magnitude and direction of opinion change, with outcomes contingent on contexts. Our findings are important for informing how mini-publics are designed and used to inform environmental policy-making at different scales.

Keywords: political participation; citizens' juries; deliberation; natural experiment; opinion change; sustainability; windfarms; Scotland



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1. Introduction

Citizen engagement is critical to enable the complex socio-economic transformations required for a sustainable future [1]. Indeed, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development presents a clear mandate for public participation, outlining a shared vision to “ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels” (Indicator 16.7) [2]. Mini-publics are now widely used in policymaking practice as a means of bringing citizens into processes of framing, advising on, or deciding about, complex public policy issues such as climate action and environmental health from local to global governance [3], exemplified by the rise of climate assemblies [1]. A key aim of the mini-publics is to realise norms of deliberative democracy [4] and to foster its long-term sustainability, as argued in this special issue of the journal by Strandberg et al. [5], in relation to mixed deliberations between citizens and politicians, and by Kulha et al. [6], in relation to environmental intergenerational fairness.

A central tenet of the normative theory of deliberative democracy is that participants should enter a discussion with an open mind, be willing to reflect upon their opinions in light of reasons offered by others, and therefore remain open to changing their opinions accordingly. Only with open minds can the ‘forceless force of the better argument’ [7] (p. 108) have any chance of prevailing. These mindsets alone realise the epistemic and prudential benefits that justify a deliberative approach to democracy. However, it is evident that, firstly, there are many causes of opinion change other than deliberation [8]. Secondly, and more concerning from a deliberative democracy perspective, many of these causes are not compatible with the norms of deliberative democracy, such as manipulation and bias. We, therefore, need a greater understanding of the role deliberation plays in generating opinion reflection and change, and the potential conditioning effects of the context in which it occurs.

Much of the research to date on this issue has been conducted through mini-publics, that is, participatory processes where citizens are selected through a civic lottery (e.g., stratified random sampling) and supported to engage in informed deliberation to produce recommendations or decisions on a public issue. A key reason for their popularity is that mini-publics are artificially designed to create environments conducive to learning, open-mindedness and deliberation that stimulate opinion reflection. Indeed, empirical evidence from mini-publics routinely indicates that participants do indeed reflect on, revise and modify their opinions during the process [4]. However, the evidence from these studies is far from conclusive with regard to the relationship between deliberation and opinion reflection and change. In particular, it is not clear which aspect(s) of the process is associated with opinion change and whether the findings are consistent across mini-publics in different contexts. This is important for assessing the compatibility of opinion change with the norms of deliberative democracy, mini-public design, and the application and use of mini-publics. If mini-publics are to guide political choices amongst the public and policymakers, as some have advocated [9], then we must understand what shapes the opinions participants have at the end of the process and ascertain if this is consistent within different contexts, or responsive to those contexts, so we can discuss the level of trust and influence that should be afforded to these opinions and the deliberative process. Environmental governance offers an excellent context to study these issues because deliberation must encompass local, national, and global considerations.

This paper analyses three standardised citizens’ juries conducted in Scotland on the contested topic of onshore windfarms. They were held contemporaneously in locations with different levels of exposure to local windfarms. This was organised as a research project rather than an official policy process, but it was nonetheless designed to inform Scottish debate about onshore windfarms, deliberative public engagement, and democratic innovations. Despite it being a research project, it aims to offer insights of relevance to environmental governance, especially given the proliferation of mini-publics on this topic, and the need to understand better the dynamics within these processes. Nonetheless, due to the limitations of size and context, this study is only one of several that will be needed to generate reliable and coherent theory for the purposes of policy.

The task for the jurors was to consider: ‘What should be the key principles for deciding about windfarm development, and why?’ Accordingly, participants were invited to engage with long-term considerations regarding policy, energy generation, and climate change, topics that have been at the centre of Scotland’s debate on environmental governance (Further details are provided on the project website: <https://www.climatexchange.org.uk/research/projects/citizens-juries-on-wind-farm-development-in-scotland/> (accessed on 26 August 2021)). Here, we analyse if, how, and when jurors change their opinions during the course of the process in three different locations, using findings from survey research, supplemented by ethnographer and evaluator fieldnotes. Consequently, our analysis contributes to testing the normative claims made by deliberative democrats about opinion change, and, moreover, to debates about the contribution citizens’ juries can make to institutionalising deliberative democracy in environmental governance, given various

contextual conditions. In our research, we were interested in testing whether opinions about the key principles for wind farm development were consistent in conclusion for Scotland as a whole, irrespective of location, or whether these contextual differences were reflected in opinion divergence.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first two consider the theories and empirical studies of opinion change in relation to deliberative democracy and citizens' juries, respectively. The third section outlines the methodological aspects of our study, leading into the fourth section which presents the findings. The fifth section discusses the results in relation to what is already known and offers conclusions.

1.1. Deliberative Democracy and Opinion Change

Deliberative democrats believe opinions should be open to development during the political process, through deliberation, rather than concluded prior to it. This implies that interlocutors need to be willing to change their minds. Indeed, for Chambers [10] (p. 318) 'a central tenet of all deliberative theory is that deliberation can change minds and transform opinions', while for Elster [11] (p. 6) 'the transformation of preferences through rational deliberation is the ostensible goal of arguing'. The normative argument is that through engaging in public deliberation participants' opinions do not just change, they become more 'informed, enlightened, and authentic' [12] (p. 1) (see also [13]). Consequently, opinion change is not necessarily desirable per se, as people might change their minds due to 'conscious manipulation' or 'unconscious bias' [8] (p. 321). For example, empirical research indicates that, when participating in collective discussion, people will change their opinions due to 'inequalities, biases, and manipulatory strategies' [14] (p. 380), such as the employment of particular frames [15]. Further, opinions may change to comply with majorities to achieve conformity [16], or through being 'undermined by group norms' [17] (p. 657), due to group polarization [18] and due to cognitive constraints [19], all of which are problematic for deliberative theory [20]. Therefore, when people change their minds, if it is to be authentic and legitimate, it must be due to the 'mechanisms specified in the normative theories' of deliberative democracy [21] (p. 1). Ultimately, the distinction is between manipulation, which is bad for deliberative democracy, and non-coercive persuasion, which is good [22]. Here we focus on two of these mechanisms related to persuasion; information gains and reasoning.

During collective deliberation, participants pool the relevant information they have on the issue at hand, leading to information gains for most participants [23,24], which can, in turn, lead to changes in opinion [25]. This is a significant benefit of collective deliberation, but, for Rosenberg [26] (p. 109), what is more important, from a deliberative point of view, is whether the increased information improves 'the quality of their reasoning'. Therefore, it is not just receiving more information that should induce opinion reflection and change, but the process of public reasoning more broadly. For deliberative democrats, opinions, preferences and attitudes are adaptable to reason and, through consideration of differing reasons, existing opinions can be transformed and new opinions formed: 'democratic deliberation is publicly reasoned in the sense that people offer reasons in support of their opinions and perspectives, hope they will prove convincing to others and expect these reasons, and these reasons alone, to be the motivating force of people accepting them or not' [27] (p. 69). In sum, we need both information and reasons to form coherent opinions between available options [25].

Deliberative democrats do accept, however, that participating in collective deliberation will not always cause opinion change. On reviewing the new information and considering the reasons others provide, a participant may decide that their initial opinions were still appropriate and publicly defensible [23]. This is legitimate from a deliberative perspective, providing participants entered the deliberative process with an open mind [13,23,28,29]. Therefore, a non-coercive reflection is required, rather than opinion change per se [13]. Despite this acknowledgement, there are good reasons why we expect deliberation to affect opinion [14]. Firstly, citizens often enter deliberation with tentative and incomplete

views [24,30]. This is especially the case if the opinions of those deliberating are unlikely to be consequential. Rational choice theory implies that citizens would not have the motivation to become informed about an issue if their influence is likely to be very limited [31]. Secondly, participants in inclusive public deliberation should be exposed to different kinds of information and arguments to what is usual for them [23,32,33], which encourages them to see issues in a different light and may affect their views [25]. Thirdly, in the course of devising and articulating public reasons to justify their position, participants may adapt their opinions [29,34].

For others, public deliberation is not always required if it is accepted that uncoerced opinion reflection is key [35], as ‘deliberation within’ can also generate public reasoning because other opinions can be made ‘imaginatively present’ through individuals conducting ‘a wide-ranging debate within their heads’ [36] (pp. 63–64). This involves an ‘internal reflective process’ amongst participants where they put themselves in the place of the other [37] (p. 81). Indeed, we weigh up reasons and attempt to understand the reasons of others, all through internal reflection, even when we do engage in collective deliberation [35], which may occur between, not necessarily within, deliberations [38].

The problem is that, despite the importance of open-mindedness, opinion reflection and opinion change for deliberative democracy, there are significant gaps in our understanding about the connection between these [14].

1.2. Citizens’ Juries and Opinion Change

Mini-publics are the most lauded device for institutionalising deliberative democracy but have also been employed by researchers seeking to test the normative claims of deliberative democracy [39], particularly those relating to opinion change [32,33]. They are seen as an opportunity for citizens to deliberate on important and contentious issues, and to reflect on and revise their opinions in light of deliberation. There are various types of mini-public, including planning cells, consensus conferences, deliberative polls, and citizens’ assemblies, but here we focus on citizens’ juries. Citizens’ juries are typically organised into three sequential phases: an ‘information phase’ where witnesses provide a range of evidence and advocacy of relevant information and positions as a supplement to the sharing of information amongst jurors; a ‘deliberation phase’ where citizens discuss the merits of different options and reach a collective decision; and a ‘reflection phase’ which occurs in between. It is important to note that all three phases can be ‘reflective’ and that the ‘information’ phase is discursive too, as it includes the questioning of the witnesses and informal talk, but it can still be differentiated from the more formal deliberation phase where jurors strive to reach a collective viewpoint on the issue at hand [35].

The significant focus that mini-publics have been afforded by deliberative democrats ‘is based on the premise that the norms of deliberative democracy are so difficult to achieve in practice that it will not occur naturally, so the conditions . . . need to be artificially created’ [40] (p. 7); [32]. For practical reasons, stratified random sampling is employed to recruit a diverse selection of citizens, ensuring that each person has an equal chance of being selected within their stratum. The aim is to assemble a ‘deliberative microcosm’ of the population that is ‘small enough to be genuinely deliberative and representative enough to be genuinely democratic’ [41] (p. 11). Most studies of this nature are very small in order to achieve these deliberative aims; e.g., Strandberg et al.’s use of two citizens’ forums with 17 and 18 people (21 citizens and 14 politicians) [42]; Baccaro et al.’s twelve discussion groups of 9 to 11 students per group [20]; and the use of 57 discussion groups by Gastil et al. [43], with only 3 to 6 students per group. However, given the small number of participants (typically 12–25 [44]) in citizens’ juries, they are not intended to be statistically representative of the population, but ‘demographically diverse’ [45] (p. 96). The hope is that this will also lead to a diversity of starting positions on the issue, although the likelihood of this is disputed [46]. Because the sampled citizens are probably not partisan stakeholders on the issue, they tend not to have strong pre-deliberative opinions on the

issue being discussed and are, therefore, more likely to enter the process with an open mind, amenable to reflection and opinion change [4].

Opinion change does appear to be commonplace in citizens' juries [44,47–51]. However, most of these studies are based on surveys of the jurors' attitudes before and after the process. Therefore, although they show that opinions do change, the results cannot fully explain when and why the participants changed their minds. Adopting an experimental design, Esterling et al. [52] randomised 2793 participants to small discussion tables in 19 Town Halls in the USA, with an average of about 8 people per table. By separating immediate intuitions, measured through questions of latent ideology, and deliberate, analytical thinking, based on topic-specific questions, namely System 1 versus System 2 thinking [53], they were able to show that argument-based persuasion, rather than polarisation by ideology, influenced participants' opinions. It was most likely for opinions to change when the discussions were perceived as well-informed, although no attempt was made to separate the contributions of information and deliberation.

Strandberg and Berg [42] found that facilitated rather than non-facilitated deliberation prevented opinion polarisation and may relate to aggregate-level change and the magnitude of change at the individual level (see also [20,54]). Himmelroos and Christensen [55] also found in their quasi-experimental study that deliberation moved people away from the extremes, rather than any evidence of group dynamics changing opinions, although they admit it might be due to information rather than deliberation per se. In contrast, Herne et al. [56] find that increased knowledge can cause polarisation at the individual level; it varies according to deliberative context, and deliberation in mini-publics can reduce polarisation at the aggregate level.

The evidence on opinion change from mini-publics in general, and citizens' juries in particular, has been criticised, as it is hard to prove that opinion change has been the result of the deliberative phase and not just the information provided, media coverage, discussion procedures adopted, or other political or psychological factors [20,32,57–60]. Indeed, research on deliberative polls could not identify any 'robust' predictor of opinion change [61]. In short, many of the existing studies on deliberation and opinion change fail to uncover 'the underlying opinion processes at work' [23] (p. 688).

Research on the 'Far North Queensland Citizens' Jury' in Australia attempted to find a resolution to this shortcoming [35]. Twelve jurors were surveyed at the beginning and end of the jury process, and once during the process between the information phase and the deliberation phase of the jury. The before and after analysis indicated that the jurors' opinions on the various policy options changed greatly, and 'the bigger change, by a wide margin, occurred in the minds of the jurors before the jury's formal discussion began' (i.e., before the deliberation phase), possibly in anticipation of forthcoming deliberations [35] (p. 634). Although the deliberation phase did produce opinion change, the changes within the information phase were substantially greater than those in the deliberative phase [35]. The jurors themselves also reported feeling that most impacts on any changes to their opinions occurred during the information phase (Ibid.). Goodin and Niemeyer [35] argue that these findings are not due to the fact that the information phase occurred first and lasted three times longer than the deliberation phase, because the opinion changes were not random, continuous, unidirectional, or proportional to the duration of the information and deliberation phases. Further, evidence from deliberative polls [62] supports the findings that information, rather than discussion, has the greatest effect on the magnitude of opinion change. The findings are also corroborated by the outcomes from citizens' assemblies in Canada that followed a discussion-information-discussion format and found that the information session was the most influential on participant attitudes [63].

Goodin and Niemeyer [35] do not conclude that opinion change in citizens' juries can simply be explained by information gains. After all, discussion did occur during the information phase, and the deliberative phase also led to opinion change. Furthermore, some psychological studies indicate that increased information is not a reliable source of opinion change in itself [64], while Sanders [61] finds that in deliberative polls there is no

effect of knowledge gain on opinion change. Rather, Goodin and Niemeyer conclude that internal-reflexive processes of ‘democratic deliberation within’ are of central importance to the deliberative process, as it may alter ‘the way people process . . . information and hence (perhaps) what they think about the issue’ [35] (p. 642). Furthermore, when receiving the information in the initial phase, the jurors did so in anticipation of having to deliberate later in the process, where they knew they would have to find a publicly defensible position and account for their views with reasons [35]. Again, this is consistent with other studies on deliberative polls, which indicate that knowledge gains of participants are enhanced by deliberation [65,66] and that those who enter the process with the least knowledge change their opinions to the greatest extent [67]. That said, research from a mini-public held in Ireland in 2011 indicates that deliberation might still be crucial for opinion change [68] as it has *different* effects on opinion than information [69]. A control group was provided with the same information packs as the mini-public participants but did not go on to undertake collective deliberation. The control group did not undergo as much opinion change as the mini-public participants [68]. Clearly, further research is required to establish the cause(s) of citizen opinion change in mini-publics.

As Curato et al. [70] argue, deliberative transformation takes time and may not follow a linear path, with initial informational effects producing a cathartic change, which might later develop into deliberative opinions after further reflection [35]. Citizens’ juries may be too short to enable the tracking of these deeper transformations. Moreover, a significant limitation of these studies is that they focussed on a one-off, isolated mini-public. Therefore, we do not know if another sample of citizens would have adopted similar opinions after the process and if the information phase would consistently prove to have the most significant effect on opinions [23,71]. Citizens’ juries are potentially more affected by this issue than other types of mini-public, since they do not comprise scientifically comparable samples [24]. The question of how reliable mini-publics’ outcomes are is important, as some scholars suggest that the opinions of mini-public participants should act as trusted proxies to guide broader public opinion and policy-making [9]. Whether the opinions of mini-public participants are consistently compatible with norms of deliberation should be a crucial consideration on whether they should be trusted proxies. Consequently, the study presented here considers if, how and when participants changed their views in three citizens’ juries, in substantively different contextual frames, held contemporaneously on the same issue. Such an approach has been hailed as essential: ‘If we want to find out more about how deliberation can best be institutionalised, we need cases where institutional characteristics form the independent variable and where other variables that affect outcomes of interaction are as constant as possible’ [14] (p. 397). Goodin and Niemeyer [35] issued one survey between the information and deliberation phase of their jury, and so were unable to trace the influence of the reflection phase on an opinion that occurs in-between. We issued four surveys to overcome this limitation. We turn now to a full consideration of these cases and methods.

2. Materials and Methods

The research was designed as a natural experiment, whereby the project held three standardised citizens’ juries in different locations in Scotland, selected according to their exposure to windfarm developments at the time (Table 1). Essentially, one location (Coldstream) acted as the control group, since no windfarms existed or were planned, while the others either had existing windfarms in the locality (Aberfeldy) or they were under consideration (Helensburgh). The only other variation between the groups was the participants themselves, who were selected to reflect the socio-demographic diversity present across Scotland and exhibiting varying attitudes to wind energy. There was no opportunity to randomise individuals to the different localities in order to implement a pure experiment. There was also an unavoidable change of two of the five witnesses who provided information in Coldstream. In all other respects, the conditions were kept as constant as possible.

Table 1. Three Scottish citizens' juries on windfarms (n = 47).

Jury Number	Town (Local Authority)	Dates	N	Town Population	Windfarms Status (in 2013)
1	Coldstream (Scottish Borders)	Day 1: 26 October 2013 Day 2: 16 November 2013	15 7 male, 8 female	1813	No existing or proposed windfarms nearby
2	Helensburgh (Argyll and Bute)	Day 1: 9 November 2013 Day 2: 23 November 2013	14 10 male, 4 female	14,626	Early stages of proposal; small windfarm 2 km away
3	Aberfeldy (Perth and Kinross)	Day 1: 18 January 2014 Day 2: 1 February 2014	18 6 male, 12 female	1895	Large operating windfarm; within 10 km

The research project was overseen by a formal Stewarding Board, including advocates and opponents of windfarms, and had two broad aims, to contribute to: (1) substantive understanding of public attitudes to onshore windfarm development, and (2) methodological understanding of mini-publics and how they might be used. This paper focuses on aspects of the latter aim. In order to develop analytical purchase on this second aim, we developed two sets of hypotheses (H), based on previous research, that we wished to evaluate in relation to the phase (H1 and H2) and context (H3 to H5) of the citizens' juries, respectively. These are presented schematically for ease of reference and overview, but they follow from the insights gleaned from the earlier sections, with brief rationales provided after each one.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Greater opinion change is expected in the information phase.*

This is likely to be the result of witness argumentation, as well as general information received on Day 1 [52].

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *The facilitated deliberation phase is likely to reveal greater change at the individual level rather than in aggregate opinions, through a more nuanced and open-minded appreciation of opposing arguments.*

While facilitated deliberation is expected to minimise enclave polarisation [42,72], opinion crystallisation, rather than change, may occur where there is little diversity in starting positions [73].

Hypothesis 3 (H3). *Lack of local relevance of windfarms, either now or in the immediate future, is likely to lead to a relatively neutral set of opinions.*

This indicates that we would expect Coldstream to be relatively indifferent in their attitudes compared to the other juries, since there are no local consequences [31].

Hypothesis 4 (H4). *Unless there are perceived detrimental effects, familiarity with windfarms is likely to lead to acceptance of the status quo, leading to:*

Hypothesis 4a (H4a). *The most positive attitudes.*

Previous research has made this connection [74,75].

Hypothesis 4b (H4b). *Smaller changes in opinions.*

This would suggest that, in the absence of evidence of detriment, Aberfeldy is likely to show the most positive attitudes to windfarms and the least change in their opinions during the process compared to Coldstream or Helensburgh [76].

Hypothesis 5 (H5). *Anticipation of change without public involvement, when the outcome is unfamiliar or unexpected, creates uncertainty, leading to resistance and negative opinions of that change.*

It would be expected that the greatest negative opinion would be seen in Helensburgh (planned windfarm), where jurors did not raise the principle of public involvement, unlike the other juries. Existing research has shown the importance of community participation on acceptance, especially through information sharing [77], rather than NIMBYism [76]. Differences between localities are expected to occur irrespective of variations in group composition relating to socio-demography [55] but may be affected by different starting attitudes [73].

2.1. Sample

Each jury comprised between 14 and 18 participants (Table 1), selected to represent a cross-section of Scottish citizens by gender, age, and income (Table 2). The group also represented a mixture of educational attainment, working status, involvement in civic activities, such as volunteering or activism, and a range of attitudes towards the environment and wind farms. The initial sample was 49 jurors, but two female participants (Coldstream and Helensburgh) dropped out during the process due to ill health or relocation, leaving 47.

Table 2. Participant demography (aggregate of the three citizens' juries) (n = 47).

Demographic Measure	Target (%)	Actual (%)	Actual (n)
Gender			
Male	50	49	23
Female	50	51	24
Age			
18–24	20	19	9
25–54	50	53	25
55+	30	28	13
Working status			
Full time		45	21
Part time	Mix	9	4
Not working		47	22
Education			
School		11	5
Further education		21	10
Higher education	Mix	47	22
Other (inc. professional/trade qualifications)		21	10
Income (6 non-responses)			
under GBP 15,999 per year	>40	34	14
GBP 16,000 GBP 31,199	>20	37	15
GBP 31,200 to GBP 51,999	>10	20	8
GBP 52,000 or above	>5	10	4

Table 2. Cont.

Demographic Measure	Target (%)	Actual (%)	Actual (n)
Civic activities			
Have taken part in one or more activities	Mix	49	23
Have not taken part		51	24
Attitudes towards windfarms in Scotland			
Should be more	Mix	45	21
Should be fewer		24	11
Current level about right		31	15
Attitudes towards the environment (4 non-responses)			
Very/fairly interested	Mix	88	38
Neither interested nor uninterested		5	2
Not very/not at all interested		7	3

Participants were recruited face-to-face by a market research company according to a pre-agreed specification. The jury topic remained unknown to the participants prior to the event to minimise the self-selection of an already engaged minority, so the project was vaguely described to prospective participants as ‘public conversations about environmental issues’. A question in the recruitment process allowed the selection of participants with a range of interests in wind energy, without revealing at this stage that the discussions were going to focus on onshore windfarms. Recruiters were instructed to assure participants that knowledge or interest in environmental issues did not affect eligibility. If the topic was completely unknown, people may have been reticent to sign up.

Each jury was held over two full days (Saturdays), either 2 or 3 weeks apart, for which jurors were compensated for their participation (GBP 70 for day 1; GBP 100 for day 2). The process was designed and facilitated by two engagement practitioners, whose approach is outlined in Escobar et al. [78]. At the start participants were presented with the overall task for the citizens’ jury: “There are strong views on windfarms in Scotland, with some people being strongly opposed, others being strongly in favour and a range of opinions in between. What should be the key principles for deciding about windfarm development in Scotland, and why?”

2.2. Content of the Citizens’ Juries

There were three evidence sessions on Day 1:

- I. Energy and Climate Change: One academic witness, who sought to present an impartial overview.
- II. Wind Energy: Two witnesses, one presenting the argument ‘for’ and the other ‘against’ wind power.
- III. Windfarms: Two witnesses (different from those in session two), one presenting the argument ‘for’ and the other ‘against’ onshore windfarms.

For each, the jury heard brief presentations from the witness(es) followed by a longer session for scrutiny, where the jurors first worked in groups to prioritise key questions and then interrogated the witnesses in plenary. The witnesses were drawn from universities (3), NGOs (2), and trade bodies (2).

Should the jurors wish to learn more between the two days, each participant was provided with a user-friendly Handbook (https://www.climatexchange.org.uk/media/1442/citizens_juries_handbook.pdf (accessed on 26 August 2021)), which presented background information about climate change and energy, and links to resources for further information in various formats. The Handbook was prepared by an independent group under the oversight of the Stewarding Board. After Day 1, the witnesses were given a list

of questions that were not addressed in the plenary, due to time constraints. Their written answers were circulated to the jurors approximately a week before Day 2.

On Day 2, the jurors set the agenda by agreeing on key themes to structure the deliberations, which eventually led to the group ‘verdict’; a series of prioritised statements that expressed their principles for windfarm development and summed up the various group opinions. The same process was adopted for all three juries with respect to the structure, duration, topic, facilitators, and engagement with witnesses.

2.3. Data Construction

The project entailed a parallel mixed methods research design [79], comprising six data sources, including questionnaires conducted individually at four time points and several interviews and observations. This paper focuses largely on relevant results from the questionnaires, supplemented by observations of ethnographers and evaluators, to understand if, how and when citizens’ opinions changed during the jury process.

Jurors were asked to complete a series of highly structured questionnaires throughout the process, incorporating mainly closed response options. Several questions were repeated throughout the process, enabling opinions to be tracked. The four questionnaires were administered to record participants’ opinions and beliefs during the process as follows:

- a. QA1, at the start of Day 1, as a baseline measure
- b. QA2, at the end of Day 1, following the information phase (i.e., the formal evidence-giving phase)
- c. QA3, at the start of Day 2, following the reflection phase (i.e., following a 2 or 3 week break between jury days)
- d. QA4, at the end of Day 2, following the deliberation phase.

Therefore, we are able to assess the extent of opinion change in the reflection phase, unlike in the Goodin and Niemeyer [35] study.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data from the four survey questionnaires are used in the following analyses. Three scaled variables are created to reflect citizens’ underlying opinions on wind power and energy policy, windfarms in the locality, and windfarm planning, respectively. Each scale is an additive index based on the strength of agreement/disagreement with a series of statements related to each of the three topics, for which scale reliability is calculated using Cronbach’s alpha (Table 3). Each question was scored -2 (strongly disagree), -1 (disagree), 0 (neither agree nor disagree), $+1$ (agree), $+2$ (strongly agree), based on level of agreement with each statement. Missing values were replaced by the median response to the given question in the survey wave for that jury location.

Table 3. Scaled variable question composition and reliability scores.

Scale	Coding Reversed (X)
1: Wind Power and Energy Policy	
It is important for Scotland to develop its wind energy resources	
I think Scotland should invest in other renewable electricity sources rather than wind power	X
Wind energy development is important for combatting climate change	
Wind energy development is economically important for Scotland	
For wind energy, the positives outweigh the negatives	
Windfarm developments offer the prospect of future jobs in Scotland	
Cronbach’s alpha: 0.9216	

Table 3. Cont.

Scale	Coding Reversed (X)
2: Windfarms in the Locality	
I would like it if this area produced electricity from wind power	
I would like it if this area produced electricity from wind power, if the electricity was for local use	
I would prefer to see electricity from wind power produced somewhere other than this area	X
Windfarm developments decrease the value (the price) of houses nearby	X
The financial rewards from windfarms benefit the energy companies rather than the local community	X
Overall, communities located close to windfarms benefit from the development	
Windfarms would not change my relationship with the countryside	
Cronbach's alpha: 0.7842	
3: Windfarm Planning	
I support the development of onshore windfarms in appropriate locations	
I support the development of windfarms offshore (at sea)	
Windfarms pose greater threat to the local environment than climate change	X
Windfarms are planned and designed to minimise the potential environmental damage	
Windfarms are planned and designed to minimise the potential disruption to people living nearby	
The rules about wind farm plans minimise the noise and visual appearance of wind farms	
Windfarms are harmful to the health of people living nearby	X
Cronbach's alpha: 0.8663	

Comparisons are made between jurors' opinions following each phase of the deliberative process using two different approaches. The first treats each jury as a separate sample to compare average opinion changes within juries, to provide contextual comparisons over the jury process. We use paired sample *t*-tests and Wilcoxon sign-tests to compare changes in the mean and median values, respectively. The second combines the three juries into one general sample (due to the similar structure and timing across all juries), to increase the statistical power in our analyses in understanding if, how, and when changes take place overall. A four-wave Generalised Least Squares (GLS) model with random effects [80] was used to investigate the relationship between each jury phase and individuals' opinions on each of the three scales, with standard errors clustered by location. All statistical analysis was conducted using Stata, v14.2.

3. Results

For all three scales (Table 4), the starting opinions (QA1) were most positive in Aberfeldy, the locality with a windfarm, and least positive in Helensburgh, where a windfarm was being considered. We discuss statistically significant changes in each scale for each phase in turn, though a similar pattern is observed across all three scales.

At the beginning of Day 1, individuals held a positive opinion of wind power and energy policy, particularly in Aberfeldy and Coldstream, while Helensburgh bordered on neutral. However, opinions in Coldstream declined notably during the information phase, with no significant change thereafter, ending fairly neutral. In Aberfeldy, a small (not statistically significant) opinion decline occurred during the first day (information phase) and between the first and the second day (reflection phase), but with no noticeable effect during the deliberation phase, still concluding positively. Helensburgh, however, revealed a significant decline, particularly during the information phase (which shows the

most dramatic opinion shift observed in all scales), but also the deliberation phase, leaving them ultimately much more negative than the other juries in absolute terms.

Table 4. Jurors' opinion changes over two days for three scaled variables.

Questionnaire	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Min	Max	Phase Change in Mean	Phase Change in Median
1. Wind Power and Energy Policy (−12 most negative; 0 neutral; 12 most positive)							
All jurors (n = 47)							
QA1	2.64	4	5.89	−12	11		
QA2	−0.47	1	6.46	−12	9	−3.11 ***	−3.00 ***
QA3	−0.49	1	6.81	−12	11	−0.02	0
QA4	−1.30	0	7.02	−12	10	−0.81 *	−1
Coldstream (n = 15)							
QA1	2.73	4	5.75	−10	10		
QA2	0.80	1	5.19	−12	9	−1.93 ***	−3.00 ***
QA3	1.87	2	6.22	−12	10	1.07	1
QA4	0.87	1	4.75	−12	9	−1	−1
Helensburgh (n = 14)							
QA1	0.43	−1	7.52	−12	11		
QA2	−6.57	−7	4.15	−12	2	−7.00 ***	−6.00 **
QA3	−6.36	−7	5.79	−12	11	0.21	0
QA4	−8.21	−11	5.55	−12	8	−1.85 **	−4
Aberfeldy (n = 18)							
QA1	4.28	4	4.06	−7	11		
QA2	3.22	4	5.59	−12	9	−1.06	0
QA3	2.11	3	5.26	−9	9	−1.11 *	−1
QA4	2.28	4	5.86	−11	10	0.17	1
2. Windfarms in the locality (−14 most negative; 0 neutral; 14 most positive)							
All jurors (n = 47)							
QA1	0.17	1	5.55	−13	9		
QA2	−2.19	−1	5.05	−10	8	−2.36 ***	−2.00 ***
QA3	−2.00	−1	5.31	−11	9	0.19	0
QA4	−2.53	−2	5.16	−14	8	−0.53	−1
Coldstream (n = 15)							
QA1	0.07	1	4.53	−13	6		
QA2	−0.33	1	3.85	−10	7	−0.4	0
QA3	0.20	0	3.47	−7	6	0.53	−1
QA4	−0.67	0	4.78	−14	7	−0.87	0
Helensburgh (n = 14)							
QA1	−1.29	−2	5.84	−13	6		
QA2	−6.93	−7	2.81	−10	−1	−5.64 ***	−5.00 **
QA3	−6.93	−7	3.52	−10	2	0	0
QA4	−5.93	−7	4.46	−11	3	1	0
Aberfeldy (n = 18)							
QA1	1.39	3	6.08	−12	9		
QA2	−0.06	0	4.93	−10	8	−1.45	−3
QA3	0.00	−1	5.32	−11	9	0.06	−1
QA4	−1.44	−2	4.93	−10	8	−1.44 *	−1

Table 4. Cont.

Questionnaire	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Min	Max	Phase Change in Mean	Phase Change in Median
3. Windfarm Planning (−14 most negative; 0 neutral; 14 most positive)							
All jurors (n = 47)							
QA1	3.85	6	6.26	−14	14		
QA2	1.62	2	6.51	−14	14	−2.23 ***	−4.00 ***
QA3	1.40	2	6.84	−12	14	−0.22	0.00 *
QA4	0.91	3	7.12	−14	14	−0.49	1
Coldstream (n = 15)							
QA1	4.40	6	6.34	−14	10		
QA2	2.73	4	4.35	−5	10	−1.67	−2.00 *
QA3	3.80	5	5.20	−6	14	1.07	1
QA4	2.87	3	5.82	−8	14	−0.93	−2
Helensburgh (n = 14)							
QA1	1.36	1	6.86	−13	14		
QA2	−3.50	−6	6.35	−14	10	−4.86 ***	−7.00 *
QA3	−5.36	−6	5.11	−12	6	−1.86 **	0.00 **
QA4	−5.71	−7	6.06	−14	5	−0.35	−1
Aberfeldy (n = 18)							
QA1	5.33	6	5.41	−11	14		
QA2	4.67	4	5.99	−11	14	−0.66	−2
QA3	4.67	5	5.50	−7	13	0	1
QA4	4.44	5	5.35	−10	13	−0.23	0

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$. Key: QA1: Start of Day 1, QA2: End of Day 1, QA3: Start of Day 2, QA4: End of Day 2.

Regarding the second scale, windfarms in the locality, jurors in Aberfeldy (located close to a large windfarm) showed the most positive opinions at the start but became more negative during deliberation, ending more negative than jurors in Coldstream (where there were no windfarms proposed at the time), which had remained relatively neutral throughout. Helensburgh, where at the time of the study a prospective windfarm development was being proposed, started negatively and then declined further during the information phase.

The third scale, concerning windfarm planning, showed strongly positive support in Coldstream and Aberfeldy at the beginning, with a more neutral stance in Helensburgh. Once again, from a moderately positive position at the start, a statistically significant decline was seen in Helensburgh during the information and reflection phases, while a relatively small decline was seen in Coldstream during the information phase. Opinions in Aberfeldy remained high throughout the phases.

If we treat the three juries as one sample, we consistently see statistically significant declines in opinion in all scales following the information phase, in both the means and the medians, influenced by the strong effect in Helensburgh. Smaller declines are evident in different localities during the reflection and deliberation phases. In general, there was a high level of stability in the period between the two jury days. Nonetheless, there was a fair degree of opinion diversity at the individual level at each stage, as shown by the relatively large standard deviations.

The results above indicate that jurors do exhibit changes in opinion during the process and, moreover, these occur in different phases and on different topics to different degrees in the three jury locations. The random-effects GLS regression model in Table 5, with standard errors clustered by location, looks at the level of opinion at each phase of the process relative to the start for all jurors (n = 47). While the models were run with the inclusion of socio-demographic traits, including age, gender, and education level, none of

these attributes were found to be statistically meaningful in explaining levels of opinion and were therefore omitted here to create a more parsimonious model.

Table 5. Regression model coefficients for opinion changes by phase for each scale.

	Wind Power and Energy Policy		Windfarms in Locality		Windfarm Planning	
	Coefficient		Coefficient		Coefficient	
	(s.e.)	<i>p</i> -Value	(s.e.)	<i>p</i> -Value	(s.e.)	<i>p</i> -Value
Constant (QA1)	2.638 (1.124)	0.019	0.170 (0.788)	0.829	3.851 (1.174)	0.001
QA2	−3.106 (1.790)	0.083	−2.362 (1.497)	0.115	−2.234 (1.237)	0.071
QA3	−3.128 (1.677)	0.062	−2.170 (1.610)	0.178	−2.447 (1.924)	0.203
QA4	−3.936 (2.121)	0.064	−2.809 (1.156)	0.015	−2.936 (1.886)	0.119
n	188		188		188	
R ²	0.0511		0.0418		0.0282	

Table 5 reveals the varied mean starting opinion levels for each scale, with ‘wind power and energy policy’, and ‘windfarm planning’ initially positive, while ‘windfarm locality’ showed a relatively neutral view. Following the information phase on Day 1, the initially positive scales exhibited negative opinion shifts that were marginally statistically significant. During the period between the jury days, when participants could reflect on the first day, opinions hardly changed.

After the second day, when participants had the opportunity to deliberate on the topic, views on the scales ‘wind power and energy policy’, and ‘windfarm locality’ are statistically more negative than the start of the process, unlike ‘windfarm planning’, despite all three scale coefficients indicating lower mean opinion levels. The inability to obtain statistically significant findings could be an artefact of small sample sizes, reflecting the nature of the project.

4. Discussion

We find that during a citizens’ jury, the information phase most influences jurors’ opinions, rather than the reflection and deliberation phases. This is in agreement with other studies [35,62,63], and supports our first hypothesis (H1).

Across all three scales, we repeatedly observe statistically meaningful changes across the information phase. Given the likelihood of being more informed in Aberfeldy, due to the existence of a windfarm locally, jurors show less change than in the other localities in relation to wind power/energy policy and windfarm planning, although not windfarms in the locality.

There is evidence of a smaller change in aggregate opinions in the deliberative phase, compared to the information phase, but higher variation in individual opinions within each phase as measured by the standard deviation. Jurors reported higher self-assessed and retained knowledge after Day 2, despite little formal information exchange in the deliberation phase, indicating support for the second hypothesis (H2).

Most jurors considered climate change to be an important issue, although some Coldstream and Aberfeldy participants did not hold this view. However, the Helensburgh jury was less in favour of renewables, initially arguing for natural gas (fossil fuel) in their top five energy sources, later replaced by nuclear energy. Given the relatively negative opinion throughout the process on all three scales in Helensburgh, a jury that commented on its relative unanimity of attitudes, it does suggest that there has been a crystallisation of opinions by the conclusion. The relatively large standard deviation in the deliberation

phase, coupled with relatively less aggregate change, does show support for the second hypothesis.

The relatively neutral or middle position throughout the process found in Coldstream, where no windfarms existed or were planned, indicates strong support for the third hypothesis (H3) across all scales. It is interesting that, while these jurors' attitudes became more negative during the information phase in relation to wind power/energy policy and windfarm planning, there was little statistical change subsequently on any scale. Their views are more likely to be hypothetical than Aberfeldy, which may be particularly apposite concerning local impact, given that their attitudes may be inconsequential.

There is clear evidence for Aberfeldy having the most positive opinions throughout the process compared to the other localities, thus supporting hypothesis H4a, except after deliberation about windfarms in the locality. This jury does show the least change in opinions in relation to windfarm planning, but about the same as Coldstream in 'wind power and energy policy' and more than Coldstream in relation to 'windfarms in the locality'. We have already noted that there may have been some local experiential concerns about developments in Aberfeldy, which had a particular impact on this scale. It is worthy of note that this locality is the only one not to have had statistically significant changes in opinion after the information phase. Thus, we find partial support for the second part of the fourth hypothesis (H4b), conditioned by non-hypothetical considerations.

There is very clear evidence in support of the fifth hypothesis (H5). The unfamiliarity or unexpected change in the local area may be the likely cause of Helensburgh's jury exhibiting the most negative opinions on all three scales, both in relative and absolute measure across the process. Although there was some imbalance in the gender composition of this jury, it did not appear to show a consistent pattern. However, the imbalance of views in this jury, unlike the others, with a clear dominance of a more negative view of wind power before the start of the process is likely to explain the ensuing results. Only one juror revealed a constantly positive position across the scales.

At first sight, our results may appear rather odd, given that deliberative theory argues that opinion transformation is a result of collective discussion, argument, and public reasoning, rather than simply more information [10–13,29]. However, as discussed earlier, Goodin [36,37] and Goodin and Niemeyer [35] emphasise that it is not necessarily deliberation, *per se*, that causes opinion reflection and opinion change, but a combination of a focus of attention on the issue, the acquisition of information about it, and a process of internal reflection, possibly induced by having to deliberate the issues later in the process and the need to find a publicly defensible position. In other words, the prospect of having to engage in group deliberation, justifying one's opinions, and articulating a public position, provides a strong incentive for jurors to take in and reflect on the evidence shared during the information phase. Goodin and Niemeyer [35] believe that the pre-discursive phase will invariably have greater salience than the deliberation phase, by changing the way that jurors relate to an issue.

We think there is great value in the replication of the Goodin and Niemeyer findings to both the internal and external validity of their project and ours [81]. This is especially the case as, methodologically, we move beyond their study [82] to look at consistency in opinion change in several standardised citizens' juries and introduced an additional survey instrument to enable us to account for the reflection period. This enabled us to consider other contextual factors that might have a bearing on opinion change in citizens' juries. In order to understand the factors that influence participants' opinions and how they might change, we have considered such factors as the change in knowledge throughout the jury process, proximity to windfarms (as measured by the different jury locations), the strength of initial opinion on the topic, and socio-demographic characteristics. It is possible that the witnesses, representing organisations with presumed authority, had an inordinate effect on some jurors, especially if their own knowledge on the issue was limited. This was the second most important reason for opinion change in the Goodin and Niemeyer study [35]. Our analytical models explored the effects of socio-demographic variables

(i.e., age, gender, and education), but we find very little correlation with the opinion changes observed. As with Goodin and Niemeyer [35], we also conclude that our results are not epiphenomenal. Although the information phase was the first phase in each of the three juries we analysed, we look to evidence from deliberative polls which follow a discussion-information-discussion format, but still found the information phase most crucial. In addition, unlike the citizens' jury that Goodin and Niemeyer [35] considered, in the three Scottish citizens' juries the information and deliberation phases each had the same duration.

Most participants in each jury began the process slightly in favour of the current energy policy and windfarm development in Scotland. However, it seems that exposure to the complexity of the arguments during the information phase, which were sometimes presented as a political debate, led to a more considered, nuanced, and sometimes sceptical response. For example, the development principles generated by the juries feature support to strengthen community benefits, local economic impact, and even public ownership as a corrective to current profit-making by private landowners and developers of wind farms. We also found from the ethnographer and observer fieldnotes, and survey questionnaire open questions, that witnesses can have a significant influence on the intra-process opinions of the citizen sample, whilst noting that the unavoidable change of two of them did not impact greatly on the changes across the juries. For the overwhelming majority of jurors, this was the first time they had been exposed to a task involving collective working with fellow citizens on policy issues. While the explicit reason for their involvement was to require them to deliberate on complex issues to arrive at a consensus on a set of principles, the incentive in the information phase was to listen, consider and weigh the evidence and values presented to them. Participants could reflect individually, or in groups, either while agreeing on questions to ask the witnesses, or via informal conversations in the interstices of the day; e.g., during tea/coffee breaks, over lunch, or in snatched asides to each other. In other words, learning as an activity is not a passive act, but is a response to various stimuli, both formal (information packs, witnesses) and informal (between jurors), that incorporates discursive and reflective processes. While the deliberative phase makes public the thoughts and discussions of jurors, it is erroneous to assume that the preceding phases are not incorporated as part of a cumulative and developmental process.

In QA4, although jurors reflected that they felt that they learnt the most about the topic on Day 1, the vast majority (88%) sought additional information from the Handbook, the witnesses' feedback, friends and family, and the internet during the reflection phase. They also reported that the conversations in facilitated groups on Day 2 were useful for helping them to make up their mind. This was apparent in the statistically significant changes observed in the deliberation phase.

Nevertheless, it is clear that location is also an important factor in the findings about opinion change, with Helensburgh providing the starkest example of a negative change in opinions. Although jurors held similar views about renewable energy policy in all three localities, the opinions about wind energy, windfarms, and climate change were on average least supportive in the Helensburgh group from the start. The Helensburgh jury was not as diverse as the other juries. Women were under-represented (Table 1), and the recruitment company investigated these issues and found that the participants who did not attend were mostly those who expressed moderate support for wind energy in the hidden recruitment question. Thus, the jury had fewer advocates to express these perspectives during the group conversations. Deliberations were less rich and diverse in the individual sessions, and, at the end of Day 2, several jurors reflected how group discussions and agreements backed up their opinions. The one Helensburgh juror in favour of windfarms reported feeling like '*the only one*' throughout the process.

Previous research on deliberation and opinion change has demonstrated the risk of 'enclave deliberation' as it can lead to opinion polarization [18,83], although it might be more a case of crystallisation [73]. The lack of diversity in the initial opinions of the Helensburgh jurors led to the creation of such an enclave. However, we did not see

opinions becoming unilaterally more extreme and polarised through the jury process; even in Helensburgh, despite considerable polarisation, opinions were fluid, with some participants becoming more supportive and others more opposed. This illustrates that jurors were engaging with both sides of the argument, rather than simply assimilating more information to back up views that they already held (confirmation bias). In short, opinion reflection was stimulated in all three juries. Nevertheless, this still demonstrates the importance of having a diversity of opinions in a mini-public beyond the witnesses and the particular challenges citizens' juries face here due to their small sample size.

It is difficult to be absolutely sure whether the possibility of a windfarm in the Helensburgh area influenced the jurors' attitudes, although the results are in line with the hypotheses. We do know that the plan had been controversial, especially given the rejection of another windfarm development nearby. However, it transpired that many jurors were unaware of the failed or future proposals, which might have raised their concerns in itself. Those jurors who lived in the other localities were either used to windfarms (Aberfeldy) or were likely to be aware of several moderate scale windfarms in their region (the Scottish Borders), even if not in their patch (Coldstream). Another factor that might have been important in the case of Helensburgh was the nearby location of a nuclear submarine base, a significant employer in the area. Unlike the other two localities, several of these jurors repeatedly suggested that nuclear power was a higher priority for energy production, a position also taken by one of the witnesses, which may explain the very negative mean for wind power in conclusion. This is in line with research that indicates that the local social, economic, political, and historical context of any particular place will shape attitudes towards any new development [84–86].

5. Conclusions

The strength of this study is in having three standardised juries in contexts that reflect different levels of development relating to the topic under discussion, yet dealing with the same questions, embedded within a longitudinal, and mixed methods design, resulting in rich data for analysing opinion change between each phase and in aggregate.

Our findings confirm the importance of the information phase in changing jurors' opinions, rather than the theoretically expected deliberative phase, or even the intermediary reflection phase. The provision of information causes a significant change in jurors' opinions, probably due to being relatively uninformed at the start, which is less pronounced in the rest of the deliberative process. Nevertheless, we believe the information phase had such an influence on opinions in part because the jurors knew they were going to collectively deliberate on these issues, which provided the incentive to gain information in order to develop and justify their positions. We tentatively conclude that our labelling of the phases, whilst ostensibly reflecting their purposes, actually may misrepresent what is occurring in the process. In a nutshell, there is deliberation in the information phase, and there is information in the deliberative phase. Therefore, we must be careful when ascribing too much influence to any single phase and focus more on understanding the cumulative and iterative effects of the mini-public process. Deliberative practice encompasses both learning and discussion interwoven throughout, albeit with activities that may encourage more of one or the other at different stages.

We conjecture that the information phase in these juries, through making the issues appear to be much more complex than first appreciated and, therefore, offering less clear solutions, led to jurors moderating their initial opinions and developing more nuanced and negative arguments. Reasoning may in fact take place in private or informally during the information phase, when these new challenges are made clear, rather than being delayed until the deliberation phase, when issues related to the psychological aspects of advocating and defending positions in public, such as confidence or saving face, become problematic. This might have been catalysed by the perceived requirement to become briefed prior to the deliberative phase.

Importantly, we found that the information phase had the greatest influence on jury opinions in those localities without a windfarm, albeit unequally. This suggests that when different jurors discuss the same issue, under similar conditions, it is similar factors that determine the final opinions. This is important to supporting claims that mini-publics could be used to guide public opinion and policymaking, as it demonstrates that participants change their views for reasons desirable from a deliberative perspective, namely because they are more informed on the issue and because they need to develop an opinion on the issue that could be defended publicly. However, substantively different contextual frames can lead to inconsistent outcomes and how these factors can impact the outcomes of a citizens' jury. These findings are therefore important for our understanding of deliberative democracy and the institutionalisation of mini-publics. They demonstrate that citizens' juries should be opinion diverse, to avoid enclave deliberation and polarisation/crystallisation of views, and, if they are to be used for national policymaking, ideally they would include a mixture of different contexts to understand their impact.

Our comparative case study research adds further exemplars of the importance of pre-discursive work on opinion change and how particular features that maximize the contextual differences, in this case, the level of development of on-shore windfarms, while holding others constant (socio-demography, information, and witnesses), reveal how mini-publics, such as citizens' juries, can affect outcomes. Albeit these findings were derived from an academic research project, they will be important knowledge for the use of citizens' juries in an official policy process. As Flyvbjerg asserts [87], the richness of detail provided by case studies, however small in themselves, can contribute multiple exemplars to the cumulative development of generalised knowledge in a way that large samples may not.

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Article

For the Sake of the Future: Can Democratic Deliberation Help Thinking and Caring about Future Generations?

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Abstract: This article examines whether democratic deliberation can enhance participants' capacity to consider future generations' perspectives and willingness to make sacrifices to ensure their well-being. In addition to normal deliberation, we are interested in the effects of a mental time travel exercise where deliberators imagine themselves in the future (without ageing). The study is based on an experiment conducted as a part of Citizens' Assembly that contributed to the long-term planning of the Satakunta region in Finland. Our findings suggest that deliberation as such increases participants' willingness to consider future generations' perspectives in long-term planning; yet the mental time travel exercise had only a modest impact on perspective-taking. The results also show some support for the assumption that deliberation can enhance willingness to make sacrifices for future generations, although we do not see such an impact in case of an intergenerational conflict in flood protection.



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1. Introduction

The need and urgency of sustainability transformations presents democratic societies with an unforeseen challenge. Decisions concerning climate change, biodiversity loss and other environmental problems should satisfy the needs of citizens living today and simultaneously guarantee that the future generations will also have at least a sufficient amount of resources available [1]. The transition to a sustainable society is not just a technical endeavor but entails complex normative and political choices [2]. Without citizen participation and inclusive decision-making processes, these choices carry the risk of coming out as illegitimate [3].

It is, however, widely recognized that democratic decision-making and practices of representative democracy, in particular, are prone to short-sightedness, or democratic myopia. There are 'drivers' of short-termism in representative democracies [4] such as short electoral cycles, and the influence of interest groups that shorten the time horizon of elected representatives. Individual voters are equally prone to democratic myopia, which decreases public support for future-oriented policies. Thus, the capability of representative democratic institutions to make sustainable policy is hindered by strong political and economic interests in preserving status quo [5].

Sustainability transformations seem to require wider public appreciation of the principle of intergenerational fairness. Therefore, different modes of incorporating citizens' perspectives into sustainability transformation policies should be explored and their effects examined. Well-designed processes of citizen deliberation have been regarded as a remedy for the tendencies towards short-termism in representative systems [6]. In other words, deliberative mini-publics or randomly selected second chambers could arguably be inclusive and democratic means of enhancing sustainability transformations.

This study asks whether participation in democratic deliberation can help increase citizens' sense of intergenerational fairness. More specifically, we ask whether participation in a deliberative mini-public helps imagine and consider future generations' perspectives and increase willingness to make sacrifices for future generations' well-being. We consider acknowledgment of the needs of future generations as a precondition for willingness to allocate some portion of resources to well-being of those who come after us. Previous research shows that deliberative mini-publics can both change the minds of those taking part [7–9] and increase their knowledge and willingness to contribute to collective action [10].

In this article, we explore two separate mechanisms that might take place in a deliberative process. The first pertains to the capacity of democratic deliberation to help participants consider others' perspectives, including those of future generations. The second mechanism is that democratic deliberation should give more weight to vital interests and thus increase concern for intergenerational fairness. This in turn would make participants more willing to make sacrifices in order to ensure future generations' wellbeing. In addition, we are interested in the effects of a 'mental time travel' exercise where participants are actively encouraged to take perspectives of future people in the context of a deliberative process.

The empirical analysis is based on the experimental procedure conducted in conjunction with Satakunta2050 Citizens' Assembly. This online mini-public was organized to contribute to a long-term regional planning process reaching to the year 2050 in the Satakunta region in South West Finland. In addition to the standard procedures applied in deliberative mini-publics [11], the Citizens' Assembly entailed an experimental treatment where deliberators were actively encouraged to imagine and to consider perspectives of people living in the future. In this particular case, the participants took a mental time travel exercise where they imagined themselves in the year 2050 without ageing [12].

The next section of this article provides an account of previous theoretical and empirical research regarding the capacity of democratic deliberation to help take future generations' perspectives and consider their interests, and formulates four hypotheses on this basis. This is followed by a description of the Satakunta 2050 Citizens' Assembly, as well as the experimental procedure and its results. Our results lend some support for the hypotheses that deliberation increases the willingness to consider future generations' perspectives and make sacrifices for future generations. These results are discussed in the final section of this article.

2. Theory: Why Deliberation Might Enhance Thinking and Caring about Future Generations

Democratic deliberation can be understood as an intersubjective process of mutual justification among a diverse group of citizens or their representatives. Previous literature has articulated the argument that democratic deliberation can enhance foresight and consideration of long-term consequences of public decision-making [6] (p. 287). First, deliberative processes entail consideration of relevant *factual* information on policy consequences. This is likely to enhance increased awareness of the long-term effects of different policies, including the effects on future generations [4]. In this respect, what matters is the capacity of deliberative processes to facilitate learning and understanding of relevant information, especially on causal effects of different policy choices. This should help deliberators consider the possible positive or negative consequences that public policies might bring about in the future.

Second, deliberative processes are based on weighing of *normative* arguments by their merits. Self-serving arguments appealing merely to narrow, short-term interests should not be influential in a deliberative process [6,13]. This should benefit more collectivist and sustainable orientations toward public policy. Deliberative process should also help make intersubjective evaluations of the urgency of claims made [14] Arguments appealing to vital interests of individuals and groups or to major injustices between different groups should carry weight in processes of democratic deliberation. Generalizable arguments, including arguments referring to intergenerational justice, are likely to be brought up and

sustained in the deliberative process. In this way, appeals to interests of future generations, should emerge and succeed in the deliberative process.

In order to make judgments on the weight of different normative claims, deliberative processes require a capacity to understand others' perspectives, or 'to put oneself to others' shoes' [15]. Empirical studies on deliberative mini-publics show that deliberation can also enhance mutual understanding and perspective-taking among people who do not initially share similar views or identities, thus counteracting empathy biases [16,17]. Inclusive deliberation could therefore be expected to enhance empathy towards 'out-groups' represented in the deliberative process, especially if they appear to be in a disadvantaged position. There are also some indications that deliberation can enhance consideration of perspectives of such people who are not involved in the process. A study analyzing perspective-taking (or cognitive empathy) in the context of a citizen deliberation experiment on immigration [18] concludes that participants became more willing to consider immigrants' views, even when no immigrants were present in the group. In other words, supporters of immigration seemed to have acted as 'representatives' by bringing up immigrants' viewpoints.

However, Lindell et al. [19], who study the same deliberative experiment, find out that the actual presence of an immigrant in a deliberative small group contributes to the attitude shifts to more pro-immigration direction. The finding by Lindell et al. [19] seems to highlight the importance of the 'politics of presence' in Phillips' [20] terms. Physical presence in deliberative processes seems to be important for empathic concern and perspective-taking, especially when it comes to individuals representing different social groups [21]. Ackerman and Fishkin [13] (p. 141) argue about the importance of physical presence in deliberative forums as follows: "[B]eing in a room with randomly assigned fellow citizens can stimulate understanding across social cleavages".

Compared to other affected groups who are not represented in the deliberative process, the difficulties of taking the perspectives of future generations seem to be even more severe. This is because future generations are not just present, but actually non-existent [20]. In Phillips' terms, future generations and their interests can only be represented in the deliberative process in the sense of 'politics of ideas'. It may be hard to consider future generations' perspectives because they are necessarily hypothetical or imagined. Moreover, the scope of empathetic reactions is particularly limited because of future people do not have identities [22]. For example, artistic ways of articulating future generations' perspectives could, however, facilitate internal processes of imagination and reflection or, in Goodin's [23] terms, 'democratic deliberation within'.

Despite the reservations put forward above, we set the following hypotheses regarding the effects of deliberation on participants' capacity to take future generations' perspectives and sympathize with them.

Hypothesis 1. *Participation in a deliberative process helps consider future generations' perspectives.*

There is some evidence that processes of group deliberation enhance other-regarding attitudes, even individual belief in and personal proneness to collective action for goals accepted by all. Setälä et al. [10] show that participation in a deliberative mini-public can increase participants' belief in collective action to resolve societal problems and their willingness to participate in such collective action. In a more recent study, MacKenzie and Caluwaerts [24] find that deliberative practices can be used to encourage climate action policies, which are highly relevant to the interests of future generations. Based on a large-scale deliberation experiment they show that deliberation make participants more supportive of policies that help mitigate climate change and more willing to make personal sacrifices, such as paying higher gas taxes. In this respect, group deliberative processes seem to be different from individual deliberation, which, according to studies (e.g., [25]), can even breed callousness.

While there seem to be reasons to believe in the capacity of democratic deliberation to help consideration of future policy consequences and future generations' interests, there

may be limits to this capacity. The problem of short-termism is likely to be prominent in policies that involve intertemporal welfare trade-offs, i.e., the sacrifices of welfare at the present in order to gain benefits in the future. There are different reasons for this. First, uncertainty regarding future consequences of policies is likely to give more weight to current benefits and losses in comparison to those materializing in the future [4]. Second, the abstract nature of future events, especially when expected to occur in distant future, reduces individuals' willingness to take them into proper consideration [26].

Third, deliberation may fail to give equal consideration of future generations' interests in case of so-called intergenerational conflicts. The problem of intertemporal trade-offs is likely to be especially pertinent in situations where current sacrifices are expected to be made, not in order to ensure the welfare of future selves but rather that of future others. Therefore, intergenerational conflicts seem to pose a particular challenge to the idea of intergenerational fairness. Policy proposals that entail welfare tradeoffs between current and future generations are particularly difficult to handle equitably, even in a good-quality deliberative process. There are no guarantees that future generations' interests are articulated or gain the attention they deserve in a deliberative process, not least because the bearers of those interests are not there to defend their views.

Despite these reservations, drawing on the assumptions of deliberative theory together with findings by Setälä et al. [4] and MacKenzie and Caluwaerts [24], we form the following hypothesis regarding the effects of deliberation to participants' willingness to take future generations' interests into account and even make sacrifices to ensure those interests.

Hypothesis 2. *Participation in a deliberative process increases willingness to make sacrifices for future generations' interests, even in intergenerational conflicts.*

Facilitating Intergenerational Fairness through a Mental Time Travel Exercise

Some earlier studies suggest that imagining oneself in the role of future generations as a part of deliberation might have an effect on individuals' policy preferences and other outcomes of deliberation. Visualizing the future through 'time travelling' exercises is often used in context of different future exploration activities, such as scenario building, backcasting and forecasting [27–30]). The aim of these exercises is to help participants create a picture or pictures of the future with their imagination [29].

Hara et al. [12] used a guided time travel exercise—a so-called future design—in deliberative workshops where participants' task was to create a future vision for their hometown Yahaba in Japan. They found out that groups who did the time travel exercise and assumed the position of future generations set markedly different policy goals for the development of their hometown compared to groups who did not 'time travel'. In another study, Uwasu et al. [30] obtained similar results with a corresponding future design setting.

However, there is still little research on whether such exercises, used in the context of democratic deliberation, could have an impact on individuals' capacity to take future generations' perspectives and contribute to their welfare. To explore this question, a special visualization exercise was designed for the purposes of the study. In this mental time travel exercise, participants were instructed to imagine themselves in the future, without ageing. Because such exercise should help deliberators in role-taking, or put themselves in the shoes of those living in the future, we can assume that a mental time travel exercise can enhance consideration of future generations' perspectives and increase willingness to contribute to their welfare, even in intergenerational conflicts.

Based on these earlier studies, the following two hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 3. *Mental time travel in conjunction with a deliberative process helps participants consider future generations' perspectives.*

Hypothesis 4. *Mental time travel in conjunction with a deliberative process increases participants' willingness to make sacrifices for future generations' interests, even in intergenerational conflicts.*

3. The Experimental Design: The Satakunta2050 Citizens' Assembly

3.1. The Purpose of the Citizens' Assembly and the Recruitment of Participants

The data utilized in this study originates from a Regional Citizens' Assembly organized online in the fall of 2020. The Citizens' Assembly was organized by researchers in collaboration with the regional authorities. The assembly took place in Satakunta, a region with a population of around 224,000, located in South West Finland. The Citizens' Assembly process was linked to the drafting of Regional Strategy for 2050, a work carried out by the Regional Council of Satakunta. Regional Strategy is a document prepared according to the Land Use and Building Act (132/1999) [31] in Finland, outlining the general development trajectories and goals of the region for the coming decades. Regional Strategy is an integral part of steering official activities towards sustainability. As highlighted in the Act on Regional Development and Administration of Structural Funds (7/2014, 4§) [32], sustainability should be one of the core features in the economic and environmental development of the regions.

The purpose of the Citizens' Assembly was to allow citizens living in the region to take part in the drafting process of the Regional Strategy. In what follows, we first outline the recruitment process and composition of the Citizens' Assembly, and explain the experimental design thereafter. The recruitment of participants began in February 2020 with a recruitment survey mailed to a random sample of 6000 residents aged between 15 and 80 living in Satakunta region. The survey included questions related to the preferred future of the region, measures on respondents' political future orientation and tendency to think about future generations' interests, in addition to enquiries about socio-economic attributes. Respondents also had the opportunity to indicate whether they would be willing to participate in the Regional Citizens' Assembly to be held in mid-April. The respondents were also informed about the compensation of 75 € for participants of the assembly. Of the initial sample of 6000, around 17 percent ($n = 1049$) responded to the survey and of the respondents, 281 volunteered to take part in the deliberative event.

However, due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, considerable changes to the process had to be made. Following the governmental response to the pandemic, all volunteers were informed that the Citizens' Assembly would be postponed until fall of 2020. In June, the researchers decided to move the assembly online. All volunteers were informed that the assembly would be carried out online using Zoom application in September, and were invited to take part in it. From this group of 281 volunteers, 70 people expressed their willingness to take part in the Citizens' Assembly. This is a notable decrease, which can most likely be explained by changes made in the organisation of the event. Some confirmed participants dropped out at the last moment, and 55 participants participated in the discussions. Basic information regarding the demographic composition of the assembly is presented in Table 1.

As can be seen from Table 1, the Citizens' Assembly represented the population of Satakunta quite well in terms of gender, age, native language and place of living. Even though there were more men than women attending the assembly, the gender balance is quite satisfactory. When it comes to age, the recruitment process managed to gather a well-rounded group, where the youngest participant was 17 years old and the oldest 79 years old. In terms of place of living, the divisions between the three sub-regional units in Satakunta is almost identical in the assembly and in real life. When it comes to education level, it must be noted that the education level among participants was higher than among the population as a whole. Especially people holding a university degree were overrepresented in the assembly.

Table 1. Demographics (%).

		Satakunta 2018	Participants (n = 55)
Gender	Male	49.7	56.4
	Female	50.3	43.6
Age	Mean	45.7	49.2
Native language	Finnish	96.1	98.2
	Other	3.9	1.8
Sub-region	Northern Satakunta	8.5	9.1
	City of Pori sub-region	60.6	50.0
	City of Rauma sub-region	30.9	30.9
Education level	Mean (1–5)	2.1	3.3

Education level coded as follows: 1 = Elementary school or middle school, 2 = Matriculation exam or vocational degree, 3 = College level vocational degree, 4 = Polytechnic degree or lower university degree, 5 = Upper university degree. (Demographics represent the situation on December 2018, from where we have complete data regarding regional demographics (see [33,34])).

The main task of the Citizens' Assembly was to prioritize different goals related to regional development, and give comments on specific future visions drafted by the Regional Council. Goals covered a broad range of policy areas: health and social services, inequality, economy, education, technical development, creating jobs, biodiversity, climate change mitigation, transport system, equality between regions and cultural heritage. After the deliberative process, participants prioritized these goals individually by selecting three that were most important to them. Here economic development and jobs, education possibilities, and a well-functioning transport system were the three most frequently selected goals in participants' prioritizations. When comparing participants' post-deliberation prioritizations to those before deliberation, the most notable change was an increased weight given to education opportunities. Participants' views and written feedback were handed to the Regional Council to be taken into account in the drafting of the Regional Strategy.

Based on participants' evaluations, the deliberative quality of the Citizens' Assembly was high, despite the move to the online environment. A vast majority of participants agreed with positive statements of the process such as 'I had enough opportunities to express my opinions during the deliberation' (92.5% completely and 7.5% partly agreed), and 'Other participants respected my views regardless of whether or not they agreed with me' (90.6% completely and 7.5% partly agreed, 1.9% could not say). In addition, 81.1% of participants completely and 11.3% partly disagreed with the statement 'I had difficulties of expressing my opinions in the discussion if others disagreed with me (5.7% agreed partly, 1.9% could not say).

3.2. Experimental Procedure and Data

The aim of this article is to study whether deliberation and a specifically designed 'time travel' experiment helped participants' take future generations' perspectives and become ready to make sacrifices for future generations' well-being. For this purpose, a 'time travel' exercise, or using the terminology by Hara et al. [12], future design, was planned to be carried out in conjunction with the Citizens' Assembly.

The participants were randomly allocated into a treatment condition and a control condition. In the treatment condition, participants carried out the future design exercise before deliberation, while in the control condition participants engaged in 'normal' deliberation. Deliberation took place in altogether randomly allocated 10 small groups, five in treatment and five in control condition. Each small group had an average of five or six participants. The deliberative process lasted for four hours, with a 45 min break in the middle. Apart from the 'time travel' exercise, similar deliberative procedures were followed in the small groups with future design and in groups that engaged in 'normal' deliberation. In the future design treatment, participants were also encouraged to think about the viewpoint of the people living in 2050 during the small group deliberation.

The future design exercise was composed by the researchers, following loosely the examples of Markley [27], Cuhls [29], Hara et al. [12] and Nakagawa et al. [35]. The exercise's aim was to help participants assume the perspective of future generations during the deliberation. The future design consisted of a visualization part and a short reflection phase. During the visualization, participants were instructed to 'time travel' to the future without aging. They were asked to imagine themselves in their home surroundings in Satakunta region in the year 2050. To guide the visualization process, participants were asked different questions, such as 'Do you see something familiar or something completely new?', 'Do you see other people?', 'What topics would you discuss with your close ones in 2050?', 'What would you read from the news in 2050?'. In practice, the visualization was conducted by playing a pre-recorded audio tape to the participants.

In the reflection phase, participants were instructed to write down thoughts and emotions experienced during the visualization. These reflections were not discussed jointly with the group. As an instruction for the upcoming discussion, participants were prompted to consider how today's decisions will affect people living in the year 2050. More specifically, they were asked 'What kind of actions and decisions would the people of 2050 want people living in 2020 to take and make?' The exercise was recorded in advance and played to participants by the moderator to ensure the treatment would be similar to all groups. Apart from the future design exercise and a prompt to consider the viewpoints of the people living in the year 2050 during the deliberation, the treatment condition followed the same deliberative process as the control condition. An initial overview of the data regarding group discussions suggests that participants in the future design treatment reacted to the exercise in varying ways. At least some participants referred to the future design exercise or reported having thought about the exercise during the discussions.

The collection of the data used in this study began one week before the assembly, when those who had volunteered to participate in it filled in a pre-test survey. In this survey, the participants were asked to prioritize goals related to the future of the region. In addition, this survey included questions on taking future generations' perspectives and willingness to make sacrifices for future generations, which are analysed in this article, as well as other questions measuring participants' attitudes towards long-term decision-making. After the pre-test survey, participants received a document containing background information about the current state of the region, including information on demographic, economic, environmental and other matters. The post-test survey included the same questions as the pre-test survey and questions about the respondents' evaluation of quality of discussions. The post-test survey was divided into two parts; the first part was answered during the break and the second part right after the event. All participants completed the pre-test survey ($n = 55$) while one failed to complete the first part of the post-test survey ($n = 54$) and two failed to complete the second part ($n = 53$).

4. Results

The first part of the empirical analysis takes a closer look at how participation in the Citizens' Assembly affects the aptitude to take future generations' perspectives. We want to know to whether democratic deliberation increases proneness to perspective-taking, and whether the time travel exercise enhances such proneness further (Hypotheses 1 and 3). To this end, we make use of pre/post-test design with attitude measurements before and after the assembly. To examine the effects of participation in the Citizens' Assembly and the differences between future design treatment and regular deliberation treatment, we compare means of various measures in the pre-test and post-test surveys. Paired samples t-tests are used to inspect changes across the whole sample and within treatments, and independent samples t-tests are used to compare treatment and control.

To measure perspective taking aptitude, we use the following three items: "I often think about what kind of world we are leaving to future generations (Translated from original in Finnish: "Mietin paljon sitä, minkälaisen maailman jätämme tuleville sukupolville.")", "When I read or see a story set in the future, I imagine the events hap-

pening to me (Translated from original in Finnish: “Kun luen tai katselen tulevaisuuteen sijoittuvaa tarinaa, kuvittelen miltä tuntuisi, jos kokisin tarinan tapahtumat itse.”), and “I sometimes try to envision the future by imagining what things look like from the perspective of future generations (Translated from original in Finnish: “Yritän toisinaan hahmottaa tulevaisuutta paremmin kuvittelemalla, miltä asiat näyttäisivät jälkipolvienne näkökulmasta.”)”. These items represent different ways the respondents think about future generations in their daily lives. In addition, we make use an index combining the three items. The findings for these measures are reported for each of the deliberative treatments and for all participants in the deliberative experiment. Following Hypotheses 1 and 3 we expect that the participants’ perspective-taking aptitude would increase as a result of taking part in deliberation, and that the time travel exercise in combination with deliberation (future design treatment) would further increase this aptitude.

The findings from paired samples T-tests for the perspective taking aptitude (Table 2) are mixed at best. On the one side there is clearly significant change in the mean for the third item measuring perspective taking, both for all participants (at the 0.05 level) and for the future design treatment (at the 0.01 level). A closer examination reveals that it is the future design treatment that is driving the results, and there is no evidence of similar change taking place in the regular deliberation treatment. The perspective-taking index also shows a significant mean change between the two measuring points, but again this outcome is mostly a result of the notable change that takes place in the third item among participants in the future treatment. It should also be noted that the third item is measuring behavior very similar to the time travel exercise assigned to the future treatment participants. In this respect, this analysis gives only weak support that deliberation in the Satakunta2050 Citizens’ Assembly increased the perspective-taking aptitude among the participants.

Table 2. Perspective-taking capacity of participants in Satakunta2050.

	All Participants (N = 54)		Future Design Treatment (N = 28)		Regular Deliberation Treatment (N = 26)	
	Mean t1	Change t1–t2	Mean t1	Change t1–t2	Mean t1	Change t1–t2
i. “I often think about what kind of world we are leaving to future generations”	0.56	0.01	0.56	0.03	0.57	−0.01
ii. “When I read/see story set in future, I imagine the events happening to me”	0.49	−0.02	0.52	0.01	0.45	−0.06
iii. “I sometimes try to envision the future, by imagining what things look like from the perspective of future generations”	0.48	0.05 *	0.44	0.10 **	0.52	0.00
Perspective taking-index (a + b + c)	1.53	0.03	1.52	0.13 *	1.53	−0.07

Significance: † <0.10, * <0.05, ** <0.01. Variables for statement a and b have been coded to vary between 0–1. Variables a, b and c are highly correlated (0.34–0.60, $p < 0.001$) and have also been combined into a perspective taking-index.

To further test Hypotheses 1 and 3, additional between-group comparisons were made utilizing two variables from the post-test survey. Using an 11-point scale ranging from ‘very hard’ to ‘very easy’, participants answered the questions ‘How easy was it for you to imagine how life would be like in Satakunta in 2050?’ and ‘How easy was it for you to take the future generations’ perspective?’. Assuming Hypothesis 3 would hold true, means for the abovementioned questions should be higher in the future design treatment compared to regular deliberation. Results from two-sided between-group T-tests indicate that this is not the case, however. Table 3. shows that, first, the mean difference between the treatments is not significant with either of the variables, and second, that the means of

future design treatment are actually lower than those of the regular deliberation. While the high p -values suggest that this might be due to pure coincidence, it could be possible that the people in future design groups found imagining the future and taking the perspective of future generations harder precisely because they had tried it themselves. One way or the other, Hypothesis 3 is not supported by the data from our post-test survey.

Table 3. Perspective-taking and imagining the future.

	Future Design Treatment (N = 27)	Regular Deliberation Treatment (N = 26)	Mean difference (sig.)
How easy was it for you to imagine how life would be like in Satakunta in 2050? (0–10)	Mean 5.63	Mean 6.12	0.486 (0.412)
How easy was it for you to take the future generations' perspective? (0–10)	5.52	6.08	0.558 (0.362)

The Hypotheses 1 and 3 can be further tested through examining participants' responses to a question measuring their willingness to consider future generations' perspectives: 'From whose perspective should the future of Satakunta region be planned primarily?' The answers were given on an 11-point scale, where 0 meant that the future of Satakunta should primarily be planned from the perspective of *current* inhabitants, and 10 meant that it should be planned from the perspective of *future* inhabitants. To explore the effects of deliberation, the mean difference of pre-test and post-test answers was analyzed using two-tailed paired samples T-test.

As can be seen in Table 4, deliberation appears to have had a noteworthy effect on participants' answers. The mean position of all participants increased by over 0.8 points from 5.74 to 6.55, and the change is significant at a 0.01 level. This effect can also be observed in both treatment groups separately, although with slight differences in volume and significance levels. The results indicate that deliberation, especially when combined with the time travel exercise, indeed supported the willingness to consider future generations' perspectives in regional planning and thus provide support for Hypothesis 1. However, independent samples T-test (not reported here) shows no significant difference in mean change between the treatment groups, which does not provide support for the Hypothesis 3 pertaining to the effects of the future design treatment.

Table 4. From whose perspective should the future of Satakunta region be planned primarily?

	All Participants (N = 53)		Future Design Treatment (N = 27)		Regular Deliberation Treatment (N = 26)	
	Mean t1	Change t1–t2	Mean t1	Change t1–t2	Mean t1	Change t1–t2
From whose perspective should the future of Satakunta region be planned primarily?	5.74	0.811 **	5.41	0.852 *	6.08	0.769 †

Significance: † <0.10, * <0.05, ** <0.01. 0 = from the perspective of people currently living in Satakunta—10 = from the perspective of people who will live in Satakunta in the future.

We now turn to examine the Hypotheses 2 and 4 pertaining to the effects of deliberation and future design on willingness to make sacrifices for future generations, which is considered as the key component of sustainability [1]. In other words, we are interested in participants' readiness to accept costs in case of intergenerational conflicts. Willingness to make sacrifices for future generations is measured with the help of two items 'Today's voters should be prepared to reduce their standard of living for the wellbeing of future

generations (Translated from original in Finnish: “Nykyäänestäjien tulisi olla valmiita tinkimään elintasostaan, jos tulevien sukupolvien hyvinvointi sitä vaatii.”) and ‘I would be willing to pay more taxes if we thereby can improve the well-being of future generations (Translated from original in Finnish: “Voisin maksaa korkeampia veroja, mikäli siten voidaan parantaa tulevien sukupolvien hyvinvointia.”)’, as well as an index combining the two items. The first item is about making sacrifices as a collective by lowering standards of wellbeing, while the second is about personal willingness to contribute to collective efforts by paying taxes. Following Hypothesis 2 we expect that deliberation in general would lead to a greater willingness to make sacrifices for future generations, and based on Hypothesis 4 we expect that taking part in the future design exercise before deliberating would further increase the willingness to make sacrifices for future generations.

From the results reported in Table 5, we can see that there is some evidence to support the former hypothesis, and that the results overall are more consistent than for the perspective-taking aptitude. There appears to be a modest increase in the willingness to make sacrifices across the board but because the changes are relatively small, the findings are statistically significant only when adding all participants together. When looking at all participants the mean change for the first item ‘Today’s voters should accept . . . ’ is significant at the 0.10 level and the combined measure is significant at the 0.05 level. There are no significant changes for neither the future design treatment nor the regular deliberation treated separately.

Table 5. Willingness to make sacrifices for future generations among participants in Satakunta2050.

	All Participants (N = 54)		Future Design Treatment (N = 28)		Regular Deliberation Treatment (N = 26)	
	Mean t1	Change t1–t2	Mean t1	Change t1–t2	Mean t1	Change t1–t2
i. Today’s voters should be prepared to reduce their standard of living for the wellbeing of future generations.	0.46	0.04 †	0.45	0.03	0.48	0.03
ii. I would be willing to pay more taxes if we thereby can improve the well-being of future generations.	0.29	0.02	0.26	0.00	0.31	0.06
Make sacrifices-index (a + b)	0.76	0.06 *	0.72	0.04	0.80	0.08

Significance: † <0.10, * <0.05, ** <0.01. Variables for statement a and b have been coded to vary between 0–1. Variables a and b are highly correlated (0.41, $p < 0.001$) and have also been combined (a + b) into a sacrifice-index.

We also inspect willingness to make sacrifices for future generations by analyzing support for a concrete policy measure that involves an intergenerational conflict. According to our Hypotheses 2 and 4, deliberation and especially deliberation enhanced with future design exercise should increase the support for future-oriented policy. Previous research has found that when presented with different concrete policies, people can be supportive even for options that bring greater benefits to the generations that come after them [36]. We asked participants about their preferences on a concrete policy to protect against destructive floods that are a recurring natural hazard in the Satakunta region. The region’s largest river, Kokemäenjoki, and its estuary belong to the areas most prone to flooding in Finland.

Participants were asked to select one of three options, each with a different distribution of benefits between their generation and the next generation. Option A prevents 20 destructive floods during this generation, and 10 during the next generation, Option B prevents no destructive floods during this generation, but 30 during the next generation, Option C prevents 10 destructive floods during this generation, and 20 during the next generation.

Note that we did not make available an ‘equal shares’ option as it has been found to introduce bias. When allowed to allocate resources equally between the present and future generations, most respondents may opt for this option simply in order to avoid the moral weighting between the importance of well-being of future others and present citizens [36].

Options that clearly favor either the present or the future generation could thus be better in measuring true presentist or selfish attitudes that are not as socially desirable as sharing costs or burdens equally. This variable was recoded into a new measure of support for policy choices, where the most presentist option was given value 0, modestly future-regarding option value 0.5 and the most altruistic option from the perspective of future generations value 1.

As we see in Table 6, there was a minor increase in the future design treatment in support for preventing more destructive floods during the next generation than during this generation, but the changes were not statistically significant even at 0.10 level. Furthermore, in the regular deliberative process treatment support for long-term policy actually decreased, which means that there was no significant change even when looking at the full sample. Hypotheses 2 and 4 are therefore not supported by our data on policy preferences in an issue framed as an intergenerational conflict in flood protection.

Table 6. Policy preferences for flood protection among participants in Satakunta2050.

	All Participants (N = 54)		Future Design Treatment (N = 28)		Regular Deliberation Treatment (N = 26)	
	Mean t1	Change t1–t2	Mean t1	Change t1–t2	Mean t1	Change t1–t2
Support for future-regarding policy	0.42	−0.02	0.41	0.02	0.42	−0.06

Significance: † <0.10, * <0.05, ** <0.01. Variable has been coded to vary between 0–1.

5. Discussion

There is a widely recognized need to develop institutions and practices that can prompt individuals to think in more intergenerational terms, in order to effectively implement the required sustainability transformations in democratic societies. Deliberative mini-publics are expected to have a capacity to enhance, not just participants' understanding of long-term consequences of policy choices, but also their capacity to perspective-taking and sense of intergenerational fairness. Obviously, mini-publics are just one possible remedy to the problem of short-termism in representative politics. Moreover, there are open questions regarding the possible roles of mini-publics or other randomly selected bodies in representative democracies [6,24].

In this article, we have examined the effects of participation in a deliberative mini-public on citizens' willingness and capacity to take future generations' perspectives and care for their well-being. The effects were rather clear when it comes to participants' overall willingness to consider future generations' perspectives. Deliberative process made participants increasingly think that the regional planning process should be conducted from the perspectives of people living in the year 2050. This result seems to confirm the view that deliberation can encourage people to accept and support sustainability transformations in public decision-making, as expected. At the same time, our findings suggest that it is hard for individuals to imagine future generations' perspectives [37], even when particularly encouraged to do so. More specifically, our results suggest that while deliberation as such did not improve participants' capacity to step in future generations' shoes, the mental time travel treatment had only a modest positive effect in this respect. Yet, considering the level of abstraction when discussing the perspectives of people living in the year 2050, perhaps it is not a wonder that we did not observe stronger effects in terms of aptitude of taking future generations' perspectives.

In terms of willingness to make sacrifices on behalf of future generations, deliberation seems to have had a small, positive effect. Most notably, the different deliberative treatments did make participants more prone to accept that there may be a need for current generations' to make sacrifices in order to ensure future generations' well-being. In other words, there seems to be a potential in deliberation to make citizens accept some burdens, including tax increases, for the benefit future generations. This finding suggests that de-

liberation can help evoke sense of intergenerational fairness and make more sustainable policy choices, which is in line with findings by MacKenzie and Caluwaerts [24]. However, the results regarding the flood protection question suggest that democratic deliberation does not necessarily increase present generations' willingness to make altruistic sacrifices in intergenerational conflicts.

The results of our experiment seem to be partly in line with but partly different from the observations of Hara et al. [12]. There could be several reasons for these differences. It could be that, in order to achieve similar results, more emphasis needs to be put on the content and breadth of the future design itself. While the participants in Hara et al. study were tasked to actually *represent* these interests throughout the deliberative process, in our study the participants were asked, first, to imagine themselves in the future and, second, to consider future perspectives during the deliberative process. In addition, the deliberative process Hara et al. [12] was longer and was conducted face-to-face, while ours was a one-day process conducted online. That said, Hara et al. [12] relied on a very limited sample of participants and, unlike our study, it did not make use of an experimental design that provides a more reliable test of the mechanisms driving future-oriented behavior.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that the relatively small number of participants in the Citizens' Assembly calls for some caution when interpreting our results, especially in terms of external validity. Further research is thus needed to explore how different design features of deliberative mini-publics—e.g., duration, information, and inclusion of youth perspectives—might facilitate consideration of future generations' perspectives and interests in the context of deliberative mini-publics. Further studies should also investigate the capacity of mental time travel exercises and other similar interventions to change participants' mindsets concerning future generations.

Our experimental study gives some support to the view that deliberation on policy goals as well as hearing the perspectives of people with different backgrounds can help participants understand the trade-offs related to long-term policy-making, or at least become aware of them. Deliberation in the Citizens' Assembly made participants more committed to consider future generations' perspectives and interests in long-term planning and somewhat more likely to accept costs to ensure future generations' well-being. However, the task of imagining the particular perspectives of future people, in itself, did not seem to become any easier in the process.

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Article

Democratically Sustainable Local Development? The Outcomes of Mixed Deliberation on a Municipal Merger on Participants' Social Trust, Political Trust, and Political Efficacy

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Abstract: Municipal mergers are typically contentious and polarizing issues among both citizens and politicians. In deciding on these, municipal-level referendums are often commissioned by municipal councils. Referendums, though, are also per se polarizing processes that only exacerbate an already polarizing issue. Adding deliberation to referendum processes has been shown in previous studies to be a more democratically sustainable process than mere referendums. In this study, we explore the use of mixed deliberation between citizens and politicians within a municipal merger process in the municipality of Korsholm in Finland, one year before a referendum on the issue occurred. The deliberations were two-hour sessions in February 2018, with local politicians present in each discussion group. Using pre- and post-deliberation surveys, we trace how citizens (n = 117) engaging in deliberation developed their social trust, political trust, and political efficacy during deliberation. Generally, we expected that all of these would be strengthened in deliberation. The results, however, reveal only a few statistically significant effects, some of which ran contrary to expectations.

Keywords: mixed deliberation; referendums; municipal mergers; democratic sustainability; social trust; political trust; political efficacy



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1. Introduction

When it comes to local administrative development, municipal mergers are arguably one of the broadest reforms (e.g., [1]). This is primarily because municipal mergers have several economic and fiscal effects [2,3] and give rise to redistribution of resources between services or groups of the population (e.g., [4,5]). Furthermore, mergers often alter political representation and power relationships [6]. Even though they are complex, municipal mergers have been one of the most common types of local development reforms around the developed world in recent decades [7]. In the Nordic countries, several waves of large-scale municipal mergers have taken place during this period [8]. In Finland, a new law was adopted in 1990 according to which advisory referendums could be organized also on municipal policies. Since this legal reform, albeit that the municipal councils retain the final decision, many proposed municipal mergers in Finland have included an advisory referendum as a key component in informing the decision whether to merge or not [9]. The high occurrence of municipal mergers in Finland has resulted in the number of municipalities being reduced from just under 600 to around 300 since the 1950s [10]. Furthermore, the salience of municipal mergers can also be seen in the fact that 89% of all municipal referendums held in Finland have been about a proposed municipal merger [11].

While the inclusion of a referendum induces a participatory element in the decision-making process and thus creates an opportunity for citizens to have their say on a local development issue that affects them, referendums—and especially concerning municipal

mergers—are not without their challenges. Firstly, given the inherent complexity of municipal mergers, the pro or con setup of a referendum greatly simplifies the issue per se [12]. The campaigning efforts by proponents and opponents of a merger likewise focus on rallying supporters and spreading soundbite information (e.g., [13]). Thus, citizens' learning, perspective-taking, and deeper reflection on the merger issue are rare in referendum campaigns [14]. Consequently, referendums are particularly prone not only to polarization on the issue but also to affective polarization whereby prejudices and distrust of the people on the "other side" are common (see for example [1,12,15,16]). Over time, distrust and negative prejudices of the people on the "other side" might further develop into more socially ingrained forms of polarization [17]. Secondly, municipal mergers often induce a strong element of emotionality as citizens tend to see their municipality as symbols for deeply rooted identities [18]. Consequently, while participatory components can generally be argued as being beneficial to citizens' perceived legitimacy of decisions (e.g., [19]), one can raise serious questions regarding whether referendums in conjunction with municipal mergers are de facto democratically sustainable processes or whether they exacerbate tensions between opinion camps on the issue and reduce meaningful reflection on the complexities of a municipal merger.

Considering these potential problems with referendums, scholars have contemplated the use of deliberative elements in conjunction with referendums to achieve a deeper reflection and more perspective-taking on the issue put to a referendum, even across polarizing divides (see [20–23]). Furthermore, the use of a deliberative Citizens' Jury providing an impartial source of information on a ballot initiative to the broader public, has been tested with promising results [24,25]; see also [14]). Thus, these types of deliberative bodies can increase citizens' capacity for reflective judgment, making them more confident about their ability to make an informed decision about the issue [25] and increase their trust in other citizens and political institutions (e.g., [26]), including those whose opinion differ from their own [27,28]. As these types of public sentiments are considered essential elements for the functioning of democracy (see [29,30]), fostering these is of vital importance for the long-term sustainability of democracy.

As Hammond [31] explains, the rise of the sustainable development paradigm has been followed due to a concern for problems with the current ways of democratic participation. According to The United Nations Agenda 21 on sustainable development, a prerequisite for sustainable development is broad public participation in decision-making [31]. Representative democracies seem to be challenged by phenomena (e.g., lack of political and social trust, lack of citizen engagement, short-term interests) that contribute to an unsustainable political system [31,32], (p. 77). It is argued that a transition to a sustainable society needs new forms of citizen participation and inclusive decision-making processes, otherwise political decisions might be considered illegitimate [33]. Deliberation is seen as a promising instrument to enhance the legitimacy of governance [31] and we regard the democratic intent of deliberative processes to be one way of transitioning society into sustainability as one of the goals of sustainable development is to "ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels" [34]. One way of doing this is to explore the potential of mixed deliberation to stimulate attitudes that are pro-social and create participants that hold democratically oriented preferences that are necessary for a sustainability transition [35]. In our view, deliberative processes that have the potential to increase citizens' levels of political efficacy as well as political and social trust can contribute to democratic sustainability.

In this article, we study mixed deliberations—deliberations with both citizens and local politicians at the same table—on a proposed municipal merger in Finland one year before a referendum was held on the issue. Specifically, we focus on whether deliberation affected participants' social trust, political trust, and internal- and external political efficacy. Thus, on a general level, we seek to increase the knowledge about whether deliberative innovations can help create more democratically sustainable processes under testing circumstances such as referendum campaigns on a polarizing issue. Therefore, the article serves to

further develop deliberative theory and especially relates to its current focus on bringing deliberation into real-world use (e.g., [36]). Hence, the overarching research question in this study is what kind of effects on political efficacy, political trust, and social trust can be related to participation in mixed deliberation.

1.1. Mixed Deliberation

Mixed deliberation refers to deliberative events where citizens and elected representatives meet to discuss political issues in small groups [37,38]. Usually, mixed deliberation entails small group discussion where citizens are in majority and politicians in minority (e.g., [38,39]). Variants of mixed deliberation have been called “mixed-membership deliberation” (e.g., [38]), “directly representative democracy” [40], “mixed assemblies” [39], “mixed discursive spheres” [41] (p. 8) or “mini-publics as collaborative institutions” [42]. Mixed deliberation as a form of hybrid model between citizen and elite deliberation has been tested in Ireland, the UK, Belgium, Finland, and Italy [43–45]. Mixed deliberation has thus far received far less attention than other forms of deliberation (see [46]). Criticism against the benefits of deliberation has pointed out that the policy impact of deliberative events has often been weak [47,48]. When deliberation has no connection to actual decision-making, events might not be taken as seriously as when a connection exists [38] (p. 2). Therefore, organizers of deliberation have started inviting politicians to participate in deliberative events to close the gap between deliberative and representative decision-making processes (e.g., [38]). The inclusion of politicians in deliberation is thought to strengthen the commitment of politicians to suggestions made as a result of deliberation and should motivate decision-makers to promote these suggestions in formal decision-making [43] (p. 28). Citizens’ willingness to participate in deliberation is dependent on the assumed political impact of the event, as they might not participate if there is no potential impact [49,50]. Moreover, mixed deliberation can reduce the distance between citizens and their representatives [38,51]. For example, Suiter et al. [52] found that 75% of the citizen members of the Irish Constitutional Convention agreed that their attitude towards politicians improved as a result of the Convention. A study on mixed deliberation in Finland reported mostly positive findings from the viewpoint of politicians as well [43]. However, politicians remain skeptical about the value of deliberative citizen bodies in general [53] and prefer these to have a consultative/advisory role [54].

There is some skepticism regarding the inclusion of politicians in deliberation. There is, for instance, a fear that politicians might dominate the discussions and bring inequality to the deliberation table [39,55]. This, in turn, can further solidify negative sentiments towards politics among citizens instead of producing positive effects on participants, such as higher levels of political efficacy [56,57]. Nevertheless, Farrell et al. [38] found no evidence of politicians dominating discussions in mixed deliberation and concluded that concerns over intellectual domination and imbalances of power were unfounded in the Irish case. Other studies have concluded that citizens tend to gain insight into politics and appreciate the opportunity to meet politicians in mixed deliberation regardless of its impact on actual policy [58] (p. 189) [59] (p. 633). Regardless, Farrell et al. [38] recommend that politicians should, just like lay citizen members, be selected randomly to deliberative forums. In contrast, Flinders et al. [39] found that the presence of politicians had a negative effect on deliberative quality. Moreover, including politicians in deliberation did not have any effects on citizens’ attitudes towards politicians and political institutions. Likewise, citizens’ levels of internal and external efficacy did not change more in a mixed deliberation setting compared to a citizens-only setting. Attitudes regarding the presence of politicians were mixed, although most participants found it positive. Flinders et al. [39] (p. 42) speculate that the type of politicians participating may have bearing on the process and effects of deliberation in the sense that “more high-profile politicians”, compared to local politicians, would yield more positive results since it signals higher importance of the deliberation. Experiments with mixed deliberation featuring US Congressmen, also imply that the profile of the politicians matter when it comes to citizen satisfaction with the

process [40]. However, because Gerber and Mueller [60] found gaps between lay citizens and mostly part-time politicians regarding participation and deliberative quality, gaps between ordinary citizens and professional politicians may be even larger. Moreover, the length of deliberative events appears to be important since Flinders et al. [39] (p. 42) found that the citizens' perceptions of the presence of politicians grew more positive over time. Another factor that might have a bearing on the outcome of mixed deliberation is the timing of the event within a decision-making process. Ideally, events should be organized before a political decision has been made, otherwise, citizens might perceive an event as meaningless window dressing by the authorities [37,43] (p. 43).

1.2. Political Efficacy and Mixed Deliberation

A commonly cited potential effect that deliberations have on individuals taking part in deliberative discussions is that it can enhance their levels of political efficacy by improving their competence of democratic participation and their perceptions of the political system [61] (pp. 23–26) [62]. The terms internal and external political efficacy are often used to pinpoint these two aspects. Thus, internal efficacy is the belief that one is capable of effective political action and self-governance while external efficacy is the belief that governing officials listen to the public and that there are legal ways to influence governing decisions [63]. Both are arguably important components of a well-functioning and sustainable political system. Internal political efficacy might increase among participants in deliberation as they 'practice' taking part in a political process themselves [64] (p. 358) [26] (p. 98). This mechanism might also be especially relevant in mixed deliberations since the presence of politicians might make this 'practice' even more real and citizens may directly see that they are equal to politicians in the process. However, Mutz [65] (p. 358) argues that being challenged and confronted with opposing views may cause doubts in one's position and beliefs. Since politicians in mixed deliberations often have a higher deliberative capacity, i.e., prior knowledge and experience in argumentation, than citizens (e.g., [37]), it is plausible that opposing, well argued, views from politicians causes citizens to doubt their own capacity and even reconsider previously held assumptions.

In the context of deliberations on complex issues such as a municipal merger, it is perceivable that as citizens deliberate and encounter more opinions about a given topic, they can also be expected to become better equipped to ponder various aspects of a merger and feel that they have a better grasp of the issue. Gastil [21] (p. 156) also states that deliberation can help voters see beyond simplistic arguments put forward in referendum campaign rhetoric and to ponder various aspects of the issue. Findings also show that citizens become more confident about their ability to make an informed decision about the issue [25]. Thus, their level of internal efficacy would be augmented. In mixed deliberations specifically, there is also strong reason to expect that especially citizens' external efficacy is boosted since they interact in deliberation with politicians and get 'proof,' so-to-speak, of the officials listening to the public. Grönlund et al. [26] (p. 99) remark that external efficacy might increase because participants realize the complexity of political issues and develop an understanding of the actors and processes of representative democracy. Similar observations have been made when citizens' juries have been used in conjunction with referendums (e.g., [66]). Setälä [51] also discusses that mixed deliberation in particular gives citizens an opportunity to engage with politicians, which signals a greater importance of the process and can help to increase their external efficacy ([51]; see also e.g., [56,67]). Tentatively, this might be due to the simple fact that the politicians can explain things hands on in the deliberations. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that mixed deliberations reveal that politicians do not live up to expectations, which could result in lower external efficacy. Flinders et al. [39], for instance, found no effects on efficacy in their study of mixed deliberation. Nevertheless, Geissel and Hess [56] argue that improvements in the level of political efficacy is more likely to occur in municipalities with an institutional commitment to deliberative procedures.

In light of the discussion in this section, we generally expect participation in mixed deliberation to create positive effects on both forms of political efficacy among the participants. We thus formulate our initial hypotheses accordingly:

Hypothesis 1a: *Participation in a mixed deliberation contributes to higher levels of internal efficacy among the participants.*

Hypothesis 1b: *Participation in a mixed deliberation contributes to higher levels of external efficacy among the participants.*

1.3. Social and Political Trust in Mixed Deliberation

Social trust reflects a belief that in a worst-case scenario others will not willingly do harm and at best even work in one's interests [68] (p. 202) and is derived from an assessment of whether an individual or a group of individuals can be relied upon [69] (p. 651). High levels of social trust are important for the social cohesion in any given political community, as it helps with creating a social environment where democracy can prosper (see [30]). Social trust therefore functions as a form of generalized trust that is expected to link people together and contribute to forming more egalitarian political communities [70] (p. 45). Hence, high levels of social trust are considered essential for a well-functioning political system and democratic stability [71,72]. Following a merger process, a process putting citizens against each other based on preferences on the merger issue, it is not farfetched to expect it to have negative effects on the social trust within the political community. Political trust entails the citizens' confidence that political institutions and procedures function according to positive expectations [29,73]. While representative democracies arguably require a certain level of healthy distrust, or 'warranted trust' [74], the level of political trust can be regarded as one of the key measures of the performance of democracy and the quality of government. Therefore, political trust has come to be perceived as "the glue that keeps the system together, while simultaneously making the political system work" [73] (p. 76). Although the reasons for the decreasing levels of political trust in many liberal democracies remain contested, and there are concerns that growing distrust can undermine the public will for cooperation and support for democratic institutions [73]. The polarizing nature of both municipal mergers and referendums are arguably especially detrimental for political trust. Thus, the dichotomous nature of the referendum in conjunction with the contentious nature of merger issues divides voters into yes and no camps, fostering prejudices and negative perceptions of both actors and institutions on the "other side". Scholars have argued—e.g., [27] (p. 365); see also [75]—that polarizing issues can transform political trust into a partisan form of sentiment, in the sense that citizens only trust political actors and institutions that they perceive as being on their side.

That deliberation increases trust in fellow citizens (e.g., [76]) and trust in certain political actors—see [26] (p. 99)—is well-established by now. The former typically as a result of citizens sitting at the same table engaged in rational, polite, and sincere discussion with each other and the latter often as a spin-off effect of deliberators learning and understanding political processes better. Some (e.g., [77]) have even argued that restoring trust in political institutions should be the primary role of deliberation. In mixed deliberations, it might be argued that both trust-increasing mechanisms could be strengthened. Scholars (e.g., [58,59]) have shown that citizens tend to have positive views on opportunities to meet with politicians in deliberation and one would expect that citizens trust the politicians more as individuals after having engaged in deliberation with them. This would essentially be a form of generalized trust being strengthened through deliberation where some of the persons 'happen to be' politicians. However, mixed deliberation most likely strengthens the learning and understanding path to higher political trust more than the inter-personal path. Thus, when citizen meet politicians face-to-face in deliberations, the politicians have a higher pre-deliberation knowledge and familiarity of the issue at hand [37,78]. They can thus explain facts, reasoning, and various viewpoints on an issue in a detailed and

insightful manner and convey a picture of being trustworthy at dealing with the issue. Consequently, a mixed deliberation setting might improve the knowledge about the given topic as well as the image of the other participants, including politicians and fellow citizens.

If we then, finally, consider complex and emotionally laden issues in relation to these trust-enhancing paths in mixed deliberation, some potential caveats are evident. First, the highly salient nature of the issue and its polarizing nature affects the mindsets with which people enter deliberation. Thus, the more a person cares about an issue prior to deliberation, the less willing he/she is to consider other citizens' and politicians' views during deliberation [79–81]. This would hamper any potential positive effects on both types of trust. Secondly, as discussed earlier, political trust tends to become partisan in the context of referendums and it is uncertain whether mixed deliberation manages to remove partisan biases in trust. Nevertheless, Warren and Gastil [27] and Lafont [28] have argued that deliberative bodies in conjunction with referendums enhance factual learning as well as the understanding of viewpoints and a variety of arguments, including those contrary to one's own and that this is expected to increase trust in actors with opposite viewpoints.

Based on this overview, we expect both forms of trust to increase following a mixed deliberation. We hence formulate hypotheses accordingly:

Hypothesis 2a: *Participation in a mixed deliberation contributes to higher levels of social trust among the participants.*

Hypothesis 2b: *Participation in a mixed deliberation contributes to higher levels of political trust among the participants.*

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. The Context

In 2017, the predominantly rural municipality of Korsholm in Western Finland decided to start negotiating a possible municipal merger with the neighboring urban municipality, the city of Vasa. At the same time, the municipal council in Korsholm also made a decision-in-principle to organize a non-binding referendum on the proposed merger. The consultative referendum in Korsholm was eventually organized in March 2019. In the referendum, a clear majority, 61.3%, voted against the merger, 36.8% were in favor of it, and 1.9% chose the third option on the ballot to not choose either side (turnout 76.4%).

Already from the outset in 2017, the debate on the merger issue was very heated both among the public and even among local politicians, both internally within and between the political parties. Proponents argued that the merger was necessary in order to sustain the vitality of both Korsholm and the region, while the main fear among the opponents was that it would considerably weaken the position of the Swedish language group in the region. Signs of affective polarization were evident whereby opponents of the merger were seen as backwards striving and too emotional by proponents of the merger, whereas the proponents themselves were criticized by opponents for being dreamers and not showing any concrete evidence of positive impacts that the merger would yield for Korsholm's residents.

Opinions on the issue itself were also very divided. A survey sent to all adult citizens in Korsholm ($n = 6686$), commissioned by the municipality in 2018, measured opinions about the merger on a scale between 0 and 10 (0 being entirely against and 10 entirely for). The mean opinion on that scale was 4.81, but the standard deviation was 4.02, which means that the opinions were heavily distributed towards either extreme of the opinion scale (see [1]). The key aspect of the merger was that it would turn the Swedish-speaking majority in Korsholm into a minority in a merged municipality. The merger was thus at the core of a long-standing sensitive language debate in bilingual Finland. Accordingly, the public views on the merger were highly segregated along language divisions [1]. The above-mentioned survey shows that the mean opinion was only 3.71 among Swedish speakers, whereas it was 7.38 among Finnish speakers. In fact, separate analyses show that

the strongest single factor explaining why citizens in Korsholm were in favor of the merger was being a Finnish speaker (see [1] for analyses).

Over time, polarization on the merger issue became even more affective. The survey conducted in 2018 for instance showed that people only believed arguments supporting their own view on the merger and dismissed opposing arguments entirely. Strong affective polarization can be further confirmed by instances of harassment and threat during the campaign [82]. The merger issue even divided the locally dominant Swedish People's Party in Finland (SPP), which is supported by a vast majority of voters in Korsholm. The leading politicians on both sides of the merger campaign represented this party, and in this respect, divisions on the merger issue did not follow partisan alignments. In addition to the issue of linguistic identity, the planned municipal merger would have potentially had significant consequences on public services and local democracy, which made it even more of a salient issue among the public. The issue of municipal merger was furthermore sensitive because a large share of the population was employed by the municipality, and the merger could have posed a threat to their jobs in the long run (in a 2018 survey, 11% of respondents indicated that they were employed by the municipality).

2.2. Design of Study

For the purposes of this study, we conducted a series of three deliberative discussions together with the municipality of Korsholm in the winter of 2018, which was one year after the initial decision to negotiate a merger had been made and roughly one year prior to the referendum on the merger. The deliberative discussions were part of the official municipal hearings of citizens prior to negotiations about the merger with Vaasa. The deliberations were conducted as mixed groups containing both citizens and politicians with 225 participants in total. For the purposes of this study, however, we only analyze the citizens taking part ($n = 117$), since several of our dependent variables measure opinions on politicians and it thus makes no sense to have politicians assess themselves. Due to missing values for some of our dependent variables, the actual number of analyzed citizens is 105. The details of the deliberative discussions are described next.

2.3. Procedure and Participants of the Deliberative Discussions

Since the deliberative discussions were part of the municipality's official hearings of the public, we did not enforce any experimental treatments in the deliberative discussions so all of them were thus conducted in small- n groups with facilitation and discussion rules. However, we used a pre-test post-test experimental design in the small- n deliberation groups. Participants thus answered a pre-test questionnaire prior to deliberation (abbreviated to T1 henceforth) and immediately after deliberating (T2 henceforth). Besides basic demographics, these surveys contained items on internal and external efficacy, and political and social trust (see Appendix A for details). By studying pre-test to post-test changes regarding political efficacy and political- and social trust, we can test our hypotheses.

The deliberative discussions were held on 31 January (92 participants divided into 8 discussion groups), 13 February (94 participants, 10 groups) and 20 February (39 participants, 4 groups) in 2018. Since the municipality is geographically vast, these events were held in different parts of the municipality to give all of the municipality's citizens a chance of attending an event nearby. Each event was thus open to all interested; there were no random samples of invited citizens. This resulted in some overlap between the events so that some citizens attended several events and likewise for the politicians. The lack of random sampling also resulted in the sample of citizens deliberating being skewed compared to the population in general (see Table 1 below). Thus, there was an overrepresentation of men, Swedish-speakers, older citizens and those with secondary level education. Furthermore, opinions on the proposed merger were even more negative among the deliberating citizens (average 2.87) than among the public (4.87).

Table 1. Deliberating citizens compared to general public in Korsholm.

	Population (n = 6235)	Deliberators (n = 117)
	%	%
Gender		
Woman	53.4	25.0
Man	46.4	75.0
Mother tongue		
Swedish	69.7	89.7
Finnish	30.3	10.3
Age		
16–24	10.8	0.0
25–34	11.7	1.7
35–49	26.5	19.7
50–64	24.3	26.5
65–	26.6	52.1
Education		
Primary	14.9	4.3
Secondary	47.5	66.9
Tertiary	37.6	30.7
Opinions about merger (0–10)	4.87	2.87

The template was exactly the same for each deliberation event: after a brief welcoming speech and information about the process of municipal negotiations of the merger held by the municipality's chief executive officer, participants at each of these three events were randomly allocated to the small-n discussion groups (event one: 8 groups, event two: 10 groups, and event three: 4 groups). We used stratified randomization to ensure that each small-n group contained a mix of politicians and citizens [39,51,83]. The typical ratio between citizens and politicians was 1:3 in each discussion group, as was the ratio of women to men. Each small-n group had an assigned facilitator and participants were initially given time to answer the T1 survey, to read a brief information package about the merger, and to be acquainted with the rules of discussions. Discussions lasted for about two hours, after which the groups summarized the most important aspects brought up in discussion regarding the proposed municipal merger and each participant then answered the T2 survey. The rules and tasks for the facilitators were designed to steer the deliberation processes as close to the normative ideals of deliberation discussion as possible (e.g., [84]). The rules essentially supported the ideals of reasoned justifications, reflection, sincerity, and respect, whereas the facilitator made efforts to ensure reciprocity, inclusion, and equality of discussion. The facilitators were graduate political science students who were trained for the task in two sessions. Some of them also had previous experience of facilitating deliberative discussions.

2.4. Measures

All three of the dependent variables, social trust, political efficacy, and political trust, were measured using standard survey items commonly used in survey research on trust and efficacy such as in the European Social Survey, World Values Survey etc. (see also [63,85–88]). Social trust was thus measured by asking respondents, on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 meaning that they feel most people can be trusted, whether they feel that most people can be trusted, or that one can never be too careful when dealing with people. Political efficacy was measured for internal and external efficacy as both summarized efficacy scales and as single survey items. We also chose to study single efficacy items in order to explore in detail which aspects of internal- and external efficacy that taking part in mixed deliberation potentially affected. Political trust was measured by asking respondents to assess their trust in various actors on a scale from 0 to 10, where 10 means that they fully trust the actor in question (see Appendix A for exact questionnaire wording).

3. Results

The results are organized according to the two sub-aspects of interest: political efficacy followed by social and political trust. All analyses are carried out using paired samples t-tests of pre-deliberation and post-deliberation values for each dependent variable. Significance tests are one-tailed since our hypotheses have directional expectations. Where significant effects are found, we ran post-hoc regressions predicting the post-test value of the dependent variables. This so-called regressor strategy includes the pre-test measure of the dependent variable as covariate in the model in order to correct for potential regression to the mean effects (e.g., [89]). The other variables included in the post-hoc regressions were gender, age, education level, and a measure of how each citizen experienced the deliberative quality of the discussion. Table 2 below displays the findings on how internal and external efficacy developed during deliberation.

Table 2. Development of internal and external efficacy during the mixed deliberations (n = 105).

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Change
Internal efficacy scale (0–3)	1.78	1.72	−0.06
I know more about politics than most people	1.27	1.12	−0.15 *
I have no say on what the municipal council or executive board decide	1.03	1.04	0.01
Sometimes politics seems so complicated that I do not really understand what is going on	1.25	1.13	−0.12 †
External efficacy scale (0–3)	1.30	1.35	0.05
People can exert influence through voting	0.71	0.88	0.17 **
Politicians do not care about the opinions of ordinary citizens	1.00	0.97	−0.03
People’s opinions are taken into account through the parties’ decision making	1.20	1.16	−0.04

† $p < 0.10$ one-sided tests. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. Note: The efficacy scales have been recoded so that a higher value corresponds to higher level of efficacy. The single items range between 0 and 3. For the single efficacy items. Higher values for internal and external efficacy mean that the respondent agreed more with the statement.

The findings on political efficacy provide little support for our hypotheses. There were only two rather weak statistically significant findings. Firstly, people, after deliberation, felt less that they understood politics better than most people. This is contrary to H1a, but is potentially tied to the specific topic of municipal mergers. Thus, as citizens engage in deliberation about the merger with politicians, they come to understand the complexity of the issue more and, perhaps, realize that their knowledge of politics is rather limited. The post-hoc regression of this effect, however, suggests that this change is partly also due to regression to the mean. Secondly, the participants increased their agreement with the statement that people can exert influence through voting. This finding lends some support to H1b, albeit it is not easy to decipher why deliberation increases this specific item on external efficacy. Further analyses into the actual content of what was said during deliberation would potentially shed more light on this effect and the causes for it. Again, the post-hoc analysis suggest that regression to the mean is at play here. There was also a statistical trend whereby people agreed less with the statement that politics is too complicated to understand. Here the post-hoc regression showed that, besides regression to the mean, women had higher post-test level of efficacy after deliberation.

We now turn to our findings concerning social- and political trust. Table 3 below displays the findings on how those opinions developed during deliberation.

Table 3. Development of social trust and political trust during the mixed deliberations (n = 105).

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Change
Social trust (0–10)	5.97	5.96	−0.01
Political trust (0–10)			
Political parties	4.60	4.52	−0.08
Politicians	4.53	4.50	−0.03
Municipal politicians	5.14	4.96	−0.17 †
The municipal council	5.34	5.13	−0.21 †
The municipal executive board	4.94	4.80	−0.13
Public officials	5.68	5.72	0.04

† $p < 0.10$ one-sided tests.

The findings regarding social- and political trust are mostly insignificant and the two statistical trends both run against our hypotheses and the post-hoc analyses suggest that regression to the mean is a factor behind the change as well. Thus, citizens trusted municipal politicians and the municipal council less after deliberation. A potential reason for this could be the fact that politicians' opinions on the merger issue were less critical (average 4.67 on 0 to 10 scale) which resulted in rather heated clashes of opinions in some deliberating groups (based on our annotations from the events). We argued earlier that the fact that people had very strong opinions on the issue before deliberation might hamper how deliberation fosters trust [79–81], which most likely plays some part in understanding these findings too.

4. Discussion

This study set out to explore whether participating in mixed deliberation, in the context of a prospective referendum on a polarizing municipal merger issue, appears to augment citizens' social- and political trust as well as their feelings of internal- and external efficacy. The underlying argument of the paper was that putting contentious issues to deliberation would be a more democratically sustainable process than only putting the issue to a referendum. While democratic sustainability is a multifaceted concept that arguably takes a long time to develop, strengthening trust and belief in the political system and in one's own role in it are arguably important pieces in starting such a development. Generally, however, the results of this study provide little proof of the deliberating participants strengthening any of the aspects in focus here. Most of the sentiments did not change at all during deliberation and the few statistically significant findings were inconsistent with regards to our hypotheses. We presented some potential interpretations to these findings already in the results section, but what do these more-or-less null findings tell us about the democratic sustainability of mixed deliberation in conjunction with a referendum on a polarizing issue?

First and foremost, it should be remarked that although we studied a rather critical case and found few effects of deliberation—which usually is akin to a dead end in terms of generalization—similar findings to ours have been found (e.g., [56]) when studying practices of participatory budgeting in a plethora of different circumstances. While participatory budgeting is not entirely the same as our case of mixed deliberation, we argue that our findings nevertheless appear to fit into a general pattern. Continuing, then, to discussing the key findings of our study, the most important finding is that this study has shown that mixed deliberation is not a universal quick fix for building trust and belief in the political system and its actors. Under circumstances of severe polarization, such as in the case studied here, it might even serve to exacerbate the situation. Nevertheless, as others have demonstrated [39] (p. 42), mixed deliberation matures over time in the sense that citizens' opinions on the politicians present in deliberation gradually become more positive after several deliberation sessions. Since this study focused on only one session of deliberation between citizens and politicians, a session which also was the first time these met in deliberation, there is a possibility that more positive sentiments would have

developed among the deliberating citizens if the deliberations had spanned several sessions. Button and Mattson [59] (p. 612) have argued that deliberation serves various roles in various contexts; provides an arena for venting anger and frustration, creates learning on an issue, strengthens mutual understanding, and (rarely) has a direct legislative impact. None of these, however, usually occur all at once nor at every deliberative event. Besides a direct legislative impact, the deliberations studied here contained elements of all these aspects but, considering our observations at the events, the primary focus tended to be on citizens ventilating anger and frustration and politicians needing to be defensive. Again, if the deliberations had spanned several events and a longer time period, it is perceivable that stronger elements of learning and mutual understanding would have matured among the deliberators. These, admittedly speculative, sentiments of ours point to something that others have reiterated several times (e.g., [41,56,90]), that one-off isolated deliberative events are rarely successful. The key to a sustainable democracy is rather to achieve a system-level culture of deliberation where deliberative spaces are abundant and clearly tied to the political institutions and processes:

“If a government aims at conducting a successful deliberative procedure, it should allocate adequate funds and infrastructure. Special staff for citizens’ participation and a local participatory plan are crucial for the success. If the local government plans a ‘low-budget’ procedure without financial and institutional commitment, the endeavor will most likely not produce any effects” [56] (p. 15).

Besides the systemic perspective on mixed deliberation, the work with gathering data for this study and observing the deliberations in action has highlighted the importance of micro-factors in creating fruitful deliberations. Thus, the importance of the facilitator in keeping the deliberation session on track appears even more crucial in mixed deliberation on contentious issues. As Gerber [91] (p. 114) has pointed out, facilitators need to be subtle but ensure that basic civility and order is maintained in the discussion and that everyone gets the opportunity to speak. Maintaining civility is especially hard when participants enter deliberation with strong emotional investment in the topic of deliberation. The task of ensuring equal opportunities to speak is also especially tricky in mixed deliberation where politicians might tend to dominate the discussion (see [37]). We observed great variation in how ‘deliberative’ the sessions were and, besides different participants in the sessions, the facilitator was the only thing that varied between the groups. A common situation was that a woman facilitator struggled to maintain order in discussion groups with a lot of ‘old angry men’ in them. Future research into optimizing facilitation in mixed deliberation is clearly needed and potential effects of the gender of the facilitator on deliberative quality could be explored. Similarly, unraveling the deliberative grand treatment and studying deliberation in each discussion group—since a deliberative event hides a lot of important variation at the group-level (see e.g., [92])—appears to be an important avenue for future research to pursue in order to gain better understanding of micro factors leading to deliberation working or failing. To illustrate, our sessions contained discussion groups that worked similar to textbook examples of successful deliberation but, at the same time, there were several groups that failed and ended in shouting-matches between angry citizens and politicians. Additional important aspects to study further regarding mixed deliberation, are the impact the type of politicians (local/national) might have on the process and outcomes of deliberation [39] (p. 42). Is there so-to-speak a difference if citizens meet local “low-profile” or national “high-profile” politicians in mixed deliberation?

Our study clearly has limitations. The most obvious one is that we have studied one case only, which we have discussed rather thoroughly already in the discussion. This means that generalization to other contexts is by necessity speculative. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that case studies’ main purpose is more about generalizing to a theory—in this case the theory of deliberation in general and mixed deliberation in specific—and not to a broader population [93] (p. 21). Thus, our findings provide important knowledge on the boundaries of deliberation in polarized contexts and on polarized issues and builds on the ever-increasing pool of knowledge on how deliberation as a theory is

best adapted to real-world circumstances (see [36]). Other noteworthy limitations are that participants, both citizens and politicians, in the mixed deliberations studied here were self-selected, which resulted in a skewed representation of the population. Ideally, deliberation should feature randomly selected participants to ensure that panels are representative of the population [38]. Nevertheless, non-representativeness of participants is possible in deliberation events using random recruitment as well [33,43]. Allowing participants to self-select might also introduce partisan bias [38] and result in the participation of citizens and politicians that are particularly engaged in the deliberation issue. However, not allowing participants to self-select can also result in problems. In the case studied here, it is likely that a randomized selection of participants would have been interpreted as a measure by the municipality to shut out and silence critical citizens or politicians. Moreover, this is not a study of the effects of mixed deliberation since we did not have an experimental design testing differences between mixed and non-mixed deliberative events. Therefore, we cannot make causal claims about whether the results would have been different if the deliberative events had been open to citizens only. Another limitation is that since the deliberations studied here took place rather late in the broader merger negotiation process citizens may have viewed the events as mere ‘window-dressing’ by the municipality to legitimize decisions that had already been made. The potential external policy impact of the deliberations might thus have been unclear to the citizens taking part, which could have lowered their expectations of the outcome of these events. This could possibly partly explain the lack of change in levels of trust and efficacy.

5. Conclusions

Generally, in science, as Popper taught us, more is often learned from putting something to a critical test rather than creating optimal conditions for it to work. Deliberation as a field of study could earlier be criticized for a clear positivity bias (see [94]) whereby positive effects of deliberation were found in an array of scientific experiments with near perfect circumstances for deliberation to succeed in. In recent years, as deliberation is rapidly moving from the lab into embedded experiment in real-life, knowledge that is much more crucial has arguably been gained. Within this strand of research, this study explored mixed deliberation embedded in a context of a contentious issue (municipal merger) and a polarizing referendum process. A main conclusion of relevance to the broader discussion and theory of deliberative democracy to draw from this study, as we discussed, is that deliberation is no quick solution to complex and contentious societal issues. Potential positive effects of deliberation were few in our results, and whether these would have occurred long-term is uncertain in light of this study. Nevertheless, our conclusion is that, despite being important, effects in terms of trust and efficacy are not everything. The societal climate in Korsholm was more-or-less unsustainable when the deliberations studied here commenced, so much was to gain and little to lose in terms of democratic sustainability. Simply letting out steam was arguably important at this point and the value per se in citizens and politicians sitting down at the same discussion table should not be neglected either [58] (p. 298) [59] (p. 633). Experiences from the Oregon Citizens Initiative Reviews (e.g., [24,25]) give reason for long-term optimism regarding the potential to achieve democratically sustainable combinations of deliberation and referendums. The key, as we discussed, is to achieve a context-wide culture of deliberation so that deliberation becomes part of the ebb and flow of local democracy instead of extraordinary one-off events. For now, one-off events such as the one studied here, are part of the first thriving steps towards a more democratically sustainable system.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to a contract with the municipality of Korsholm.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A. Survey Items Used in This Study

Nr	Question Text	Question Alternatives
1	Gender	Woman; Man; Other
2	Mother tongue	Swedish; Finnish; Other
3	Age, what year were you born?	
4	What is your highest achieved education?	Only compulsory school; vocational school; upper secondary school; degree from a university of applied sciences; University degree or higher
5	What is your opinion about a potential merger between Korsholm and Vasa?	Indicate your opinion on a scale between 0 and 10, where 0 means that you are entirely against a merger and 10 means that you are entirely in favour of the merger.
6	Indicate your stance on the following statements:	Disagree entirely; somewhat disagree; somewhat agree; completely agree; do not know / do not want to answer
(a)	I know more about politics than most people	
(b)	People can exert influence through voting	
(c)	Politicians do not care about the opinions of ordinary citizens	
(d)	I have no say on what the municipal council or executive board decide	
(e)	People's opinions are taken into account through the parties' decision making	
(f)	Sometimes politics seems so complicated that I do not really understand what is going on	
7	Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you cannot be too careful in dealing with people?	Indicate your answer on a scale between 0 and 10, where 0 means you cannot be too careful and 10 means that most people can be trusted
8	To what extent do you trust the following actors?	Indicate your answer on a scale between 0 and 10, where 0 means that you do not trust that actor at all and 10 means that you fully trust the actor in question
(a)	Political parties	
(b)	Politicians in general	
(c)	Municipal politicians	
(d)	The municipal assembly	
(e)	The municipal council	
(f)	Public officials	

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Article

Engaged, Indifferent, Skeptical or Critical? Disentangling Attitudes towards Local Deliberative Mini-Publics in Four Western European Democracies

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Abstract: Democratic innovations, such as deliberative mini-publics, are designed to encourage public engagement in policymaking. They are increasingly being used to inform decision-making on the environment, climate change, and other sustainability issues. Research on support for democratic innovations has focused on identifying citizens in favor and understanding whether they are “enraged” or “engaged” with politics. However, this approach ignores potential differences between citizens expressing more (or less) positive attitudes towards democratic innovations. In an online vignette study, respondents from four Western European countries rated varying descriptions of a local mini-public, indicating both their support for the decision-making process and their willingness to get involved. Four distinct groups were identified based on a latent profile analysis: (1) those who are truly engaged, in that their support for mini-publics is reinforced by intentions to participate, correspond to one-third of citizens. Engaged deliberative democrats stand out as being more concerned about the environment than any other issue on the agenda; (2) the majority of citizens are indifferent, expressing neither positive nor negative inclinations towards mini-publics; (3) a group of “elitists” is skeptical of integrating citizens into policymaking despite intending to participate themselves; and finally (4), a small share of citizens was identified as critics, scoring low on both support and willingness to participate in a mini-public. The diversity of profiles points to the challenges of using deliberative mini-publics to address sustainability issues.

Keywords: deliberative mini-publics; democratic innovations; political participation; public opinion; local government; sustainability



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1. Introduction

Democratic innovations, or processes enabling citizens to influence decision-making on important social and political issues, are often championed as providing a solution to the crisis of representation affecting established democracies [1]. European democracies are making more consistent use of direct democratic processes, such as referendums and initiatives, that are popular among majorities of citizens [2]. However, scholars and policymakers have increasingly turned their attention to deliberative processes emphasizing focused discussions among ordinary citizens as a crucial component of decision-making. An example of such processes is the deliberative “mini-public” (DMP), or a body of citizens selected by lot to reflect the characteristics of the general population, which gathers to deliberate and decide on specific policy issues [1].

Recent studies have shown that DMPs are being used more frequently across established democracies to inform policymaking on an expanding portfolio of topics [3]. As shown in Figure 1, the environment was the most common topic for DMPs held in European democracies between 2000 and 2020, closely followed by other topics related to sustainability, such as science and technology and urban planning [4]. Although DMPs are increasingly popular, they remain a novel approach to policymaking in most democracies. Therefore, the potential of these innovations for addressing sustainability issues

depends on the extent to which ordinary citizens perceive them as legitimate channels for policymaking and are willing to get involved.

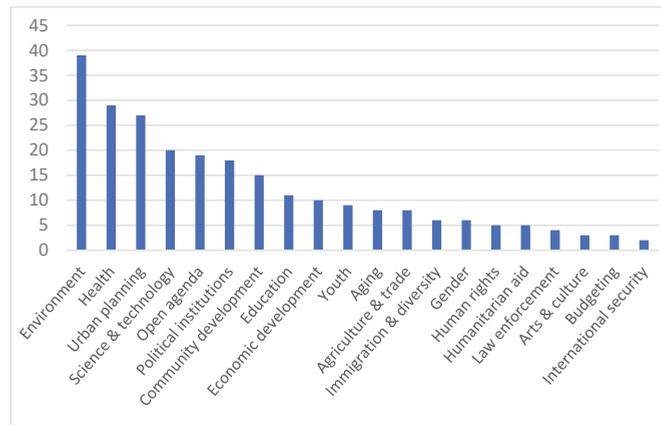


Figure 1. Issues discussed in 127 local, regional, and national DMPs held in European democracies between 2000 and 2020 based on the Politicize project’s inventory of DMPs available at: <https://politicize.eu/inventory-dmps/> (accessed on 5 September 2021).

To assess the potential of democratic innovations for policymaking, scholars have sought to gauge public support for the use DMPs. Studies from the US [5,6], Belgium [7,8], and the UK [9] have shown that DMPs are relatively popular, even if less so than referendums. Most studies have focused on separating the advocates of democratic innovations from the critics and determining whether the advocates are politically “engaged” or politically “enraged” [10–12]. However, there may be several groups of citizens with different levels of support for democratic innovations and distinct socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics. Furthermore, most studies have ignored a potential gap between support and willingness to participate, assuming that support for democratic innovations translates to participation [13]. However, some citizens may intend to participate despite rejecting a more institutionalized role for DMPs, whereas others may be less inclined to participate despite supporting the initiative to get citizens involved.

In an online vignette study conducted in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, and the UK, we presented 1559 respondents with varying descriptions of a local DMP. Attitudes towards deliberative democratic innovations were measured by asking respondents to rate their support for the DMPs described as well as their willingness to participate if invited. Using latent profile analysis, we identified several groups or “classes” of citizens with distinct patterns of support and willingness to participate. Whereas critics neither support nor would participate in a local DMP, engaged deliberative democrats are both supportive and willing to participate. In addition, we also identified “skeptical” citizens who reject the use of DMPs despite intending to participate and “indifferent” citizens who show neither positive nor negative predispositions towards DMPs. Building on these findings, we compared the socio-demographics and political attitudes of the four groups.

On one hand, the viability of DMPs for addressing sustainability issues rests on the ability of policymakers and practitioners to convince not only the critics but also the skeptics and those who are indifferent. On the other hand, citizens who prioritize the environment over any other issue of concern are most likely to be identified as engaged deliberative democrats.

2. Literature Review: Who Are the Deliberative Democrats?

For many years, scholars have taken an interest in citizens demanding a greater role in shaping public policy, potentially undermining the authority of elected officials. More

specifically, they have tried to understand who these citizens are and how they differ from the rest of the public. According to *cognitive mobilization theory*, citizens demand more opportunities to decide on important matters affecting their lives since they are interested and engaged in politics. According to *political disaffection theory*, citizens seek alternative processes due to the fact that they are enraged with politics as usual, which they perceive as distant and unresponsive [10–12]. These theories have encouraged scholars to search for one of two mutually exclusive profiles, instead of considering a typology. As a result, empirical research has often produced contradictory findings [14]. Some studies found that participatory processes are preferred by citizens who are politically engaged and confident their participation will make a difference [10,12]. Others found that participatory processes are preferred by those who are lower educated, less confident in their ability to influence politics, and distrusting of political actors and institutions [7,8,11,15].

One explanation for this mixed bag of results is that these theories work hand-in-hand, implying that deliberative democrats are both engaged and enraged. Gamson claimed that “a high sense of political efficacy and low political trust is the optimum combination for mobilization” [16] (p. 48). This claim is reflected in the concept of *critical citizens* or individuals who support the institutions of democracy but have acquired sufficient skills and knowledge to challenge the decisions of political elites [17]. Providing evidence for this, a study in Belgium found that support for DMPs that would replace local councils is strongest among citizens who are both confident in their ability to influence local politics and dissatisfied with political parties and elected officials [7].

Another explanation is that there are several types of deliberative democrats; some are either engaged or enraged and others are simultaneously enraged and engaged. Webb is the only scholar who provided evidence for this idea. Using survey data from the UK, he demonstrated that there are two kinds of democrats, both of whom are dissatisfied with politics [9]. The dissatisfied democrats are more politically interested and efficacious, therefore preferring intensive modes of engagement such as deliberation. By contrast, the stealth democrats are less politically interested and efficacious, therefore preferring easy modes of engagement such as referendums.

Webb’s research opens a new avenue for studying attitudes towards democratic innovations by suggesting that we should pay more attention to the difference between wanting more say and wanting to get involved. There may be democrats who would not participate, despite being favorable towards DMPs. Vice versa, there may be democrats who would participate despite being unfavorable towards DMPs, which has not been articulated in the literature.

Most studies investigated support for the introduction of specific democratic innovations or for the broader notion of citizens playing a role in decision-making processes. Only a few studies investigated citizens’ past participation or willingness to participate in democratic innovations [5,9,18]. Support and participation are both important as they tell us different things: whereas support is an indication of the perceived legitimacy of participatory processes, participation is an indication of their potential for inclusiveness.

Research from the US demonstrated that Americans’ increased support for direct citizen participation did not imply increased willingness to get involved in politics, suggesting a potential support-participation gap [18]. By contrast, studies in Finland [13] and Germany [19] demonstrated that support and participation are linked. However, these studies examined correlations between citizens’ broader decision-making preferences and their participation in a range of political behaviors, e.g., voting, protesting, demonstrating and boycotting, instead of comparing support for and participation in the same decision-making process. Furthermore, a positive correlation between support and participation does not rule out the possibility that a support-participation gap exists for *some* citizens.

Support may not translate into participation since the latter requires greater skills and resources than the former [19]. Several characteristics are known drivers of political participation, namely income, education, and political interest [20], and hence those who make the step from support to participation are likely to possess more of these traits.

Another explanation is that in theory participatory processes are a good idea, but in practice politicians do not listen to what citizens have to say, and therefore participation is perceived as a waste of time. Vice versa, participation in democratic innovations does not guarantee support. This may be due to the fact that some citizens are relatively satisfied with the performance of political elites, whom they perceive as better equipped to take decisions than the masses. However, should the opportunity arise, these citizens would participate as they would not want decisions to be taken by less competent citizens.

Building on the distinction between support and participation, we expect to identify four groups of individuals with differing patterns of support and willingness to participate in a DMP (see Table 1). *Disengaged deliberative democrats* support greater use of DMPs, but are less likely to participate in one if invited (H1a). *Skeptical deliberative democrats* reject a more institutionalized role for DMPs, but would not miss out on an opportunity to take decisions (H1b). *Engaged deliberative democrats* are both enthusiastic about DMPs and eager to participate in one (H1c). Finally, *critics* neither support nor would participate in a DMP (H1d). In the following section, we extend previous theories on the demand for participatory processes, developing hypotheses on the distinct socio-demographic and attitudinal profiles of these four groups.

Table 1. Four groups with distinct patterns of support and willingness to participate in a DMP.

	Low Support	High Support
Low willingness to participate	Critical	Disengaged
High willingness to participate	Skeptical	Engaged

3. Socio-Demographic and Attitudinal Characteristics of the Four Groups

Disengaged deliberative democrats are inspired by the literature on stealth democracy [18]. These citizens are in favor of shifting decision-making opportunities away from politicians, whom they perceive as unresponsive and corrupted. Despite supporting democratic innovations, disengaged democrats are unlikely to participate since they lack the resources and motivation to engage in politics, which they perceive as complicated and distant. Furthermore, they feel their participation would not make a difference since representative institutions are not responsive, especially to people like themselves. Therefore, we expect that disengaged deliberative democrats are less skilled and resourceful and more critical of political elites and institutions than other attitude groups (H2). Skills and resources refer to both *objective* goods such education and income and *subjective* goods such as interest in politics and feelings of internal political efficacy [7].

Skeptical deliberative democrats are similar to those Bedock describes as individuals with an “entrustment” conception of politics [21]. Despite being interested in politics, skeptics do not support a sustained role for citizens in policymaking since politics is not for everyone. Hence, citizens should not be involved beyond selecting more competent leaders with superior qualities. These individuals are less negative about politics as they come from privileged backgrounds. Higher status groups are generally better represented and therefore less likely to favor alternative political processes [22]. For example, a study from Canada demonstrated that better informed citizens are more skeptical of referendums since they are satisfied with government [23]. Although they do not support a more prominent role for citizens in policymaking, skeptics would not miss out on an opportunity to decide since they are still interested in politics and want to avoid decisions taken by those less competent than themselves. Therefore, we expect that skeptical deliberative democrats are more skilled and resourceful and more satisfied with political elites and institutions, but less confident in the abilities of ordinary citizens to understand politics than other attitude groups (H3).

Engaged deliberative democrats come closest to those Norris describes as “critical citizens” [17]. Similarly to the disengaged, they are in favor of shifting decision-making away from underperforming politicians to ordinary citizens. However, unlike the disengaged,

they are eager to participate in decision-making since they are more interested in politics and feel their participation will make a difference. Contrary to skeptics, engaged democrats are strongly opposed to the professionalization of politics, which they believe should be carried out by ordinary citizens temporarily engaged in collective initiatives for the common good [21]. Therefore, we expect that engaged deliberative democrats are more skilled and resourceful, more critical of political elites and institutions, and more confident in the abilities of ordinary citizens to understand politics than other attitude groups (H4).

Finally, the fourth group expected are the *critics* of deliberative decision-making. In a recent study from Belgium, Pilet and colleagues identified a significant subgroup of citizens who remain positive about elected politicians and are very critical of including citizens in policy-making [24]. Similarly to the skeptics, critics might be more trusting of political elites and institutions and less confident in the abilities of ordinary citizens to understand politics. Unlike skeptical and engaged democrats, critics would be less interested in politics, less skilled and resourceful and less confident in their own capacity to influence politics (H5).

4. Data

The data analyzed is from an online vignette study conducted by the POLPART project in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and the UK during summer 2017. Respondents were recruited from online panels by a market research company employing the same recruitment strategy in all countries. The samples range between 364 (UK) and 418 (Switzerland) participants per country.

The four countries have sufficiently diverse political systems to investigate whether the attitudinal groups described in the hypotheses exist across differing institutional contexts. Whereas Germany and Switzerland are federal democracies, the UK and the Netherlands are unitary states. Unlike the other three countries, the UK is a majoritarian democracy with lower levels of territorial and institutional decentralization [25]. Switzerland stands out as a semi-direct democracy where citizens can participate in political decision-making through referendums and initiatives at different levels of government.

Since the 1990s, the use of deliberative democratic innovations has been expanding in the Netherlands, Germany and the UK. However, these initiatives are often implemented ad hoc, loosely connected to policymaking and specific to a few cities or regions [25–27]. Municipalities in the Netherlands have experimented with citizens' juries, participatory budgeting, and citizens' summits. Mini-publics composed of randomly-selected citizens referred to as "G1000" were implemented to reinvigorate representative democracy in at least a dozen municipalities [27]. In Germany, a similar initiative known as "Planning Cells", of which more than 50 cases have been recorded, bring together randomly-selected citizens to influence decision-making on urban development [28]. In the UK, participatory budgeting has been employed by at least 100 local authorities and hundreds of citizens' juries have encouraged deliberation on topics related to science and technology, the environment and healthcare [25]. In Switzerland, deliberative democratic innovations organized in support of direct democratic votes, such as the citizens' initiative review, are slowly emerging [29].

Online surveys are increasingly common in research on citizens' political attitudes and behaviors [30]. However, as a result of self-selection into online panels, respondents in these surveys may differ on certain characteristics from the general population. To ensure an optimally representative sample, we constructed weights matching the distributions on age, sex, and education among the general population of each country. These weights were modelled on post-stratified samples from the 2016 European Social Survey, excluding persons older than 65 years who are underrepresented in online surveys. Research from the US has shown that with appropriate weighting, samples recruited through online panels are sufficiently representative of the general population to be used as alternatives to probability samples, such as those constituted through random digit dialing [31].

5. Variable Measures

Citizens' attitudes towards deliberative innovations were measured by presenting respondents with two randomly generated "vignettes" or descriptions of a local DMP. The vignettes provide more information about the design of DMPs than standard survey items, which is crucial for capturing attitudes towards relatively complex and unusual political processes [32]. We chose to focus on local politics, where the issues and consequences are more immediate and concrete [25].

Besides the key criteria of (a) citizen participation, (b) random selection, and (c) deliberation (which are emphasized in all vignettes), DMPs come in a variety of shapes and sizes. To better reflect the diversity of institutional designs, the initiators, size, composition, number of topics, and outcome of the DMP were randomly varied across the vignettes presented to respondents. The full vignette text with all potential attribute levels is provided below. Full randomization implies that vignette characteristics are independent from respondent characteristics (e.g., all respondents had an equal chance of receiving an advisory or binding DMP) and therefore do not need to be included as controls [33].

Imagine that residents in your town or city were given the opportunity to influence political decisions at the local level by participating in a citizens' meeting. The meeting will be organized by [local politicians/an independent organization] and composed of [25/100/500] randomly selected citizens from different socio-economic backgrounds [however, efforts will be made to invite citizens from lower socio-economic backgrounds whose views are not often heard/blank]. Together, these citizens will discuss [one/several] important political questions and collectively take decisions. The decisions taken are [advisory, which means the local government can choose whether to implement them/binding, which means the local government must implement them].

Following each vignette, respondents answered two questions on *support* and *willingness to participate* in the DMP. These measures represent the observed attitudinal outcomes determining membership to the different groups described in the hypotheses. As a measure of support, respondents indicated whether the DMP described was a bad or good way of taking decisions in their town or city on a scale ranging from "very bad" (0) to "very good" (10). Support for local DMPs was far from overwhelming, with an average score of 5.43 out of 10. As a measure of willingness to participate, respondents indicated how likely they would be to participate in the DMP if invited on a scale ranging from "very unlikely" (0) to "very likely" (10). While prospective (as opposed to past) participation might be considered a limitation, real opportunities to participate in DMPs are few and far between, even at the local level [32]. Overall willingness to participate was slightly higher than support, with an average score of 5.89 out of 10. Figure 2 demonstrates that despite institutional differences, respondents' overall scores on support and willingness to participate are similarly structured across all countries, with the exception that support is lower in the Netherlands and Switzerland and willingness to participate is higher in Germany.

Several independent variables were included to test hypotheses (H2–H5) comparing the socio-demographics and political attitudes of the four groups. *Education* and *income* measure objective or "hard" skills and resources. Education is derived from the International Standard Classification of Education and ranges from less than lower secondary education (0) to higher tertiary education (6). Although deliberative skills can be learned through participation in a DMP, previous research has shown that higher educated individuals exhibit more deliberative qualities (e.g., justification rationality, common good orientation, constructive politics) than lower educated individuals [34]. Therefore, educational attainment is a suitable proxy for certain deliberative skills. As a measure of income, respondents rated their feelings about their household income nowadays on a scale ranging from "very difficult on present income" (0) to "living comfortably on present income" (3).

Political interest and *internal political efficacy* measure subjective or "soft" skills and resources. Respondents indicated how interested they are in politics on a scale ranging from "not at all interested" (0) to "very interested" (3). As a measure of internal political efficacy, respondents rated their agreement with the statement "I am confident in my

own ability to participate in politics” on a scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (0) to “strongly agree” (4).

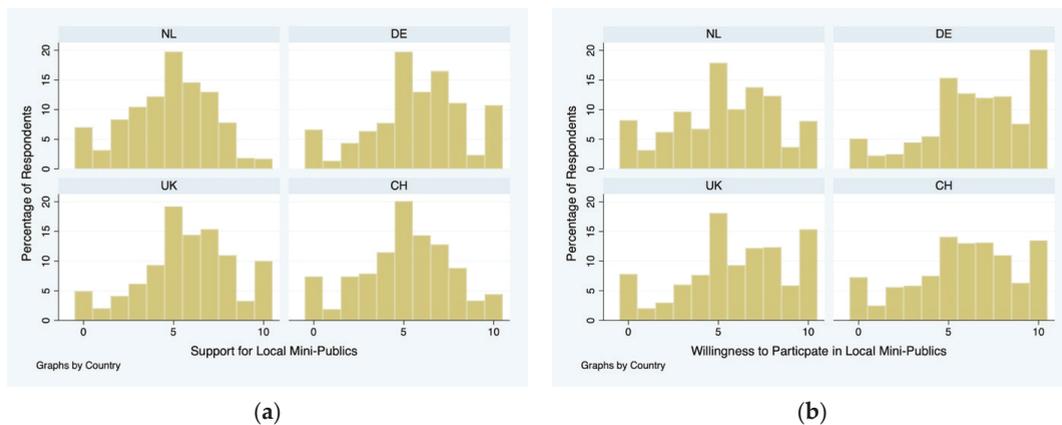


Figure 2. Distribution of scores on (a) support for local DMPs and (b) willingness to participate in a local DMP by country.

The relationship between political disaffection and political process preferences may depend on how attitudes towards politics are measured [14]. Therefore, both *anti-elitism* and *trust in representative institutions* were included to respectively account for “specific” and “diffuse” political support. Anti-elitism is a scale averaging each respondent’s scores on four statements about the qualities of elected officials, ranging from “strongly disagree” (0) to “strongly agree” (4) (see Appendix A for item wording). These statements formed a reliable scale in each country, with alphas above 0.80. Trust in representative institutions is a scale averaging each respondent’s scores on trust in parliament, political parties and politicians ranging from “no trust at all” (0) to “complete trust” (4). These items formed a reliable scale in each country, with alphas above 0.85.

As a measure of *confidence in ordinary citizens* respondents rated their agreement with the statement that “most citizens have enough sense to tell whether the government is doing a good job” on a scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (0) to “strongly agree” (4).

Age and sex (female = 1) were included as control variables. Descriptives of all variables are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptives of variable measures.

Country	NL (n = 377)		DE (n = 400)		CH (n = 418)		UK (n = 364)		All (n = 1559)	
<i>Attitudes towards local DMPs</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Support	4.85	0.09	6.04	0.11	5.07	0.10	5.74	0.11	5.43	0.05
Willingness to participate	5.25	0.11	6.63	0.13	5.89	0.11	5.74	0.12	5.89	0.06
<i>Respondent characteristics</i>										
Education (0–6)	3.89	0.06	3.79	0.06	4.00	0.06	3.84	0.07	3.88	0.03
Feelings about income (0–4)	2.43	0.03	2.24	0.04	2.17	0.04	2.23	0.04	2.23	0.04
Political interest (0–3)	1.63	0.03	1.86	0.03	1.70	0.04	1.68	0.04	1.72	0.02
Internal political efficacy (0–4)	1.48	0.04	2.39	0.04	2.40	0.04	2.13	0.04	2.12	0.02
Anti-elitism (0–4)	3.41	0.03	3.91	0.03	3.66	0.03	3.76	0.04	3.69	0.02
Trust in institutions (0–4)	2.74	0.04	2.58	0.04	2.74	0.03	2.48	0.04	2.64	0.02
Confidence in citizens (0–4)	2.89	0.04	3.29	0.04	3.22	0.03	3.44	0.04	3.22	0.02
<i>Controls</i>										
Age (18–66)	41.5	0.62	44.3	0.62	41.2	0.55	39.4	0.61	41.6	0.31
Female (0–1)	0.50	0.02	0.48	0.02	0.51	0.02	0.57	0.02	0.51	0.01

Note: descriptives are based on weighted samples.

6. Latent Profile Analysis

Whereas previous research has focused on separating the advocates of participatory decision-making from the critics, we argue that there are several attitude groups, some of whom score differently on support for greater use of DMPs and willingness to participate in one. Latent profile analysis is particularly well-suited to the development of such typological constructs, as it enables the identification of distinct clusters of respondents who share a similar combination of responses across two or more indicators [35]. These clusters of respondents are commonly referred to as “classes”. Latent profile analysis only differs from latent class analysis in that the indicators (support and willingness to participate in our case) are continuous as opposed to categorical. These analyses provide a more inductive approach to the study of participatory attitudes and behaviors. As opposed to constructing groups based on pre-conceived notions, the classes are identified based on individual patterns of response [36].

We begin by identifying the most appropriate number of classes and the expected proportion of the population falling into each class, separately by country. After this, we report on the predicted levels of support and willingness to participate in a local DMP for each class. The effects of our socio-demographic and attitudinal predictors on class membership are modelled in two different ways. First, we plot the average marginal effects of the predictors from a multinomial logistic regression where each class is compared to the reference group. Second, we present the multiple linear regression estimates of the probability of membership to each group separately.

7. Results

Based on the four attitude groups described in the hypotheses, respondents’ support and willingness to participate in a local DMP were used to fit a four-cluster latent class model. The goodness of fit statistics for models with one up to six clusters of respondents are provided separately by country in Appendix B, Table A1. A comparison of the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) demonstrates that a four-cluster model provides the most optimal solution in all countries except the UK, where the BIC is only slightly improved by fitting a model with four classes. Selecting a model with a greater number of classes based on a slightly smaller BIC may undermine the interpretability of groups [37]. Indeed, we found that a four-cluster model on data from the UK produced a group of respondents who differ very little from the engaged democrats. Therefore, we pursue our analyses with three classes in the UK as opposed to four classes in the remaining countries.

Table 3 presents the marginal latent class probabilities and marginal predicted means of the indicators within each latent class, separately by country. The marginal latent class probabilities represent the expected proportion of the sample in each class. The marginal predicted means represent the strength of support for local DMPs and willingness to participate in one as distinguishing who would be a member of each class. In all models the standard errors were clustered at the respondent level to account for the two vignettes per respondent and the samples were weighted to match the distributions on age, sex, and education in the general population.

Between 11 and 18% of the sample was classified as members of the first class, with the smallest proportion in the Netherlands and the greatest proportion in Switzerland. The first class is distinguishable from the others by its low levels of support for local DMPs coupled with an even lower likelihood of participating in one. Therefore, this class corresponds most with the “critics” of deliberative innovations described in H1d.

Between 41 and 50% of the sample was classified as members of the second class, with the smallest proportion in Germany and the greatest proportion in the Netherlands. The second class is distinguishable from the others by its average levels of support for local DMPs coupled with an average likelihood of participating in one. This class does not correspond with any of the groups described in the hypotheses, but given that they are neither enthusiastic nor pessimistic about local DMPs we hereafter refer to them as “indifferent”. This label has been used in previous research on other political attitudes to

describe individuals lacking both a positive or negative affect [38]. It is worth noting that this is the largest group in all countries except Germany.

Table 3. Marginal latent class probability and predicted means by country.

	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4
<i>Netherlands (n = 377)</i>	<i>Critical</i>	<i>Indifferent</i>	<i>Skeptical</i>	<i>Engaged</i>
Probability of membership	11%	50%	12%	28%
Predicted support for local DMP	1.34	5.04	2.09	7.07
Predicted willingness to participate	0.98	4.23	7.98	7.65
<i>Germany (n = 400)</i>	<i>Critical</i>	<i>Indifferent</i>	<i>Skeptical</i>	<i>Engaged</i>
Probability of membership	13%	41%	5%	42%
Predicted support for local DMP	3.64	5.48	1.67	7.82
Predicted willingness to participate	1.28	5.52	8.99	9.06
<i>Switzerland (n = 418)</i>	<i>Critical</i>	<i>Indifferent</i>	<i>Skeptical</i>	<i>Engaged</i>
Probability of membership	18%	43%	7%	32%
Predicted support for local DMP	2.25	5.07	1.54	7.46
Predicted willingness to participate	1.24	5.30	9.25	8.63
<i>United Kingdom (n = 364)</i>	<i>Critical</i>	<i>Indifferent</i>	-	<i>Engaged</i>
Probability of membership	15%	48%	-	37%
Predicted support for local DMP	2.90	5.33	-	7.44
Predicted willingness to participate	0.73	5.03	-	8.71

Between 5 and 12% of the sample was classified as members of the third class, with the smallest proportion in Germany and the greatest proportion in the Netherlands. The third class is distinguishable from the others by its very low levels of support for local DMPs coupled with a very high likelihood of participating in one. Therefore, this class corresponds most with the “skeptics” of deliberative innovations described in H1b. Skeptical democrats were not identified in the UK, where a four-cluster model generated a third class that differed very little from the engaged democrats.

Finally, between 28 and 42% of the sample was classified as members of the fourth class, with the smallest proportion in the Netherlands and the greatest proportion in Germany. The fourth class is distinguishable from the others by its very high levels of support for local DMPs coupled with a very high likelihood of participating in one. Therefore, this class corresponds most with the “engaged” deliberative democrats described in H1c.

In all countries we find groups of respondents who are indifferent, engaged and critical. Indifferent democrats are not very enthusiastic about local DMPs and only somewhat willing to participate in one. Engaged democrats are both enthusiastic and eager to participate in such forums. Critics not only reject the use of local DMPs but are also the least likely to participate. In the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland we find skeptical democrats who reject the use of local DMPs (except in the Netherlands) but would not miss out on an opportunity to join one. Contrary to expectations (H2) we did not uncover a group of disengaged democrats, who support the use of local DMPs but would not participate. However, it may be that the expected characteristics of disengaged democrats are shared by those identified as indifferent or critical.

The similarity of classes in the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland is a strong argument for combining the data from these countries. Therefore, we pursue our analysis of the socio-demographic and attitudinal predictors of class membership for the three continental European countries versus the UK separately. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the characteristic features of each class in the pooled data versus the UK.

We now turn to the hypotheses comparing the socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics of the different classes (H2–H5). Figure 4 plots the average marginal effects (AMEs) or average change in the probability of class membership for a one unit increase in the predictors, separately for the UK and the three remaining countries. The AMEs are derived from a multinomial logistic regression with class membership as a categorical dependent variable and those who are indifferent as the reference group. To facilitate

comparison of the results with the hypotheses, the AMEs are reported by class as opposed to in the order of predictors.

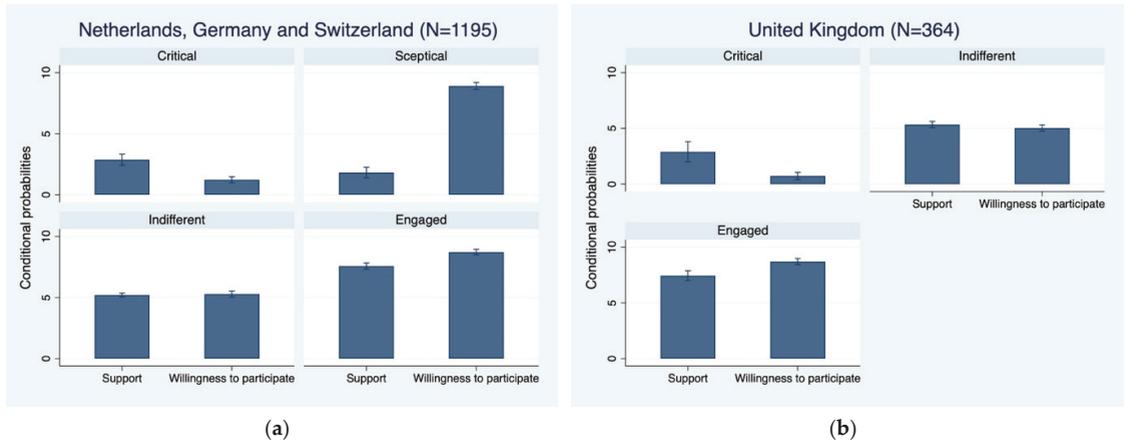


Figure 3. Characteristic features of the latent classes in (a) the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland; and (b) the UK.

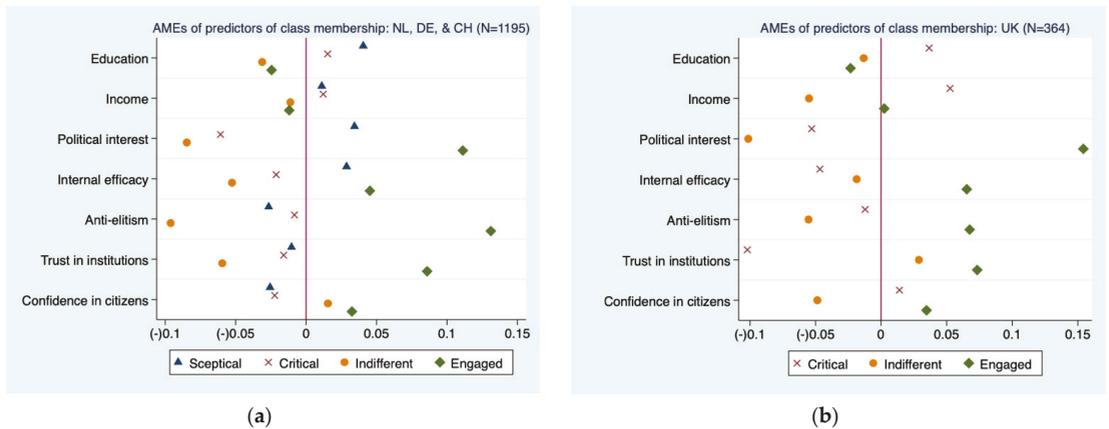


Figure 4. AMEs of predictors on class membership in (a) the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland; and (b) the UK.

Starting with the pooled data from the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland, a one unit increase in political interest, political efficacy or confidence in the abilities of ordinary citizens decreases the probability of being a critic of local DMPs. All other predictors have very little effect on belonging to this class. These findings confirm expectations that critics are less engaged in politics and question the abilities of fellow citizens to understand politics, but not that they are more trusting of political elites and institutions (H5). Results from the UK suggest that the critics are also higher educated, wealthier, and less trusting of representative institutions (contrary to expectations). However, these differences may depend on the comparison group, as argued later on.

An increase in education, political interest, political efficacy, anti-elitism, or trust in representative institutions decreases the probability of being indifferent towards deliberative decision-making. Although we failed to develop expectations for this group, the findings demonstrate that individuals who are indifferent towards the use of DMPs in local policymaking are less politically engaged and less critical towards politicians, but are

not as trusting of the broader institutions of representative democracy. In fact, this group appears to score the lowest on interest, efficacy, anti-elitism, and trust in institutions. In the UK, those who are indifferent are also less engaged and more forgiving of political elites. Contrary to their European counterparts, they appear to be more trusting of institutions and less confident in fellow citizens, but these differences disappear in the following analysis where they are not the reference group.

An increase in education, political interest or political efficacy increases the probability of being skeptical of deliberative decision-making. By contrast, an increase in anti-elitism and confidence in fellow citizens decreases the probability of being skeptical. These findings confirm expectations that skeptics, who would participate but do not support local DMPs, are more skilled and resourceful, more confident in political elites and less confident in ordinary citizens (H3).

Whereas an increase in education decreases the probability of being an engaged deliberative democrat, an increase in political interest, political efficacy, anti-elitism, trust in institutions, or confidence in citizens increases the probability of belonging to this class. These findings confirm expectations that engaged democrats, who are both optimistic and willing to participate in a local DMP, possess more subjective skills and resources, are more critical of political elites and have faith in the political competencies of fellow citizens (H4). Contrary to expectations, engaged democrats are not more critical towards representative institutions. This suggests that the strongest engagement with deliberative innovations comes from individuals who have faith in the system but express concerns about its leaders. Engaged democrats in the UK share similar characteristics with their continental counterparts.

While the AMEs show how socio-demographics and political attitudes influence class membership, they do not test differences between classes. Furthermore, the AMEs are based on a MNL regression whereby each class is compared only to the reference group (indifferent citizens). Therefore, we also present the results of separate linear regressions estimating the probability of membership to each class. The results from the three continental European countries and the UK are presented in Tables 4 and 5, respectively.

Table 4. Linear regression estimates of probability of membership to each class in NL, DE & CH ($n = 1195$).

	Model 1: Critical	Model 2: Indifferent	Model 3: Skeptical	Model 4: Engaged
<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Coef(SE)</i>	<i>Coef(SE)</i>	<i>Coef(SE)</i>	<i>Coef(SE)</i>
Education	0.01(0.01)	−0.04(0.01) *	0.05(0.01) ***	−0.03(0.01) *
Feeling about income	0.02(0.01)	−0.01(0.01)	0.01(0.01)	−0.01(0.01)
Interest	−0.06(0.01) ***	−0.09(0.02) ***	0.03(0.01) ***	0.11(0.02) ***
Internal efficacy	−0.02(0.01)	−0.05(0.01) ***	0.03(0.01) ***	0.04(0.01) **
Anti-elitism	−0.00(0.01)	−0.09(0.02) ***	−0.03(0.01) **	0.13(0.02) ***
Trust in institutions	−0.01(0.01)	−0.06(0.02) ***	−0.01(0.01)	0.08(0.02) ***
Confidence in citizens	−0.02(0.01) *	0.01(0.01)	−0.03(0.01) ***	0.03(0.01) **
Age	0.00(0.00) *	−0.00(0.00) *	−0.00(0.00)	0.00(0.00)
Sex	−0.01(0.02)	−0.02(0.02)	−0.02(0.01)	0.05(0.02) *
Constant	0.26(0.09) **	1.34(0.10) ***	0.18(0.05) ***	−0.79(0.10)

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$; Note: The LCA on pooled data from the first three countries includes country-fixed effects.

Table 5. Linear regression estimates of probability of membership to each class in UK ($n = 364$).

	Model 1: Critical	Model 2: Indifferent	Model 3: Engaged
<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Coeff(SE)</i>	<i>Coeff(SE)</i>	<i>Coeff(SE)</i>
Education	0.02(0.01)	−0.02(0.01)	0.00(0.0)
Feeling about income	0.02(0.01) *	−0.02(0.01)	−0.00(0.0)
Interest	−0.06(0.01) ***	−0.09(0.02) ***	0.15(0.0) ***
Internal efficacy	−0.03(0.01) *	−0.04(0.01) **	0.06(0.0) ***
Anti-elitism	0.00(0.01)	−0.10(0.02) ***	0.10(0.0) ***
Trust in institutions	−0.02(0.01)	−0.04(0.02) **	0.07(0.0) ***
Confidence in citizens	−0.02(0.01)	−0.00(0.01)	0.02(0.0)
Age	0.00(0.00) **	−0.00(0.00)	−0.00(0.0)
Sex	−0.02(0.02)	−0.01(0.03)	0.02(0.0)
Constant	0.24(0.09)	1.35(0.11) ***	−0.59(0.0) ***

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4, Model 1, shows the effects of our predictors on the probability of being a *critic* of deliberative innovations in the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland. A one unit increase in political interest or confidence in ordinary citizens is associated with a decrease in the probability of being labelled a critic. This confirms expectations that critics of DMPs are not as engaged in politics and do not think fellow citizens are capable of being engaged either (H5). However, there is no evidence that critics come from lower socio-economic strata or that they are (dis)satisfied with political elites and institutions. These findings are further substantiated in the UK (presented in Table 5, Model 1), with the exception that critics appear to be wealthier, despite being less politically interested and efficacious than others.

Table 4, Model 2 shows the effects of our predictors on the probability of being *indifferent* towards deliberative innovations in the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland. A one unit increase in education, political interest or confidence in one's ability to influence politics is associated with a decrease in the probability of being indifferent. This demonstrates that those who are indifferent towards the use of local DMPs have less of the objective and subjective skills and resources needed to participate in politics. Furthermore, anti-elitism and trust in representative institutions are both negatively related to the probability of being indifferent. Therefore, despite being the most critical of representative organs, this group is not critical of politicians per se. Indifferent democrats in the UK share similar features, with the exception that they are not lower educated than others (see Table 5, Model 2).

Table 4, Model 3 shows the effects of our predictors on the probability of being *skeptical* of deliberative innovations in the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland. A one unit increase in education, political interest or confidence in one's ability to influence politics is associated with an increase in the probability of being skeptical. This confirms expectations that skeptics have more of the objective and subjective skills and resources needed to participate in politics (H3). Furthermore, anti-elitism and confidence in citizens are both negatively related to the probability of being a skeptic. This is in line with expectations that those who are skeptical of local DMPs are trusting of politicians whom they perceive as more competent than ordinary citizens.

Finally, Table 4, Model 4 shows the effects of our predictors on the probability of being an *engaged deliberative democrat* in the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland. Whereas political interest and confidence in one's ability to influence politics increase the probability of being engaged, education decreases the probability of membership to this group. These findings confirm that engaged democrats are cognitively mobilized, but (contrary to expectations) do not possess more of the "hard skills" needed to participate in politics (H4). Anti-elitism and confidence in citizens are both positively related to the probability of being engaged. This is in line with expectations that engaged democrats are more critical of politicians and have more faith in the abilities of ordinary citizens to understand

politics. Contrary to expectations, trust in representative institutions is associated with an increase in membership to this group. Hence engaged democrats trust the system more generally but not its the leaders, whose functions they might like to see performed by ordinary citizens. Engaged deliberative democrats in the UK share similar features, with the exception that they are not lower educated or more confident in ordinary citizens than others (see Table 5, Model 3).

8. Additional Analyses: Comparing the Issue Priorities of the Latent Classes

The vignettes presented to respondents were not connected to specific policy issues, and therefore we do not know whether support and willingness to participate depend on the issue at hand. However, our data does enable us to investigate whether the classes identified are motivated by specific policy concerns. Respondents in the Polpart survey selected three issues they perceived as most important for their country from a longer list of issues. Figure 5 shows the AMEs of selecting one of the top six issues (immigration, healthcare, rising prices, pensions, education or the environment and climate change) as a priority on class membership. The results show that the environment is the most important issue for engaged deliberative democrats: selecting this issue increases identification as an engaged democrat by 7 percentage points in The Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland and by 14 percentage points in the UK. This suggests that citizens who care about the environment and climate change think DMPs are good way of taking political decisions and are more willing to participate in one.

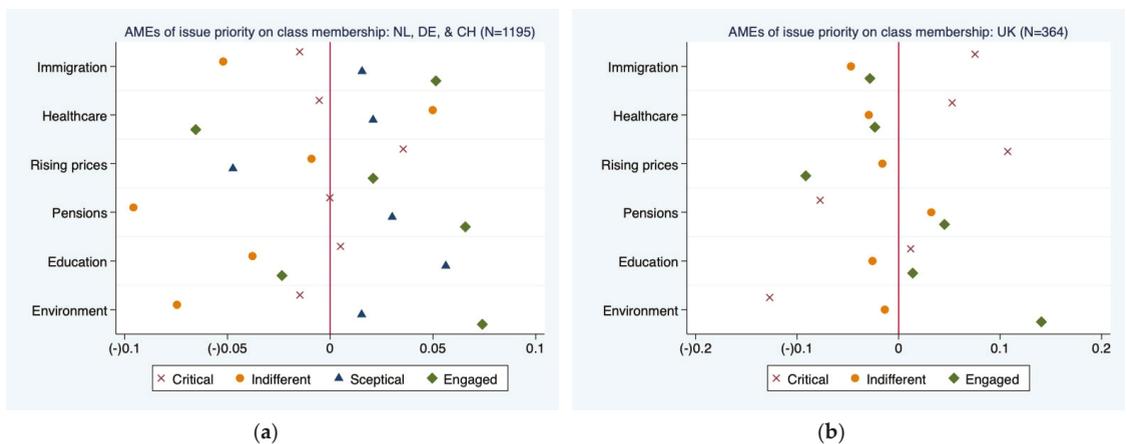


Figure 5. AMEs of issue priority on class membership in (a) the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland; and (b) the UK.

9. Discussion

Whereas previous research has focused on separating the enthusiasts of direct citizen participation from the critics, our results demonstrate that citizens' attitudes are more varied, especially when taking into consideration both support and willingness to participate. In addition to the enthusiasts and critics of DMPs, we also identified indifferent and sceptical citizens who have not received particular attention in the literature (see Table 6).

In the four western European democracies examined, the truly engaged deliberative democrats, in the sense that their support for local DMPs is reinforced by intentions to participate, correspond to roughly one-third of citizens. The socio-demographic and attitudinal profile of engaged democrats emphasize the shortcomings of theories that characterize those with inclinations towards direct citizen participation as either "engaged" or "enraged". In line with some previous research [7], we find that these individuals are *both* confident in their abilities to influence politics and critical of elected officials.

Table 6. Four attitude groups identified by the latent profile analysis.

Critical	Indifferent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not supportive • not willing to participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • neither supportive nor critical • neither willing nor unwilling to participate
Skeptical	Engaged
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not supportive • willing to participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supportive • willing to participate

However, our results offer further insights into the characteristics of engaged deliberative democrats. Firstly, despite being politically interested and efficacious, they do not necessarily possess more of the “hard” skills needed to participate, namely education. Instead, we find that among those who intend to participate, the higher educated are more skeptical of local DMPs. Second, while engaged democrats are more critical of elected officials, they are also more trusting of representative institutions, suggesting that they perceive DMPs as a corrective for unresponsive and corrupted elites rather than an alternative way of doing politics. Finally, engaged democrats are more concerned about the environment than any other issue, suggesting that DMPs would attract individuals who care about sustainability.

In the four Western European democracies examined, only a small proportion of citizens outright reject local DMPs. The socio-demographic and attitudinal profile of the critics suggests that rejection of DMPs has mostly to do with a lack of interest in politics and a feeling that citizens cannot influence policymaking, potentially due to their limited knowledge and experience. There is little evidence that critics come from a particular socio-economic group or that they are driven by higher levels of trust in politics, with the exception that critics in the UK appear more satisfied with their household incomes.

Our expectations were influenced by prior research assuming polarization between the critics and enthusiasts of direct citizen participation. Hence, we did not develop expectations for a group of citizens that expresses indifference, or the absence of a positive or negative affect, towards local DMPs. However, the results demonstrate that the majority of citizens in all countries examined except Germany (where they still account for 41%) actually sit on the fence. This finding is echoed by another contribution to this special issue, demonstrating that at least one-third of Germans are indifferent towards the use of randomly-selected citizen assemblies for local policymaking [26]. Psychological research tells us that citizens generally have difficulties forming clear attitudes towards abstract political concepts [39]. As a case in point, research on attitudes towards European integration shows that scholars tend to underestimate the proportion of citizens who are neither pro-European nor Eurosceptic [40]. Therefore, if scholars fail to establish what citizens want from democracy, it might be due to the fact that many citizens do not have strong or detailed opinions about procedural alternatives to representative politics [41].

Drawing from the literature on stealth democracy, we expected to identify a group of “disengaged democrats” who support alternatives to politics as usual but do not want to be more involved in political decision-making. Contrary to expectations, the latent profile analysis did not identify individuals who combined high levels of support with low intentions to participate. Among those who support the use of DMPs for local policymaking, there may be some respondents who report false intentions to participate in order to appear more “desirable”. Or, it may be that disengaged democrats are actually indifferent or critical of DMPs, preferring more direct and less demanding ways of influencing politics, such as referendums. Indeed, many of the socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics expected for disengaged democrats were shared by those identified as indifferent (i.e., lower educated, less politically engaged and less trusting of representative institutions).

Finally, a fourth group which has received limited attention in the literature are the skeptics who are eager to participate, despite rejecting the use of DMPs. The results from Germany and Switzerland show that skeptics are even less supportive of DMPs than critics. Their lack of support is likely explained by the perspective that citizens are not competent enough to perform the functions of elected officials, as skeptics are found to score lower on both anti-elitism and confidence in citizens. However, they would not miss out on an opportunity to decide, as they are higher educated and more interested in politics than most citizens, whom they perceive as “lacking enough sense to tell whether the government is doing a good job”. The finding that skeptics are the highest educated group, echoes previous research demonstrating that education is negatively related to support for instruments incorporating citizens into policymaking [12,15,42]. All in all, the characteristics of this group portrays them as elitists with an “entrustment” conception of politics [21].

The same four classes were identified in all countries—except the UK where sceptics were missing—suggesting that attitudes towards local DMPs are similarly structured across western European democracies. However, the proportion of respondents falling into each class differed across countries, which might be related to institutional differences. For example, both Germany and the UK are composed of single-member constituencies, generating more electoral losers at the local level. As a result, there may be more citizens seeking additional means of influencing politics in-between elections, potentially explaining why the share of engaged democrats is higher in these countries and why skeptics are missing from the UK. The availability of direct democratic institutions in Switzerland might explain why the critics constitute almost one-fifth of the sample, as critics may not perceive the need for additional means of influencing politics. Finally, the share of skeptics might be greater in the Netherlands since several parties publicly renounced their support for direct citizen participation after the 2016 Ukraine-EU Association Referendum [42].

10. Conclusions

DMPs have covered a wide range of topics including bioethics, resource scarcities, biodiversity loss and climate change [43]. Notable examples are the many citizens’ assemblies on climate change held in France (2019–2020), Germany (2015), the UK (2020), Belgium (2020) and Hungary (2020). As argued by other contributors to this special issue, deliberation encourages citizens to consider others’ viewpoints, including those of future generations [44]. Furthermore, the inclusion of ordinary citizens is crucial for promoting the acceptance of sustainability policies that require a concerted effort from the broader public [45]. Some authors, such as Graham Smith would even argue that “forms of participatory and deliberative politics offer the most effective democratic response to the current political myopia, as well as a powerful means of protecting the interests of generations to come” [46] (p. 1). DMPs might therefore be relevant solutions for a more sustainable democracy. However, the capacity of DMPs to deliver long-term solutions depends not only on whether citizens support deliberative innovations, but also on whether they are willing to get involved.

On one hand, our results suggest a promising future for local DMPs. Whereas only a small proportion of citizens in the four Western European democracies examined are critical of local DMPs, around one-third are both supportive and willing to get involved. These “engaged deliberative democrats” are more concerned about the environment than any other issue on the agenda, underscoring the potential of DMPs for influencing policymaking on sustainability issues in a positive direction. Furthermore, DMPs may offer a corrective to the concentration of power in the hands of distant or corrupted elites, at least from the perspective of engaged democrats, who are motivated by stronger feelings of anti-elitism.

On the other hand, the greatest share of citizens in the countries examined (except in Germany where they still constitute 41%) is actually indifferent towards the use of local DMPs. The perceived legitimacy and inclusiveness of DMPs largely depends on whether those who are indifferent can be informed and convinced of the relative merits of

deliberative democratic innovations [47]. Mobilizing this substantial group of apathetic citizens is crucial, as they appear to be the least politically engaged and the least trusting of representative institutions. Finally, among those who are willing to participate, we identified a group of skeptics who reject the use of DMPs for local policymaking, sometimes even more than the critics. Although the skeptics constitute only a small proportion of citizens, they may act as a barrier to democratic innovations, especially if they represent the elite, as suggested by our results.

Therefore, the potential of deliberative innovations for addressing sustainability issues hinges on the ability of practitioners to convince not only the critics, but also the skeptical and indifferent citizens. For example, integrating experts into DMPs might encourage support among the skeptics and relating the issues at hand to everyday life might mobilize those who are indifferent.

11. Limitations and Future Research

Respondents may have found it difficult to judge the merits of DMPs based on hypothetical scenarios, especially as most citizens have probably never participated in one before. However, describing a “real-life” DMP runs the risk of capturing attitudes towards that specific event rather than attitudes towards the general idea of using DMPs to influence policymaking. Furthermore, research has shown that citizens’ preferences for alternative decision-making processes remain relatively stable, even when they are given the opportunity to “think twice” or deliberate about those alternatives [48].

DMPs come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Therefore, while maintaining the key criteria of citizen participation, random selection and deliberation, we varied the initiators, size, composition, number of topics and outcome of the DMPs described. Although the randomization of attribute levels does not influence a group’s overall support and willingness to participate, some groups may have rated certain attribute levels more favorably than others. For example, skeptics may have rated DMPs initiated by politicians more favorably than those initiated by civil society organizations. Therefore, a further step would be to compare the different groups’ design preferences.

Respondents’ ratings of local DMPs provide a window on citizens’ attitudes towards deliberative alternatives to representative democracy. However, respondents may perceive DMPs as more suitable for dealing with community problems than for addressing issues of national concern such as foreign policy or constitutional reform. Therefore, future research might investigate whether citizens’ attitudes towards DMPs influencing central government decisions are similarly structured using latent profile modelling. Nonetheless, sustainability issues are relevant to local DMPs. For example, in the UK climate assemblies were organized by local authorities from Brighton, Leeds, Oxford, London, and many other cities [49].

Finally, while the characteristics of the four classes offer insights into the reasons why some citizens are more (or less) inclined towards DMPs, this study has not specifically explored those reasons. Combining the vignettes with a focus group or interviews would provide a more detailed understanding of why respondents pick a specific number out of ten. For example, do citizens position themselves at the mid-point of the scale since they see both the pros and cons of DMPs or since they don’t care much for the subject? The characteristics of indifferent citizens (less politically interested and efficacious) point towards the first explanation, but interrogating this group about their specific concerns and aspirations would provide more certainty.

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Appendix A

Wording of items included in the scale measuring anti-elitism

- “elected officials talk too much and take too little action”
- “most politicians are only in politics for what they can get out of it personally”
- “most politicians make a lot of promises but do not do anything”
- “I don’t think politicians care much what people like me think”.

Appendix B

The Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) is the most widely used goodness of fit statistic for identifying the optimal number of classes, with lower values indicating better model fit. The model fit statistics in Table A1 compare superiority of fit for models with one up to six clusters of respondents. In all models, the standard errors are clustered at the respondent level (to account for the two vignettes per person design) and the distributions on age, sex and education are weighted to match the distribution on these variables in the general population. In all countries the BIC is much lower for four-cluster models than for preceding models but only slightly lower for five and six-cluster models, which is an indication of having reached “saturation point”. Hence, selecting a model with more than four classes might affect the estimation of probabilities (as this means fewer people per class) and the interpretability of the classes [32]. The UK is an exception as a four-cluster model offers very little improvement in goodness of fit relative to a three-cluster model.

Table A1. Latent class model fit statistics by country.

Netherlands (n = 377)	ll(model)	df	AIC	BIC
Class 1	−3442.45	4	6892.901	6911.402
Class 2	−3384.107	7	6782.214	6814.592
Class 3	−3360.046	10	6740.093	6786.347
Class 4	−3314.212	13	6654.424	6714.555
Class 5	−3287.087	16	6606.174	6680.18
Class 6	−3281.533	19	6601.067	6688.949
<i>Germany (n = 400)</i>				
Class 1	−3823.481	4	7654.962	7673.7
Class 2	−3715.773	7	7445.546	7478.339
Class 3	−3633.708	10	7287.415	7334.262
Class 4	−3588.636	13	7203.271	7264.171
Class 5	−3555.22	16	7142.441	7217.395
Class 6	−3551.391	19	7140.783	7229.79

Table A1. Cont.

Netherlands (n = 377)	ll(model)	df	AIC	BIC
<i>Switzerland (n = 418)</i>				
Class 1	−4010.093	4	8028.187	8047.101
Class 2	−3876.666	7	7767.331	7800.432
Class 3	−3838.252	10	7696.504	7743.79
Class 4	−3720.233	13	7466.466	7527.938
Class 5	−3704.869	16	7441.738	7517.396
Class 6	−3649.931	19	7337.863	7427.707
<i>United Kingdom (n = 364)</i>				
Class 1	−3621.688	4	7251.376	7269.737
Class 2	−3503.484	7	7020.967	7053.099
Class 3	−3402.327	10	6824.653	6870.556
Class 4	−3367.231	13	6760.461	6820.135
Class 5	−3368.67	16	6769.34	6842.785
Class 6	−3280.171	19	6598.342	6685.558

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Article

Ecology Projects and Participatory Budgeting: Enhancing Citizens' Support

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Abstract: In contemporary times, a large number of ecology projects are put on the public agenda through participatory budgeting. There is variation in the support they receive from citizens, but until now we have not known what drives this support. This article aims to identify the factors that could determine the support for ecology projects in participatory budgeting. It includes all 36 projects on ecology, which passed the technical eligibility check, submitted to the participatory budgeting in Cluj-Napoca (Romania) between 2017 and 2019. We use quantitative analysis to test the extent to which five project characteristics have an effect on the public support for the ecology projects: the requested budget, the type of project, the number of arguments, the use of jargon, and images and videos in addition to text descriptions. The results show that citizens take the environmental matters seriously and do not vote for schematic projects that are limited in scope and which have limited contribution to the general welfare.

Keywords: participatory budgeting; ecology; local level; citizens; support; Romania



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1. Introduction

Topics related to the environment and its protection have gained momentum in the public agenda around the world over the last two decades. Decision makers and citizens are increasingly involved in actions directed towards addressing broad issues such as pollution, climate change, natural habitats or waste disposal [1,2]. To address current environment challenges, action is taken at the local, regional, or national levels both in terms of policies and projects. At the local level, one way to address environment issues is through participatory budgeting [3–5]. Earlier research provides evidence about participatory budgeting as an appropriate tool for the promotion and implementation of ecology projects [3,6]. Other studies show that ecology projects submitted to participatory budgeting are, in general, appealing to citizens compared to projects on other topics but that the competition is stiff [7,8]. This means that while many projects on ecological topics are submitted, few are voted on by citizens and implemented. To date, we know very little about why some ecology projects are supported by citizens while others are not.

This article seeks to address this gap in the literature and identifies the factors that could determine the support for ecology projects in participatory budgeting. Our analysis includes all 36 projects on ecology, which passed the technical eligibility check, submitted to the participatory budgeting in Cluj-Napoca between 2017 and 2019. We focus on Cluj-Napoca because it is the first city in Romania to use participatory budgeting, it is an example for many localities in the country, the city has fast growing economy, and there is continuity in terms of the local administration. We argue and test the extent to which five project characteristics have an effect on the public support for the ecology projects. These characteristics are the requested budget, the type of project, the number of arguments, the use of jargon, and images and videos in addition to text descriptions. Our quantitative analysis uses bivariate correlations and ordinal logistic regression.

The following section provides an overview about the relationship between ecology and participatory budgeting. The third section reviews the literature on ecology projects and public support. It outlines the reasons for which citizens may support ecology projects and formulates five testable hypotheses. From here, we present the research design of the article with emphasis on the case selection, variable measurement, and methods. The fifth section includes a general description of the participatory budgeting procedures in Cluj-Napoca. This is followed by a section that describes and analyzes the ecology projects submitted to participatory budgeting. The seventh section explains the potential determinants of public support and provides a discussion along theoretical and empirical lines of inquiry. The conclusions summarize the key findings, discuss the broader implications of our analysis, and outline avenues for further research.

2. Ecology and Participatory Budgeting

In the last decades, extensive attention has been devoted to explaining the impact of human activities on the environment [9–11]. Deforestation, depletion of natural resources, and industrialization generate ecological problems such as air pollution, climate change, destruction of natural habitats, and affect individuals' health and quality of life [3,12–14]. To address these problems, citizens and political actors engage in ecological action [9,15].

Earlier research discusses instances in which individuals were consulted by the political decision makers about how to address ecology issues. This is done to enforce the bonds between political actors and citizens, to raise the general awareness regarding the fact that ecological problems affect everybody, to help the citizens to become more environmentally friendly, and to increase the decision makers' accountability and legitimacy [1,2]. To increase citizens' involvement in decision-making processes related to the environment, governments could resort to e-participation practices. The latter employ specific information and communication technologies (e.g., blogs, discussion forums, e-mails, e-voting procedures) to increase citizens' willingness to engage in an inclusive decision-making process [16–18]. These practices are demanded and praised by the citizens and the governments that support them enforce the idea of good governance and create opportunities for citizens to advance solutions for city management and sustainable development strategies [19–21]. While these actions could be limited in scope and controlled to some extent by political actors, practices such as participatory budgeting could open effective avenues for citizens' engagement in ecology projects without political interference [3,22].

Participatory budgeting refers to an inclusive process in which citizens engage in a collective decision making where they can decide how a specific percentage of local funds should be spent [15]. It is usually praised for its potential to cure social injustices, to enforce democratization, and to invest more effectively the local finances [23,24]. Participatory budgeting increases the legitimacy and transparency of decision makers and provides the citizens with a tool through which they can promote their ideas [25–30]. In addition, earlier research has demonstrated the potential of participatory budgeting. The potential for participatory budgeting to advance ecology projects was emphasized both in theory and in practice. In theory, the process meets the necessary conditions for the deliberation and promotion of specific projects depleted by political interference. In practice, there were several instances in which participatory budgeting significantly contributed to the promotion of solutions to local ecology problems [3,4,6].

In Porto Alegre (Brazil) between 1989 and 2010, the environmental quality and citizens' willingness to engage in processes revolving around ecological preservation and protection increased through participatory budgeting [3]. Similarly, in the U.S. there were reported cases in which participatory budgeting advanced several effective solutions for increasing the quality of agriculture in specific areas—the projects were innovative even for the decision makers [4]. The ecology projects promoted via participatory budgeting have the potential to enhance the environmental quality and are highly supported by citizens who usually manifest an increased interest in engaging in actions concerning the environment [5].

Evidence from Poland shows that a relatively large share of participatory budgeting projects (i.e., up to 40% of the total) is reserved for ecology, and they are usually directed towards addressing air pollution and bringing back the ecological elements in highly industrialized areas [7,8]. Among the eight possible categories where one could submit a project (i.e., green infrastructure, blue infrastructure, protection of nature, air and atmosphere pollution, environmental education, pet care, waste management, and protection against noise), the ecology projects aiming at multiplying the green infrastructure's facilities and thwarting air pollution are the most appealing to citizens—especially in Western areas where pollution levels are high due to the intensified industrialization [31]. In addition, ecology projects usually score high when it comes to the implementation rate (which varies between 25–42.5% of the total number of the winning projects) [7].

3. Ecology Projects and the Public

The literature points in the direction of three main reasons for which ecology projects can be popular among citizens. They can (1) enhance the overall quality of life/individuals' welfare (i.e., a healthier environment/society), (2) increase the citizens' awareness and socially responsible attitudes, and (3) exert a positive influence in society. To begin with the first point, previous studies show a strong connection between the quality of ecology and individuals' welfare [32–34]. The heavy industrialization of many areas led to lower quality of life for citizens because of the high levels of pollution [35]. Air pollution increases the chances of health problems [11], generates respiratory and cardiovascular problems, affects the reproductive and nervous systems, and, in some cases, can produce cancer [36]. It could augment the severity of some diseases and hinder the healing process [37]. Local communities are highly affected by the increasing pollution of their water sources, which could cause diseases, complications in childbirth, or respiratory problems [38]. Since the desire to live a healthy life is common among many individuals, ecology projects are appealing [4,35].

Ecology projects can mobilize the masses, raise citizens' awareness towards environmental problems, and influence the formation of socially responsible attitudes [39]. The desire to contribute to a healthier environment is usually considered an act of social justice and general sense of fairness among citizens [40,41]. These beliefs are not about enforcing the relation between citizens and political factors that are usually perceived as actors that neglect the ecological issues for the sake of economic progress [35]. Instead, they refer to the cooperation among citizens who consider themselves the drivers for an eco-friendly society [39,40,42]. Citizens often engage in social activities aiming to solve environment problems such as marches or protests against actions/policies that affect the environment [42,43]. Ecology projects are considered manifestations of collective rights and examples of good practices [42,44]. The increased interest for environmental activities could be doubled by the citizens' desire to increase their awareness and levels of information regarding ecology problems [5,44].

Ecology projects can have a positive influence on society in several ways [6,35,43,45]. Ecology projects often provide strategies for sustainable development [10,41,46]. The latter is an effective way of valorizing the natural resources without the environment being endangered. It aims for shaping a maximized relation between individuals' needs and the means of attaining the latter, and its core aim is to create an environment in which the current and future generations' well-being to be enhanced and built within the ecological boundaries [15,33,35,41]. Sustainable development underlines a series of strategies in which the existing resources are to be better managed and become more effective [35,45]. For instance, recycling activities bring benefits to the environment and provide financial gains to those who use them [47] and valuable and non-pollutant energy resources [48]. Selective waste collection improves the environmental quality and the area's aesthetics and enhances the level of sanitation [49]. As a final point, ecology projects bring benefits for the overall image of the community/city in which they are implemented by making the

public spaces more attractive for leisure activities and by stimulating tourism, which could indirectly increase the local finances [7,32].

What Drives Public Support: Five Hypotheses

We suggest there are five factors that can increase the likelihood of the public to support ecology projects in participatory budgeting. This is important since the competition in this policy area is quite strong [7]. The most straightforward driver for project's support is the total value of its utility: the projects' potential to enhance the community's welfare [50] as emphasized above. In addition to this, we argue that five characteristics of the projects can foster public support for the proposal.

The budget (H1) and the type of project (H2) could increase their support among the public [5,51]. The sums of money demanded for the implementation of a specific project could determine its acceptance by the public because citizens may consider expensive projects as more important and impactful for their communities in comparison to others. As previous studies show, citizens are more likely to vote for more expensive projects [7,51]. Another potential determinant for the public support of an ecology project is its type or specific goal. For example, the projects that want to address a social problem faced by a specific community (e.g., access to electricity, food, sanitation, water) are more likely to gather support [51]. When a project targets a subject that raise citizens' interest, its success rate grows according to the degree of social interest towards the proposal [3].

The number of arguments used in the project proposal (H3) and the avoidance of jargon in proposals (H4) could increase public support for ecology projects. Those projects that are very detailed and provide multiple arguments about why they should be implemented are more likely to influence individuals' decision to cast a vote for them [5]. Ordinary citizens are not acquainted with the project outputs or with the steps to be followed for implementation; they might want to receive all the details concerning these elements before deciding which project to support [5]. A schematic description with few arguments could be associated with projects that do not bring many benefits to the community. Those projects using simple explanations, formulated in plain language, tend to be supported more by the public in participatory budgeting. The jargon may hinder the understanding the proposal's objectives [52].

Finally, projects that are accompanied by images and videos can gather citizens' support (H5). The information is processed and remembered easily when images are used. Citizens could be influenced by the presence of images and videos when deciding what project to support [53,54]. The information presented alongside images becomes more persuasive and suggestive for the public and as a result individuals' willingness to vote a project that contains images/videos could increase [54].

4. Research Design

To investigate the reasons for which ecology projects receive public support in participatory budgeting, we focus on Cluj-Napoca as the first city in Romania to use this practice. The city has fast-growing economy that places it well above the European average according to comparative statistics [55]. This financial situation means that the city is a favorable setting for an innovation in the local public management—including budget allocation—such as participatory budgeting. Moreover, there is continuity in terms of local administration: the mayor, who is a supporter of participatory budgeting, has been in office uninterrupted since 2012. Before that, he was elected as a mayor of the city in 2004 and re-elected in 2008, and then moved to a central level to serve as the country's prime minister between 2008 and 2012.

Our analysis includes all 36 projects on ecology submitted to participatory budgeting between 2017 and 2019, which passed the technical eligibility check (see the following section). In total, there were 86 projects submitted, but 50 failed to meet the required standards to enter the voting stage. Most of them (22 out of 36) were submitted to the 'green spaces and playgrounds' domain—which is reserved for this category of projects.

The rest of the 14 projects were placed in other domains (e.g., alleys, sidewalks, and pedestrian areas or mobility, accessibility, and traffic safety). This was possible due to the fact that the proposals met the necessary criteria to be submitted there, even though their end was to improve the environmental quality of Cluj-Napoca. The dependent variable of our study is an ordinal measure that has three values: rejected in the initial vote (coded as 1), rejected in the final vote (coded as 2) and accepted (coded as 3). This allows us to rank the 36 project proposals according to their degree of support by citizens. Our logic is that rejection in the initial phase means limited support for the proposal, rejection in the final vote shows medium support, while many votes that grant acceptance of the proposal for funding reflect major support in the population.

We have five independent variables: budget, type of project, number of arguments, use of jargon, and images and videos. The budget is measured on a nine-point ordinal scale to reflect the budget estimated by each project proposal in the submission phase. The values range between EUR 600 (coded as 1) and EUR 150,000 (coded as 9). The types of projects are divided into three categories according to their degree of generality: green areas, ecology infrastructure, and local innovations. The projects addressing green areas are very specific (green fences, tree planting, etc.), the ones targeting ecology infrastructure are more general (pollution sensors, solar panels, etc.), while those on local innovations are the broadest (community gardens, electric public scooters, plant sculptures, etc.). These three types are not different variables but are values of measurement reflecting the specific or general character of the project. Accordingly, this variable is coded on a three-point ordinal scale where green areas are coded as 1, ecology infrastructure is coded as 2, and local innovations are coded as 3.

The number of arguments is a count variable that reflects how many arguments are provided in the project proposal submission phase. The lowest value is 0 and the highest is 17; the latter is an outlier with only one project using so many arguments, the following value is 5. We consider one argument as one distinct reason for which a proposal should be implemented. For instance, a proposal about the necessity for smart garbage collection units was supported by four arguments: increasing waste collection capacity, lower costs/resource employment for the sanitation companies, the cultivation of an ecological spirit among citizens, and the chance for Cluj-Napoca to become the first city in Romania to implement smart waste collection. Looking at the number of arguments instead of the number of words is more appropriate because the arguments are likely to reflect the degree of persuasion. There are instances in which a proposal with a high number of words focused mostly on the description and not on the arguments.

The use of jargon is a dichotomous variable in which we code the absence (0) or the presence (1) of jargon in the project description at the stage of submission. The jargon includes words with a certain level of technicality that ordinary people do not use in their daily language. For example, we consider that jargon is being used when the proposal refers to 'photovoltaic panels' instead of 'solar panels'; the latter is a more common term, while the former is technical. Another example is the provision of specific explanations such as the way in which light pollution affects the production of melatonin, both concepts being difficult to grasp by ordinary citizens. The existence of images and videos in the project proposal is measured on a three-point ordinal scale that reflects the presentation of project proposals. Some proposals have text only (coded 0), others have images accompanying the project (coded 1), while others have both images and videos accompanying the text description (coded 2).

In addition to these variables, we also considered other variables such as the scope of the project (addressing needs of the entire city vs. those of specific neighborhoods), details about the implementation steps in the project description, or the number of words in the proposal. We did not report the results and do not include them in the analysis for two reasons: they either had no statistical relationship with the degree of public support for ecology projects (e.g., the scope) or correlated very highly with other variables that we already considered (e.g., the number of words correlates with the number of arguments).

We run two types of statistical analyses. The first is a bivariate non-parametric correlation between each of the five independent variables and the degree of acceptance by citizens of project proposals. This type of correlation is appropriate due to the ordinal measurement of almost all variables. The second is multivariate ordinal logistic regression. We tested for multicollinearity between the independent variables included in the model and the results indicate that the highest correlation is between the number of arguments and images and videos used in the text (0.48). Our discussion of results focuses more on the correlation because we are aware that there are some limitations for the regression analysis due to the low number of cases.

5. Participatory Budgeting in Cluj-Napoca

Cluj-Napoca is the fourth largest city in Romania by population, with over 300,000 inhabitants. It is located in the northwestern part of the country and is the main city in the historical region of Transylvania. It is one of the most important cities in the country in terms of economic development and quality of life. The participatory budgeting is implemented at the city level, and it was organized online between 2017 and 2019. In 2020, it did not take place because of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it was reinitiated in 2021. The Cluj-Napoca City Hall created in 2017 an online platform dedicated exclusively to the project and was open for its inhabitants of at least 18 years. It provides the participants with the opportunity to shape and observe the implementation of projects concerning their communities, to transfer their ideas into projects, to signal to the authorities the main concerns and shortcomings of their neighborhoods, to find solutions for their problems, and to take part in the process of setting priorities in spending local money.

The Cluj-Napoca participatory budgeting funds 15 projects annually with a maximum value of EUR 150,000 for each project. The City Hall provides EUR 2.25 million for this process, which is roughly 0.65% of the total municipal budget, which was approximately EUR 344 million in 2020 [56]. All those who live, work, or study in the city can submit projects or cast a vote on existing proposals. They must access the participatory budgeting platform, create an account, and proceed with the application or vote. Every citizen has the possibility to submit a single proposal for each category. The project competition includes six domains of submission: (1) alleys, sidewalks, and pedestrian areas; (2) mobility, accessibility, and traffic safety; (3) green spaces and playgrounds; (4) arrangement of public spaces (urban furniture, public lightning); (5) educational and cultural infrastructure; and (6) digital city. Unlike the Polish case where there are eight potential categories of ecology projects [31], in Cluj-Napoca the proposals concerning the environment could be submitted in the domain “green spaces and playgrounds”. Ecology projects are merged with playgrounds because, in most cases, playgrounds’ creation/renovation includes ecology or the expansion of green spaces [57]. Although most ecology projects are submitted to this domain, there are instances in which proposals about the environment are submitted to other domains. For example, some proposals about smart waste collection units, solar panels, or electric scooters were submitted to the domains of mobility, accessibility, and traffic safety or the arrangement of public spaces (urban furniture, public lightning). This happens because the projects include details that make them suitable for these domains.

The submission should meet the general objective of the participatory budgeting, must not be already included on the City Hall’s agenda or have any advertising and commercial character, and must meet the necessary criteria for being included in the program [57]. A project submitted to participatory budgeting is analyzed by the technical departments of Cluj-Napoca City Hall to check its eligibility. The latter includes, among others, if it can be implemented by the local authorities or does not surpass the limit of EUR 150,000. After this technical check, it will be placed in the competition. The standards imposed by the participatory budgeting in Cluj are not case-specific, and similar practices are encountered in other cities outside Romania. For instance, the participatory budgeting in Paris meets similar criteria when it comes to the projects’ eligibility check or voting processes. One major difference between the two cities is that, in Paris, citizens could vote both online and

in person [58], unlike in Cluj, where participants can vote exclusively on the participatory budgeting platform.

The projects that pass the technical check become eligible for being subjected to the voting process which is divided in two stages (i.e., the vote according to the domains and the final one). In the first stage, 30 projects are chosen from all domains, and every citizen has the right to vote on six proposals (i.e., one belonging to each domain). The top three projects according to the voting share go directly to the second stage, and the rest of them are selected based on the number of votes they gathered. In the second stage, every citizen could vote for 1 project (irrespective of its domain), and a total of 15 projects are selected. The project with the most votes in each domain will be automatically selected, and the rest of the winning projects will be decided according to their voting share [57]. The projects that gather the highest number of votes will be implemented by the City Hall. Those who wish to vote or submit projects but do not have access to the Internet or do not know how to use the platform can benefit from the help of City Hall's employees in specific locations in Cluj-Napoca during the process.

6. Ecology Projects in Participatory Budgeting

The total number of projects submitted to participatory budgeting in Cluj-Napoca decreases over time (Figure 1). In 2017, there were 338 projects, and their number goes down to less than half in 2018 and then increases to 200 in 2019. In terms of eligibility, there is a more steady and continuous decrease in the total number of projects: 126 in 2017 and roughly one third of that number in the following 2 years. By comparing these numbers, we also observe that the percentage of eligible projects of the total number of projects submitted decreases steadily. For example, in 2017, slightly more than one third of the submitted projects are declared eligible after the technical check. In 2019, only one fifth of the projects submitted are declared eligible. One would expect the percentage of eligible projects to increase over time because applicants become familiar with the process, they understand the rigor of the selection process, and submit when they stand a chance of surviving the technical check. Nevertheless, the opposite happens in the Cluj Participatory Budgeting, and this might be due to a reduced interest of citizens in the process, which provides limited funding and reduces the likelihood of producing a major impact in community. In addition, the process is advertised less by the municipality compared to its beginning in 2017.

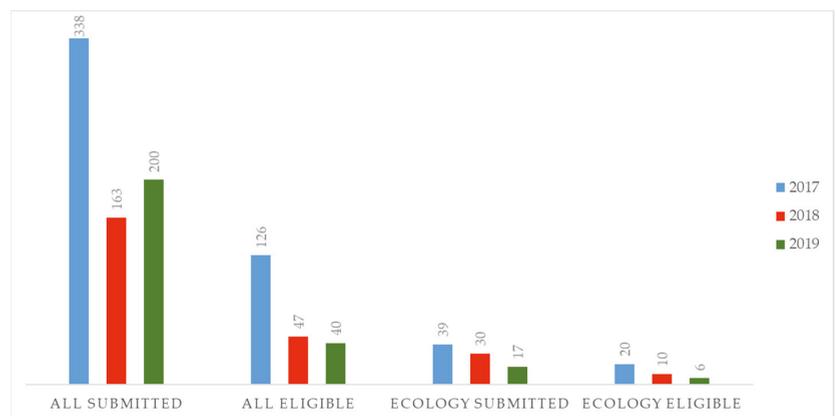


Figure 1. The projects submitted to participatory budgeting (2017–2019).

The projects submitted on ecology have a similar trend to the general ones: there are fewer applications every year and fewer eligible ones. Over time, the percentage of ecology projects of the total submitted projects also decreases from 11.5% in 2017 (39 out of 338) to

8.5% in 2019 (17 out of 200). However, the percentage of eligible ecology projects out of the total number of eligible projects is similar in 2017 and 2019, roughly 15%. This indicates a stable share of well-developed projects on ecology submitted to participatory budgeting. At the same time, we observe that 50 out of the 86 ecology projects submitted did not meet the minimum requirements to be voted and subsequently implemented. This means that people have many ideas related to ecology, and they submit project proposals related to them, but quite often, these are underdeveloped.

The 36 projects depicted by the last three bars in Figure 1 lie at the core of this analysis. They passed the technical check and were voted on by citizens. Figure 2 shows the distribution of acceptance and rejection rates for these projects in the three years covered by our analysis. The acceptance rates are between 30% in 2017 to 40% in 2018, with an intermediary value of 33% in 2019. In 2019, there were only two ecology projects that were accepted and implemented. In the three years, 12 ecology projects were accepted. The two successful projects in 2019 aimed to (1) reduce pollution through tree planting, green fences, and vertical hedges for buildings, and (2) redesign the concrete roofs from blocks of flats with the help of rooftop urban gardens and to promote the use of solar panels in the city. Two quite similar projects were rejected in the final vote: they aimed to install solar panels on the rooftop of schools and to create an urban garden between two neighborhoods where fruit and vegetables could be planted, and the crops could have been used for social meals. Two other projects were rejected in the initial vote, and they targeted lower intensity for city night lights and a higher and larger green fence in Central Park.



Figure 2. Level of public support for ecology projects (2017–2019).

These are recurrent themes among the projects submitted to ensure the city's ecological sustainability. For example, the three projects rejected in the final vote in 2018 were devoted to the use of sensors that could detect pollution in various city areas, the use of solar panels for the city's light poles, and tree planting in the largest neighborhood to lower pollution and expand the green areas of the city. In 2017, two of the accepted projects were about the planting of one tree for every third parking lot and the building of vertical hedges in specific locations in the city.

There are also two important differences between the ecology projects submitted from 2017 to 2019. The first refers to their scope: some of them are general, oriented towards the city's sustainability, while others focus on sustainable development within particular neighborhoods. For example, one of the successful projects in 2017 involved the creation of smart waste collection units in public spaces throughout Cluj. The same year, another

successful project aimed to rehabilitate a park (the Fraternity Park) in one of the city's neighborhoods. The acceptance of a project does not depend on its scope: city level and neighborhood-oriented projects are equally likely to be funded or rejected. The value of the correlation coefficient between the projects' scope—coded dichotomously—and the likelihood to become accepted for all 36 projects covered by our analysis is 0.01. A second difference is about the specificity of the proposed projects. Many are general and involve the creation, rehabilitation, or conservation of green areas and parks, tree planting and green fences, and the promotion of solar panels. There are also projects that propose very specific elements such as the acquisition of cars used to relocate trees with their roots from one location to another. Another example is the creation of plant sculptures to be placed throughout the city aiming to improve city's aesthetics and to promote eco-art.

7. Explaining Support for Ecology Projects

This section discusses in detail the results of the statistical analysis. The bivariate analyses (Table 1) indicate that the budget, the number of arguments and the presence of images and videos in addition to the written description of the project correlate positively and strongly with acceptance. All coefficients are statistically significant either at the 0.1 or 0.01 levels. All these are in line with the theoretical expectations derived from the literature and presented when we formulated the hypotheses. High sums requested by ecology project proposals are strongly associated with acceptance (0.53). All 12 projects that were accepted requested the maximum funding allowed of EUR 150,000. There are two possible explanations for this relationship. On the one hand, large sums correspond to large projects that aim to produce a broad impact in the community. Projects perceived to have a broad impact are more likely to attract citizens' votes than those that are perceived as having a limited impact. On the other hand, large sums can be a signal for citizens that the project proponents take the tasks seriously and are realistic about the resources required to accomplish them. For example, one project in 2015, rejected in the initial vote, asked for EUR 15,000 to demolish old garages in one particular area of the city and replace them with green parking lots. The costs for such an endeavor may sound unrealistic to many citizens since the procedures are quite expensive. Nevertheless, even if the costs are realistic, the impact of the project is limited since it targets a low number of garages.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients and ordinal logistic regression odds ratios.

	Correlation Coefficients	Odds Ratios
Budget	0.53 ***	2.30 *** (0.76)
Type of project	0.13	2.23 (1.30)
Number of arguments	0.51 ***	2.00 ** (0.65)
Use of jargon	−0.15	0.14 (0.21)
Images and videos	0.28 *	1.54 (1.07)
Pseudo R ²		0.34
Log likelihood		−24.57
N	36	36

Notes: Correlation coefficients are non-parametric. Standard errors are in parentheses for the ordinal regression analysis. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

A high number of arguments in the project description correlates highly and positively with their acceptance. This is intuitive since people are persuaded by the presence of details that illustrate the reasons behind the project, how the project will be implemented, and what the subsequent steps are. The projects differ greatly in terms of arguments provided to the audience: at one extreme there are four projects with no argument and eight with one argument, while at the other extreme there are 4 projects with 5 arguments and 1 with 17. The number of arguments is reflected very well in the length of the descriptions listed on the participatory budgeting website. There are projects with less than 100 words, which makes it difficult to include many arguments for its rationale because the goal of the

project already occupies extensive space. There are also projects with more than 400 words that allow for detailed explanations. All those with more than 400 words have 4 or more arguments explaining why the project is necessary.

The presence of additional images and videos is associated with higher acceptance of the ecology projects. The reason is similar to that outlined for the existence of arguments: images and videos increase the appeal of the project by providing a broader understanding of its content in addition to the text description. Only one out of the 12 ecology projects that were accepted did not have supplementary images and videos. The project was accepted in 2017 and targeted the demolition of 40 old garages throughout the city and their replacement with parking lots that included green areas or children's outdoor playgrounds. There are eight projects that included both images and videos, and three out of those were accepted.

More general types of projects devoted to ecological innovations as opposed to the specific ones about green spaces have slightly greater chances of being accepted. The value of the correlation coefficient is quite small. One possible explanation for the positive correlation is the perception that the general projects will contribute more to the sustainable ecological development of the city compared to the specific ones. The correlation is quite weak because, as noted above, there were several projects on green areas, fences, and tree planting that were voted by the citizens in Cluj. The use of jargon in the project description correlates negatively to the acceptance of ecology projects. Those project descriptions that use simple language, are easy to understand, and avoid technical details are more appealing to citizens. People understand easier things that are explained in plain language, and they are likely to express preference or vote for those projects that they understand.

The results of the ordinal logistic regression confirm and strengthen these observations. There is empirical support for all the hypothesized relationships, but the evidence is stronger for some of them. The effects are presented in Table 1 and visually in Figure 3. The high value of the pseudo R^2 indicates that the statistical model is a good fit to the data. The findings illustrate that high budget (H1) and the number of arguments (H3) have strong and statistically significant effects on the likelihood of ecology projects being accepted. A project proposal with a budget at the maximum level is 2.3 times more likely to be accepted compared to a low budget proposal. A proposal with many arguments is two times more likely to be accepted compared to projects with no arguments. Although not statistically significant, the effects are strong for the remaining variables. A general type of project is 2.23 times more likely to be accepted, while a project proposal that accompanies the text with videos and images (H5) is 1.54 times more likely to be accepted. The strongest predictor in the multivariate statistical model is the use of jargon (H4): a proposal with plain language is more than 7 times more likely to be accepted compared to one using jargon. Since the odds-ratio for the use of jargon is less than 1, we use the log odds for the simplicity of interpretation.

These results indicate that all five characteristics of an ecology project could influence the support provided by citizens in the voting phase of participatory budgeting. A high budget, a general type of project, and a large number of arguments appear to be the strongest predictors for support. All these are in line with earlier findings from the literature and indicate that citizens vote for those ecology projects that are likely to make greater impact in society. Equally important, the quality of the proposal can play a relevant role. In this way, citizens send the message that their involvement in the decision-making process is more than a rubber stamp and aim to make informed judgments.

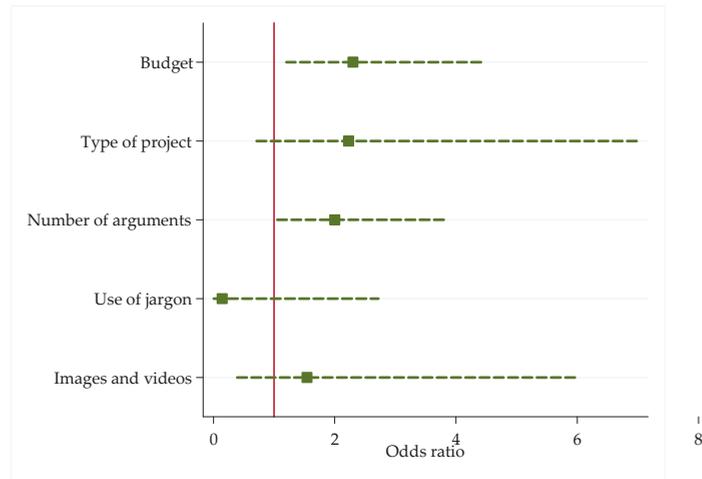


Figure 3. The effects on likelihood for public support of ecology projects.

8. Conclusions

This article aimed to identify the factors that favor the acceptance of ecology projects submitted to participatory budgeting. To our knowledge, this is the first analysis seeking to explain the variation in support for ecology projects submitted to participatory budgeting. The study focuses on the participatory budgeting practice in Cluj-Napoca (Romania) between 2017 and 2019. This practice includes two rounds of voting before generating the list of accepted projects. We analyzed 36 projects that were rejected in the initial vote, rejected in the final vote, and accepted. Our results show that the likelihood of public support for ecology projects depends greatly on the rigor of the proposals. While the total number of ecology projects submitted between 2017–2019 show general interest towards environmental matters, the projects are voted based on several characteristics. The empirical support for the five determinants (i.e., budget, type of project, number of arguments, use of jargon, and the presence of images/videos) indicates that citizens take environmental matters seriously and do not vote for schematic projects that are limited in scope and that do not pose any potential for contributing to the general welfare.

The implications of our results go beyond the single case study presented here. At a theoretical level, we propose an analytical framework that includes five project characteristics that could be tested in other settings. Since these characteristics are not context sensitive and the features of participatory budgeting in Cluj-Napoca are likely to be found in other contexts/cities (see the research design), further research could identify the extent to which they explain the public support for ecology projects elsewhere. In terms of methodology, our analysis uses an approach that can be replicated at a broader scale in the study area. The variables that we identified as potential drivers for popular support are available for projects submitted to participatory budgeting elsewhere. This methodology can set the grounds for comparative analyses covering several types of projects beyond ecology. At the empirical level, the study contributes to the literature by identifying the factors that could influence the success of ecology projects submitted to participatory budgeting. These results enhance our understanding about individuals' attitudes towards specific decision-making processes in local politics and what expectations they have. In this sense, the results could bear some societal relevance, especially for project submitters. They could learn that in order to gain support, a project must have a large budget, present clear arguments in plain language, and have attached images and videos in the proposal.

The number of cases for analysis represents a limitation of our study. While 36 cases are suitable for conducting bivariate analysis, they are not sufficient for providing robust

results in a multivariate test; the latter was only used to strengthen the findings of the bivariate analysis. Other limitations include the absence of a discussion about the legitimacy and representativeness of the participatory budgeting's voting process. These could influence the extent to which citizens engage and vote for projects. Our approach also disregards voters' characteristics that could influence their vote for a specific project such as the ability to use the online platform, belonging to vulnerable groups, awareness about specific projects, etc.

Starting from these limitations, further studies could test the effect of the five determinants in other cases with larger numbers of ecology projects submitted to participatory budgeting. The analyses could be applied to more cases from specific regions that pose a high interest in ecology. Since the methodology can be applied to most projects submitted to participatory budgeting worldwide, future studies could also compare ecology and non-ecology projects to understand how they differ. Other studies employing qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups) could be conducted to explain what determines citizens' desire to vote for a specific category of ecology projects (i.e., green areas, ecology infrastructure, and local innovations) or what factors influence the projects' submitters to advance a proposal belonging to one specific category in the expense of the others; this factor also influences the proposals' densities and frequencies. Further studies could also investigate if the citizens perceive the online voting format as being legitimate and representative for the entire population. The context presented here indicates that this may be an issue in the process of supporting projects to be funded through participatory budgeting.

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Article

The Scope of Climate Assemblies: Lessons from the Climate Assembly UK

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Abstract: In recent times we have seen a spate of climate assemblies across Europe as the climate emergency gains increasing prominence in the political agenda and as the citizens' assembly approach to public engagement gains popularity. However, there has been little empirical research on how the scope of citizens' assemblies affects the internal logic of the assembly process and its impacts on external policy actors. This is a significant oversight given the power of agenda setting. It is also of particular importance for climate assemblies given the exceptional scale and complexity of climate change, as well as the need for co-ordination across all policy areas and types of governance to address it. In this paper, we start to address this gap through an in-depth case analysis of the Climate Assembly UK. We adopt a mixed methods approach, combining surveys of the assembly members and witnesses, interviews with the assembly members, organisers, MPs, parliamentary staff, and government civil servants, and non-participant observation of the process. We find that attempts to adapt the assembly's scope to the scale of the climate change issue compromised assembly member learning, the co-ordination of the resulting recommendations, assembly member endorsement of the recommendations, and the extent of their impact on parliament and government. We argue that more democratization in setting the agenda could help combat these issues.

Keywords: citizens' assemblies; climate change; decarbonization; agenda setting; deliberative democracy; mini-publics; environmental politics



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1. Introduction

The citizens' assembly approach to public engagement has gained popularity following perceived successes in Ireland [1]. Given the increasing prominence of the climate emergency in the political agenda, especially on the approach to COP26, citizens' assemblies have been used increasingly to address climate change issues. We have seen a spate of such 'climate assemblies' across Europe.

Citizens' assemblies are a type of mini-public. They recruit a representative, or diverse, selection of members of the public through various forms of civic lottery (stratified random selection), provide the participants with information on the topic to be considered, and facilitate their discussion to promote deliberative norms and enable the participants to address the assembly remit [2]. Moreover, they are thought to be more equipped at cultivating long-term thinking than traditional liberal democratic institutions [3,4] and a better way of engaging the public with the climate change issue than other methods [5].

However, there has been little empirical research on the impacts of the scope of citizens' assemblies on their design and influence on policy. This is a notable oversight given the power and unequal nature of agenda setting [6]. The agenda is of particular importance in the case of climate assemblies, given the significant scale and complexity of climate change and the need for co-ordination across all policy areas and levels and types of governance to

address it [3,7]. Perhaps reflecting the relative recency of the ‘democratic wave’ (barely a decade old [8]), the research on this topic to date has been predominantly theoretical and focused on who sets an assembly’s agenda and how the assembly is managed, rather than on the consequences and impacts of an assembly’s scope.

In this paper, we address this gap through an in-depth case analysis of the Climate Assembly UK (CAUK). It was commissioned by six select committees from the House of Commons, and given the remit of addressing the question: ‘How should the UK meet its target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050?’ The UK is an interesting case generally, not least given that a large number of climate assemblies have been run at various levels of governance across the country, probably more than in most countries [9]. Furthermore, CAUK is an important case specifically as it was the first nationwide citizens’ assembly in the UK and, indeed, the first national climate assembly in the UK. Moreover, it split assembly members into thematic groups as a measure to compensate for the broad scope of the assembly. Whilst an unusual approach for citizens’ assemblies generally, this is becoming increasingly common for climate assemblies.

We adopt a mixed methods approach combining surveys of the assembly members and witnesses, interviews with the assembly members and organisers, MPs and parliamentary staff, and government civil servants, as well as non-participant observation of the process. We find that the attempts to adapt the assembly scope to the scale of the climate change issue compromised assembly member learning, the co-ordination of the resulting recommendations, assembly member endorsement of the recommendations and the extent that they impacted on parliament and government. Whilst the need for trade-offs between the breadth and depth of the scope of climate assemblies can never be eliminated, especially given inevitable constraints with respect to time and budget, we argue for a two-step process for setting the agenda for a citizens’ assembly. Step one requires the commissioning authority to set a broad remit for the assembly, to ensure they receive recommendations on a policy area that they are interested in and looking for public guidance on. Step two enables the assembly members themselves to determine the specific remit of the assembly, once they have received some initial information.

The paper proceeds as follows. In Section 2, we review the literature on climate and citizens’ assemblies on agenda setting and scope. In Section 3 we justify our case study approach and case selection and give an overview of Climate Assembly UK. Section 4 provides details of our mixed methods approach. In Section 5 we present our results, and in Section 6 discuss our analysis with respect to the scope of CAUK and its consequences. We conclude in Section 7 with some pointers for further research in this area. Our findings have relevance for climate assembly design in particular, but also for citizens’ assemblies, mini-publics, and public engagement in climate change policy more broadly.

2. Citizens’ Assemblies and Their Agendas

Citizens’ assemblies can be defined as ‘carefully designed forums where a representative subset of the wider population come together to engage in open, inclusive, informed, and consequential discussions on one or more issues’ [10]. They are a type of mini-public which means that random and stratified sampling is used to ensure the assembly participants are representative of the population, or at least diverse, with respect to key demographics and often attitudes on the issue. Participants are often remunerated for their time and travel, accommodation and childcare etc. are usually provided to lower the barriers to participation. The participants are then given relevant information on the issue from a range of experts and advocates. They engage with this information, and their own views, through facilitated discussions aimed at promoting deliberative norms such as inclusion, respect, and reason-giving. They result in a set of policy recommendations on the topic. In comparison to other mini-publics, citizens’ assemblies tend to have a ‘larger’ number of participants (typically 100 [8]), a ‘longer’ duration, and be connected, in some tangible way, to established political institutions, (see [2] for an overview of the design

features of the different types). Climate assemblies are a citizens' assembly that addresses the issue of climate change.

This section provides a review of existing research on the agenda and scope of citizens' assemblies. We find that the literature in this area, while acknowledging the importance of the agenda, is limited, predominantly theoretical, focused primarily on agency, and, moreover, does not cover climate assemblies. We argue that the absence of empirical research on the scope of an assembly, and its consequences for assembly design and its potential to impact policy, is a significant oversight in citizens' assembly research in general but especially in relation to climate assemblies. This is due to the unique nature of the scope of the climate change issue. We therefore identify a need for more empirical research in this area. First, we start with an overview of existing research on climate assemblies.

Climate Assembly UK is part of a growing wave of climate assemblies globally. With renewed interest in the urgency of the climate crisis, governments at all levels have used the mini-public model to involve citizens in proposing recommendations to minimize the impacts of the crisis [11]. This is important because the climate governance debate has been dominated by scientists, interest groups, and politicians, with the public rendered 'spectators' [12]. In the context of disengagement from traditional avenues of participation, deliberative forms of civic engagement have become increasingly attractive tools for policy-makers [13]. Citizens' assemblies offer a unique approach to responding to the issue of climate change. Smith [4] and Fisher [3] argue that citizens' assemblies allow for the consideration of complex, longer-term issues such as the climate crisis. This is distinct from typical policy-making by elected officials who tend to focus on short-term goals, in response to electoral incentives, public opinion and media coverage, and also promote climate delay discourses [14]. There is empirical evidence that deliberation [15,16] in citizens' assemblies [17] can promote concern for future generations.

This may be because the citizens' assembly model allows for in-depth learning and respectful discussion among participants and thus is well-suited for addressing complex and polarizing issues such as climate change [18,19], as it provides a format in which the public are receptive to climate science [12]. Drawing on evidence from an Australian mini-public, Niemeyer [20] (p. 448) argues that 'deliberative democracy . . . has the potential to transform the public response to climate change'. Climate activists like Extinction Rebellion seem to agree and have also called for climate assemblies to inject long-term thinking into the political system.

Previous research has explored the impact participating in a climate assembly has on the participants, including the implications for fostering public support for policies to address climate change [11,12,21]. For example, Devaney et al. [5] (p. 144) argue that the citizens' assembly method can be a powerful tool for 'engaging and communicating with the public more deeply on the climate crisis.' Howarth et al. [19] similarly argue that climate assemblies are a useful tool that can help to 'build a social mandate' for addressing the climate crisis. Research has also considered the external factors of climate assemblies such as the impact they have on government policy [11] and the reasons why they are instigated [22]. However, a key gap in the existing research is how far the scope of the climate assembly agenda may influence these internal and external dynamics.

The process by which issues are selected for discussion is structured by the 'value choices and the political power of the players' involved [23] (p. 35). This political power includes the ability to determine which issues are important and how they are framed, which exacerbates existing inequalities [6] as it is the stage of the process where the 'mobilisation of bias is at its highest' [24] (p. 84). There is also a path dependency here, as the scope of a citizens' assembly will determine many of the design features and the interest of policy-makers and the public in the process and its outcomes [25]. Therefore, the process of issue selection in a mini-public is 'of fundamental importance' [26] (p. 343).

However, much of the research on the agenda of mini-publics has been theoretical [24–28]. The empirical studies that have covered the agenda have focused on the agenda setting agents. This work has found that agenda setting is inherently political and

typically reflects the priorities of the commissioning body [29–34]. For Richardson [27] (p. 184), this means that mini-publics with pre-determined agendas ‘will tell us little of value about the popular will’ as policy makers will remain uninformed about the issues that matter to the public most. For Böker and Elstub [28], it inhibits the potential of mini-publics to contribute to the more critical and emancipatory aspirations of deliberative democracy as a normative theory.

On the other end of the spectrum ‘open’ and ‘bottom-up’ agenda setting processes provide opportunities for participants in a mini-public to determine the topic to be discussed; examples of these include the ‘We the Citizens’ pilot in 2011 [35] and Austrian Wisdom Councils [36]. Recent data indicate that open agendas were employed more frequently since 2015, compared with previous years studied [37]. There are limitations of this approach to agenda setting too. Firstly, there is a reduced opportunity for the assembly to impact on policy if it is on a topic that is not of interest to policy-makers. Secondly, as mini-publics recruit representative samples of the public, they may not have the knowledge of particular issues to be able to set their own agenda [2,13].

Other methods allow for citizen control of the agenda but do not limit this authority to members of the mini-public. For example, the so-called ‘Ostbelgien model’ provides an opportunity for citizens to create the agenda; in this case, a permanent Citizens’ Council is given the power to commission a citizens’ assembly on a topic of the Council’s choice [33]. In a similar manner, the issues considered during the G1000 were drawn from proposals by the public through an online consultation [34].

Another aspect of agenda-setting within a deliberative setting that there has been research on is the level of influence afforded to citizens in structuring the formal agenda after an issue has been selected. Lang [32] adds an important consideration to our discussion of agenda-setting. Her study examines the parallel processes of informal and formal agenda setting in the BCCA and serves as a reminder of the role of power and the significant consequences for the deliberative experience of both formal and informal agenda-setting.

However, again the research here primarily focuses on agency. Smith’s [13] (p. 89) work on democratic innovations argues that in a typical mini-public, citizens are asked to consider an issue area that has been chosen in advance following a ‘format that has been established without their involvement’. However, more recent scholarship suggests variations on this front. For example, in the French Citizens’ Convention for Climate, the members had input into the selection of expert witnesses [38], as has been the practice in the Irish processes [30]. Choosing the speakers within a mini-public can function as a form of agenda-setting, as each individual speaker brings their own perspective and expertise. There is potential for expert witnesses’ own opinions to influence the outcome of an assembly [13,39]. Expert selection is usually a task performed by the organisers or their stewarding board [40,41]. A further variant is offered by the case of the Irish Citizens’ Assembly, which included a ‘steering group’ of members who were charged with providing feedback and guidance on meeting plans [30].

Consequently, while citizens’ assembly research has flagged the importance of the agenda, it has primarily focused on agenda setting agents. There is only limited research on the consequences of scope of the mini-public on other factors and most of it is theoretical. For example, Dryzek [42] (p. 28) argues that mini-publics ‘require that well-defined boundaries can be drawn around issues.’ For others, the scope of the agenda for a citizens’ assembly is of particular importance, because if it is not suitably refined and narrow it is likely to result in poor quality deliberation [13] (pp. 89, 97) [2] (p. 182).

Agenda scope is an issue of particular relevance for climate assemblies given its significant breadth and complexity, which means that it affects every aspect of modern life and therefore all policy and governance areas [3,7]. To date, climate assemblies have focused predominantly on mitigation, rather than adaptation, but, nevertheless, they also tend to have very broad remits [43]. The assembly scope has consequences for how time in the assembly can be used. The British Columbia Citizens’ assembly met for 26 days [39], and yet its focus on electoral reform, while significant in scope, pales in comparison to the

scope and complexity of climate change. Therefore, we know very little about how the remit and scope of climate assemblies can be appropriately designed to be proportionate to the time available. Assembly design is crucial to enable the time available to assembly members to be used most effectively to do justice to the significance and breadth of the issue, while enabling the members to become informed about key elements of the issue relevant to the assembly remit. In turn, there is a dearth of research on how the scope of climate assemblies affects their impact on policy. Moreover, existing research focuses on agency and which actors set the agenda of assemblies but gives insufficient attention to the nature and consequences of these choices for the assembly. Shaw et al. [43] have started to fill this gap with an overview of the remits of several European climate assemblies, but do not provide new empirical data. Therefore, more empirical research on this topic is required. It is these significant gaps that the paper seeks to address through a case analysis of the Climate Assembly UK. We next provide an overview of our case and the rationale for its selection.

3. Empirical Case: Climate Assembly UK

To address our research questions of how assembly scope affects both the internal design of assemblies and policy impact, we adopt a case study approach. Case study research allows for the gathering of intensive and contextual data that will help us understand the internal dynamics of the assembly [44]. The rich contextual data that case study research unveils can enhance understanding of how an institution, in our case a climate assembly, relates to a variety of actors, across a range of locations within a political system [45]. Moreover, case studies are useful for building theory through the generation of hypotheses [46], which is helpful given the lack of research on citizens' assembly scope to date as highlighted in the previous section.

Climate Assembly UK (CAUK) was the first nationwide citizens' assembly in the UK, and the first national climate assembly in the UK. It was also one of the first national-level citizens' assemblies focused specifically on the climate emergency (the 'environment' generally had featured in a number of CAs by then [10] (Figure 2.3), but the particular focus on the climate emergency is a more recent phenomenon), joining a short list that—at that stage—included France (whose climate assembly somewhat overlapped in timing with CAUK) [38] and Ireland (whose 2016–2018 citizens' assembly included climate change as one of five topics to consider) [47]. Despite the limited research on climate assemblies to date, which might lead us to classify CAUK as a 'revelatory case', we see it as a 'common case' [46] due to the relatively large number of climate assemblies in Europe that there are now [48], and also because CAUK has many similar design features to these other cases (e.g., the use of thematic groups to create a division of labour amongst the assembly members), thereby making it a typical and representative case.

CAUK comprised of 108 randomly selected members of the public from across the UK. It met over a period of six weekends from late January to mid-May 2020. This was a longer period than had been anticipated (four weekends) due to the COVID-19 pandemic which prompted the assembly to move online. It was commissioned by six select committees from the House of Commons, which asked it to consider the question: 'How should the UK meet its target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050?' This remit followed the government legislation that committed the UK to reaching this identical target. Parliament commissioned a public participation organisation (Involve) to organise CAUK and provided them with a list of topic areas, agenda-setting questions, and areas to prioritise which collectively covered the six select committees' interests on climate change and the net zero target.

In particular, the parliamentary committees wanted CAUK to give sufficient attention to three key topics: 'how we travel', 'in the home', and 'what we buy and land use, food and farming'. Furthermore, the parliamentary committees had specified certain topics that should be deprioritised in the case of time constraints, on the basis of the committees' interests. These included freight transport, green investment, direct industrial emissions

and consumption emissions (i.e., emissions from processes that take place outside of the UK but are ‘imported’ via goods and services).

To cover these topics in the time allotted, during most of weekend 2 and the whole of weekend 3, the assembly members (AMs) were split randomly into three different topic groups meeting in separate rooms, each tasked with considering a topic. The members of each group were selected randomly and stratified (based on the same criteria used at the recruitment stage of the assembly), so that the membership of each group remained as representative and diverse as possible. AMs were not allowed to change group. AMs were informed of the product of these separate topic deliberations in short presentations and those more interested were advised to watch the livestreams. The division of AMs into topic groups impacted on CAUK’s recommendations; some recommendations that AMs later voted on were the product of deliberations that they had not been party to, and some recommendations were voted on by the topic group only (accounting for a third of the AMs). As we discuss below, this was to cause some disquiet among several AMs, and it also affected how some parliamentary and government observers treated the import of the recommendations.

In common with the design of citizens’ assemblies generally, the AMs were a randomly selected, stratified sample of UK citizens with respect to key demographics and attitudes to climate change and rural and urban dwelling. There was a mixture of small group and plenary sessions throughout the assembly and the AMs were supported by a team of external experts, advocates, and facilitators. A team of ‘expert leads’, who had expertise on different aspects of climate change, were convened to oversee the process. These were selected by the organisers, based on advice received from trusted experts in the sector, and were approved by Parliament at the end of the tender process. The expert leads were advised by a 12-member academic panel and an advisory panel consisting of 19 experts from private, public, and charity sectors, all related to climate change. Steps were taken to ensure that there was balance on the advisory panel with respect to demographics, stakeholder groups and political backgrounds. The members of both panels were initially proposed by climate change specialists in the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) and agreed in consultation with the expert leads. With guidance from the academic panel, the expert leads drafted content for CAUK, which was then issued to the advisory panel for comment, including who was invited to present (expert witnesses) and what they should be asked to cover. They were also asked to comment on documents between meetings, as were POST.

A brief overview of the agenda for each weekend of CAUK is provided in Table 1. Like most mini-publics, CAUK broadly adhered to a format that started with learning about the topic, followed by deliberation and decision making. As detailed in Table 1, the learning phase was predominately undertaken during weekend 1 and 2. This was followed by deliberation and decision-making. We now proceed to give an overview of the research methods used to analyse this case study.

Table 1. Overview of the Climate Assembly UK (CAUK) agenda.

Weekend	Format	Purpose	Activities
1	In-person	Introduce the topic	Presentations on climate change and ethical and practical questions about the path to net zero. The AMs decided on the principles and values they want the Government to use to guide the path to net zero.
2	In-person and in topic groups	Provide information	AMs were split into three different topic groups. They heard presentations on their topic followed by question-and-answer sessions. AMs given summaries of other topic groups, then discussed and voted on key considerations for decision-makers.
3	In-person and in topic groups	Deliberation and decision-making	AMs reviewed and discussed what they had learnt about their own topics in weekend 2, and then voted on considerations for Government and Parliament about their topic. AMs were presented with a range of ‘future scenarios’ and ‘policy options’ for their topic which they discussed and voted on.

Table 1. Cont.

Weekend	Format	Purpose	Activities
4a, 4b and 4c	Online	Provide information, deliberation, and decision-making	In plenary, all AMs heard presentations on new topics. Each topic information session was followed by Q&A, deliberation, and voting. On the last day of the assembly, the AMs discussed, proposed and voted on 'final recommendations' for the report.

4. Materials and Methods

This paper adopts a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collected from surveys of the AMs and speakers, interviews with the AMs, CAUK organisers, parliamentarians, and government, as well as non-participant observation of sessions. Each data source is summarised in Table 2 and explained below.

Surveys of participants are a standard and widely used approach to researching mini-publics [2]. As detailed in Table 2, we surveyed AMs at the start and end of each CAUK weekend, as well as the expert witnesses around four months after the close of the assembly. While the surveys informed us of what the assembly members thought about the process, as well as how they perceived it had affected their knowledge and views of climate change and decarbonisation, they provided limited insight into the reasons why the AMs thought this. To overcome this limitation, we supplemented the surveys with qualitative methods.

Qualitative methods such as interviews are particularly suited to answer research questions related to how democratic innovations emerge and the effects they have on participants and public policies [49], both of which strongly relate to our research questions for CAUK (how assembly scope affects both the internal design of assemblies and policy impact). Therefore, we generated qualitative data from interviews as well as non-participant observation.

Non-participant research approaches are useful for linking findings with processes in mini-public research, especially when they are supplemented with interviews [49], as we do in our study. It can change how researchers perceive assembly members, organisers, facilitators, experts, how these groups interact, and the process design that influences this interaction, as observations uncover taken-for-granted aspects of the assembly process [50]. In this study, a member of the research team attended and observed each of CAUK's in-person weekends and listened to audio recordings of the online sessions. They also attended the online report launch and the subsequent online stakeholder briefings. Researchers' observations were recorded in a field diary, structured around the research questions. These were then coded and analysed according to the research questions and to capture emerging themes.

The use of mixed methods in social sciences is well established and is valued for facilitating triangulation [51]. As described above, quantitative and qualitative methods used alone have their limitations, but by combining them these are compensated for, enabling meta-inferences to be made that draw on numerous data sources [52] (p. 512). This is considered the best approach for researching democratic innovations like citizens' assemblies [52] where we seek to understand the assembly as a whole, particular aspects of it, and its broader context. In this study we used a mixed method approach to assess the data from different perspectives and explore the complex research questions including what happened within the assembly, especially with respect to the scope of the remit provided, and how these affected perceptions of other political actors towards the assembly.

There are risks and limitations in using mixed methods research. Conducting multiple strands of research can be complicated [53]. Combining data from mixed methods into integrated analysis can also be difficult [54]. In this study, we managed this by dividing the collection and analysis of the different types of data between the four authors, who worked closely together to help harmonize the different data sources. As described above, each method was selected to address specific aspects of the research questions; the purpose of the analysis from each data source was established from the outset to facilitate integration.

Table 2. Summary of the methods of data collection.

Source	Participants	When	Delivery	Format	Analysis
Surveys	Assembly Members: 99 of 108 AMs who consented *	Start and end of each weekend	In-person in weekends 1, 2 and 3, and digitally on the online weekends	Open and closed questions covering: knowledge of and attitudes to climate change; experiences at CAUK; political attitudes and interests; and activities between the weekends.	Quantitative data analysed to track how knowledge, opinions, attitudes, abilities and experiences evolve throughout the process. Analysis, completed in SPSS, included descriptive statistics, correlations, <i>t</i> -tests, and multi-variate regression.
	Expert witnesses: 21 of 48 who consented	September 2020	Digital survey	Open and closed questions on motivations and expectations of taking part, and experiences of presenting and engaging with AMs.	Quantitative data analysis, completed in SPSS, included descriptive statistics, correlations and <i>t</i> -tests.
Interviews	Assembly members: 28 AMs ** from 75 who consented	June and July 2020	Online	Semi-structured: AMs were asked about their motivation for participating, their perspectives on the experience of participating, and views and engagement on climate change and politics.	The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then coded according to the research questions, but also to capture emerging themes by using a staged hybrid approach to thematic analysis [55,56].
	16 MPs and Parliamentary staff ***	September–November 2020	Online	Semi-structured: they were asked about how and why CAUK was established; their contact with the process; thoughts on the process and the recommendations; and future plans to act on the assembly recommendations.	
Non-Participant Observation	N/A	Each CAUK weekend	In person attendance on weekends 1, 2 and 3, and from recordings of the online sessions	Researchers recorded their observations in a field diary, structured around the research questions.	Observations were coded and analysed according to the research questions and to capture emerging themes.

* Each member had a unique ID to add to each survey they completed, enabling us to use panel analysis to track this evolution at an individual-level, rather than in the aggregate, while still preserving member anonymity, and to enable us to link answers to participants' demographic and attitudinal data [57]. ** A sample of 30 AMs, that broadly reflected the demographic (gender, age, qualification, ethnicity, geography) and attitudinal (concern about climate change at the start of the assembly) makeup of the assembly was created. Potential interviewees were contacted via email. When a potential interviewee declined, another person was chosen from the list who resembled the person who declined as closely as possible in terms of the selection criteria described above. *** Four Chairs, or former Chairs, of select committees; seven Clerks, or former Clerks, of the committees; a member of the CAUK communications team, a member of the CAUK organising team and three other civil servants or researchers involved in the promotion of the CAUK report and recommendations within government.

In the following section we report our key findings derived from the application of these mixed methods to CAUK.

5. Results

Our analysis of the scope of CAUK, and how this affected internal aspects of the assembly and its uptake in policy, is divided into four inter-related sections. First, we consider the relationship between time and issue scope. Second, we analyse how the assembly scope affected information provision and learning. Third, the consequences of splitting the assembly into topic groups are investigated, which was one of the main measures introduced to enable the broad scope to be managed in the available time. Fourth, we present the two-step agenda-setting process which includes the democratisation of assemblies as a potential solution to the problems we identify in our analysis.

5.1. Time

As discussed previously, the assembly members met for a total of six weekends. Three meetings were conducted in person, followed by three that took place online. Decisions about the length of CAUK were determined by budget constraints and, crucially, the significant costs associated with member accommodation and travel that are unavoidable for in-person meetings.

Our examination of the assembly indicates that the short time frame allotted for consideration of such a complex and broad issue was insufficient (by comparison, the issue of electoral system change was considered by two citizens' assemblies that were allotted six weekends for learning alone, followed by six additional weekends for deliberation [39]). This combination had an impact on the AMs' experience. Many noted a desire to have more time for each of their assigned tasks: learning, deliberating, and voting on recommendations. One consequence of the desire to ensure AMs were well-briefed despite the short time frame was that each meeting day was long and full, with some tasks even being completed over an evening meal. One member commented, 'it was a lot of information to take in and it was very, very, very tiring . . . I was exhausted because you had to take it all in and understand it and try and remember what they said . . . It was hard going'. This was also observed by the researchers, who noted that the long days had an impact on levels of AM engagement. This is especially important given that the membership was diverse and thus included participants who were not accustomed to participating in long meetings. Overall, many AMs suggested the process was too short: 'Ideally the assembly should have been more than four weekends to discuss further options and more proposals.'

Expert witnesses expressed a similar concern about the amount of time provided for their presentations, given the breadth and technical complexity of the ideas they were asked to cover and the wide range of prior knowledge of the topic among the audience. Some worried about the volume of information that they were expected to present within the time constraints. One witness noted that 'it would be challenging to meet the brief' due to the complexity of the topic and the time available. Others agreed: one stated that they 'expected it would be challenging to make [their] presentation simple enough', and another worried about 'explaining my area clearly within the time available.' Many members noted the value of engaging with the presenters at their tables and that this allowed members to ask more detailed questions; both expert witnesses and members indicated that they would have preferred these sessions to be longer.

In sum, the evidence points us to the conclusion that there was a mismatch between the scope of the agenda of the assembly and the time available for AMs to address it in a sufficiently meaningful way.

5.2. Information and Evidence Provision and Learning

Our AM survey data suggests that the extensive methods of information provision were, overall, effective. Most AMs understood the information and were able to use it to inform their decisions; the majority of AMs also agreed that they had learnt a lot

from the information provided during weekends 1, 2 and 3, as shown in Figure 1. In addition, in our interviews of the expert witnesses it was noted that members asked relevant questions throughout the assembly (something that was also observed by the research team), suggesting a level of comfort with the material.

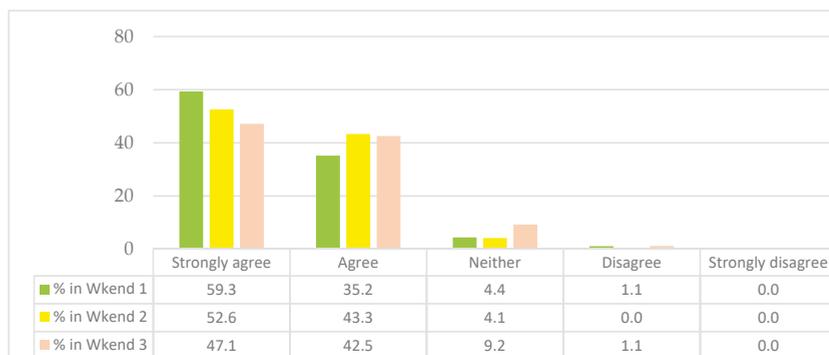


Figure 1. Extent the assembly members (AMs) felt they had learnt a lot from the speakers.

However, our analysis further indicates that the extent the AMs agreed that they had learnt a lot decreased over the course of the assembly. On a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), the mean response was 1.47 after weekend 1, 1.52 after weekend 2, and 1.64 after weekend 3. The results of *t*-tests reveal there is a statistically significant mean difference between the responses given after weekend 1 and 3, indicating that learning decreased as the process progressed, with the most amount of learning occurring in the early stages of CAUK.

Moreover, the volume of information, pace of delivery, and use of jargon sometimes overwhelmed some of the AMs and left them feeling that some topics had not been explained in the necessary level of detail or in a manner that was accessible to the diverse membership in the room. In an interview one AM reflected that they got ‘the feeling that a lot of people were ending the day very confused ... don’t forget, we came from nothing ... very little information ... and we are suddenly supposed to sort of take it and make a decision.’ Another AM noted that they, ‘found it quite difficult to take it all in and understand it and then quickly generate questions’. In weekend 3, some AMs said that they had not been given enough time to receive and digest all the information from the first two weekends. While it is obvious from the many methods of information provision that a concerted effort was made to ensure members were able to learn in a supportive environment, it appears that, given the broad scope of the assembly, the time allotted did not allow all members to fully assimilate the material before voting on the assembly’s recommendations.

In addition, despite the large volume of information provided, the researchers’ field-notes recorded that some AMs identified what they considered to be important gaps in the content covered during the assembly. For example, some asked why specific issues were not covered, such as freight transport and tidal and wave technology, and queried the depth of some topics. These concerns were echoed by the expert witnesses. In response to an open question in the survey, one expert witness encapsulated the issues arising from time constraints and gaps in information: ‘I felt the whole thing was rather compressed. Some sectors were not covered ... Ideally, the members should have more time and ability to call for additional speakers.’ The researchers observed that, when questioned about gaps in information, the lead facilitators often blamed time constraints for limiting evidence provision.

It therefore seems apparent that the scope of the assembly created issues for the provision of information and opportunities for members learning.

5.3. Thematic Groups

The CAUK designers seemed aware of the tensions between the broad scope of the assembly and the time available to address it. One of the main attempts to address this was to split the assembly into three thematic groups, as explained by one of the organisers: ‘So, it’s a big topic, isn’t it? . . . it was the first time we’d split into groups like that at a national assembly which, I think reflects the size of the topic.’

A significant consequence of this decision was that many of the recommendations were only endorsed by a segment of the AMs. Even though there was the briefing to ensure that all AMs were aware of what was being discussed by the other groups, it was decided, nonetheless, that for some of the decisions, AMs should only vote on recommendations from their own topic group because the other AMs had not had enough opportunity to make a sufficiently informed vote. As explained by one of the CAUK organisers: ‘we just felt that the people who looked at it in detail . . . would potentially have gone on quite a journey of learning and changing their opinions and learning from each other and then if you put it back to a vote of everybody who hadn’t had the same information without having a chance to bring them up to speed on the evidence. What were you gaining from that if you’re looking for an informed output?’

This use of separate topic groups had implications both for what AMs thought of the process, and also for the reception of the CAUK’s recommendations. We can deal with each in turn. Some AMs raised issues with the final recommendations, noting that they were not given adequate opportunity to participate in the production of recommendations by topic groups to which they were not assigned. Some felt that the process of reporting the work of the topic groups was not sufficient for members to provide an informed vote. One participant raised the issue of the recommendations being presented to the public as reflecting his perspective, when he had not participated in the deliberation and drafting of recommendations of the two other issue areas: ‘. . . when it says the Climate Assembly supports this decision, I’ve not had any information about what to do in the home. I’ve not had any information to do with the farming or anything like that. Even though we got that information afterwards, it was always the stuff that had already been agreed rather than the information that led to that decision’. In the open text comments on the AM survey, complaints about being split into topic groups were frequent, such as ‘Not being involved in the other two discussions’ and ‘Missing the other topics.’ This suggests that the measures to integrate the work of the thematic groups were considered insufficient.

The results of the AM survey suggest that most of the AMs agreed with the principles and decisions made in weekends 1 and 3 (see Figure 2). On a scale of 1–5, where 1 is very much agree/strongly agree and 5 is not at all agree/strongly disagree, the extent AMs agreed with proposed principles and decisions decreased on average between weekend 1 and weekend 3; the mean answer was 2.07 for decisions made in weekend 1, and 2.13 for weekend 3. However, a *t*-test shows that there is no statistically significant mean difference between the survey answers. This indicates that the difference between the extent the AMs said that they agreed with proposed principles and decisions made in weekend 1 and after they were split into thematic groups in weekend 3 is not significant.

Figure 3 illustrates the degree to which the AMs felt they had influenced the decisions made in weekend 1, after they had been split into thematic groups in weekend 3, and online in weekends 4a–c. Using the same five-point scale as above, the extent the AMs thought that they influenced the decisions decreased, on average, over the course of the assembly; the mean answer was 2.12 for decisions made in weekend 1, 3.01 for weekend 3, and 2.90 for weekends 4a–c. The results of *t*-tests indicate the mean difference between the answers given after weekend 1 and 3, as well as the difference between weekends 1 and 4a–c, were statistically significant. This indicates that the extent the AMs thought they influenced the decisions reduced between weekend 1 and being split into thematic groups, and weekend 1 and the online weekends.



Figure 2. Extent assembly members (AMs) agreed with proposed principles and decisions made in Climate Assembly UK (CAUK).

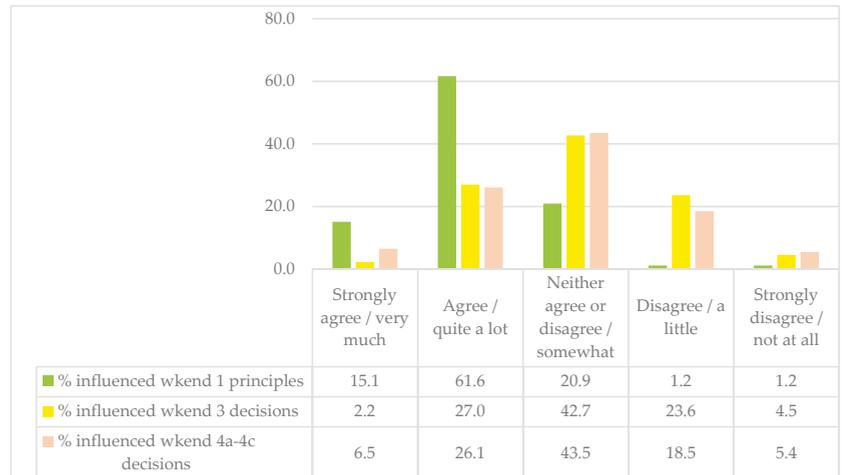


Figure 3. Extent assembly members (AMs) thought they influenced the decisions made in Climate Assembly UK (CAUK).

We might be tempted to conclude that in each case these are minority views, and that most AMs agreed with the decisions and thought that they had influenced them to some degree. However, the whole logic behind a citizens’ assembly is that they should be highly inclusive spaces. The fact that the extent AMs felt they influenced decisions before and after they were split into the thematic groups changed so much is cause for concern. Indeed, the researchers’ observational fieldnotes also noted that access to sufficient information was limited by splitting the AMs into three topic groups. Furthermore, it compromised the ability of the AMs to co-ordinate their recommendations. For example, decisions were being made about ‘how we travel’ whilst unaware of what decisions were being made on ‘what we buy’ and vice versa, as if these are unrelated topics that do not need to be harmonised in order to decarbonise effectively.

Concerns were also expressed in interviews with several of the civil servants who were tasked with briefing government ministers on the CAUK report. For one this was ‘probably the most problematic thing. Because ... you have to tell a minister that only actually 36 or 37 people voted on a certain thing. ... it’s hard to ... convince them of the

weight of it'. This concern was shared by another, who noted: 'Government might not do something because 17 out of 30 people said they voted for it.' Clearly, policy makers want to know what all the participants think about an issue and not just a segment of it. Indeed, this is the distinct advantage and purpose of a citizens' assembly having representative samples. Addressing the broad scope of the assembly further led to the production of a large number of recommendations (50 in total). This makes holding both Parliament and Government accountable in responding to all of the recommendations more challenging.

Dividing the assembly into thematic groups did have the positive consequence that some AMs got a more in-depth understanding of a particular topic, but this is at the expense of learning across the topics, being able to co-ordinate the recommendations, and enabling all AMs to endorse all the recommendations, which in turn can lead to politicians feeling less impetus to implement them. We now turn to consider some solutions to these perennial issues for mini-publics.

5.4. Democratizing Climate Assemblies

The AMs were given some opportunities to shape the course of CAUK. In weekend 3, AMs got to discuss if there was anything else on the topic of decarbonisation that they would like to tell Government and Parliament. There was also a board where members could log issues that they think should be considered but that were not on the agenda. The COVID-19 recovery and the path to net zero topics that were covered in the assembly came from AM suggestions. This indicates that AMs can make important agenda-setting decisions. Measures like this should be integrated throughout the assembly process and used instead of top-down design methods. Our evidence indicates that AMs would welcome such opportunities. For example, some AMs noted that they were confused when they returned for week 3; specifically, they reported that they were being asked to vote on items while unclear on their origin. Some 'scenarios' were provided by the expert leads for the AMs to vote on: e.g., for 'what we buy', AMs were presented with three possible futures, offering different emphases on efficiency, repairing and sharing, and using less stuff. Some AMs were unhappy that the expert leads had proposed the 'Future Scenarios' rather than the AMs. One AM said:

'I lost my way completely between week 2 and week 3. When we came back to week 3 we were going down paths that I had not consciously or subconsciously or to my awareness of anybody I spoke to about it had actually structured where the paths in week 3 had come from. We arrived at week 3 and were suddenly presented with alternatives that I personally didn't buy into because I hadn't been party to how we got there. I was having a little bit of difficulty if you like accepting that I was going to roll with it from then on To the point, where on the first vote that we did . . . I refused to participate because I didn't own them, I didn't own what was being asked of me.'

The fact that they felt unable to vote is quite damning, but assembly democratisation could combat these types of instances. We now move to discuss the implications of our findings, and the democratization of assembly agendas further.

6. Discussion

Our empirical study supports theoretical work on the fundamental importance [26] of agenda-setting in mini-publics. It does indeed determine many aspects of design of the assembly [25]. Problems with issue scope are not an unusual phenomenon in mini-publics. There are inevitable trade-offs that have to be made between depth and scope of evidence given the realities of budget limits in constraining the time allotted to a given mini-public. However, these problems are more acute in climate assemblies given the breadth and complexity of the issue [3,4,7].

There are potential solutions to some of the issues raised here. An obvious one is to give more time and resources to the deliberative process to allow sufficient space to give the subject-matter the full consideration it warrants. CAUK was run on a relatively tight budget (£560,000) and kept to a limited time period (originally of just four weekends,

that was extended by a further two due to the need to move online during the COVID-19 pandemic). Contrast this with the French climate assembly that had a budget of €5.4m and was given a longer time period (10 weekends) (although, despite this the French process also chose to use thematic groups [38,58]).

In CAUK, as with many previous cases [29–34], the determination of the focus of each topic group was done in a top-down manner; the parliamentary committees set the agenda and insisted on all dimensions being given equal treatment. To allay a lot of the concerns of assembly members about having more input into the process, thought should be given to introducing more democratic procedures into the assembly agenda and design. A better approach would have been to enable the AMs to refine the scope of the assembly themselves. While the AMs would not have been in a position to make these important agenda-setting decisions at the very start of the assembly [2,13], there is no reason why they could not be empowered to make these choices once they had become more informed about climate change and decarbonisation after the first weekend. Figure 1 suggests that AMs are sufficiently equipped to decide which aspects of decarbonisation interested them and mattered to them most reasonably early in the process. They would effectively reign in the scope of the assembly themselves by setting their own priorities.

This two-stage agenda setting process has several advantages, but comes with risks too. Firstly, the commissioning public authority (in the case of CAUK, the six select committees from the UK's House of Commons) gets to determine the broad agenda of the assembly. As opposed to a purely bottom-up mini-public agenda-setting processes, this means they would not be receiving recommendations on a policy area on which they had little interest in, no plans to legislate on, or had already made up their mind about [2,13]; all of which would negate being influenced by the assembly. Secondly, it would enable the AMs to determine the more specific remit that they will address; thereby affording policy makers greater insight into the priorities of an informed and representative portion of the public [27], as well as enabling the scope of the assembly to be reined in and avoiding some of the tensions, outlined above, the broad scope of CAUK caused. Thirdly, if AMs did decide that a split into thematic groups was appropriate to address the issue, it could have less impact on policy take-up as it would have been a decision taken by all the AMs themselves. Of course, the danger that the AMs take the remit of the assembly too far from the commissioning authority's interests and, in turn, reduces the potential for policy impact remains [59].

There are other risks to this two-stage agenda-setting process too. The AMs may not sufficiently refine the scope of the broad agenda given by the commissioning authority, and therefore fail to address it in the time available. Refining the agenda democratically may also prove very time consuming, compromising the capacity of the AMs to provide meaningful recommendations. We believe these challenges can be overcome through effective assembly design and facilitation. Lessons should also be learnt from other cases [5,9,11,21,22,38,58–60].

For example, in the Irish assemblies, they established an AMs' reference group, [30], in which representatives of the AMs provided suggestions on the itinerary of assembly meetings, the proposed expert witnesses, and the time given to areas to be discussed. The concern with this approach is that it undermines the equality of the AMs, but it is time efficient. Alternatively, a regional climate assembly from the UK was set a broad remit, but organizers enabled the participants to determine which aspects of climate change mitigation they wanted to focus on in the available time [60]. Moreover, we recommend more experimentation of new measures to democratise citizens' assemblies given the relatively small number of cases that have introduced these democratic measures.

7. Conclusions

In citizens' assemblies, trade-offs between the scope of the agenda, depth and breadth of learning, assembly duration and budgets are inevitable. Due to the unique nature of the issue, these tensions are more acute in climate assemblies, where there is a trend to

divide the assembly into topic groups to enable more of the vast issue to be covered [58]. Designers of climate assemblies should be aware that there are negative consequences to this approach. Our mixed method study of CAUK, that drew on surveys, interviews, and non-participant observation, found that dividing the AMs into different topic groups compromised the breadth of learning for many AMs and undermined their endorsement of recommendations from topic groups which they did not participate in. In turn, it has also hindered the potential of CAUK to influence UK climate policy as policy makers may feel less pressure to adopt recommendations coming from only a sample of the assembly, and thereby adding to the challenges for climate assemblies to influence policy [11,59].

A climate assembly cannot consider the whole issue of climate change, given it applies to every policy area, type of governance and aspect of life [3,4,7]; the scope has to be reined in somehow. We suggest a two-step approach to this. The commissioning authority should provide the broad remit of the assembly. This would help ensure the recommendations that they receive are aligned with their policy priorities and are on issues on which policy-makers do not already have a determined agenda. However, the assembly should be democratised to enable the AMs themselves to decide their own priorities and to have a say on the types of information they need to address them. Our evidence indicates that AMs would be well-equipped to do this quite early in the process after being provided background information on climate change. Inspiration from mini-publics that have used democratising techniques should be drawn on [30,60], but more experimentation is also required.

This is, of course, just one case study, and due to the absence of research in this area our study is exploratory and therefore more empirical evidence on this vital topic is clearly required. Given the number of climate assemblies occurring across Europe at present [5,9,11,21,22,38,58–60], many of which are implementing topic groups within the assembly, comparative analysis would therefore be welcome.

Nevertheless, given research on the scope of citizens' assemblies has been limited, focused on agency, largely normative, and has not specifically focused on climate assemblies, our case study analysis starts to fill an important gap. The remit of an assembly not only affects assembly design, but also how it is perceived by other political actors in the system.

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Article

Sustainability and Politics: Explaining the Emergence of the 2020 Budapest Climate Assembly

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Abstract: The relationship between political participation and the pursuit of sustainability at the local level has been investigated extensively in the literature. In this content, the emergence and extensive use of citizens' assemblies receive particular attention. Much research focuses on the functioning of these assemblies and potential impact in the community. However, we know very little about why such initiatives occur. This article fills that gap in the literature and aims to explain why a citizens' assembly on climate change was organized. It focuses on the Citizens' Assembly in Budapest (Hungary), organized in the fall of 2020 with randomly selected citizens. The findings illustrate that although civil society initiated the deliberative process, the prime mover of the Citizens' Assembly was political. Local politicians pursued this objective to fulfil their election pledges, ensure ideological consistency and promote sustainability.

Keywords: political participation; citizen engagement; political institutions; sustainability



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1. Introduction

Citizens' assemblies have gained momentum in the last two decades as they provide useful forums for high-quality deliberation and citizen decision-making [1]. There is great variety in the topics addressed by these deliberative mini publics throughout the world. Recently, citizens' assemblies have also been used in the field of climate change, mainly with the aim to identify existing problems and suggest specific policies. Earlier research shows how assemblies advance climate action, educate the citizenry, how proposals are generated (including the functioning of these meetings), and their consequences on decision-making [2–5]. In spite of this burgeoning literature, we know very little about why climate assemblies are organized. Understanding the emergence of citizens' assemblies is important for at least two reasons. On the one hand, it can shed light on the institutional and societal factors that favor the involvement of citizens in deliberation. Such knowledge will allow policy makers to act in broadening deliberation to additional policy areas. On the other hand, the analysis reflects the dynamic of deliberation on an issue that is increasingly salient.

This article aims to address this gap in the literature and seeks to explain why the citizens' assembly on climate change was organized in Budapest in 2020. Our quest for an answer is based on five potential drivers derived from the literature on deliberative mini-publics: the political interest of the promoters, their ideology, the desire to create a local identity, the pursuit of a broader economic interest for the community, and the desire to ensure sustainability. Budapest is an excellent case for analysis due to the differences in ideological orientation between local government and the central government, which are explained in detail in the following paragraph and in the research design section. Our qualitative analysis rests on a combination of document analysis (election manifestos,

policy documents and information documents) and six semi-structured interviews with politicians and experts involved in the process conducted between June and October 2020.

The city of Budapest is run by a political party that opposes the Hungarian Government. The city mayor Gergely Karácsony is the head of Dialogue for Hungary, which is the Hungarian green party, and he has been an environmental advocate for several years [6]. Karácsony emphasized the importance of participation in his electoral program, in which he claimed that the basic interest of the local government dictates that it should be addressed to the people of Budapest in as many areas as possible—be it community planning, involving the people of Budapest in the implementation of projects, or placing them in community care. In November 2019, the Municipality of Budapest declared a climate emergency, which resulted in the creation of a citizens' assembly in the autumn of 2020 in collaboration with the NGO DemNet. The aim was to identify what Budapest inhabitants should do to address the climate emergency.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The second section uses evidence from the literature to identify potential drivers to initiate the citizens' assembly. The third section briefly presents the research design with emphasis on the case selection, methods of data collection, and methods of data analysis. Next, we briefly describe the Budapest Climate Assembly. The fourth section includes an analysis of the factors that led to the emergence of this Assembly. The conclusions summarize the main findings and discuss avenues for further research.

2. Citizens' Assemblies on Climate Change

Citizens' assemblies are a form of deliberative mini publics that include a randomly selected body of citizens to reason together about an issue of public concern. They originate in the 1980s and emerged at the margin of the political system, gaining attention in the 2000s [7,8]. Citizens' assemblies aim to make recommendations to political leaders and illustrate how decision-making can follow an inclusive process of discussion considering all perspectives carefully in light of evidence [5]. For example, the Canadian assemblies on electoral reforms provided recommendations directly to the public at the regional and national level [3]. Similarly, Irish assemblies make recommendations on polarized constitutional issues such as same-sex marriage and abortion [9].

Gradually, an increasing number of central government institutions have started using citizens' assemblies in the decision-making process. In some instances, there are initiatives to institutionalize citizens' assemblies [10] in different forms. For example, to avoid politicians' tendency of cherry-picking issues and recommendations [11], some activists proposed radical propositions to create a new chamber in parliaments composed of randomly selected citizens [12].

In the field of climate, citizens' assemblies are organized to address the challenges in a particular way [13]. Through the prioritization of the commons over self-interest, the 'talk-centric' deliberative approach of citizens' assemblies can lead to support for ambitious climate policy solutions [14]. For example, the Irish Constitutional Convention discussed nine policy areas including climate change [4] and the Assembly participants decided on 13 policy recommendations that were 'significantly more radical than many expected' [15]. In October 2019, as part of Great National Debate, the French President invited 150 citizens to formulate proposals to fight against climate change. Discussed and amended during an eight-month deliberative democracy process, participants came up with 149 proposals [16]. In June 2019, the UK Government and Parliament passed a law committing the UK to reaching net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Commissioned by six select committees of the House of Commons, members of the Climate Assembly UK agreed to twenty-five underpinning principles and 50 recommendations for policy measures for achieving a balance between the amount of greenhouse gas emissions produced and the amount removed from the atmosphere [2].

While nation-states have struggled in recent years to work collectively and sometimes individually to mitigate climate change, sub-national units such as regions and cities

emerged as important sites of climate policy innovation. Earlier studies argue that the response to climate change globally can be best observed if we pay attention to sub-national government climate actions [17]. When it comes to climate policy innovations, underlying economic motivations, awareness of climate change, and political motivations also shape the decision-making processes [17].

In general, participatory democracy can play an important role when it comes to climate justice education. Climate activists view education as an extension of systemic change and propose different approaches that include “recognized agency and the politics of knowledge production as climate justice issues . . . through participatory democracy” [18]. These studies offer relevant insights into the functioning of these assemblies and their potential to impact decision-making across different contexts. However, they do not allow for comparative investigation of why citizens’ assemblies are established. In the next section of our literature review, we focus on main actors behind the inauguration of such assemblies and decisive contextual factors behind the process.

Why Citizens’ Assemblies?

This section identifies the reasons leading to the emergence of citizens’ assemblies in different policy fields across the world. Starting from the highest level of generality, deliberative practices are often used by political parties with several goals in mind. One of these is the possibility to provide people with genuine deliberation, characterized by importance given to people in the decision-making process, communication and learning processes. Another possibility is the use of deliberative practices by political parties to their own advantage: creating leverage in the political negotiation with other parties, improved communication with the electorate, or greater visibility that can lead to higher electoral support [19]. The instances in which deliberation has been initiated with manipulative purposes are limited mainly to intra-party processes [20,21].

When comparing three citizens’ assemblies on electoral reform (two regional assemblies in British Columbia and in Ontario and one at the national level in the Netherlands), Fournier and his colleagues [3] identified three reasons why they were created. First, politicians campaign on the promise to support citizens’ assemblies to boost their chances of winning an election. In British Columbia, Campbell, the leader of the Liberal Party, had promised to organize a citizens’ assembly when running for office. After being elected as the new premier, he was centrally responsible for its establishment. In Ontario, the citizens’ assembly was a politician’s initiative where premier McGuinty followed Campbell’s example. In the Netherlands, the minister affiliated with the D66 (Democrats 66) political party resigned due to the lack of support within the coalition for his legislative proposal to change the electoral law. Searching for a way to change the electoral system while strengthening the image of the party, his successor came up with the proposal to organize a citizens’ assembly. The plans were reluctantly accepted as the cost of keeping D66 in the coalition.

Sub-national governments in areas with a powerful sense of territorial distinctiveness often seek to intensify that uniqueness and to maximize and enhance their political autonomy. Scotland’s devolved institutions are relatively new, but they supply political representation for a historic and distinctive nation within the UK. The Scottish case best illustrates the enduring importance of institutional, fiscal and policy capacity but also the ways in which actors can overcome constraints by the proficient use of policy networks, skillful navigation of the multi-level policy environment, and by emphasizing its non-constitutional and natural energy resources. The case confirms that pioneering action is also driven by economic advantage and the exploitation of economic opportunities according to environmental principles, but economic motivations are certainly more evident than ‘green’ ambitions within the Scottish case [22].

Beyond the already discussed strategic promises or behaviors, there is also the possibility of ideological match between political parties and the deliberative function of a citizens’ assembly. In this sense, the entry of the Green Parties within the government

coalition of the two regions in Belgium were a decisive push for the promotion of deliberative tools. These parties convinced their coalition partners to establish deliberative processes [23]. The network of activists that emerged in the second phase played a crucial role in initiating citizens' assemblies at different levels of government and political actors were gradually convinced.

In Europe, most frequently left-wing or green parties initiate participatory democratic actions [24]. In the case of Belgium, political parties that are in favor of participatory democratic innovations are post-materialist parties who "share a cosmopolitan vision of society" [25]. These parties underline the fact that the increased participation of citizens in the processes of public policymaking favors an investment and a renewal of citizens' interest in politics.

Green parties have reformed their own internal organizations to be more inclusive and advocate for larger scale democratic changes. Due to their pioneering role, some claim that green parties represent democratic issues most effectively, and most importantly, they are the most competent and credible delegates of these concerns: "The German Green party argued that political work should not be just confined to the representatives. Instead, it should also be considered as a citizens' job" [24]. While participatory democracy is present in green party manifestos, deliberative democracy appears less. In the case of Belgian green parties, there are two aspects in which the parties advocate for deliberative democracy: to revitalize and irrigate the representative system and to create real local deliberative assemblies.

According to the two Belgian green parties, participatory democratic implementations can strengthen and re-establish the links between citizens and the political authorities and also improve the legitimacy of public decisions. However, it has to be noted that in Belgium, parties that are most in favor of participatory democratic innovations (referendum, popular consultations, etc.) are anti-establishment far-right parties [25].

Against this backdrop, building of a territory's political identity can also be an important motivation of the German-speaking community of Belgium behind creating a permanent citizens' assembly. In this case, the subtle connections between the citizens' assembly and the local German community can be explained by the socio-political features of the minority group and by the fact that the aim of the assembly was to support identity building [10].

Another study suggests that the level of citizens' capacity to understand and contribute to complex policy issues can be an obstacle when planning to organize a climate assembly. To this, we can add two other potential obstacles: how politicized and adversarial the issue of climate change is, and the role of the media in citizen assemblies. Even though technically the citizens are in charge, their destiny is in the hands of key elites. Accordingly, "processes such as the CA need to be designed, understood and communicated as part of a broader consultation program" [26].

The Irish Citizen Assembly is a highly praised deliberative democratic innovation that was able to respond to the climate crisis. In 2011, Irish academics ran a pilot citizen assembly with the premise that such events can connect Irish citizens to politicians and increase their democratic participation [27]. From 2013 to 2014, this forum "deliberated on potential changes to the constitution that could then be put to a wider population in a referendum" [27]. Climate change became a topic of the assembly in 2017. According to Devaney et al. [27], Ireland was famously disappointing when it came to climate change, as local civil society groups called Ireland "climate laggard" and not without reason as the country "repeatedly ranked as the worst performing EU member state in the annual Climate Change Performance Index" [27]. The Irish case demonstrates the importance of citizen climate assemblies as it presents how governments can become more inclusive and collaborative when including citizen opinions in the decision-making processes. However, deliberation is only one form of public engagement that must be combined with other sources, such as education or communication, but in the proper context, "citizens' assemblies can facilitate societal buy-in for tough policy decisions by including the concerns and

ideas of citizens in policymaking, increasing the legitimacy of decisions and actions taken. For citizens, they can represent a unique learning environment and help to re-connect the public with democratic processes” [27].

This set of studies give some hints about why (or why not) citizens’ assemblies are created in different contexts, but they do not rely on a systematic empirical inquiry. In order to present the diversified reasons behind citizen assemblies, we collected the emerging factors and compared them in the case studies (see Table 1).

Table 1. The Promoters of Citizens’ Assemblies and the Main Reasons Behind Them.

Topic	Promoters	Reasons
Electoral reform	Leaders of political parties	Election pledges Greater visibility and electoral support
	Experts and activists	Election pledges
Permanent citizens’ assembly	German speaking minority	Building a territory’s political identity
Controversial policies: same-sex marriage, abortion, climate change	Academics	Ideological match
	Politicians	Election pledges
	Citizens	National identity
Climate change	Government	Election pledges
		Economic interest
		Sustainability

This theoretical section indicates that citizens’ assemblies remain top-down processes. There are several drivers behind the creation of assemblies that will be closely investigated when turning to the Budapest case. Our analysis seeks to understand which of the factors outlined in Table 1 favored the establishment of the Budapest Climate Assembly. In this sense, we distinguish between the political interest of the promoters, their ideology, the creation of a local identity, the pursuit of a broader economic interest for the community, and environmental sustainability.

3. Research Design

Our analysis focuses on an influential case [28] from Central and Eastern Europe where political parties often lack stable connections with local associations [29]. We focus on Hungary because it has a political system in which both the relations among parties and the relationship of the party system with its environment is affected by populist polarization [30]. Hungary has some experience with direct democracy but the spread of democratic innovations to complement the institutions of representative democracy is limited. As such, the country is the least likely case in which citizens’ assemblies are expected to be convened for community decisions. In particular, Budapest contributes to these characteristics due to its local government that opposes the central government. Such a situation would expect the political fight to be on the agenda at the expense of citizens’ involvement in the community.

To understand the reasons behind the establishment of the citizens’ assembly, we use a combination of document analysis and semi-structured interviews. The documents consist of the election manifestos used in the 2019 municipal elections and the climate related policy documents (e.g., the draft of the climate strategies of Budapest), and documents that were circulated to invite citizens to take part in the process. To complement the information from these documents, we conducted six semi-structured interviews with politicians and experts involved in the process: the Mayor of Budapest, the Deputy Mayor, the advisor to the Mayor, one city councilor in charge of the process, or the main organizer from the NGO in charge, and one facilitator. The face-to-face interviews were conducted in June–October 2020 (Appendix A).

The interview guide included eight main themes: the role of the interviewee in relation to the citizens’ assembly, the interviewee’s understanding of the context and

purpose of the assembly, reflections on the content and structure of the assembly, reflections on its practicalities (accessibility, structure), reflections on how the process enabled or hindered participation, the assembly's impact on climate change, and expectations on outcomes from the assembly. To analyze the content of answers to interviews we used narrative analysis [31]. The aim was to achieve an understanding of complex phenomena by explaining the richness and complexity of a real setting [32].

4. An Overview of the Budapest Climate Assembly

In November 2019, as one of the first measures of the new city administration, Budapest declared a climate emergency, which was in line with the approach of many other European cities [33]. In the summer of 2020, the Municipality of Budapest invited the public to discuss how to deal with the climate emergency. This commitment to community planning that involve citizens was novel because it relied largely on the participation of activists and experts. Although the Citizen's Assembly on Climate Change was commissioned by the City Hall, the congregation process was not designed for their political needs or expectations, but it was developed by civil society members [34]. It was organized in September 2020 and invited 50 randomly selected citizens to better understand the issue of climate change from politicians, experts, and leaders of different NGOs, and to suggest potential solutions for the Municipality of Budapest. The community meetings were coordinated by the DemNet Foundation for Development of Democratic Rights with the participation of several civil society experts and with the support of the British Sortition Foundation, the European Climate Fund, and the Municipality of Budapest.

4.1. Selection Process and Participants

In August 2020, 10,000 residents of Budapest received a personal invitation to the Climate Assembly. The names and addresses of the guests were requested by the Budapest Municipality from the address register of the Ministry of the Interior within the framework of group data provision. From the hundreds of respondents in Budapest who responded to the invitation, DemNet Foundation had already randomly selected 50 people who were over 18 years old and reflected the population in a way that was representative of age, gender, education and place of residence. The people could indicate their intention to participate on an online interface. During the registration, applicants could ask Budapest Municipality for help by phone or in person via customer service. During the registration process, in addition to their contact information, applicants were required to provide their education as well. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the recruitment began later than planned, which presumably reduced the response rate. During the second step of the selection process, DemNet compiled a list of 50 participants who represented the population of the capital over 18 years of age by gender, age, education, and place of residence, in a representative random selection of applicants. Due to the pandemic, many withdrew or did not show up in the last few days before the first weekend of the Assembly and due to the shortness of time the organizers were not able to replace them. As a result, a total of 39 people attended the Budapest Climate Assembly [33].

4.2. The Organizers, Process and Topics

The citizens' assembly was organized in two weekends (16–17 and 26–27 September 2020). Two senior experts were responsible for the professional program of the Climate Assembly. The experts are recognized for their knowledge on the topic discussed at the Assembly weekends; they have thorough insight into the topic from both mitigation and adaptation perspectives, are familiar with other experts in the related fields, and are committed to an objective and comprehensive information sharing [33]. The lead experts in cooperation with the lead facilitators compiled the professional program of the Assembly, coordinated the work of the experts and interest groups speaking at the meetings, participated in the development of the program and were present during the weekends. The events were led by two senior facilitators, with the help of a total of eight

trained, independent facilitators working to ensure that the work proceeded effectively and according to a pre-planned process. Table 2 highlights the topics, meetings and the output of the assembly.

Table 2. Budapest Citizens’ Assembly on Climate Change: Topics, Meetings and Outputs.

Topic	Meeting and Discussion	Output
Climate change	1.5 h	1 recommendation
Energy use of households	1.5 h	1 recommendation
Transport and climate change	1.5 h	1 recommendation
Health and climate change	1.5 h	-
Sustainable rainwater management	1.5 h	1 recommendation
Green surfaces	1.5 h	2 recommendations
Social adaptation	1.5 h	2 recommendations
Visions about the future of Budapest	2 h	-

Notes: The report was sent to the City Council on 11 November 2020. The reaction of the City Council: The draft strategy on Climate Change of the City Council (published in January 2021) accepted all proposals and included them into the text. The final document was accepted in March 2021.

During the first weekend (16–17 September), experts from different areas of climate change and other stakeholders (e.g., activists of Fridays for Future) gave factual presentations to the participants about climate change and its effects. The presentation topics included the meaning of climate change, opportunities to reduce household emissions, transport and climate, and social adaptation. The participants worked in small groups assisted by trained facilitators in continuous collaboration with each other. During the second weekend, the participants developed 21 proposals on how the Municipality of Budapest should respond to the climate emergency. At the end of the third meeting day (September 26), the participants selected the proposals they considered the best out of the 21, which were later discussed in detail the following day. Finally, members of the assembly weighed the pros and cons of eight proposals, gathered other considerations for the proposals, and voted on the extent to which they supported the joint deliberations [33].

4.3. The Drivers for Budapest Climate Assembly

The document analysis reveals the environmental sustainability and economic development of the area as crucial drivers behind the formation of Budapest Climate Assembly. From the sustainability dimension, the environment program for 2017–2021 drafted by the City Council indicates strong policy motivations. The document states that the cause of climate change is rooted in current human activities [35]. Based on that assessment, most of the environmental reports for the city [36] explicitly identified air pollution as one of the major problems with an impact on climate change. The air quality is influenced primarily by the emissions of domestic heating and from transport. Road traffic grew by an average of 1–1.5% per year between 2014 and 2019. According to the report, in comparison with other European large cities of similar size, Budapest is moderately equipped with green surfaces for public benefits and degraded green spaces currently do not fulfill their recreational and conditioning role. Based on these documents, the City Council took several policy measures: it approved the development of green surfaces through the Budapest Green Infrastructure Concept, it declared a climate emergency, and it created a carbon neutrality plan.

The Budapest Climate Assembly was convened as a continuation of the carbon neutrality plan with the aim of contributing to the new climate strategy. The assembly was intended to complement the three institutional measures described above. It aimed to gather public opinion and involve citizens directly in the matter of environmental sustainability that is directly derived from human activity. The set-up of the assembly was the practical component of the initiative taken by the City Council that was encouraged by the activist profile of many people in Budapest. For example, in September 2019 during

the third global climate strike, thousands of protesters marched on the streets of Budapest. This was followed by many citizens becoming active online. Both events were covered extensively by the media and had a social impact that was comparable to other European cities where similar events took place [37]. As such, the establishment of the Budapest Climate Assembly followed an increase in citizens growing highly interested in the topic of sustainability.

There were also economic reasons behind the assembly's set-up. These reasons are related to the European Union's (EU) Green Deal that was created for its climate protection efforts, which sets out the necessary economic steps for member states. The Green Deal is an integral part of the European Commission's strategy to implement the United Nation's 2030 Agenda and the sustainable development goals [38]. The EU expects its member states to have an overall climate-neutral economy by 2050, to replace the use of natural gas entirely and to ensure that transport is entirely electric. To this end, Hungary requires around HUF 50 trillion, which is the equivalent of approximately 140 billion € [39]. The Municipality of Budapest relies heavily on EU financial support for climate protection actions, which is not surprising given the extensive budget of the European Green Deal and the political circumstances in which the Mayor belongs to a party that is in opposition to the central government. The planned Climate Strategy and Sustainable Energy and the Climate Action Plan of Budapest indicate the EU and the EU tenders as the main sources of funding [40]. By adapting to EU standards, the local government in Budapest sets a climate strategy that can be implemented with European funds. Once this priority was in place, the Budapest Climate Assembly was a natural step forward.

A close look at the main political actors involved in the process indicates a combination of election pledges, ideological match between the topic of the Assembly and attitudes oriented toward citizen participation. The current mayor of Budapest was elected after two rounds of primaries. The primaries forged unity among the fractured opposition parties and gained their support for his program. His manifesto promised that in case of major investments and developments, he would use the tools of community planning [6]. Unlike other Hungarian politicians, Karácsony devoted a whole chapter on climate protection in his program, in which he discussed several environmental issues such as energy efficiency, zero carbon emission, and ecological cultural shift. Since the Mayor belongs to a party that has environment at its core, there is high ideological consistency between the party's goals and his manifesto.

There are reasons to have the citizens assembly go beyond election pledges and ideological matching. The Mayor appears to believe in democratic innovations as a key tool to address the needs of the community. The report drafted about the meetings of the Budapest Climate Assembly presents the speech delivered by the Mayor to the audience during the opening session. The Mayor explicitly outlined the importance of such tools to address an important policy dimension: "The issue is climate change, which we hear and talk a lot about, but we may still not understand exactly the extent to which it poses a threat to us and to future generations. The tool we use is democracy" [33]. His strong commitment to the process was also reflected in an interview conducted with the Mayor. His emphasis on the importance of citizens' involvement reflects a participatory approach that the Mayor promotes:

The logic of participation is that it is insatiable. When you open a door, people come in through it and then they do not want to go out anymore. This is why participation should be expanded continuously, which is why I think we need to proceed in careful steps (Interview 2).

The Deputy Mayor of Budapest in charge of smart city projects promised in his manifesto to involve the widest possible range of society in urban decision-making as much as possible and named community budgets as a means of facilitation (Momentum, 2019). After being elected, the two city leaders remain committed to their electoral pledges. As part of the annual budget, the citizens' assembly process is controlled by the Mayor or a designated Deputy-Mayor. Beyond electoral pledges, another reason for supporting

the Budapest Climate Assembly is that the City Council consists of several newly elected councilors who experiment with democratic innovations to increase their party's local embeddedness through networking.

The report written about the meetings of the Budapest Climate Assembly presents the speech delivered by the Deputy Mayor in which he expressed the reason for organizing the deliberative event:

We will now talk about a very complex issue: what to do with climate change in general, and how we can reduce its effects here in Budapest. Experts also have an opinion on this, but it is very important that we try to get the opinion of the people of Budapest on this as well [33].

This orientation toward people and the willingness to go beyond representative politics is also reflected in the interview conducted with the Deputy Mayor. He emphasized once again the importance of public voice in the decision-making process not only in the context of the Budapest Climate Assembly but in general:

As a city leader I do not sit behind thick walls, but I go to meet people, I put my skin and my arguments in the game, I talk face to face with those whose fate is concerned. In an effort it also means that I try to convince the officials working here to go and talk to people too, to have interaction between the office and citizens (Interview 1).

4.4. Civil Society and Political Institutions

The interviews reveal a nuanced picture in which the initiative for the citizens' assembly belongs to the civil society. It was a two-step process in which the NGOs started by deciding the content of the deliberative practice. One of the main organizers explains that two NGOs—DemNet from Hungary and the Sortition Foundation in the UK—played a crucial role in the event. Unlike many cases in which political institutions initiate the deliberative process and invite non-political organizations to coordinate it, the Budapest Climate Assembly had a reverse scenario. The Sortition Foundation won an international grant to organize a citizens' assembly in Hungary, it contacted DemNet as a partner to coordinate and facilitate, and both civil society organizations had to look for a municipality that was open to collaboration. They received "a positive response from the Budapest City Council because they are dedicated to increasing deliberative and participatory methodology in their work" (Interview 4). Using a citizens' assembly for decision making was important for the NGOs because it tries to promote an alternative approach to decision-making: "we try to achieve some sort of multiplication, to invite observers from other municipalities, so they can see that it works well in any given issue, and to hopefully hold more of these CA-s" (Interview 5).

The interaction between civil society and political institutions created favorable momentum for the deliberative practice. Nevertheless, the topic was chosen by the funder, the organization that gave the grant to the Sortition Foundation, as acknowledged by two interviewees working in two different departments in the City Council. One of the interviewees explained that the topic was relatively open for discussion and steered toward "climate change since the funder had a very strong request that climate change as such should appear at the meeting" (Interview 6). The same issue is confirmed by another respondent who provides a detailed picture:

"I think there was a limitation in their funding . . . the limitation was that it needed to be around climate issues, but it was kind of flexible. So, there was a time when we were discussing talking about traffic in Budapest and other related topics, but then we decided to go for a more generic question, which climate emergency and the question what Budapest should do about it". (Interview 3)

The second step is the one in which political institutions react to the proposals of civil society organizations. In doing so, they use the initiative to fit their general approach—outlined in the previous sub-section—and pursue specific goals. The timing of the event was set according to the policy needs of the City Council: "For us, it was important to organize it before the fall of 2020 because the municipality is working on changing or updating

the climate strategy” (Interview 6). The deliberative event could serve the specific goal of framing the communication about climate change along the lines of citizens’ involvement: “First, we needed it because of the climate strategy, but second I think it is a very good tool for us to frame the conversation about climate change in Hungary [. . .] It is something we need to talk to people about” (Interview 3). This approach is in line with earlier findings about the need for citizens’ assemblies to be communicated as part of a broader consultation program [26]. There are indications that the communication strategy was effective at least from the political institution’s perspective: “We published news statements right after the event, I saw it today in one of the papers, and I was really impressed because those were exactly the messages I wanted to see about climate change” (Interview 3).

Another specific goal driving the establishment of the assembly was the aim to gather public support for the topic. According to the main organizer of DemNet, the aim was to reach out to media outlets. In order to make the event public, the lectures of the invited experts and all materials provided by stakeholders were posted on the DemNet website and on different social media platforms (Interview 4). One respondent explained that the municipality knew the necessary steps, but it wanted people to support the climate change actions and to understand what should be done. The deliberative event was useful for the local political institution to raise awareness around issues and to see how the problems can be addressed. The respondent explicitly argued that all the proposals received from the Assembly had already been covered by previous discussions in the City Council. The politicians knew what had to be done, but the Budapest Climate Assembly was essential to gain general support for the solutions and issues to be addressed (Interview 3).

5. Conclusions

This article aimed to explain why the citizens’ assembly on climate change was organized in Budapest in 2020. We started from several potential causes derived from the literature. Our qualitative analysis confirms some of the earlier findings in the literature. It shows that the Budapest Climate Assembly was determined by a combination of election pledges, ideological match, pursuit of economic interests, and the desire to achieve environmental sustainability at the local level. More precisely, the elected Mayor of Budapest belongs to a party that has the environment at its core. During the election campaign for local elections, he promised to organize participatory events and to address climate change. In addition to these converging factors, the priorities of the local government with respect to environment were strengthened by the possibility of gaining access to European funds. This possibility could contribute to the development of the local community at low costs for the municipality if EU priorities regarding climate change are reflected in policies.

Equally important, the findings complement and nuance earlier conclusions about citizens’ assemblies. The emergence of the Budapest Climate Assembly is different from other similar processes in its bottom-up approach. Instead of being proposed by the municipality—with all the above-mentioned goals in mind—it was initiated by two large civil society organizations. The NGOs received international funding and selected the City Council of Budapest because of its commitment to participatory tools of decision making. The two NGOs decided the design and the topic, and following funders’ priorities, the city administration used the opportunity to achieve two specific goals that were not gauged by earlier research. The answers from interviews illustrate that the municipality saw the deliberation on climate change as the avenue to convey the message about this specific policy to the broader population and to garner public support for their decisions. This is in line with earlier research that pointed in the direction of increased legitimacy for representative institutions when using deliberative practices [41–43]. The municipality hoped that the assembly would have an educative role for the citizenry and could be used as a springboard to communicate the saliency of the issue within the community. Both expectations are characteristics of deliberative democracy [44], which means that representative political institutions have an accurate perception about how this tool works.

The generalizability of these findings is limited to the single-case study covered here. Nevertheless, we believe it can have broader implications for the study of deliberative democracy. At a theoretical level, we provide the bases for an analytical model that can explain the emergence of citizens' assemblies on climate change (and not only) in the future. This is the first systematic study seeking to identify the causes leading to the emergence of such a deliberative practice. The results allow the development of a framework for analysis in which alternative explanations can be tested against each other and causal mechanisms are explored in detail. None of the explanations outlined by our empirical evidence is context sensitive and they can be easily replicated by further studies.

At an empirical level, this case is another example of how deliberative practices can complement the mechanisms of representative democracy. It brings two elements of novelty. First, the identification of new reasons for which citizens' assemblies are formed is a relevant addition to the existing state-of-the-art. Second, we show how the assembly had a bottom-up formation as opposed to the usual top-down process that characterizes other citizens' assemblies. The initial idea about the assembly emerged among local politicians and the political factor was essential in starting a discussion about its implementation. Nevertheless, its implementation is almost exclusively driven by civil society organizations, which took the major decisions from the selection of participants to the topics to be covered. This means that civil society has an effective avenue to promote citizens' engagement in the decision-making process and that political institutions are responsive to civil society initiatives. This is particularly relevant for a salient topic like climate change that can affect future generations.

Overall, our study can contribute more to theory-building and to a lesser extent to theory-testing. One limitation of this analysis is the absence of insights from ordinary participants to the Budapest Climate Assembly or from broader stakeholders, e.g., trade unions, private companies etc. Equally important, we focus on an assembly conveyed to fulfil clear purposes, as part of a broader strategy, which may raise difficulties of comparison with deliberative practices with a loose goal. Further research can build on our findings, address these limitations and seek to test the explanatory model developed to other contexts. One possible avenue is a comparative analysis across several types of assemblies and political systems, to identify whether the determinants identified in this article hold. Such a comparison would allow the isolation of systemic causes such as the type of political system or the ideological positioning of the party in office. Another direction for future studies can involve participants' perspectives. The citizens attending climate assemblies can be asked about what they consider driving the emergence of this deliberative practice. Their answers can be compared with an objective assessment of the causes or what the organizers claim. Such a comparison can shed light on how accurate citizens see the general picture that favors their involvement in decisions that can change their communities.

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Appendix A. The List of Interviews Used in the Analysis (in Chronological Order)

Interview Code	Position	Age	Date and Duration of the Interview
Interview 1	Deputy Mayor	53	15 June 2020, 38 min
Interview 2	Mayor	45	30 June 2020, 24 min
Interview 3	Advisor to the Mayor of Budapest on Citizen Participation	29	28 July 2020, 29 min
Interview 4	DemNet, Main Organizer	32	3 August, 2020, 28 min
Interview 5	DemNet, Facilitator	38	7 September 2020, 25 min
Interview 6	Counsellor at the City's Department of Climate and Environment	40	30 October 2020, 42 min

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