



Strengthening Democratic Governance
for Climate Transitions

D5.1 - THE IMPACT OF DELIBERATIVE MINI-PUBLICS: LESSONS FROM BELGIUM, IRELAND, AND SWEDEN

WP5 – Institutions for Deliberative Participation



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3. Short summary of results (<250 words)










This report studies the impact of deliberative mini-publics (DMPs) on climate action and democratic governance. It presents a novel analytical framework for understanding impact, which integrates components of the RETOOL Analytical Framework (Brawley-Cheshworth et al., 2025) and the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA) Impact Evaluation Framework (Demska et al., 2024). This framework is used to carry out a systematic review of 121 articles on climate change and energy transition focused DMPs, which highlights gaps in research on the impact of DMPs on justice and accountability, as well on the impact of DMPs on expertise/ resources and thinking. The framework is also used to guide case studies of DMPs in Belgium, Sweden, and Ireland. These case studies were chosen to allow for exploration of a range of national contexts and innovations in DMP practice and are informed by semi-structured interviews and primary analysis of DMP recommendations. They explore not only the impact of the DMPs, but also the extent to which the DMPs were institutionalised or embedded into national climate governance and contributed to governance innovation. Takeaways for academics and policymakers on how to understand and enhance the impact of DMPs are presented in the final section. They emphasise the need for strong political coupling and commitment, effective and innovative communication, and careful consideration of the purpose of DMPs within democratic climate governance.

4. Evidence of accomplishment

This report.

Preface

The overall goal of the RETOOL project is to advance our understanding of how to address the twin challenges of responding to the climate imperative while strengthening and reinvigorating democratic governance. The project has four overarching objectives: (i) To deepen our understanding of the relationship between democratic governance and the climate imperative by developing a novel analytical framework and creating new empirical underpinnings, including important new open-access datasets; (ii) To understand how a variety of democratic institutions across Europe are responding to the climate challenge, including learning lessons from history and studying new and innovative democratic practices; (iii) To contribute to reinvigorating democratic governance in Europe by developing and synthesising new knowledge and insights on climate democracy, and presenting them in a range of high-impact formats; and (iv) To serve as a bridge between academic research on climate democracy innovations and policymakers and practitioners, as well as civil society and the wider public. RETOOL brings together an international and interdisciplinary consortium, with partners from Western Europe (Ireland, UK, Belgium, Austria), Northern Europe (Finland), Eastern Europe (Estonia), and Southern Europe (Italy, Greece), combining expertise in political science, political sociology, deliberative democracy, environmental law, European studies, and public administration. The consortium includes a democracy practitioner foundation (DDF), and all partners are closely associated with practitioner and civil society networks and involved in hands-on activities. RETOOL will be undertaken by a mature, settled consortium that has significant experience of working together, with six of our nine partners core members of the EU-funded Jean Monnet Network GreenDeal-NET.

Consortium Partner	Acronym	Country	Logo
Dublin City University	DCU	IR	
Vrije Universiteit Brussel	VUB	BE	
Università degli studi di Trento	UNITN	IT	
Universiteit Gent	UGent	BE	
Universität für Bodenkultur Wien	BOKU	AT	
University of Eastern Finland	UEF	FI	
HOLISTIC S.A.	HOL	EL	
Praxis Think Tank	DDF	EE	
London School of Economics and Political Science	LSE	UK	

Executive Summary

Deliberative mini-publics (DMPs) that combine random selection, learning, and deliberation, such as citizens' assemblies and juries, have gained popularity in recent years as an approach to engage citizens on climate change and related energy transitions. There is a vast body of literature on the theoretical underpinnings of DMPs and their design. However, knowledge of their impact remains fragmented.

This report seeks to further our understanding of the role that deliberative democratic innovation can play in strengthening democratic climate governance. It does so through a systematic review of academic research on climate change and energy transition focused DMPs and three empirical case studies. The analysis is based on a novel analytical framework designed to capture the impact of DMPs on climate action and democratic governance. It combines the analytical framework developed by RETOOL to understand the linkages between climate change and democracy, and the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA) Impact Evaluation Framework that was designed to assess climate-related impacts of citizens' assemblies.

The systematic review of the literature on climate and energy focused DMPs draws on 121 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters and uses the analytical framework developed for this report to identify gaps in the research on the impact of DMPs. It shows that, to date, the focus in research has been on the impact of DMPs on ways of acting (e.g. on climate change policy and policy outcomes), meaning insufficient attention has been paid to the impacts of DMPs on ways of thinking or expertise and resources available for governance. There has also been insufficient attention on the impact of DMPs on the justice and accountability of climate governance. The review also highlights a shift in research towards more systematic analyses of DMPs and a growing focus on the origins of DMPs. Lastly, in policy practice, the review shows that DMPs are being delivered in more territories and scales of governance, and evidence of experimentation with digital technologies to support DMPs.

To address gaps in our understanding of impacts of climate and energy focused DMPs, the report conducts empirical case studies of citizens assemblies in Belgium, Sweden, and Ireland. The case study on Belgium focuses on the Brussels Citizens' Assembly on Climate, the world's first permanent climate assembly. The case study on Sweden focuses on the Swedish Citizens' Assembly on Climate, or Medborgarråd om klimatet (MoK), a civil-society organised assembly seeking to depolarise public discourse on climate change. And the case study on Ireland focuses on the 2016-2018 Citizens' Assembly, the 2022-2023 Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (CABL) and the 2022 Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (CYPABL). Thus, the case studies analyse the impacts of DMPs across a range of national contexts and consider how a range of innovations, including the institutionalisation of DMPs, shapes their impact.

The analysis shows that across the case studies, and particularly in Belgium and Sweden, the citizens' assemblies considered have had a greater impact on ways of thinking and expertise and resources than they have on ways of acting. This is at odds with the findings in the systematic literature review, suggesting there is an incongruence between the expected and observed impacts of DMPs. It implies that more attention should be paid to how we capture non-policy related impacts of DMPs; new models should be developed to capture impacts on ways of thinking.

The findings also raise the question of whether we need to re-evaluate our understanding of the value of DMPs. To date, the argument for climate and energy focused DMPs tends to be that they can or should shape climate policy. However, the Swedish case study shows that DMPs can be designed from the outset to engender impacts on opinions and discourse. Coupled with evidence for DMPs' ability to shift thinking about key characteristics of climate democracy in Belgium and Ireland, it suggests that proponents and organisers of DMPs could benefit from updating their arguments and objectives for DMPs, so that they focus on potential impacts beyond policy change, e.g. their potential to help depolarise public discourse around climate change.

The case studies suggest that institutionalisation (the process of integrating DMPs into governance systems) and resulting levels of embeddedness into governance systems matter for the impact of DMPs. The findings show that the Brussels assembly is highly institutionalised, but not strongly embedded; the DMPs in Ireland are not formally institutionalised, but politically and culturally embedded; and the MoK was neither institutionalised nor embedded. The contrasting levels of embeddedness and policy impact across the three case studies highlight the importance of political commitment behind DMPs as well as public awareness of and engagement with DMPs. It is clear that these are necessary factors for policy impact and for DMPs to become politically and culturally embedded in climate governance; formal institutionalisation of DMPs is important but insufficient on its own.

The report concludes with key takeaways for policy actors interested in organising future DMPs as follows. First, if DMPs are to have policy impact, they need to make policy-relevant and actionable recommendations, meaning DMPs should be timely and deliberate on salient issues. Second, DMPs need to be backed by strong political commitment from across the political spectrum. Organisers of DMPs should seek cross-party support well before the start of a DMP and carefully consider the political context in which the DMP will operate. Third, DMPs need to be backed by effective initiatives to inform and engage the wider public. This could include supporting assembly members to speak about their experiences of the process, allowing the wider public to comment on or feed ideas into the process using digital platforms, or tapping into pop culture. Fourth, policy actors should pay more attention to the non-policy related impacts of DMPs, including how to communicate them. It is clear that DMPs can have a transformative effect on the discourse and opinions of participants; efforts should be made to capture and transfer this effect to the wider public. Finally, policy actors should carefully consider the purpose of DMPs; they should not be seen as an all-encompassing solution, but rather as one promising tool among other tools for public participation that should be deployed when appropriate.

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1. Introduction

Addressing the climate and ecological crisis requires deep and rapid economic and social transformation that will have a significant impact on citizens' lives (Thomas, 2024). At the same time, democratic institutions are facing a crisis of legitimacy, with levels of trust declining across the EU (Van Beek, 2019 and Merkel 2014). Therefore, to enhance the acceptability, quality, and justice of climate policies, it is necessary to meaningfully engage citizens in decision-making processes (Smith, 2024).

In recent years deliberative mini-publics (DMPs), have gained popularity as an approach to engage citizens on complex issues including climate change and related energy transitions (Smith, 2024). These institutions have emerged across Europe at the local and national levels, with prominent examples including the French Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (2019-2020) and Climate Assembly UK (2020). They have also begun to evolve, with recent innovations including the first permanent citizens' assembly on climate in Brussels (2019) and the first Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss in Ireland (2022) (Smith, 2025).

Box 1: Defining Deliberative Mini-Publics

Deliberative mini-publics (DMPs) are a type of institution for deliberative participation. They are processes that “combine **random selection** and **deliberation**, including citizens' assemblies, citizens' juries, consensus conferences, and deliberative polling” (Boswell et al., 2023, p.184). This makes them different from other participatory mechanisms, which rely on large numbers of self-selected participants and/ or encourage a range of opportunities for engagement.

DMPs are characterized by three phases: a learning phase in which participants learn more about the issues they are being asked to deliberate on, including through presentations by experts and stakeholders; a deliberation phase in which they engage in small group and plenary discussions, supported by facilitators; and a decision-making phase in which participants collectively come to conclusions, often in the form of recommendations for policymakers.

There is a vast body of literature on the theoretical underpinnings of DMPs, which are rooted in deliberative democracy theory (Niemeyer, 2013), and their design (Setälä and Smith, 2019). Despite growing interest in the “macro-political impact” of DMPs (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006), however, our knowledge of their impact on policy and policy outcomes and democratic governance remains fragmented. Yet understanding the impact of DMPs, and the factors that enhance or hinder that impact, is critical for informing policy making.

This report seeks to address this issue, and to further our understanding of the role that democratic innovation can play in strengthening democratic climate governance, through a systematic review of literature on climate-change and energy transition focused DMPs and case studies of three DMPs.

A novel analytical framework designed to capture the impact of DMPs on climate action and democratic governance is presented in Section 2. It integrates the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA) Impact Evaluation Framework (Demeski et al., 2024) and the RETOOL Analytical Framework, which identifies the core characteristics of democracy in the context of climate change (Brawley-Cheshworth et al., 2025),. This is followed by the systematic literature review (Section 3) and case studies of several citizens assemblies (Sections 4-6).

As well as considering the impacts of DMPs, this report investigates the institutionalisation of DMPs and their potential to promote governance innovation, since these are key areas of interest in the field of deliberative democracy. More information about these ideas and the methods used to explore them can be found in Section 2.2.



The case studies chosen for this report allow exploration of a range of national contexts and innovations. First, the case study on Belgium, which focuses on the Brussels Citizens' Assembly on Climate, was selected to advance our understanding of how institutionalisation, since this is one of the first permanent citizens' assemblies worldwide, shapes impact. Second, the case study on Sweden, focusing on the Swedish Citizens' Assembly on Climate, or Medborgarrad om klimatet (MoK), because it is bottom-up (organised by non-state actors) and because of its ambition to depolarise public debate on climate change, which is a key challenge for democracies (Brawley-Cheshworth et al., 2025). Third, the case study on Ireland, which focuses on the 2016-2018 Citizens' Assembly, 2022-2023 Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (CABL) and the 2022 Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (CYPABL), was selected for its ability to provide a longer-term perspective on the impact of citizens' assemblies. It also offers insights into how earlier DMPs may shape subsequent ones and the extent to which DMPs can become politically and culturally embedded. Moreover, studying the CYPBAL presents an opportunity to better understand DMPs' potential to promote intergenerational justice.

Conclusions and takeaways for policymakers and academics are presented in Section 7.

2. Analytical Framework

The last five years have seen an upswing in the number of climate change focused DMPs: as noted by Smith (2024), “roughly half of the ‘deliberative wave’ identified by the OECD [in a landmark report on innovative citizen participation] has been made up of climate assemblies”. This “first wave” has prompted efforts by both academics and practitioners to update our evaluation of DMPs. We now see greater emphasis on, and new models to capture, the “macro-political impact” of DMPs, i.e. the impact of DMPs on the broader political system (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006).

Jacquet and Van der Does (2020), for example, suggest a novel framework for evaluating the policy-making consequences of DMPs that not only captures whether DMPs’ recommendations are translated into policy, but also whether they inform public debate or change policy practices. Meanwhile Ejsing et al. (2023, p.16) et al. propose that assemblies should also be evaluated by their ability to “include and mobilise ever broader parts of the population into the fight for a more sustainable world”.

Amongst practitioners, perhaps the best known model for understanding the impact of climate focused DMPs is the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA) Impact Evaluation Framework (Demski et al., 2024), which builds on the OECD’s Evaluating Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes (OECD, 2021). The KNOCA framework is used to evaluate three types of impact: instrumental impacts - “new ways of acting on climate change”; capacity impacts - “new expertise and/ or reprioritisation of resources for acting on climate change”; and conceptual impacts - “new ways of understanding climate change and climate action”. Impacts are also evaluated in relation to three types of actors: – state actors, non-state actors and civil society, and systems and structures (see Table 1). In this way, KNOCA’s framework understanding of the impact of DMPs, especially on climate action, is more holistic than its predecessors (see OECD, 2021 and Thorman and Capstick, 2022).

The conceptions of impact listed above, however, focus on the impact of DMPs on climate action, and do not consider the impact of DMPs on democratic governance. Boswell et al. (2023) introduce a framework for understanding the potential contributions of DMPs to robust climate governance – climate governance that is effective, flexible, and iterative (Sørensen & Ansell, 2021). Whilst they suggest robust climate governance is linked to democratic climate governance, they do not unpack this link or the concept of democratic climate governance in full.

To address this gap, we developed an analytical framework to evaluate the impact of DMPs on both climate action and democratic governance.

Table 1. KNOCA Impact Evaluation Framework (*adapted from Demski et al., 2024*)

Area of Impact	Type of Impact		
	Instrumental New ways of acting on climate change	Capacity New expertise and/or reprioritisation of resources for acting on climate change	Conceptual New ways of understanding climate change and climate action
State Actors Impacts on national and regional government decision-making.	Changes to climate policy, strategy, legislation, laws, regulation and official guidance.	Changes in expertise and resources for climate action, including connecting climate deliberation and public engagement to policymaking.	Changes to understanding of climate action by state actors, including the role of public engagement and perspectives.
Non-State Actors / Civil Society Impacts on wider society and public discourse.	Changes to behaviour or climate action by wider publics; changes to media policy, practices or coverage; changes to business or organisational policies and practices; changes in behaviour of assembly members.	Changes in expertise and resources for engaging in climate action by non-state actors, such as civil society initiatives to establish greater public contribution to climate action.	Changes to understanding of climate action by citizens, civil society, media and business organisations, including enhanced recognition of the importance of climate in their practices, and the role of public engagement and perspectives.
Systems and Structures Impacts on underlying features of practices that alter the goals or mandates that guide climate action.	Changes to the underlying mechanisms with which society addresses climate change, accounting for the systemic nature of the climate crisis (e.g., new principles guiding tax systems, economic goals, shifts in responsibilities).	Changes in organising principles or in expertise and resources available to tackle the systemic nature of the climate crisis.	Changes to understanding of the climate crisis and climate action as a systemic issue (e.g., interconnected with other societal challenges). Fundamental shifts in shared understandings and norms governing climate action.

2.1 Analytical Framework for Understanding Impact

Our analytical framework (see Table 2) draws on the seven characteristics of climate democracy outlined in the RETOOL analytical framework, namely i) participation, ii) representation, iii) knowledge and expertise, iv) accountability, v) deliberativeness, vi) effectiveness, and vii) justice (Brawley-Cheshworth et al., 2025); and examines these concepts alongside the types of impact outlined in the KNOCA Impact Evaluation Framework (Table 1).

Table 2. Analytical framework, designed to capture the impact of DMPs on climate action and democratic governance.

	Key Characteristic of Climate Democracy						
Type of Impact	Participation	Representation	Knowledge and expertise	Accountability	Deliberativeness	Effectiveness	Justice
Instrumental	Change in how/how much citizens participate in governance processes, both within and beyond elections	Change in the ability of citizens to influence outcomes, including change in who represents them, and how, and the responsiveness of the institutions that serve them	Change in the forms of knowledge and expertise used to inform policy	Change in how a governance system responds to actors, including relationships between decision-makers and citizens	Change in the use of “respectful and reasonable dialogue” (Lindberg et al.) to reach decisions, including deliberation with and amongst citizens	Change in the extent to which the governance system achieves its intended climate outcomes.	Change in the extent to which the governance system addresses spatial, temporal, and intersectional injustices associated with climate change
Capacity	Change in the resources/expertise of/for citizens to participate in governance processes.	Change in the resources/expertise dedicated to ensuring that diverse citizens have influence over outcomes	Change in the resources/expertise dedicated to ensuring that diverse forms of knowledge and expertise are used to inform decision-making	Change in the resource/expertise dedicated to the relationship between decision-makers and citizens.	Change in the resources/expertise dedicated to deliberation with and amongst citizens	Change in the resources/expertise available for a system to achieve its intended climate outcomes	Change in the resources/expertise dedicated to promoting climate justice
Conceptual	Change in thinking about the participation of citizens beyond elections	Change in thinking about citizens’ influence over outcomes	Change in thinking about the forms of knowledge and expertise that are used to inform decision-making	Change in thinking about the relationship between decision-makers and citizens	Change in thinking about deliberation with and amongst citizens	Change in thinking about climate change and climate action	Change in thinking about climate justice

This analytical framework is used to carry out a systematic literature review (Section 3) and to inform case studies on DMPs in Belgium, Sweden, and Ireland (Sections 4, 5, and 6). Conclusions on its value and usability can be found in Section 7.

2.2 Understanding Institutionalisation and Innovation

This report explores two additional areas of interest in the field of deliberative democracy: institutionalisation and innovation. Interest in the institutionalisation of DMPs has been spurred by the creation of permanent citizens’ assemblies in major European cities, such as Paris (2021), Milan (2023), and Brussels (2023) (Abbas and Smith, 2024 and Unegbu and Dupont, 2025). Yet there is a certain amount of “fuzziness” around the concept of institutionalisation; the term “institutionalisation” is often conflated with the term “embeddedness”. (Unegbu and Dupont, 2025). Unegbu and Dupont attempt to elucidate this, suggesting that “institutionalisation” is the *process* of integrating DMPs into a governance system, whereas “embeddedness” is a possible *outcome* of this integration (2025). In this context, making DMPs permanent is a form of institutionalisation.

Proponents of institutionalisation argue that it can help to enhance the impact of DMPs by making them a more regular and predictable feature of the policymaking process and creating a learning environment in which practice can evolve over time (Abbas and Smith, 2024). However, these claims require further testing. Thus, building on Unegbu and Dupont’s framework for understanding institutionalisation and embeddedness (see Table 3) (2025), we explore the extent to which the DMPs featured in the case studies on Belgium, Sweden, and Ireland are institutionalised and/ or embedded, and how this shapes their impact.

Table 3. Dimensions of institutionalisation and embeddedness adapted from Unegbu and Dupont (2025)

Dimensions of Institutionalisation	Dimensions of Embeddedness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representativeness and deliberative quality, e.g. inclusive selection methods and skilled facilitation • Regularity and predictability, e.g. a recurring schedule • Resources and skills, e.g. dedicated funding, staff training, and the creation of specialised roles • Formal recognition and integration, e.g. integration into legislative/ executive and formal transmission of recommendations • Public awareness and engagement, e.g. coverage in traditional and social media and connection to referendums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Productive connections, i.e. mutually beneficial relationships between a DMP and its environment • Cultural shifts, i.e., changes in understanding of and opinions on DMPs • Shifts in power dynamics, i.e. horizontalisation of power dynamics between elites and citizens • Rootedness, i.e., normalisation and acceptance of DMPs, which makes them difficult to abolish

The question of whether DMPs can contribute to innovation is also of interest to KNOCA and others. Adapting, the methodology in Averchenkova et al. (2025), which investigates the extent to which the French Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (2019-2020) developed novel policy recommendations, we conduct primary analysis of the recommendations developed by the DMPs featured in the three case studies. We highlight those that call for governance innovations (i.e. new institutional arrangements or reforms to an existing institutional arrangement that significantly change governance structures or decision-making processes on climate change or biodiversity loss).

Findings about institutionalisation and innovation are integrated into each of the case studies.

3. Systematic Literature Review on Climate DMPs

KNOCA maintains a [map](#) of national and local climate assemblies worldwide; for national assemblies, key resources, including third party evaluations, are also available. To complement this database we conducted a systematic review of *literature* on DMPs that focus on climate change and the energy transition. Our review sought to capture how the impact of these DMPs has been understood and studied to date, and to identify areas for future research. It also served as a scoping method to assist us in choosing three case studies for detailed research.

3.1 Methodology

Our approach for selecting literature consisted of three stages, following Moher et al. (2009): identification, screening, and eligibility (see Figure 1).

At the identification stage, we searched titles, abstracts, and keywords of documents in the Scopus academic database using the following search terms:

```
"citizens assembl*" OR "climate assembl*" OR "citizens jur*" OR "mini  
public*" OR "minipublic*" OR "deliberative participation" OR "deliberative institution*"

AND

climate OR environment OR energy OR sustainab* OR biodiversity OR eclog* OR nature
```

The search was carried out on 12 April 2025, resulting in 311 documents. We then excluded editorials, short surveys, errata, books, notes, and conference papers, as well non-English documents (N=26).

At the screening stage, we initially analysed the titles, abstracts, and key words of the 285 articles to identify those that focused on climate change and energy transitions. If necessary, we also analysed the full text of the article. All articles designated for exclusion by a first coder were reviewed by a second coder. This process excluded 147 articles, leaving 138 articles.

At the eligibility stage, we surveyed the full text of the remaining articles to identify and include those focusing on DMPs. This created a final corpus of 121 articles focusing on both climate change and energy transitions, and DMPs (see Appendix 1).

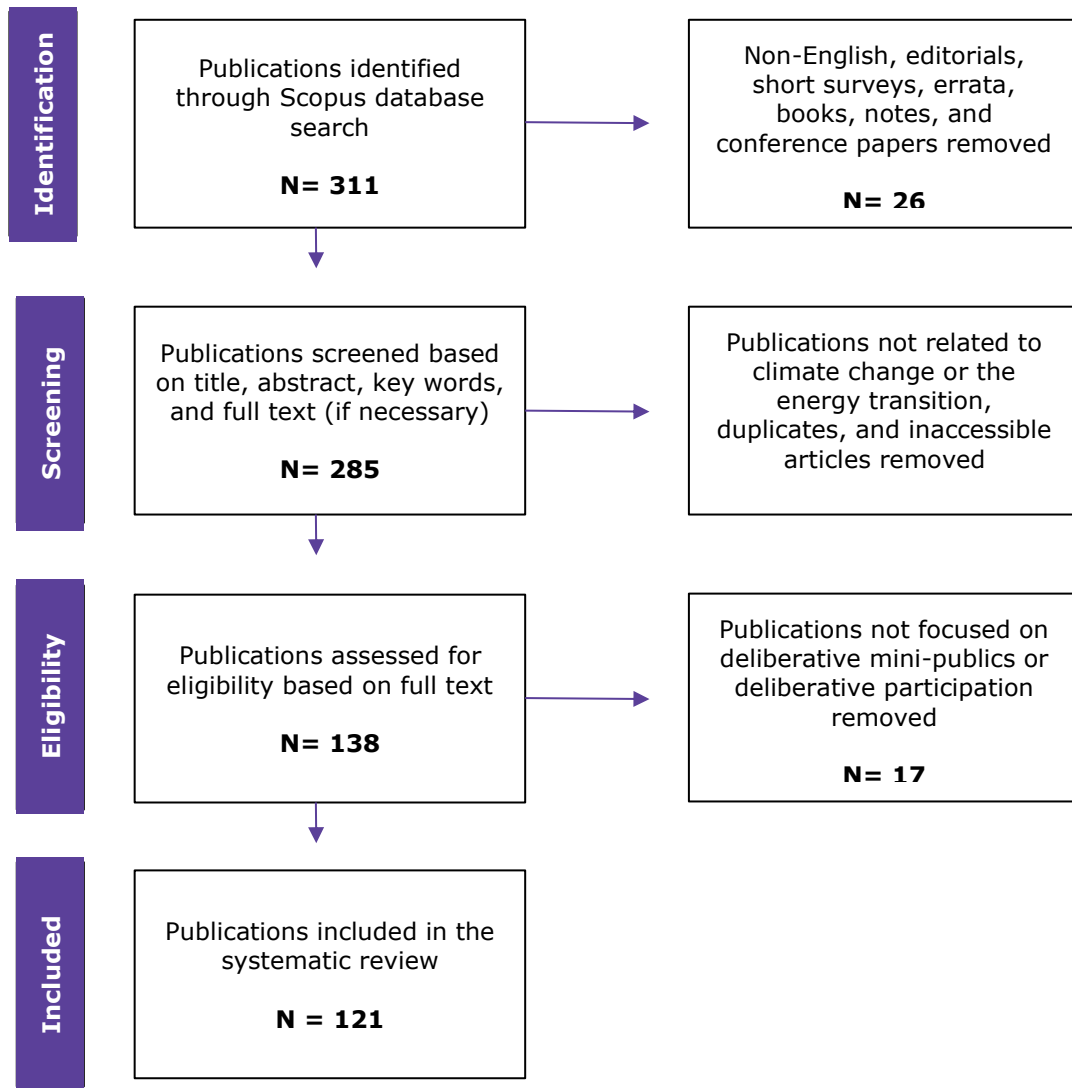


Figure 1. Literature selection process (adapted from PRISMA flow chart, Moher et al., 2009)

We coded the final corpus of 121 articles using the analytical framework outlined in Section 2.1. To ensure inter-coder reliability, five of the articles were coded by two coders and two of the articles by three coders, and revised definitions in the codebook. A full codebook can be found in Appendix 2.

3.2 Findings

From a heatmap illustrating the volume of articles coded under each characteristic of climate democracy (see Figure 2), it is evident that in the research on the impacts of climate change and energy transition focused DMPs, there has been a primary focus on the impacts of DMPs on the effectiveness of governance systems, as well as on levels of participation and deliberativeness. This makes sense given that – in the context of the analytical framework – effectiveness relates to climate goals. Also, the very nature of DMPs as forums for deliberative participation, means they are likely to have an impact on levels of participation and deliberativeness.

	Participation	Representation	Knowledge and expertise	Accountability	Deliberativeness	Effectiveness	Justice
Number of articles	66	49	46	36	63	140	45

	Number of articles
Instrumental	208
Conceptual	135
Capacity	102

	Participation	Representation	Knowledge and expertise	Accountability	Deliberativeness	Effectiveness	Justice
Instrumental	32	29	28	17	21	55	26
Conceptual	20	16	13	16	27	26	17
Capacity	14	4	5	3	15	59	2

Figure 2a, 2b and 2c: Heatmaps illustrating the volume of articles coded under each characteristic of climate democracy, each type of impact, and both categories.

Green = the highest volume; yellow = the median volume, and red = the lowest volume.

There is a gap in the research, however, on the impacts of DMPs on the accountability of governance systems. This is perhaps unsurprising: the link between deliberative participation and accountability is not immediately obvious, and impacts on accountability can be difficult to measure given the black box around climate policy making and implementation (Morrison et al., 2019).

More surprising though, is the lack of research on the relationship between DMPs and justice. Justice is a central issue in debates around climate change and energy transitions and DMPs are often praised for their potential to inject procedural justice (fairness of processes) and substantive justice (fairness of outcomes) into decision-making processes (Knops and Vrydagh, 2023).

The heatmap also shows the volume of articles coded under each type of impact (see Figure 2). Research has largely focused on the instrumental impacts of DMPs, with less attention paid to conceptual and especially capacity impacts, which relate to changes in thinking, expertise, and resources. This could be explained by the relatively recent expansion of understandings of the impacts of DMPs (see Section 2.1) and/ or the difficulty of measuring conceptual and capacity impacts, relative to instrumental impacts. Changes in thinking, in particular, take a long time to become clear and are hard to attribute to a single cause.

Our systematic literature review also identified two major trends in research on the impact of DMPs. The first is a shift from studying the impact of internal design factors to studying the impact of integrative design factors, i.e. the ways in which DMPs connect to governance systems (Elstub et al., 2021 and Galván Labrador and Zografos, 2024), and the ways in which DMPs are shaped by the context in which they are organised (Ejsing et al., 2023 and Lewis et al., 2023). This shift from more inward-looking to more outward-looking research on the impact of DMPs aligns with the “systemic turn” in the wider field of deliberative democracy (Kuyper, 2015). This turn, dating back to the mid-

2010s, shifted attention from individual instances and institutions of deliberation, to the connections between these instances and institutions, and to the deliberative system as a whole (ibid.)

The second identified trend is a growing body of research on the origins of DMPs, including on the motivations of commissioners (Kevins and Robison, 2024 and Oross et al., 2024). This could be a response to the emerging consensus that the impact of DMPs can be constrained by a lack of clarity around their objectives (Walkenhorst and Schuppert, 2024).

Our systematic literature review also revealed three major innovations in the practice of DMPs that may be of interest to researchers and practitioners. First, DMPs are being harnessed in new territories. Galende-Sánchez et al. (2024) and Pospieszna et al. (2025) document and study the emergence of DMPs in Central and Eastern Europe, whilst Curato et al. (2022), Cervillini et al. (2024) Mori and Yoshida (2024) explore experimentation with DMPs in the Global South.

Second, DMPs are being organised at multiple scales. Whilst DMPs have frequently been executed at the local level, and are increasingly being executed at the national level (Duvic-Paoli, 2022), DMPs are also increasingly being organised at the community level, e.g. in schools (Boque-Ciurana, 2024 and Cebrián, 2025), at the transnational level (Van Zeben, 2020), and at the global level (Caney, 2022).

Third, digital technologies are increasingly being used to host or support DMPs. Research on the value of online deliberation shows mixed results (Grönlund et al. 2009 and Lengthorn and Asbury, 2021), prompting consideration of hybrid formats (Willis et al., 2023). McKinney (2024) also explores the potential contributions of AI.

Notably, two innovations noted in Smith's (2024) overview of climate assemblies are not captured in this systematic literature review: DMPs commissioned by non-state actors and permanent DMPs. This is likely because these innovations are too recent to have been studied academically, but this is a significant gap given the growing interest in the field of democracy in the potential value of institutionalisation of DMPs.

3.2.1 Lessons learnt

The systematic literature review informed our choice of case studies, as well as our research questions and methodology. The lack of research on justice, for example, encouraged us to study the two Irish citizens' assemblies on biodiversity: the Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss was in part organised to promote intergenerational justice. And in response to the lack of research on accountability, we incorporated questions on accountability into interviews for the Belgian and Swedish case studies.

Similarly, questions encouraging respondents to think about capacity and conceptual impacts, instead of only instrumental impacts, were incorporated into interviews for all three case studies. In line with trends in research on the impacts of DMPs, all three case studies also aim to employ a systemic lens in their evaluation of impact, and explore the origins of the assembly/ies in question.

Finally, the seemingly limited research on innovative DMP practices, such as DMPs commissioned by non-state actors and permanent DMPs, encouraged us to study the Swedish Citizens' Assembly on Climate and the Brussels Citizens' Assembly on climate respectively.

4. Case Study One: Belgium

Belgium has a long history with DMPs (Vrydagh, 2023) and is often seen as being at the forefront of democratic innovation.

Between 2001 and 2019, over 40 DMPs were organised in Belgium (Vrydagh et al., 2021). This fact has been met with surprise, since Belgium is often seen as a consociational state, in which power is shared between elites from different social groups, leaving little room for citizen participation (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps, 2020). Contrary to academic expectations, however, it seems the divided nature of Belgian politics – in which considerable autonomy is given to subnational governments – has actually enabled the proliferation of diverse initiatives for deliberative participation across regions and communities (Vrydagh et al., 2021). Some even suggest that the growing demand for DMPs in Belgium is in part a direct result of consociationalism as citizens are increasingly dissatisfied with this model of politics and in want of more avenues to participate, prompting greater political support for deliberative participation (Vrydagh et al., 2021).

Although DMPs in Belgium have largely been organised at the local level, their rise has been supported by a nation-wide network acting as a lobby in favour of citizen deliberation. This includes the G1000 (an organisation focusing on democratic innovation established in the aftermath of a momentous deliberative process in 2012) and various Green Parties who argue that DMPs can help to re-establish and strengthen the link between citizens and decision-makers, and to enhance the legitimacy of public decisions (Vrydagh et al., 2023 and Oross et al., 2021).

The existence of this lobby helps to explain not only the rise of DMPs in Belgium, but also innovations in their practice, which have positioned Belgium at the “forefront of the so-called deliberative wave” (Vrydagh et al., 2023, p. 396). Innovations include the creation of “deliberative committees” in Brussels (2019), Wallonia (2023), and the federal level, which bring together a mix of randomly selected citizens and Members of Parliaments to explore issues ranging from 5G deployment to citizen participation, as well as the creation of permanent citizens’ assemblies in Ostbelgien (2019) and Brussels (2023).

Despite such innovations, however, DMPs in Belgium do not exercise decision-making power. The political consensus also appears to be against DMPs having such power (Vrydagh et al., 2021).

Belgium’s long history with deliberative participation, coupled with its federal structure, make it an interesting case for studying the impacts of DMPs on climate action and democratic governance. It could help us to understand the political conditions under which DMPs become institutionalised, and the role that DMPs could play in addressing weaknesses in a country’s climate governance. One question we explored as part of this case study was whether DMPs could help to reconcile disparities between regional climate policies, which undermine the coherence and ultimately ambition of Belgium’s national climate policy (Misonne, 2018).

This study focuses on the Brussels Citizens’ Assembly on Climate. This DMP was selected both for its innovativeness, as the world’s first permanent citizens’ assembly on climate, and the lack of research on its impact. The Brussels Citizens’ Assembly on Climate was launched in 2023 by the government of the Brussels-Capital Region to support the goal of the Air Climate and Energy Plan (PACE) to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. It was announced in 2022 following large-scale climate protests organised around COP27 (The Brussels Times with Belga, 2022).

In 2024 the assembly and some of its modalities were integrated into the Brussels Code on Air, Climate and Energy Management (CoBrACE), thereby formalising its permanence. A ministerial decree finalising the modalities of the assembly is due by the end of 2025.

The assembly has a rotating membership and, per cycle, brings together between 65 and 100 randomly selected citizens to deliberate on issues related to climate change and put forward

recommendations to the government. As well as standard criteria, such as age, gender, and level of education, a linguistic criterion is employed to ensure that the linguistic distribution resembles the Brussels-Capital parliament: 80% French speaking and 20% Flemish speaking.

A citizen's council, made up of 25 of the citizens, then sets the topic for the subsequent cycle. To date there have been three cycles on housing (Feb-Apr 2023), food (Oct-Dec 2023), and the economy of sharing and collaboration (early 2025).

According to the modalities outlined in CoBrACE, the government is obliged to publish one report three months after each cycle and one report a year after each cycle, explaining whether they are implementing each of the assembly's recommendations and if not, why, and if so, how. Thus far, the government has submitted its final response to the first cycle and its preliminary response to the second cycle. A follow-up committee, made up of 10 of the citizens from each cycle, monitors government action and meets with ministers at least twice.

This study investigates the context in which the Brussels Citizens' Assembly on Climate was created; the way in which this context, and the permanent nature of the assembly, shapes its impact; and the role that the assembly and similar initiatives play or could play in Belgian climate governance.

10 semi-structured interviews were conducted between June and August 2025 with a range of stakeholders: 4 academics, 3 government actors, 2 deliberative participation practitioners, and 1 civil society actor.

We also drew on materials from the official assembly website and transcripts from 11 interviews conducted by co-researchers Precious Unegbu (University of Ghent) and Elisa Minsart (University of Namur) between November and December 2023. To date, no third-party evaluations of the first three cycles of the assembly have been conducted.

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Context

Figure 3 illustrates the key actors engaged with the Brussels Citizens' Assembly on Climate, as well as the relationships between them, as described by interviewees. It is designed to demonstrate that the assembly is part of a broader climate governance system in Brussels, and to encourage a systemic analysis of its impact.

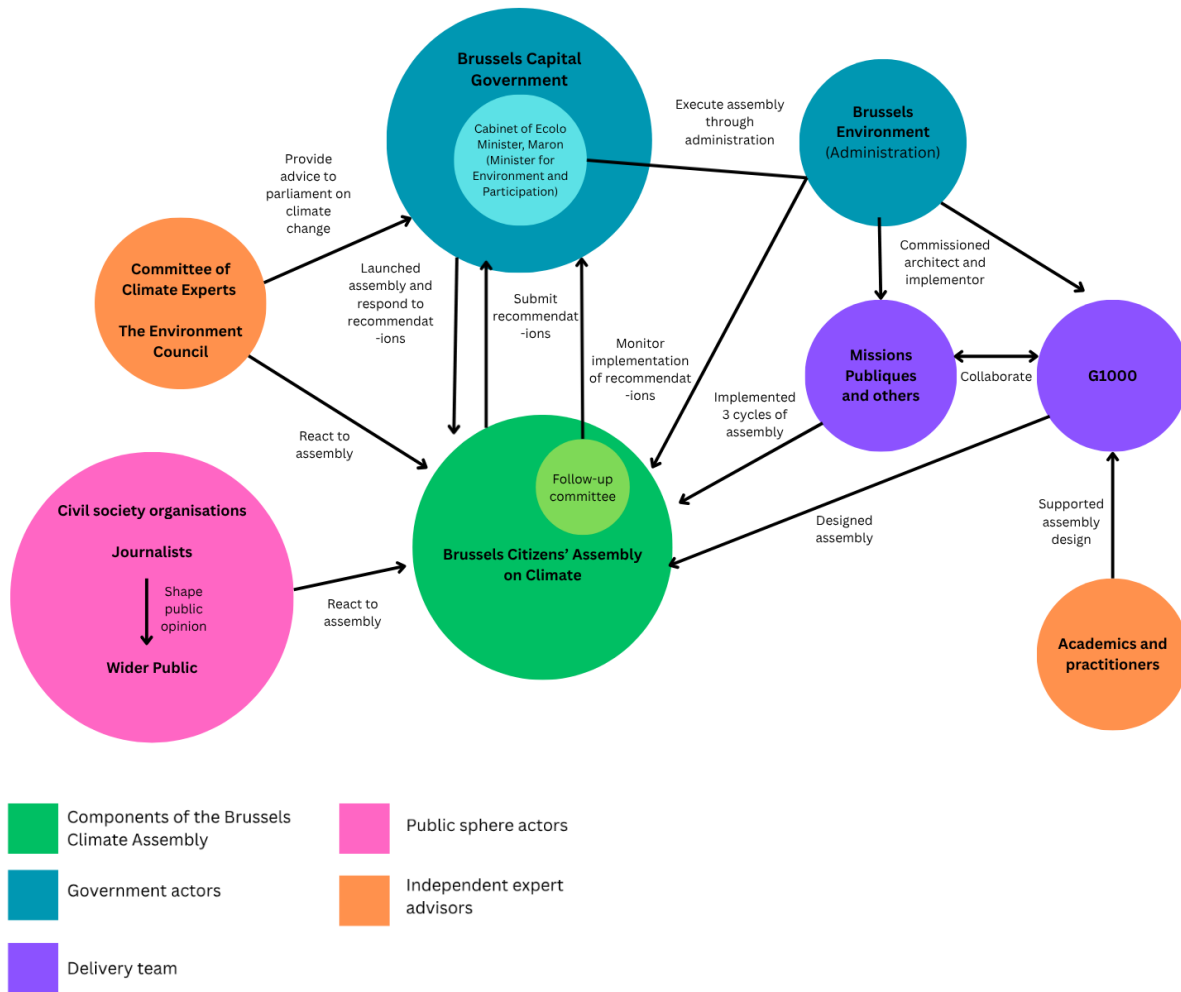


Figure 3. Map of key actors engaged with the Brussels Citizens’ Assembly on Climate

Amongst the actors depicted in Figure 3, interviewees emphasised the pivotal role played by the Cabinet of Ecolo Minister Maron, Brussels Environment, G1000, and Missions Publiques and others, in commissioning, administering, designing, and implementing the assembly respectively. The dynamics between these actors was seen as crucial for shaping the form and function of the assembly, especially since each of them had different objectives. The range of actors’ objectives and hopes for the assembly is explored in more depth in Table 3.

Interviewees also emphasised that, since the Brussels Capital government is often formed of a multi-party coalition, it is actually made up of several actors (parties), some of which are more engaged with the assembly than others. Interviewees noted that the French-speaking Green Party, Ecolo, is particularly engaged with the assembly: the party played a key role advocating for the assembly’s creation and implementation of the first three cycles of the assembly fell under the remit of Ecolo politician Alain Maron (Minister for Climate Transition and Participatory Democracy).

4.1.2 Impact

When it came to the impact of the Brussels Citizens’ Assembly on Climate, interviewees painted a mixed picture. Although some commented that it is perhaps too early to draw conclusions, the general sense was that, to date, the assembly has had limited instrumental impact on climate policy. However it has had some/moderate conceptual impact, by shifting understanding of and opinions on deliberative participation, especially within the administration.

The following section explores the impact of the assembly on core characteristics of climate democracy in Brussels and beyond in more detail. Characteristics which did not feature significantly in interviews have been excluded.

Effectiveness

To date, the impact of the assembly on climate policy in Brussels appears to be limited. This opinion was shared by almost all interviewees. Despite consensus on the assembly's limited policy impact, however, interviewees pointed out that the assembly's recommendations were often equally (if not more) ambitious than policies being explored by the administration. One interviewee also acknowledged that the assembly did inject new ideas around subsidies for home renovations that emphasised fairness. Thus, the assembly *could* help to build the administration's capacity to advocate for more ambitious, innovative, and just climate policy in the future. Two interviewees suggested that this is highly important in the Belgian context where the power of administrative departments is often superseded by ministerial cabinets. All this, however, remains to be seen.

There was also no evidence of impact on climate policy at the federal level. This is mostly because the agenda of the assembly was designed to fit with the remit of the Brussels' government. It is also, however, because even when the assembly did make recommendations that were outside of the scope of the Brussels' government, these were not, according to interviewees, explicitly communicated to the federal government.

One interviewee also noted that the assembly supported members to learn more about climate change. Commenting on the first cycle, they noted that assembly members "really understood the issues" and "have taken ownership of them". This represents an increase in the capacity of assembly members to grapple with climate change.

Deliberation and participation

One key question explored during interviews was whether the assembly had an impact on the deliberativeness of Brussels' climate governance. The sense among many was that, within the administration, *conceptions* around deliberation had shifted as a result of the assembly, but not necessarily *capacity* for deliberation.

Though Brussels has a long history with deliberative participation, several interviewees commented that they, and their colleagues, had initially been skeptical of the assembly. However, this skepticism transformed over time into curiosity and enthusiasm. Civil servants within Brussels Environment - the administrative department responsible for delivering the assembly - claimed that, by allowing civil servants to directly engage with citizens, the assembly has helped to remove them from their "ivory tower" and add fresh energy to policymaking. The assembly was also seen to have provided an opportunity to strengthen relationships with civil society and private sector actors, who have been invited to speak to the assembly as experts, as well as civil servants in their department and beyond, with whom they have collaborated to deliver cycles of the assembly. Their collaboration with GoodFood Brussels to deliver the second cycle of the assembly was consistently and especially described positively. This last point gives strength to the idea that the assembly could help to build the capacity of the administration to address climate change, by building cross-sectoral connections.

Opinion also appears to have shifted amongst civil servants beyond Brussels Environment. Interviewees pointed to the fact there had been requests from other administrative departments for the assembly to deliberate on issues that fell under their remit; this speaks to the potential value of a permanent citizens' assembly that provides time for people to understand its value and regular opportunities to engage.

Despite the general positivity, however, interviewees acknowledged that enthusiasm for the assembly did not always translate into greater capacity for deliberation. There continues to be only

a handful of civil servants who are actively involved in delivering the assembly. Although one interviewee noted that Perspective Brussels – an administrative department that aims to support public debate – has developed a Participation Service to support processes for deliberative participation across the Brussels Regions, this service appears to predate the assembly. Of course, the division of resources within the administration is largely determined by the government.

In terms of the government itself, there was no clear consensus on whether the assembly has had an impact on thinking about, resources for, or actions related to deliberation. On the one hand, interviewees suggested that the very fact that the government had responded to the assembly's recommendations was a step forward in strengthening the dialogue between citizens and decision-makers. They also suggested that those in the middle of the political spectrum are increasingly welcoming of initiatives for deliberative participation.

On the other hand, interviewees argued that the government's response to the assembly's recommendations was not as robust as expected, although they acknowledged that the responses became more robust from cycle to cycle. This again speaks to the potential value of a permanent assembly. They also noted that some skepticism remains about the cost-benefit ratio of the assembly.

Finally, in terms of the public sphere, conclusions were clearer on some aspects than others. Interviewees concluded that the assembly has had limited impact on wider public opinion on deliberation, since awareness of the assembly beyond those already interested in climate change and deliberative participation remains low. There was no consensus amongst interviewees on the impact on civil society opinion. They noted that some expressed reservations when the assembly was launched, but that others had begun to embrace deliberative participation as a way to not only accelerate climate action, but also reinvigorate democracy. Ultimately, the sample size of civil society actors interviewed for this study (n=1) is too small to draw a meaningful conclusion.

Representation and Justice

Interviewees commented on representation in two ways. First, one interviewee indicates that the assembly has had an impact on citizens' conceptions of representative democratic institutions in Brussels: they pointed to evidence from the first cycle that suggests that assembly members felt more positive towards politics and politicians after the assembly than before.

Second, a few interviewees noted that the composition of the assembly, especially in the first cycle, was not as socioeconomically or politically diverse as they were hoping; this problem was made worse by assembly members from marginalised communities dropping out partway through deliberations. Two interviewees also noted that, because French is the dominant language in formal and informal assembly deliberations, this can exclude non French-speakers. Although interviewees noted that efforts had been made to rectify both these issues, such comments suggest that the assembly may not have had a significant impact on the representativeness of procedural justness of climate governance.

Accountability

Another question explored in interviews was whether the assembly had helped to promote accountability. It is worth noting that no interviewees brought up the concept of accountability themselves. One interviewee even suggested that the concept of accountability is alien to policymaking discourse in Belgium, though we were unable to confirm the veracity of this claim.

Nonetheless, when prompted to consider accountability, interviewees suggested that the process of responding to the assembly, which entails justifying policy decisions and progress towards climate goals, could help to promote greater accountability. Crucially, however, they emphasised that it would take many years, as well as greater reach, for the assembly to have such impact; some

alluded that the same conditions would need to be in place for the assembly to have an impact on the deliberativeness of policymaking.

Overall, therefore, it is unclear, and perhaps too early to tell, that the assembly has had an impact on accountability in Brussels.

4.1.3 Factors shaping impact

Interviewees identified a range of factors that they believed shaped the impact of the assembly. These have been split into four categories: national context, local context, weaknesses in design and delivery, and resourcing.

National context

Interviews underlined two unavoidable features of Belgium that constrain not only the impact of the Brussels Citizens' Assembly on Climate, but also other DMPs across the country.

Federalism: Two interviewees noted that the division of competences in the field of climate change across different levels of governance in Belgium can frustrate participants, since it means they are unable to put forward systemic solutions to the issue. Moreover, the fact that findings and lessons from the many institutions for deliberative participation across Belgium have not been shared between regions and communities, means that they are unable to contribute to addressing the incoherence of Belgian climate policy. This challenges more positive interpretations of the impact of consociationalism outlined in the introduction to this case study.

Coalition governments: Interviewees suggested that "particratic" politics in Belgium – in which political parties, and the conflicts between them, dominate politics – constrains policy impact for three reasons. First, the presence of many policy actors, often with competing party affiliations and, therefore, objectives, means that policy-making is always a product of contestation – or at least deliberation; in this context, policy change tends to be "incremental". Second, institutions for deliberative participation in Belgium are often initiated by, and therefore associated with, parties or politicians on the left of the political spectrum. A few interviewees proposed that this strong association with their commissioners, means that commissioners are hesitant to ask participants difficult questions on polarising issues. Third, the protracted process of forming coalition governments means that communities, regions, and even the country go through frequent periods with no government; this makes it harder to budget and plan for deliberative processes, and to have sustained follow-up to their recommendations.

Local context

Interviewees also identified a number of factors specific to the Brussels context that they believed shaped the impact of the assembly.

Attitudes of key actors: Although the assembly was launched by the Brussels Capital government as a whole, some interviewees indicated that it continues to be perceived as an Ecolo, or even a Maron, initiative. This has perhaps weakened cross-party buy-in, which is necessary if the assembly is to have wider policy impact. By way of evidence, one interviewee reported a conversation with a parliamentarian in which the parliamentarian questioned the added-value of the assembly given its small scale and the prior existence of the Brussels Capital parliament, which according to them, has greater legitimacy as a representative institution.

Interviewees also pointed to potential uncertainty or resentments towards the assembly within the public sphere. One interviewee suggested that civil society organisations, especially trade unions, feel threatened by the assembly, as they believe they already represent the interests of the citizens of Brussels. Another interviewee suggested that because – unlike other parts of Western Europe

(e.g. the UK) – the push for deliberative participation in Brussels did not originate from social movements, it can be perceived as an “elite” idea. Such conceptions could undermine perceptions of the assembly within the wider public.

Political ownership: There was a sense from interviewees that since the assembly has been launched, there has been limited engagement from government, including the cabinet of Ecolo Minister Maron. They noted that although the government has responded to all three cycles of the assembly, the response to the first cycle was somewhat perfunctory, and that the responses to the second and third were largely coordinated by the administration. One interviewee indicated that cabinet ministers rarely, if ever, observed sessions of the assembly. Another indicated that the cabinet of Maron tended to avoid meetings with the delivery team. Interviewees were divided on whether this is because of a lack of political will or a fear of instrumentalising – or being seen to have instrumentalised – the assembly. Regardless, it means that the assembly has lacked a political champion and been disconnected from politics; these problems have only worsened as a result of the lack of government in Brussels since June 2024. Interviewees suggested that this not only helps to explain the assembly’s limited policy impact to date, but could also begin to stimulate frustration amongst assembly participants.

Design and delivery

Interviewees highlighted the relationship between design and impact and outlined a number of ways in which the design and delivery of the assembly could be improved.

Objectives: Table 4 outlines the range of objectives and expectations actors had for the Brussels Citizens’ Assembly on Climate. Given that there appear to have been expectations of impact on six of the seven core characteristics of democracy, it is evident that actors engaged with the assembly had many, potentially competing objectives. Interviewees indicated that this issue was worsened by the lack of a clear steer from the cabinet of Maron – one interviewee suggested they “didn’t really know what they wanted” – and the lack of time dedicated to aligning around objectives during the two-day design process for the assembly.

Recommendations: Interviewees noted that the recommendations from the first cycle were too numerous and vague for the government to implement, and that many of the policies being recommended had already been considered or implemented. They acknowledged that efforts had been made since the first cycle to reduce the scope and increase the specificity of the recommendations, but argued that the recommendations have not helped to answer difficult, politically relevant questions. One interviewee suggested that the fact the assembly has been unable to answer such questions is problematic, since it makes it harder to convince opponents of the value-added of the assembly. Another interviewee suggested, however, that it is not the substance the recommendations that is problematic, but rather, their inability to capture the deeper motivations of assembly members. Yet, understanding these motivations could equip the government to more meaningfully respond to the assembly.

Interviewees attributed the quality of the recommendations to weaknesses in agenda-setting and facilitation. With regards to the former, a few interviewees critiqued the fact that the government had little input into the agenda of the assembly, which meant the topics being deliberated were out of sync with policy cycles. With regards to the latter, two interviewees suggested that facilitators tended to guide assembly members towards consensus instead of (productive) conflict.

Table 4. Non-exhaustive list of actors’ objectives and expectations for the Brussels Citizens’ Assembly on Climate categorised under the core characteristics of climate democracy in the analytical framework. The number in brackets refers to the number of interviews in which the concept was identified.

Participation	Effectiveness	Knowledge and Expertise	Deliberation
<p>Institutionalise citizen participation, giving citizens a clearer role in climate governance (2)</p> <p>Promote citizen participation beyond the assembly, e.g. in neighbourhood climate action (2)</p>	<p>Advance the goal of the Air Climate and Energy Plan (PACE) to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 by testing, and building support for, ambitious climate policy (11)</p> <p>Give greater legitimacy to climate policy in Brussels (1)</p> <p>(Iteratively) shape climate policy in Brussels, and contribute to the long-term strategy (2)</p> <p>Raise awareness of climate issues (1)</p>	<p>Improve climate policy, by complementing technical knowledge (e.g. from the Committee of Climate Experts) with lived experience (3)</p>	<p>Demonstrate commitment to citizen deliberation and – by making the assembly permanent – cement Brussels as a “space of democratic innovation”, inspired by examples in France and Wallonia (6)</p> <p>Build a dialogue between citizens and decision-makers, and eventually trust between them (3)</p> <p>Provide a forum for deliberation on polarising issues (2)</p> <p>Further innovate institutions for deliberative participation (1)</p>
Accountability	Representation	Justice	
	<p>Counter-act the short-termism of electoral cycles (2)</p> <p>Make democratic institutions more trustworthy and legitimate (2)</p>	<p>Ensure that climate policy is more equitable, by giving a voice to those most vulnerable to climate change (2)</p>	

Awareness and engagement - As noted above, interviewees concluded that awareness of the assembly among the wider public remains low. Interviewees did acknowledge that there was often media interest around the launch of a new cycle and the release of the recommendations; this was attributed to the permanent nature of the assembly, which makes it both innovative and expected. However, they noted that the interest was neither significant nor sustained, meaning it did not spread beyond those already interested in climate change and deliberative participation. In fact, one interviewee noted that though they were probably in the top “0.001%” of people interested in the assembly, they did not know how many cycles have been organised or what impact they have had.

The limited awareness of the assembly was attributed partly to its scale, with interviewees

suggesting that more could be done to connect the assembly to the wider public, and partly to ineffective communication, with interviewees suggesting that more could be done to make information about the assembly accessible and marketable. However, interviewees did acknowledge that the assembly lacks a well-known champion, such as President Macron in France, and that communication depends on resources.

Resources

Interviewees suggested that the Brussels Citizens' Assembly has been constrained by a lack of financial and human capital. This has had an impact on inputs (e.g. the political diversity of assembly members), throughputs (e.g. the ability of non-French assembly members to participate equally in deliberations) and outputs (e.g. the ability of civil servants to follow up on recommendations). With regards to this last point, interviewees noted that the assembly has generally added pressure on already overstretched civil servants who are expected to support delivery and follow up on recommendations. One interviewee also noted that this means it has not been possible to build up in-house skills for deliberative participation, e.g. facilitation skills, so these continue to have to be outsourced. Furthermore, the budget available for future assemblies is now uncertain because of a lack of government in Brussels since June 2024; this makes it difficult to plan ahead.

4.1.4 Institutionalisation and Innovation

Institutionalisation

This section explores the opportunities and challenges presented by the permanent nature of the Brussels Citizens' Assembly on Climate and the extent to which the assembly is institutionalised and embedded into Brussels' climate governance.

Interviewees who were closely involved in the design and delivery of the assembly (n=4) highlighted benefits that arise from the permanent nature of the assembly. They especially emphasised the ability to learn from each cycle and improve the design and delivery of the assembly over time. They pointed to adjustments that had been made in the way assembly members are recruited, to improve representation from marginalised or vulnerable groups; the way multilingual deliberation is facilitated; and the way recommendations are compiled, to reduce the final number of recommendations and make the priorities of assembly members clearer. One interviewee also suggested that the permanent nature of the assembly could help to build in-house capacity for deliberative participation over time and to build awareness of the assembly amongst the wider public: they argued that if more people participate, more people will learn about the assembly through word of mouth.

The same interviewees, however, also raised some concerns. One interviewee, for example, noted the more cycles there are, the more recommendations there are on which civil servants need to follow-up; this could create a sizable burden that the administration could struggle to handle. More pressing, however, the interviewees pointed to the uncertain future of the assembly. Although the assembly has now been integrated into the Brussels Code on Air, Climate and Energy Management (CoBrACE), a ministerial decree to finalise its modalities is due by the end of 2025. At the time of writing, it is still pending. This puts the legal standing of the assembly at risk. Moreover, although it is possible that this ministerial decree will be concluded by the next Brussels Capital government (once it is formed), two of the interviewees suggested that they are unlikely to be as supportive of deliberative participation and climate action as the previous government. This also, therefore, puts the budget of the assembly at risk. It could be that the assembly is under-resourced to the point it is powerless in practice, despite being permanent in principle.

Our findings suggest that the Brussels' Citizens' Assembly on Climate is highly institutionalised but has low embeddedness. On one hand, the assembly is *formally integrated* into the Brussels Code on Air, Climate and Energy Management (CoBrACE) and recommendations of the assembly are formally

submitted to the Brussels-Capital Government after each cycle. A special role was created within Brussels-Environment to oversee the assembly and dedicated funding was set for the first three cycles of the assembly (*resources and skills*). Due to its *regularity*, the *representativeness and deliberative quality* of the assembly, as well as *public awareness of engagement* with the assembly, also appear to be increasing, though the latter continues to be low.

On the other hand, although there is evidence of *cultural shifts* within the administration, these have not trickled down to the wider public and there have been no *shifts in power dynamics* between decision-makers and citizens: the assembly has no decision-making power and, to date, has not significantly shaped policy. Interviewees also suggested that the power of the assembly could be further undermined by future governments, indicating that it is not particularly politically embedded (*rooted*). This last point highlights the importance of political will as a factor that can both foster or hinder institutionalisation and, in turn, embeddedness.

The fact that DMPs in Belgium are not strongly embedded, despite their institutionalisation, also highlights the importance of the final dimension of institutionalisation – public awareness and engagement – since this is crucial for shifting understanding and acceptance of DMPs.

Innovation

There were almost no recommendations put forward by the assembly that called for governance innovation. The exceptions were recommendations calling for the creation of a “citizen service” (based on the model of a civil service) (cycle 1 and 3) and dedicated municipal agents (cycle 1) to support the climate transition by, for example, raising public awareness of climate issues.

The citizen reports, however, did flag concerns about the current governance of climate change, especially the lack of transparency around decision-making (cycle 1) and called on the government to meaningfully engage with the assembly and be transparent about if and how they are implementing the assembly’s recommendations (cycle 1 and 2). This suggests that members see the assembly itself as a valuable governance innovation. This argument is strengthened by the fact that members have called the assembly to evolve over time (cycle 2).

4.1.5 Lessons learnt

Based on their experiences with the Brussels Citizens’ Assembly on Climate, and other DMPs across Belgium, interviewees put forward a number of lessons for those engaged with the Brussels Citizens’ Assembly on Climate and for those interested in organising future DMPs. These have been divided into three categories: design, integration, and capacity building.

Lessons on design

Interviewees stressed that a citizens’ assembly should not be seen as an end in itself and that time should be taken to establish clear objectives and criteria for success. Interviewees also recommended inviting a broad range of stakeholders to the design process and proposed exercises to help them to collaboratively develop objectives and criteria for success, including developing a system map (e.g. See Figure 1) and a theory of change.

Relatedly, interviewees noted the importance of clear expectations regarding recommendations. One interviewee, for example, suggested that the government could provide assembly members with a template for recommendations. Others suggested that the government should be realistic both in terms of what they can expect from citizens, e.g. a vision for the future rather than technical solutions, and what they can implement; this could help to prevent frustrations.

Interviewees also recommended that, going forward, relevant administrations and cabinets should advise on the agenda of the Brussels assembly, and pointed to the relative success of the

collaboration with GoodFood Brussels, which meant that members deliberated on narrower and more relevant questions. A few also emphasised the need for the assembly to start deliberating on more politically relevant issues, with one interviewee saying “a good [topic] is one on which we're waiting for a[n]...opinion. Bad [topics] are those on which everything has already been decided” and another saying that “a really good citizens’ [assembly] makes recommendations that hurt certain actors”. They suggested, therefore, that relevant administrations and cabinets should be open about the difficult questions they’re facing.

Lessons on integration

Interviewees stressed the importance of engaging with key stakeholders before and after the launch of a citizens’ assembly. In terms of engaging other parties, one interviewee pointed to the example of the permanent citizens’ assembly in the German-speaking East Belgian region. They noted that there had been years of groundwork during which politicians from across the political spectrum had been invited to provide regular feedback on the model, as well as consultations after it had been launched, to ensure that it wasn’t co-opted by a single party.

In terms of engaging civil society and private sector actors, interviewees suggested that before the assembly is launched, these actors could be invited to learn more about the assembly and the role it could play in climate governance or, better still, to co-design the assembly; and that during the the assembly, they could be invited to speak to members as experts. Not only could this help to assuage the concerns of these actors, but input from a range of sources could support the assembly to think more openly and creatively.

Interviewees also stressed the importance of political commitment: they underlined the need for commissioners to think carefully about the role a citizens’ assembly could play in climate governance, and how they could help it to play this role. Help could entail advice on the assembly’s agenda, in terms of both topic and timing; intermittent feedback on recommendations; and consistent vocal and written support. A few interviewees also suggested that the Brussels Capital government should place more trust in the process and give greater freedom and power to assembly members and the administration. As one interviewee put it “political goodwill... means daring to jump into a pool... even though the water seems cold”.

Finally, interviewees suggested ways to better connect the assembly to the wider public. Two interviewees, for example, pointed to the possibility of connecting the assembly to schools. Others proposed that assembly members, especially those in the follow-up committee could be supported to speak to the media (though one interviewee raised the concern that this could force them to become “professional citizens”).

Lessons on capacity building

Interviewees not only suggested briefing political and external stakeholders, but also briefing civil servants themselves since they are responsible for supporting delivery of the assembly and follow up. Where possible, they also recommended training civil servants in skills for deliberative participation, e.g. facilitation. They argued that this would be a long-term investment in both the individual servants and the deliberative capacity of the government as a whole.

One interviewee proposed creating a cross-departmental working group to process the assembly’s recommendations so that the task does not have to be managed by a single person; they noted that this could have the added benefit of breaking down inter-departmental silos, which can constrain the implementation of assembly recommendations.

5. Case Study Two: Sweden

Sweden has a relatively short history of deliberative mini publics when compared with Belgium and Ireland. At the national level the first DMP was reportedly the national citizens' panel on Sustainable and Healthy Food Consumption convened by the Swedish Food Agency in 2023 (Swedish Food Agency, 2023). There have been no national assemblies focusing on climate change prior to 2024.

The use of participatory tools has increased over time in Sweden (Theander, 2024; SOU 2016). The democracy inquiry commissioned by the government at the turn of the millennium advocated stronger integration of citizen participation and deliberation into the Swedish democracy (SOU 2000). A second democracy inquiry was commissioned 2014 to strengthen the possibility of citizen participation and influence in between the elections (SOU 2016). While not being as outspoken in favour of deliberative democracy, the second report argued for the importance of citizens having the possibility to participate and express their views ahead of decisions for the legitimacy of Swedish democracy (SOU 2016, cited by Theander, 2024). Support for increasing participation is not only found in government reports. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions has since 2006 been supporting municipalities and regions who are working with citizen participation, for example with educational material and courses (SALAR, 2023). However, overall, DMPs have been rare.

This study focuses on the Swedish Citizens' Assembly on Climate, or Medborgarråd om klimatet (MoK). It was selected as a case study due to the aspiration by the organisers to contribute to reducing polarisation in the public debate on climate change. In contrast to the other cases covered in this study, this assembly was organised bottom-up as part of the research programme [Fairtrans](#), a collaboration between academic institutions Stockholm Resilience Centre at Stockholm University, University of Gävle, Uppsala University, Lund University, and IVL, the Swedish Environmental Research Institute, along with partners from civil society.

The Swedish Citizens' Assembly on Climate aimed to enable a group of randomly selected Swedish residents to deliberate and agree upon a set of well informed and well considered recommendations that advise how Sweden may decrease the GHG-emissions in a fair manner and thereby contribute to Sweden's obligations under the Paris Agreement (Stockholm Resilience Center, 2024). Its focus was on transportation, which is responsible for roughly a third of Sweden's GHG emissions. The Assembly was organised in response to the increasingly polarised and partisan climate debate in Sweden. It took place from March to May 2024. [DigidemLab](#) was responsible for design and implementation of the Assembly, with support from [Democracy x. Enkätfabriken \(now renamed, Lysio\)](#) was responsible for recruitment.

There have not yet been comprehensive studies on the impact of the MoK. This study investigates the context in which the Swedish Citizens' Assembly on Climate was conceived; the way in which this context shapes its impact; the barriers to impact and the role that the assembly and similar initiatives play or could play in Swedish climate governance. 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted between June and October 2025 with a range of stakeholders: 2 academics, 2 government actors, 2 assembly organisers, and 9 civil society actors.

5.1 Findings

5.1.1 Context

Most interviewees noted the importance of understanding the broader political and cultural context in Sweden when examining the impact of the climate assembly. Many interviewees noted that the strong historical emphasis on representative democracy in Sweden has played a role in limited interest historically to deliberative public participation. The political system has well-organised structures of consultation and representation backed up by the electoral vote. In this context some

interviewees spoke of the prevalence of a political consensus culture that does not always involve working through the disagreements. Several interviewees further noted that public participation overall played a stronger role under the previous governments (referring to the period when the Swedish Social Democratic Workers Party led the government in October 2014-October 2022). Another relevant development highlighted by the interviewees is the declining membership in political parties and the changing nature of engagement between politicians and their voters, with decline in the political parties' direct engagement with citizens.

Yet in recent years there has been a growing interest in and experimentation with the DMPs in policy circles in Sweden, inspired by citizen assemblies held abroad and the recent interest from the municipalities, as alluded to by half of the interviewees. While most interviewees were excited by the idea of having a national climate change assembly, some recalled the idea being seen by several politicians as creating competition to the existing democratic institutions. One interviewee also expressed concern about the effectiveness of citizens' assemblies based on their view that the previous citizens' dialogues in Sweden had little impact due to the lack of political follow-up.

The national political debate on climate change in Sweden in recent years has undergone a significant change. A third of interviewees highlighted a growing degree of polarisation, governmental backsliding, eroding political consensus on and perception of resistance to climate action and specific policies in Sweden. However, some noted that often resistance to specific policies is being framed as resistance to ambitious action on climate change overall, overemphasising the degree of polarisation on the issue of climate change.

The Fairtrans project has an objective to develop and co-produce among civil society, including the unions and academics, scenarios and trajectories for a carbon free future for Sweden. There was some expectation that the MoK would feed into that process, according to one of the interviewees. *"The theory of change was to inform the public debate, rather than to expect that things would be taken up directly by policymakers"*, noted one of the assembly organisers. In this context there was hope that Fairtrans partners would pick up and use the assembly.

Other expectations for the interviewees included for the assembly to provide a pathway for a diversity of voices to be heard, enriching and bringing more nuance into the public debate on climate change, and providing *"a safe democratic space to discuss a contentious issue"* and *"a good way to engage people in the democracy"*. In this context several interviewees expected the assembly to contribute to addressing polarisation by building commonality and support for each other's point of view and demonstrating the possibility of developing common climate change solutions that can be supported by all and are more difficult to ignore. Exploring the potential of the assembly to build trust in the system and to bring a long-term view to discussions on climate policies were among other motivations mentioned. One interviewee also felt that assemblies could help address the democracy crisis of political parties, bringing a new deliberative model to engagement.

A few interviewees hoped for a transformative impact on the assembly members, for good media coverage and for some political response, while others saw the assembly outputs as secondary to the awareness about the idea and the process itself and expected little policy impact.

5.1.2 Impact

When it came to the impact of the Swedish Citizens' Assembly on Climate, interviewees argued that it had limited instrumental impact on climate policy. But it has had conceptual impact, by shifting the awareness, understanding, and opinions on deliberative participation and provided proof of concept of how DMPs can work in Sweden. Three of the strongest areas of impact for the MoK, identified by most interviewees, were related to raising awareness, demonstrating where public support could lie in terms of ambition and policy solutions, as well as in its potential to help overcome polarisation (see Figure 4).

The following section explores the impact of the assembly on core characteristics of climate democracy in more detail. Characteristics which did not feature in interviews have been excluded.

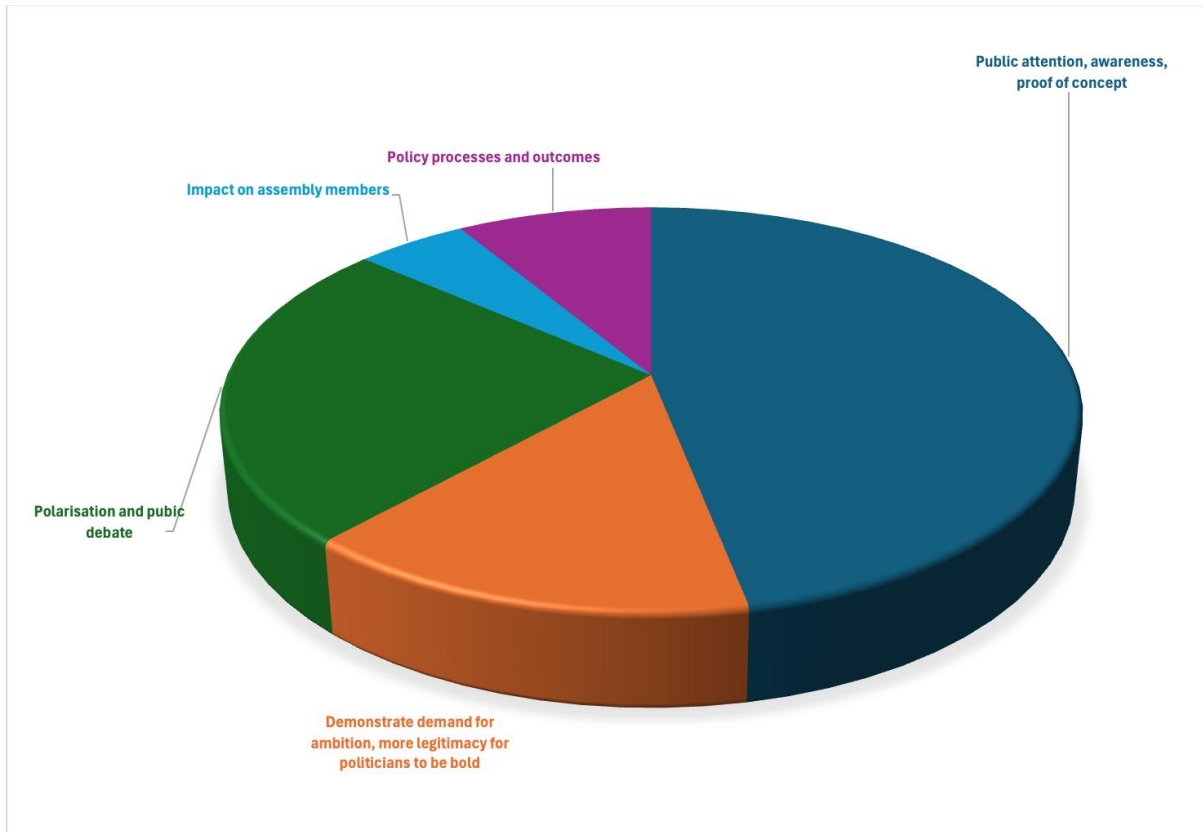


Figure 4. Areas of MoK impact most frequently mentioned in the interviews based on the number of coded references

Effectiveness

Though it was not commissioned by the government, former politicians were included in the MoK’s consultation group, and the assembly’s recommendations were presented at a seminar with parliamentarians in November 2024.

Most interviewees suggested that one of the assembly’s main impacts was in showing that, contrary to the backlash and polarisation narratives, citizens in Sweden do care about climate change and can contribute to finding solutions. As a civil society interviewee put it, the MoK showed “*that citizens of all political colour and all walks of life do care about combating climate change, and if you give them the opportunity will have fairly complete proposals on how to deal with it*”. One interviewee further noted that some media outlets used the assembly to criticise the government for inaction on climate change. It was also noted by several interviewees that the assembly showed that the government “*can’t blame the public for its inaction on climate change*”. Yet there is of course a challenge in making the conceptual leap from the DMP to the maxi public, which would not have had the benefit of expert testimonies and deliberation that the assembly members have gone through. These conceptual impacts on the effectiveness of climate democracy were supplemented by the expectation of an increased legitimacy for policy makers to develop bolder climate policies, albeit it was seen as unlikely under the current government by the interviewees.

In terms of the impact of the assembly on polarisation, most interviewees noted conceptual impacts of the MoK demonstrating the potential to overcome polarisation on climate change, as well as in suggesting that the degree of polarisation in the society around climate change in Sweden may be exaggerated. As a civil society expert put it: “*The most direct impact I think is that people that work with these issues and policy experts in different organisations can feel more confident that there is*

a way forward away from polarisation, and also there is a strong support in Sweden for ambitious climate policy". Some interviewees also highlighted direct instrumental impacts on the assembly members in terms of overcoming polarisation and changing opinions about climate change.

However, there was also a view that the assembly had not sufficiently communicated its ability to overcome political conflicts and how it was able to overcome them, which in the opinion of those interviewees who expressed it was a missed opportunity to impact political debate. Many interviewees also noted limited impact on the opinions of wider society, with some interviewees arguing that transformational impact on the attitudes about and support for climate change action requires scaling-up the assemblies across the country, institutionalising the assemblies beyond a one-off experience and simultaneous pressure for transformation from the social movements. One civil society interviewee has criticised communication around the assembly as being politicised, leading in their view to further politicisation and "tarnished the view on the political independence of scientists".

All interviewees reported limited or no instrumental impact on policy outcomes, which is also broadly consistent with the expectations from the assembly at the start. It is also influenced by the polarised political climate and the lack of meaningful involvement from government decision-makers. While some interviewees noted that all key political parties were present when the outcomes were presented, they felt there is limited potential for policy impact under the current government.

Interestingly, the interviews revealed that civil society actors, including Fairtrans partners, had not yet used the outputs of the assembly either. When prompted in the interviews some of them said that they are considering doing so going forward. However, several interviewees felt that the assembly may have some instrumental impacts on policy in the future post-elections if the future government's attitude to climate change would be different.

Deliberativeness and Participation

Most interviewees felt that the MoK had a positive conceptual impact on public awareness, drawing attention to both the citizens' assembly itself and deliberative public participation more generally, generating very good media coverage. It was also seen as a good way of finding out "the will of the people". Yet some interviewees felt that the attention to the assembly mainly came from those audiences already interested in climate change and/or public participation.

The MoK experience was also seen as proof that the DMP model can work in Sweden at the national level and serve as an inspiration to other actors. Some interviewees expected a positive conceptual impact in inspiring future policy processes. Conceptual impacts were also noted on the deliberativeness of municipalities and civil society institutions and networks, with some interviewees reporting an increase in the interest from their own institutions to use deliberative participation methods in their work. There was no impact reported on improving deliberativeness of national public institutions.

Representativeness

Several interviews noted the positive impact of the assembly in bringing greater diversity to the debate on climate policy beyond the voices of the middle class, and the value of the opportunity to speak to people outside of their usual circle for the members of the assembly. Yet some interviewees also noted that this diversity of backgrounds and views among the members has not been fully translated into the communication around the assembly. This highlights the potential of DMPs to enhance the representativeness of democracies. However, realisation of this potential depends on a balanced communication strategy and its execution, as well as on the mandate of the assembly and the intended follow-up by the government.

Accountability

When asked about the potential linkages between the MoK and the accountability features of climate democracy, some interviewees linked it to the response and follow-up to the recommendations of the assembly and argued that accountability would be relevant had the assembly been commissioned by government or parliament, and been institutionalised. Some interviewees felt that by providing an alternative channel for citizen voice and for providing pressure for ambition, citizens' assemblies

could contribute to enhancing accountability of climate democracies but felt this would be more tangible in the long term. While several interviewees struggled to see the links to accountability, and two suggested that a citizens’ assembly is the wrong instrument for that.

Justice

While the impact on the justice aspect of climate democracy was not something that interviews addressed on their own, when prompted some of them felt that the assembly served as a procedural justice tool and can be a good way to flesh out just transition aspects of policies. One interviewee thought that a citizens’ assembly could be helpful in determining Sweden’s priorities for the EU’s Social Climate Fund. Another interviewee saw no role for the assembly in addressing climate justice and generally thought this was not a helpful framing for discussions given a great variety in what different persons consider as just.

5.1.3 Factors shaping impact

Factors determining the impact of the MoK included those related to the assembly itself, including its internal characteristics, its preparation and execution; as well as external contextual factors, which are generally outside of the control of the assembly commissioners and organisers, such as challenges of reaching the broader society (or maxi-public) and lack of institutionalisation (see Figure 5).

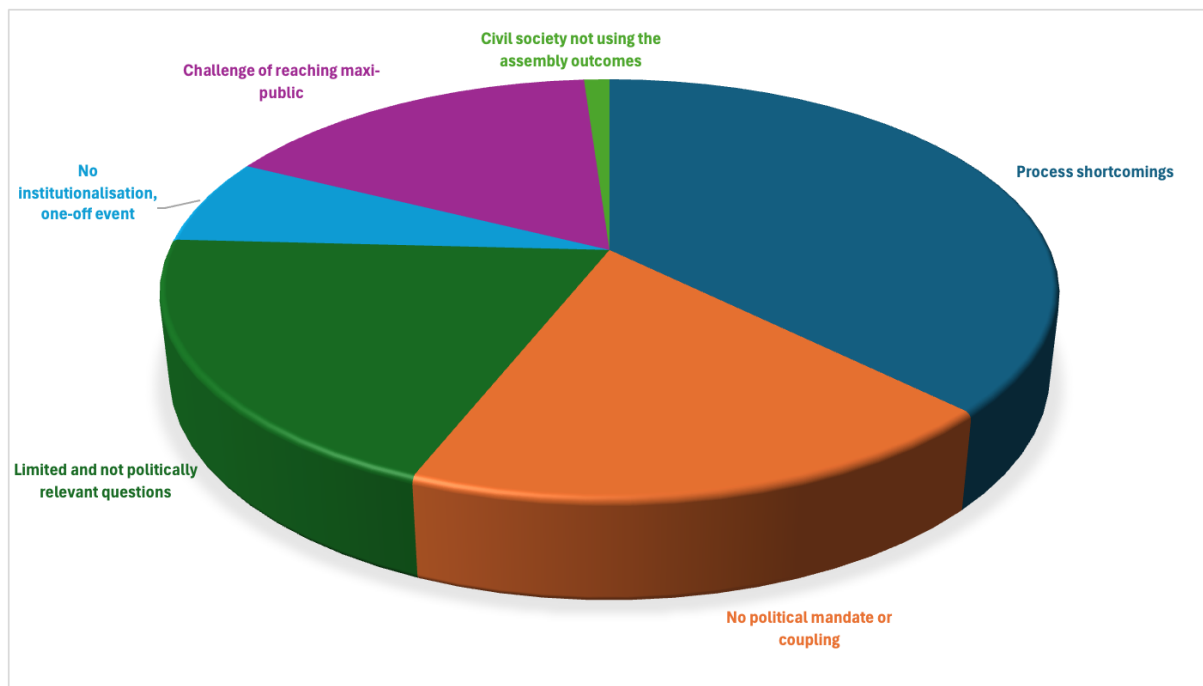


Figure 5. Barriers to impact of MoK most frequently mentioned in the interviews based on the number of coded references

Contextual factors

No political back up or mandate

One of the main barriers to impact of the MoK identified by most interviewers relates to the lack of political back up and mandate for the assembly and an uninterested government. Being convened by academia and civil society, the lack of political commitment from the government or parliament to engage with its process and outputs led to limited impact on these actors and created no accountability for follow-up. *“The assembly worked in a silo, so to speak, and the Swedish politicians, they didn’t have to relate to it”*, noted a government actor interviewee. Some interviewees felt that the lack of formal mandate made it difficult for MoK to claim representativeness of “mini-Sweden” despite adhering to sortition standards, created unclear expectations and undermined the

effectiveness of communications. Yet, one interviewee felt that in the current polarised political climate in Sweden having politicians behind the assembly would have undermined its effect. These challenges were further exacerbated by the emphasis on representative democratic culture discussed earlier and the prevalent view among the parliamentarians that they sufficiently represent the citizens. The reported lack of strong engagement of civil society with the outcomes of the assembly further diminishes its impact on the public debate and on potential policy outcomes.

Challenge of reaching maxi-publics

Difficulties of reaching audiences outside of those already interested in or committed to climate change despite very good media coverage were raised by several interviewees as a significant barrier to the impact on awareness, depolarisation and deliberativeness in the maxi-public. Specific challenges related to crowded information space, predominance of social media and simplification of information, bringing drama to communications around the citizens assembly and extending impact beyond the short-term immediate period after its end. Some interviewees felt that a citizen assembly alone cannot change the broader public debate and needs to be institutionalised to have greater impact. One interviewee also noted that ad hoc climate assemblies were particularly challenging in a polarised context and so as ensuring impact alongside multiple competing political interests.

Assembly design and implementation

Limited remit and political relevance of the outputs

Views were somewhat split on the role of the remit in the impact of the assembly. Some interviewees felt that the narrow focus on transport limited the potential use of the recommendations by a broader range of civil society actors, while others acknowledged that transport was chosen due to its relevance for the public. There was also a view that giving autonomy to the assembly to choose topics resulted in the creation of shopping lists, while having a clearer focus on policy solutions was seen as having a great potential for impact. Some interviewees felt that the recommendations produced were too general or naïve, not particularly innovative or relevant to the policy agenda. There was also a view that focusing on merely “showing an example” is of limited political interest, and that the assembly should have given a greater focus to democratic innovation and articulation of the key political questions in the debate (e.g. by providing an additional statement articulating these issues in addition to the recommendations). Emphasis on the output rather than the arguments for it has been reported as a shortcoming by several interviews.

Communication and outreach

Several interviewees reported a perception that the communication related to the assembly was biased towards political voices on the left/green side of the political spectrum that were already supportive of climate action and deliberative public participation. This was seen as an important barrier to impact. Specifically, the interviewees critiqued the self-selection of spokespeople who had a strong political stance with the Greens, while right-wing politicians did not engage in the process. Equally, some actors felt that the spokespeople still represented the middle class and did not represent enough diversity. There was a view that being more selective and ensuring greater diversity of voices talking about the assemblies would be beneficial for the impact of communication.

These challenges persisted despite several steps by the organisers to ensure political engagement across the spectrum. For example, the organisers ensured diversity of political views among the members during the selection process, invited representatives of all political parties into the reference group, which had a chance to comment on the design of the assembly, and had a chance to observe the assembly. Representatives of all political parties were also invited to the presentation of the assembly outputs. However, engagement from some parties, in particular on the political right, has been low. In retrospect some of the interviewees felt that a more targeted engagement with political actors creating potential ‘political champions’ for the assemblies by engaging with actors interested in climate change in each political party might be an effective strategy to consider for the future.

Some interviewees also commented on the role of the convener of the assembly, noting that while coming from academia provided the organisers additional credibility, being less known politically

may have impeded the impact of their communication around the assembly. There was a view that the conveners did a good job in communicating about the assembly to the Fairtrans partners. Several interviewees felt that the communication would have been more impactful if the assembly were organised by the government and/or were not a one-off event, hinting at importance of some form of permanence.

Organisation

Overall, the strong message from most of the interviewees was that the strength and the impact of the assembly depend significantly on its representativeness, both in terms of how members are selected, but also in the organisation and implementation of the assembly. Many interviewees complemented the organisation of the MoK on many counts, with one interviewee even suggested that it provided a 'gold standard' for Sweden.

An issue of critique with some interviewees were shortcomings in the representatives of the assembly and limited institutional involvement of stakeholders in its organisation. Namely, several interviews noted the absence of municipalities, business and government, and of stakeholders in the organisation of the assembly as detrimental to its impact. For example, they noted that in their view the names of invited experts or spokespeople have not been vetted with the broader community, which made the assembly more vulnerable and easier to be dismissed by the opponents.

Other concerns included the assembly being very expensive to replicate or scale-up, a challenge that several interviewees felt may diminish the potential for transformational impact of such instruments.

5.1.4 Institutionalisation and Innovation

Institutionalisation

As a bottom-up assembly organised by the Fairtrains project, the MoK does not meet most of the criteria for institutionalisation or embeddedness. The assembly did exhibit *representativeness and deliberative quality*—two of the characteristics of institutionalisation in the Unegbu and Dupont framework (2025). MoK was based on sortition and included professional facilitation according to best practice for organising the DMPs, as was highlighted in several interviews. MoK also had good *media coverage*. However, MoK does not meet any other criteria of institutionalisation and embeddedness: it has no expectations of regularity and predictability, resources allocated to it were part of a one-off project, it has no formal recognition and integration, and there is no formal follow-up process. Compared to other cases considered in this report, MoK arguably is the least institutionalised and embedded.

Several interviewees felt that the lack of institutionalisation and embeddedness was one of the key barriers to impact and suggested that a greater degree of institutionalisation, and especially integration to the legislative/ executive, would be required in the future for DMPs in Sweden to have a greater impact on polarisation and climate policy outcomes.

Innovation

The recommendations of the MoK contain several ideas on innovative governance actions: Recommendation 11 on Evaluation of Climate policy with consequences, and Recommendation 16 on Letting environmental and climate issues be governed by a professional group of experts, like the independence of the Riksbank (Sweden's central bank). On the latter, the MoK proposed to strengthen EU scrutiny of the implementation of the European Climate Law, including consequences / sanctions for member states that do not implement it correctly. They suggested that this could be through an independent review body, similar in independence to the Riksbank, that would be mandated by the EU to review Sweden's compliance with the EU climate targets and laws.

The MoK recommendations also include a proposal for the government and the opposition to work across party lines on climate issues and reach common agreements, similar to what is done on other issues such as pensions and defence. They called on all parties to engage more on climate issues and to work across sectors and committees to ensure input into decision making from various perspectives.

Recommendation 16 proposes that the government create a politically independent and autonomous

expert group with a specific climate and environment focus based on science and citizen dialogue focused on what measures are needed to achieve the climate and environmental goals. It is interesting to consider whether this recommendation may be picked up in the future by the Swedish Climate Council, which indeed is an independent expert advisory body, by including in its work formalised dialogues with citizens. Another governance recommendation requested that the government clarify responsibilities for implementation of climate actions for each ministry to avoid overlapping mandates.

Interestingly, much of the focus of proposed governance innovations is linked to the same challenges that were raised in the interviews: political polarisation, fragmentation and backsliding on implementation of climate action.

5.1.5 Lessons learnt

Based on their experiences with the Swedish Citizens' Assembly on Climate, interviewees put forward several recommendations for those engaged with the assembly and for similar future initiatives. These have been divided into three categories: 1. design and communication, 2. political engagement, and 3. systemic lessons on scaling-up and ensuring longer term impact.

Lessons on assembly design and communication

Lessons learnt on the assembly design included recommendations regarding the assembly mandate, presentation of evidence and outputs. With respect to the mandate, the interviews noted the importance of having clarity on the objectives and expectations regarding impact at the start of the planning process and suggested that the design should be adjusted accordingly. There were different views on whether the remit should focus on a broader or narrower question, but the several interviewees suggested that the question should have clear political relevance and focus on issues involving political controversy.

Much discussion in the interviews focused on lessons learnt about the outputs of the assemblies, with several interviewees seeing the main value of the assembly in filtering out the disagreements, focusing on the key dilemmas, choices and lever for reaching agreement, all which they suggested should be treated as important outcomes of the assemblies in the future and communicated as such. Some interviewees suggested that narrowing down the outputs or presenting choices could be helpful for making them more impactful. In this context it was suggested by some that the proposals or recommendations by the assembly should not be seen as the main objective.

In terms of the process of the assembly itself, most suggestions were related to simplifying information for the participants, having clear communication of the objectives and expectations, and leaving more time for dialogue relative to expert presentations.

Recommendations on communication strategy included having a clear communication plan well before the assembly takes place. Several interviews suggested that communication and the assembly outputs should not only focus on the citizens' proposals but place greater emphasis on the reasons for support and rejection. Practical suggestions included creating a concise and simple to digest summaries of the results and disseminating them broadly, as well as using the assembly members in the communications, as well as talking about the assembly in schools, and engaging famous figures to talk about the assembly. The use of high-profile mentors for the Swedish assembly (famous athletes) was seen as an important lever in drawing media attention.

Lessons on ensuring political engagement

Several interviewees commented on the lessons for how to make assemblies more impactful in the future focusing on stronger political impact. Suggestions included allocating seats for politicians and civil servants in the assembly (there are examples of mixed assemblies done elsewhere); focus on building cross-party support for the assembly by identifying and engaging specific individuals in political parties who may have interest in the topic (rather than focusing on party spokespeople); include in the advisory group all political parties; and involve politicians when designing the questions for the assembly to ensure its political relevance; and to organise seminars on the assembly with each political party to improve their engagement throughout. Careful thinking should also be given to ensuring that spokespersons for the assembly represent a variety of political affiliations to ensure



the assembly is perceived as representative. The latter is the common challenge for many climate assemblies.

Overall, it was considered important to ensure public participation including via citizens assemblies early on in the policy process before debate is locked, and on balance more interviewees felt that convening by a public authority would have a greater impact.

Lessons on scaling-up and long-term impact

Reflecting on lessons learnt from the MoK several interviewees noted that having a more profound and lasting impact on Swedish society, beyond the actors directly involved in the assembly, would require scaling up such engagement with citizens. This should be done both through holding more assemblies at different governance levels (e.g. national, municipal) making DMPs an integral part of the democratic system, but also by using other existing forums for citizens engagement to ensure DMPs are not isolated but part of a package of mechanisms for citizens engagement.

6. Case Study Three: Ireland

Over the past ten years, Ireland has developed a track record of using citizens' assemblies as a mechanism to address the interconnected crises of climate change and biodiversity loss (Harris, 2021a). The first assembly to engage with these issues was the 2016-2018 Citizens' Assembly. Although it was not exclusively focused on climate change, the topic was one of five areas considered by the Assembly, and was covered over two weekends in September-November 2017. The Assembly was tasked with exploring the question of "How the State could make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change" (Citizens' Assembly, 2018). This was followed a few years later by two assemblies specifically mandated to address biodiversity loss over several months: the 2022-2023 Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (CABL) and the 2022 Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (CYPABL).

In all three cases, the assemblies were mandated by the government and implemented by a secretariat set up at arm's length from the central government. While the terms of reference, i.e. guidelines that define the work of the assembly, were approved by the Parliament for the two adult assemblies, the children's assembly was specifically commissioned by the Minister responsible for nature and biodiversity policy, Malcolm Noonan T.D.

In terms of structure, the CYPABL was designed and run by an independent research consortium, composed of Dublin City University, University College Cork and the organisation *terre des hommes*, in collaboration with a group of young advisors (CYPABL, 2023). The two adult assemblies, by contrast, shared a similar governance structure to each other, consisting of an independent Chair and a Secretariat overseeing the process, along with an Expert Advisory Group responsible for designing the assembly (Citizens' Assembly, 2018; Citizens' Assembly, 2023).

Regarding composition, both adult assemblies included 99 randomly selected participants, stratified by gender, age, location, and social class (Citizens' Assembly, 2018; Citizens' Assembly, 2023; Devaney et al., 2020). By contrast, the CYPABL involved 35 participants aged 7-17, selected through a public expression of interest process and stratified by age, gender, location, urban/rural, ethnicity, and disability status (CYPABL, 2023).

The 58 calls to action resulting from the CYPABL were endorsed within the adults' CABL (CYPABL, 2025). By contrast, in the case of the CABL, the Parliament committed to considering the 159 recommendations through a joint committee of both Houses (Citizens' Assembly, 2023). Unlike previous assemblies, the government was expected, following the assembly, to provide the Parliament with a response to each recommendation and, where accepting some or all of them, to indicate the envisaged timeframe for implementation.

Against this background, the focus of this case study lies in understanding the impact of climate- and biodiversity loss-related citizens' assemblies in Ireland on climate and democratic governance, particularly in relation to policymaking and societal engagement. While most existing studies in the Irish context concentrate on the Citizens' Assembly on climate change, this research focuses on the more recent 2022 citizens' assemblies on biodiversity loss, which have received comparatively less scholarly attention. The 2016-2018 Citizens' Assembly is also included in the analysis because it offers a longer-term perspective on how earlier assemblies may inform subsequent ones.

The rest of this section presents the findings of the case study underpinned by 13 semi-structured interviews that were conducted between May and July 2025 with a range of stakeholders: 4 academics, 7 government actors, 1 youth participation practitioner, and 1 civil society actor. Many of them acted as members of the Secretariats and Expert Advisory Groups of the Assemblies. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, supported by NVivo qualitative software.

This section is structured as follows. Section 6.1 presents the findings from the interviews, divided into four parts: the institutional context in which the assemblies took place (6.1.1); the impact (6.1.2), which outlines the different types of impact in relation to the features of democracy highlighted in the RETOOL Analytical Framework; the factors shaping impact (6.1.3); evolution over time and lessons learnt (6.1.4). Section 6.2 focuses on the institutionalisation and innovation associated with the Irish Citizens' Assemblies.

6.1 Findings

6.1.1 Context

A recurring theme across the interviews is Ireland's strong track record with citizens' assemblies, with one interviewee describing the model as "part of the fabric of Irish democracy". The high level of trust that citizens' assemblies have earned over time as a result is therefore linked to a series of successful assemblies that have led to significant policy changes.

The most frequently cited example was the 2016-2018 Citizens' Assembly, which addressed several issues, including climate change - as mentioned - and abortion. This process ultimately led to a constitutional referendum and the repeal of the Eighth Amendment, which had granted an equal right to life to the unborn and the mother, effectively creating a near-total ban on abortion. This success demonstrated the assembly's ability to shift public discourse and influence policy on contentious issues, helping to establish its strong reputation and credibility in Ireland.

Interviews indicated that this reputation stems from the strong connection between citizens' assemblies and formal political structures. There was a shared belief that assembly recommendations are taken seriously and that the government is likely to respond, reinforcing the legitimacy and influence of the process.

6.1.2 Impact

The interview findings indicate that the citizens' assemblies in Ireland examined as part of this case study have had their strongest impact on effectiveness, particularly in terms of climate policy outputs, reiterating what is found in the existing literature. However, the interviews also revealed additional impacts, specifically the role of the assemblies in demonstrating public appetite for action on climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as their capacity to build consensus around these issues. Another important contribution from the interviews was in highlighting the assemblies' impact on justice, especially intergenerational justice, as seen in the case of the Children and Young People's Assembly on biodiversity loss.

This section explores the types of impact of the three citizens' assemblies on core features of democracy in Ireland and beyond in more detail. Characteristics which did not feature in interviews have been excluded. Regarding the assemblies' overall contribution to strengthening democracy, interviewees offered a mixed perspective. On the one hand, they observed that the assemblies enhanced people's sense of involvement in decision-making and described them as a "useful tool in the toolbox." On the other hand, they cautioned that citizens' assemblies alone are not a solution to the broader challenges of democratic decline.

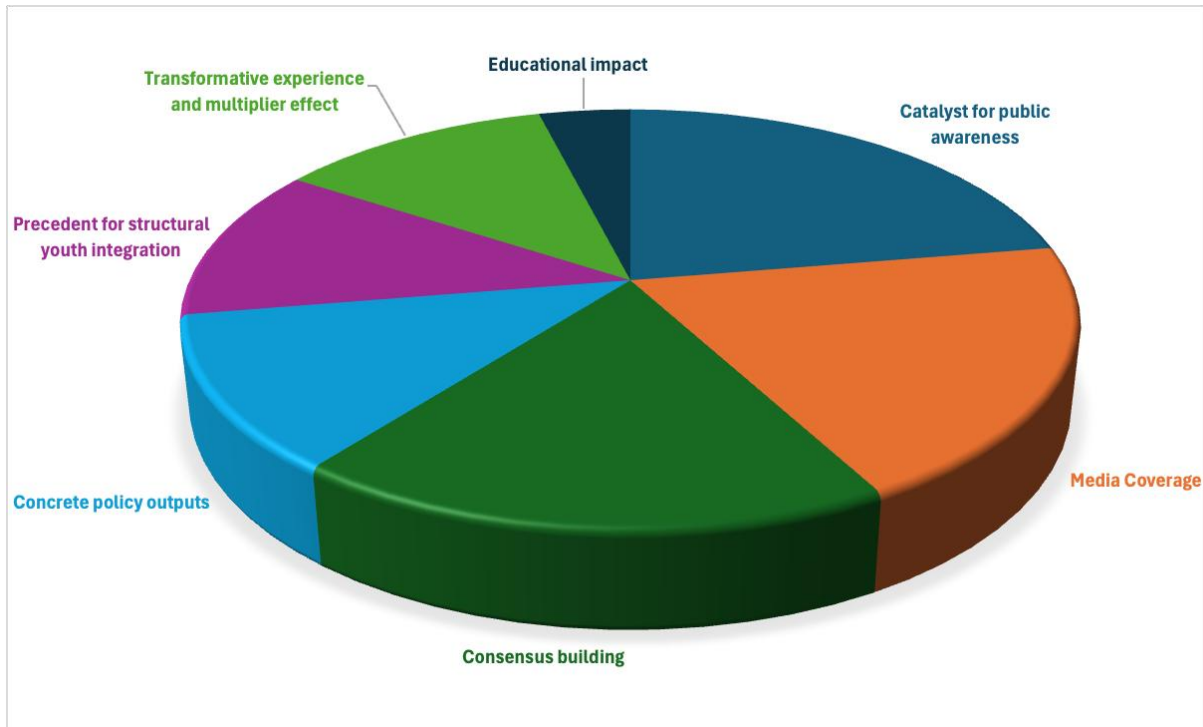


Figure 6. Types of impact most frequently mentioned in the interviews based on the number of coded references

Effectiveness

The interviews reiterated and confirmed findings from the literature that citizens’ assemblies have had visible *instrumental* impact, particularly in terms of policy effectiveness. In particular, the Citizens’ Assembly on climate change played a significant role in shaping key policy outputs, including the development of the first Climate Action Plan in 2019, the amendment of Ireland’s climate legislation, i.e. the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021, and a strengthened role for carbon budgets. In comparison, the literature more clearly emphasises the Assembly’s *capacity* impact, in terms of newly established structures and allocated resources, most notably through the creation of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action (JOCCA), highlighting its pivotal role in translating citizen recommendations into formal policy proposals (Harris, 2021b; Harris 2021a; Torney, Devaney and Brereton, 2020; Fitzgerald and others, 2021).

However, while the literature primarily focuses on the impact of the Citizens’ Assembly on climate change on policy outputs (Devaney and others, 2020; Harris, 2021a; Harris, 2021b; Torney, 2021; Torney, Devaney and Brereton, 2020), the interviews highlight similar impacts from the citizens’ assemblies on biodiversity loss. For example, they point to the inclusion of perspectives from children and young people and the adult assembly in the National Biodiversity Action Plan. This is a type of impact that most interviewees emphasised, tracing it directly back to the citizens’ assembly process.

However, when asked whether citizens’ assemblies always have positive impacts or might generate new problems, one interviewee cautioned that governments may use this format as a way to appear proactive while avoiding or postponing difficult policy decisions during critical political windows.

Somewhat related to *instrumental* impact is the emphasis many interviewees placed on the assemblies’ role in fostering consensus as a means to achieving specific climate/biodiversity outcomes. They highlighted the assemblies’ ability to reveal the extent of overlapping consensus among citizens on complex issues. However, one interviewee offered a contrasting view, stating that the Citizens’ Assembly on Climate Change was not successful in bridging polarisation in the societal debate on climate-related issues, particularly between farmers and other groups. The interview

findings echo the emphasis in the literature on climate assemblies' potential to reduce polarisation (Devaney et al., 2020) and to encourage more constructive dialogue (Torney, 2021), even if they do not eliminate political conflict entirely (Torney, Devaney, & Brereton, 2020). For instance, one interviewee noted that a single controversial recommendation, such as reducing meat consumption, can dominate media narratives, potentially alienating key stakeholders like farmers and undermining broader support for the assembly's conclusions.

Beyond the assemblies' impact on policymaking and consensus building, the interviews also revealed other important forms of *conceptual* impact. In particular, the majority of interviewees viewed the assemblies as a vehicle for capturing "public sentiment" or the "public appetite and understanding" of issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss. Several interviewees highlighted the assemblies' merit in "rais[ing] the overall quality of the discourse about [the] topic," "chang[ing] the conversation about the subject," or "mainstream[ing] the subject," demonstrating a broader public willingness to engage with and act on these challenges. Only two interviewees questioned the citizens' assemblies' impact - specifically in relation to biodiversity loss - on public discourse.

Other forms of impact highlighted in the interviews - particularly in relation to the Children and Young People's Assembly - that can be broadly linked to *capacity* impact include: the personal impact on participants' lives, with many describing the experience as transformative and life-changing; the educational impact, both in terms of what members learned and in the development of educational resources for schools; and the role of the assembly in setting a precedent for more structural integration of youth voices into decision-making processes.

It is also worth noting the assemblies' impact on media coverage, as highlighted in the interviews. The majority of interviewees emphasised that the assemblies generated significant media attention, an outcome actively supported by those organising the assemblies. However, two interviewees noted that media coverage of the Citizens' Assembly on climate change was less significant than expected. They attributed this to the relatively low newsworthiness of climate change as a topic, as well as the limited duration of the assembly (i.e. just two weekends), which they felt was insufficient to generate strong media engagement.

Deliberativeness

The interviews revealed that the Citizens' Assemblies exerted an *instrumental* impact on deliberativeness, as participants engage in a deliberative process that deepens their understanding of complex issues and shapes their final recommendations. In this sense, the interviews reiterate the literature which emphasises how the Irish Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change is credited with fostering more informed, inclusive, and reflective public discourse, building on earlier initiatives like the *We the Citizens* pilot, which introduced structured deliberative practices (Torney, Devaney and Brereton, 2020; Harris, 2021b).

Additionally, the Children and Young People's Assembly was seen, in particular, as having *conceptual* impact by promoting learning through democracy and by triggering new ways of thinking about deliberative democratic processes involving youth, an area traditionally limited to the adult population.

While only a few interviewees highlighted it, it is worth noting their perspective on the limits of the deliberative process fostered by the assemblies, specifically concerns arising from the fact that assembly members are not elected. As a result, while their deliberations carry weight, there is only a formal obligation for the government to respond. Making their recommendations binding, some argued, would be undemocratic.

Accountability

Accountability emerged in the interviews through themes of trust and legitimacy.

There was overall consensus that the assemblies had an *instrumental* impact on accountability, understood as a potential change in how decision-makers are held accountable. This impact stems from a general sense of trust that the political system will follow up on the work of the assemblies, which is treated seriously, and from a certain level of confidence in the process, shared by both the public and politicians and rooted in the history of citizens' assemblies in Ireland (as discussed in Section 6.1.1). This reiterates the existing literature, which highlights the Assembly on climate change's contribution to transparency, legitimacy, and procedural accountability in climate governance, due to the public nature of the process and the formal parliamentary response mechanisms (Harris, 2021b; Muradova, Walker, & Colli, 2020). However, the literature also notes the assembly's lack of power to review or implement its recommendations, which constrains its ability to ensure follow-through and substantive accountability (Harris, 2021b; Torney, Devaney, & Brereton, 2020). This point was echoed by one interviewee who saw value in reconvening assemblies after several years to review progress and assess what had (or had not) been implemented, potentially helping to bridge the accountability gap between recommendations and real-world outcomes.

One interviewee specifically reflected on the accountability of those running the assembly, shaped by the intense external scrutiny faced by the Citizens' Assembly on climate change, both from the media and through the formal process of its recommendations being passed to an Oireachtas Committee. This heightened scrutiny, which had originally influenced the assembly's work on abortion, carried over into the climate change deliberations. As a result, decisions had to be defensible in any forum. It was noted that, in assemblies subject to less scrutiny, there is a greater risk that those overseeing the process could exert undue influence. While this link was not explicitly made by the interviewee, this observation may suggest a *capacity* impact, in that an emphasis on rigorous accountability within the assembly has the potential to raise standards for transparency and decision-making in other institutional contexts.

Representation & Participation

The interviewees' insights related to representation and participation were often intertwined, which is why they are considered together here.

In terms of representation, interviewees highlighted a *conceptual* impact of the assemblies in broadening the sense of the 'public', both in terms of who participates and the diversity of perspectives they bring. This diversity was often attributed to the representative nature of the assemblies themselves, but it also appeared to reflect broader societal diversity. Specifically, in relation to the Children and Young People's Assembly, interviewees noted an *instrumental* impact, in terms of enhanced representation of youth as a traditionally marginalised group within decision-making spaces.

In terms of participation, the assemblies were seen to have a *capacity* impact by fostering public engagement, both through the active involvement of assembly members and through mechanisms such as public consultations and civil society mobilisation. However, one interviewee emphasised the need for greater external support to sustain this engagement. This, again, reiterates the literature, which also strongly emphasises the Assembly on climate change's impact on participation, particularly through public submissions, which enhanced broader public engagement and expanded both the reach and depth of citizen input (Devaney and others, 2020; Harris, 2021b; Torney, Devaney and Brereton, 2020). Again, in the case of the Children and Young People's Assembly, a *conceptual* impact was highlighted as it was viewed as a valuable template for how young people can participate meaningfully in policymaking.

At the same time, two interviewees warned that citizens' assemblies are increasingly seen as vehicles for progressive outcomes, which can lead to unrealistic public expectations and discourage participation from those with more conservative views, potentially skewing the process.

Knowledge and expertise

The assemblies contributed to shifts in how knowledge and expertise are understood and mobilised in policymaking, particularly in conceptual terms.

Overall, the assemblies demonstrated an expanded use of diverse forms of knowledge. Alongside scientific presentations, participants engaged with lived experiences, and in the case of the CYPABL, with participatory activities such as nature walks. These were viewed as equally valid modes of learning and decision support. The use of field trips was similarly highlighted as impactful, with interviewees noting that participants do not always relate to empirical evidence unless it is grounded in tangible experiences. This underlines the importance of engaging, relatable forms of knowledge transmission in fostering climate and environmental action.

There was also criticism, particularly for the Climate Assembly, about the underrepresentation of certain perspectives, notably from the agricultural sector.

Specifically, the CYPABL prompted a rethinking of what counts as expertise, in that reliance on experiential learning rather than a stream of formal expert presentations challenged conventional models of knowledge transfer. One interviewee reflected that participants reached similar conclusions despite following different learning paths, thereby questioning who holds knowledge and what forms of expertise are considered legitimate in shaping policy.

Justice

While the assemblies' impact on justice did not emerge clearly from the literature, this is the area where the interviews offer the most insight, particularly in relation to intergenerational justice, as the study included the Children and Young People's Assembly. Interviewees highlighted how the assembly enabled children and young people to engage with the public sphere and participate in political processes. One interviewee explicitly noted that children often bring a deeper sense of justice, not only in terms of their right to have a voice in decision-making, but also in relation to substantive justice concerning the non-human world.

Two interviewees further emphasised that this focus on children's participation has been supported by a growing interest in children's rights in Ireland, influenced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This can be linked to *capacity* impacts, as it shows how deliberative democratic processes promote the meaningful and routine inclusion of children and young people in governance.

6.1.3 Factors Shaping Impact

From the interviews, several factors emerged as shaping the impacts of the citizens' assemblies on climate change and biodiversity loss in Ireland. These include: the national context, the design of the assemblies, the nature of their recommendations, and the broader reality that their impact is shaped by multiple, interrelated elements.

Importance of the National Context

One of the key factors shaping the impact of citizens' assemblies is the national context, particularly the fact that these assemblies are embedded in Ireland's political history as formats that produce visible and credible outcomes (see Citizens' Assembly on abortion). Interviewees emphasised the importance of public trust, which is grounded in Ireland's track record of treating assembly recommendations seriously, with governments formally mandated to respond. The strong coupling between citizens' assemblies and formal political processes, along with a generally receptive political environment, has therefore been central to their impact in the Irish context.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews is that the assemblies under discussion contributed to broader national momentum around climate change and biodiversity loss, as well as growing international interest in youth involvement in decision-making. In Ireland, the government at the time was already highly mobilised around environmental issues, particularly climate change and biodiversity. However, one interviewee noted that this momentum may now be shifting due to the composition of the current coalition government.¹

In relation to the Children and Young People’s Citizens’ Assembly on biodiversity loss, there was broad agreement that the initiative was championed by the then Minister of State for Nature, Heritage and Electoral Reform, Malcolm Noonan, who was personally committed to enhancing children’s participation in policymaking.

Finally, a general point raised in several interviews concerned the international resonance of Ireland’s citizens’ assemblies, which are increasingly viewed as a reference point globally.

Assemblies’ Design

The majority of interviewees highlighted that the success of Ireland’s citizens’ assemblies - especially when compared to those in other jurisdictions - lies in the institutional response and follow-up to their recommendations, or what the literature referred to as their “coupling” with the political system (Harris, 2021a). People trust that the outcomes will be taken seriously because the assemblies are government initiatives formally endorsed by Parliament. Crucially, the political system commits in advance to responding to the recommendations. At the same time, most interviewees pointed out the importance of maintaining a careful balance between this institutional legitimacy and the independence of the assemblies.

Other aspects of the design were discussed less frequently but are still worth noting. These include the suitability of the topic - since not all issues lend themselves well to the citizens’ assembly format - the framing of the question, and the clarity of its overall purpose. One interviewee noted that citizens’ assemblies tend to work best for either polarised, binary issues (such as abortion) or complex topics where the aim is to deepen public understanding (such as climate change). However, while the Citizens’ Assembly on climate change may have helped broaden public discourse, it did not bridge the gap between public opinion and policy change to the same extent as the assembly on abortion. The interviewee linked this difference to the nature of the issue, noting that climate change is a far more complex and less binary topic, which makes political action harder to define and implement. Timing also emerged as an important factor, with the CABL taking place before the development of the National Biodiversity Action Plan, allowing its findings to inform the plan.

At the same time, while the design of the assemblies was recognised as an important factor in shaping their impact, there was also an understanding that design alone is not sufficient. As one interviewee noted, “design doesn’t operate in a kind of clinical laboratory,” emphasising the need to consider wider contextual factors.

Follow-up to and Nature of the Recommendations

Closely related to follow-up as a key factor shaping the impact of citizens’ assemblies is the distinction between acceptance and implementation of the recommendations. Several interviewees emphasised that while most recommendations may be formally accepted, this often only involves setting up a working group or launching a consultation, rather than full implementation. This distinction raises important questions about the real depth of impact.

Another key factor shaping the impact of citizens’ assemblies is the extent to which their

¹ Following the general elections, a new coalition government was formed in Ireland, with the main difference being that the Green Party is no longer part of it.

recommendations are actionable and realistic. Most interviewees noted that some proposals were so ambitious that they were sort of “programme for government–level initiatives” rather than measures that could be implemented mid-term. For example, suggestions such as recognising rights of nature in the Irish Constitution were considered as politically and logistically challenging, making full commitment difficult. Interviewees added that successful uptake of assembly outcomes depends not only on political will but also on whether the recommendations realistically address the complex trade-offs policymakers face, rather than presenting idealistic options that are difficult to implement in practice or that can take years to become clear whether or not they have succeeded. This challenge of grappling with trade-offs appears to have been addressed more effectively in the Citizens’ Assembly on climate change than in the CABL, possibly due, in part, to the more manageable number of recommendations produced by the former.

At the same time, one interviewee expressed concern that citizens’ assemblies might simply echo long-standing NGO recommendations, offering little new insight. They warned that this could delay action and risk missing a crucial political window of opportunity, particularly when the Irish government coalition appeared at the time more willing to act on climate change or biodiversity loss.

Convergence of Multiple Factors

Rather than focusing on single factors, five interviewees highlighted that the impact of the assemblies depends on the convergence of multiple elements. Strong political commitment, effective communication, the assembly’s design and transparency, wider public momentum, government context, and civil society engagement all play crucial roles in translating assembly outcomes into real-world impact.

6.1.4 Institutionalisation and Innovation

Institutionalisation

Although citizens’ assemblies in Ireland have not been institutionalised through legislative recognition, many of the other dimensions of institutionalisation and embeddedness identified by Unegbu and Dupont (2025), as outlined in Table 3, are nevertheless present.

First, the use of random selection of participants stratified by gender, age, location, and social class across the three citizens’ assemblies constitutes an inclusive selection method that enhances demographic *representativeness* and deliberative legitimacy. The assemblies also benefited from *skilled facilitation and dedicated resources*, including public funding, staff training, and the creation of specialised roles.

While the citizens’ assemblies do not follow a fixed recurring schedule, they have been convened regularly over the past decade in response to complex or politically sensitive issues, e.g. abortion, climate change and biodiversity loss, suggesting an emerging *predictability* in how they are used within the Irish political landscape.

Although not integrated in legislation, citizens’ assemblies in Ireland exhibit a *degree of formal recognition and integration* through the formal Terms of Reference approved by Parliament or government. These define mandates, timelines, and follow-up procedures, providing transparency and legitimacy that mirror more institutionalised models, such as the Brussels Citizens’ Assembly.

They have also consistently received a *certain level of media coverage* and public attention, reinforcing their public visibility and engagement. This recurring visibility has contributed to a sort of a *cultural embeddedness*, whereby assemblies are seen by interviewees as “part of the fabric of Irish democracy”.

Therefore, although assemblies in Ireland lack formal legal recognition, they exhibit a notable degree

of institutionalisation, resulting in strong embeddedness within the political and cultural landscape. However, recent political shifts have raised concerns about potential rollback. Some interviewees highlighted that changes in political leadership may be weakening momentum and political will, risking a gradual *de-institutionalisation* of the model.

Innovation

In the Irish case study, most governance innovations are found in the recommendations from the two citizens' assemblies on biodiversity loss, particularly the CABL. While the 2016–2018 Citizens' Assembly, which included climate change, led to the creation of a special parliamentary committee (JOCCA) and influenced national climate legislation and policy, these innovations were not explicitly mentioned in its recommendations. However, both the literature and interview findings make it clear that these outcomes would likely not have occurred without the assembly.

An analysis of the 159 CABL recommendations reveals that especially those falling under the heading 'Strategic Approach to Biodiversity Loss' contain a number of proposals for new institutional arrangements or significant changes to existing governance structures, aimed at fundamentally transforming the Irish approach to environmental governance (Citizens' Assembly, 2023, see Annex 2)

The CABL put forward several ambitious recommendations for governance innovation, particularly institutional changes aimed at giving biodiversity a more standalone and dedicated position within government. One example is Recommendation 22 calling for a senior ministerial position with an associated department responsible for biodiversity, in contrast to the current arrangement where biodiversity, nature, and heritage fall under the broader remit of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

While the official response from the JCECA was generally receptive to the recommendations, the government's response reflects a mixed level of commitment to institutional reform and often pushes back on certain proposals, in some cases explicitly rejecting their implementation. For example, Recommendation 22 has been deferred as a matter for government formation, while Recommendation 23 calling for a dedicated Oireachtas committee has not been formally adopted, though biodiversity remains under the remit of the existing JCECA. The call for a new independent biodiversity agency (Recommendation 24) has been partially addressed through the restructuring of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), although without the full statutory independence or the broad coordinating mandate that the CABL envisioned. Recommendation 27 on the establishment of an environmental court has effectively been rejected, with the government instead pointing to recent changes in the High Court structure - specifically the establishment of a dedicated Planning and Environmental Court - where most environmental and planning litigation currently takes place.

In addition to proposals for new institutional arrangements or structural reforms within government, it is also worth noting Recommendation 31, which concerns constitutional amendments to include substantive and procedural environmental rights, as well as rights of nature. The government's response - that it is for the NPWS to explore how the rights of nature could be formally recognised in the Constitution - raises questions about the extent to which this recommendation is actually being implemented.

In addition to the recommendations from CABL, the analysis of the 58 calls for action from CYPABL highlights Action 15 as particularly relevant, as it proposes the establishment of a permanent Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss (CYPABL, 2023). In response, the government referred to an existing commitment in the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) to establish a Children and Young People's Biodiversity Forum by 2024. However, as of today, there is no official record that the forum has been established.

Overall, the analysis of the assemblies' recommendations shows that while CABL's and CYABL's governance innovations have stimulated discussion and partial institutional responses, many of the more transformative proposals remain unrealised or only partially implemented, revealing the gap between citizen-led ambition and political uptake. These findings reiterate interview findings, which suggest that many of the more ambitious recommendations were seen as "programme for government-level initiatives" rather than feasible mid-term actions, that formal acceptance often amounts to limited steps like setting up a working group, and that accepted recommendations typically align with existing government plans. These findings further underscore the need to distinguish between government endorsement and substantive implementation.

6.1.5 Evolution over time and lessons learnt

Since the 2016-2018 Citizens' Assembly on climate change is included in the analysis - offering a longer-term perspective on how earlier assemblies can inform later ones - this section focuses on the evolution of the process. It highlights lessons learned from that assembly and how they have influenced subsequent ones on biodiversity loss. These lessons relate primarily to the design of the assemblies, but also touch on integration, long-term impact, and the future of citizens' assemblies on climate- and biodiversity-related issues.

Lessons on assembly design and communication

One key lesson learned from the Citizens' Assembly on climate change was the limited duration of the process. Interviewees viewed the timeframe, i.e. just two weekends, as too short, and identified it as a point of learning that informed the design of the subsequent assembly on biodiversity loss.

Beyond the issue of timeframe, which appeared to be a broadly recognised lesson, a range of other insights, each identified by individual or small numbers of interviewees, emerged to improve the design of citizens' assemblies.

- In the preparatory phase, some interviewees highlighted the importance of carefully designing the assemblies: overly detailed terms of reference can overwhelm participants and constrain innovation; at the same time a certain degree of structure is necessary to help people understand what is being asked of them and to ensure they feel their time is well spent. Additionally, a strong and well-composed advisory group is essential to guide deliberations and ensure the relevance and accessibility of information.
- During the assemblies themselves, field visits and direct exposure to real-world issues, such as visiting degraded habitats in the Assemblies on biodiversity loss, were seen as good practice to deepen understanding and strengthen group cohesion. This highlighted the importance of communicators and facilitators who can translate empirical evidence into formats that resonate with diverse audiences. Additionally, the importance of communicating the assembly's process and outcomes was also emphasised, including ensuring online visibility, accessible documentation, and wider public engagement, such as through local events or town halls. However, limited staff and financial resources were acknowledged as barriers to achieving this.
- After the assemblies, interviewees recommended focusing on fewer, more actionable, and realistic recommendations, potentially by capping the number of proposed actions.

Lessons on integration

One interviewee called for mechanisms to support ongoing public engagement beyond the assemblies, such as local biodiversity forums or county-level plans facilitated by biodiversity officers.



Lessons on long-term impact and the future of citizens assemblies in Ireland

One interviewee cautioned against overusing citizens' assemblies, arguing that their impact is greatest when reserved for particularly complex or divisive issues that cannot be resolved through ordinary policymaking processes.

Some saw value in reconvening assemblies after a number of years to review progress and assess what had (or hadn't) been implemented, helping to bridge the accountability gap between recommendations and real-world outcomes.

When asked whether they saw a future for citizens' assemblies on climate change or biodiversity loss in Ireland, interviews offered a mixed picture. Some expressed concern about the declining influence of citizens' assemblies in recent years and noted with disappointment that they are no longer included in Ireland's current programme for government. Others expressed optimism about their potential, highlighting opportunities for future assemblies - perhaps on a smaller scale - focused on specific environmental topics such as water, rivers, and marine protection.

7. Discussion and Policy Considerations

7.1 Insights on the impacts of DMPs and areas for future research

Across the case studies, and particularly in the Belgian and Swedish case studies, there appears to be more evidence of conceptual impacts than instrumental and capacity impacts (see summary Table 5). This is notable given the finding from the systematic literature review that the instrumental impacts of climate change and energy transition DMPs have received more academic attention than the capacity and conceptual impacts. It hints at a potential incongruence between the theorised and actual impacts of DMPs, which has implications for future research and our understanding of the value of DMPs. These findings should of course be viewed in the specific context of the assemblies studied in this report, rather than be generalised to all climate and energy focused DMPs.²

Our analysis raises important considerations for policy, practice, and research around DMPs. First, it suggests that more attention should be paid to capturing the conceptual impacts of DMPs. Existing evaluation models tend to focus on capturing instrumental impacts; new frameworks should be developed that capture the many dimensions of conceptual change evident in the case studies. Second, it raises the question of whether we need to re-evaluate our understanding of the value of DMPs. To date, the argument for DMPs tends to be that they can or should shape climate policy. However, the Swedish case study shows that DMPs can be designed from the outset to engender conceptual impacts. Coupled with evidence for DMPs' ability to shift thinking about key characteristics of climate democracy in Belgium and Ireland, it suggests that proponents and organisers of DMPs could benefit from updating their arguments and objectives for DMPs, so that they focus on potential impacts beyond policy change, e.g. their potential to help depolarise public discourse around climate change.

Across the case studies presented in this report instrumental, policy impacts seem to be greatest in the Irish case. The DMPs featured in the Irish case also exhibit strong political and cultural embeddedness, even if they lack the formal institutionalisation exhibited by the Brussels assembly. Thus a comparative analysis of these cases suggests that varying levels of political and cultural embeddedness can explain varying levels of impact. The Swedish case— which demonstrates limited political and cultural embeddedness — shows the weakest instrumental, policy impact, reinforcing the importance of political and cultural embeddedness.

Other explanatory factors for the varied levels of impact evident across the case studies are the political relevance of DMPs' remit and the political commitment to engage DMPs and their recommendations. Greater political relevance of the questions being considered by DMPs and greater clarity around the process by which recommendations would be considered appears to be an important differentiator between the impact of the Irish DMPs and the ones in Brussels and Sweden.

Despite efforts to learn more about the impacts of DMPs on justice and accountability, there were limited findings on these two characteristics of democracy across the case studies. This is particularly surprising for justice, since DMPs are perceived to hold strong potential for unpacking social conflicts and uncovering acceptable solutions to policy trade-offs. The difficulty in assessing these types of impacts in our case studies could be because the term 'justice' is too abstract; going forward conversations could be more productively framed around terms such as "trade-offs" and "fairness", which relates to distributive justice. Regardless, the findings suggest that further research is needed on the relationship between DMPs and justice/accountability.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the novel analytical framework developed in Section 2 and employed across the systematic literature review and case studies. The framework encouraged holistic thinking

² For example, studies of other climate assemblies, most notably the French Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat, report evidence of strong instrumental impacts on policy outputs through climate legislation and regulation (e.g. Averbchenkova et al. (2025)).

about the impact of DMPs, and to consider not only impacts on climate action, but also on core characteristics of democratic governance. Unlike the KNOCA Impact Evaluation Framework, which focuses on novel and positive impact, our analytical framework also prompted consideration of continued and potential negative impact. At times, however, it was difficult to decide which category an impact fit under. This speaks to overlaps between some of the core characteristics of democracy in the RETOOL analytical framework. Brawley-Cheshworth et al., (2025) begin to explore relationships between the characteristics of democracy, but these relationships could be unpacked further in future research. This challenge also speaks to the novelty of the types of impact outlined in the KNOCA Impact Evaluation Framework and the challenges of differentiating between instrumental, capacity and conceptual impact; understanding of these types of impact will take time to solidify. Nonetheless, given the tendency in the field of deliberative democracy towards more systemic ways of understanding and evaluating DMPs, this framework is a potentially valuable contribution to future research and practice.

7.2 Policy implications

Several policy takeaways also emerged across the case studies. First, DMPs need to make policy-relevant and actionable recommendations *if they are to have policy impact*. This means that DMPs should be timely, introducing their recommendations at the right point in a policy cycle or debate. It also means that DMPs should deliberate on salient issues. Both of these require active input from policymakers on design.

Second, the case studies all highlighted the need for strong political commitment behind DMPs from across the political spectrum, since this has a bearing on the resources dedicated to an assembly and the extent to which recommendations of an assembly will be implemented. The contrasting policy impact of the Irish assemblies compared to the Belgian and Sweden assemblies noted above is testament to this. Moreover, political commitment appears to be a prerequisite for DMPs to become politically embedded. This is evident from potential roll-backs in Brussels and Ireland, which threaten to undermine the power and prevalence of DMPs. Thus organisers of DMPs should seek cross-party engagement, developing diverse political champions well before the start of a DMP. More broadly, organisers and researchers interested in studying DMPs should carefully consider the political context in which a DMP operates. This confirms the merits of employing a systemic approach to organising and evaluating DMPs.

A third key takeaway that emerged from the Belgian and Irish case studies, based on contrasting levels of policy impact and cultural embeddedness, was the importance of public awareness of and engagement with DMPs. All case studies show that it was challenging to reach audiences that are not already committed to climate action. In this context, organisers of DMPs must consider a range of options for informing and engaging the wider public. Options suggested by interviewees include supporting assembly members to speak about their own experiences, introducing digital platforms for the wider public to feed ideas into or comment on the deliberations of the DMPs, and tapping into pop culture. It is also important to consider how DMPs can be held more frequently and scaled up across governance levels. Such options require additional resources so would benefit from further research or testing. Regardless, it is clear that political commitment and public awareness and engagement are also important prerequisites for DMPs to become politically and culturally embedded in climate governance; formal institutionalisation is important but insufficient on its own.

Fourth, given the need for public engagement and increased focus on *non-policy-related impacts*, greater attention needs to be paid to how DMPs' impacts are communicated. Interviewees in the Irish and Swedish case studies highlighted the transformative, depolarising effect of the assemblies on members' discourse and, ultimately, opinions. It is not clear, however, how this effect can be captured and transferred to wider public discourse. One suggestion put forward by interviewees was to communicate key conflicts that arise within DMPs, and the ways in which those conflicts were overcome to achieve consensus and develop recommendations, rather than only communicating the recommendations themselves. This idea also, however, requires further research and testing. Thus,



ways to communicate the outputs of DMPs, beyond simple policy recommendations, could be a promising avenue for further research.

A final takeaway relates to the timeframe and scaling-up of DMPs' impact. A few interviewees across all three case studies suggested that it was too soon to evaluate the assemblies they were being asked about. This suggests that we should extend the timeframe after which we expect DMPs to have an impact on climate action and democratic governance. This could have implications for when and how DMPs are evaluated. It also emphasises the importance of not seeing DMPs as an all-encompassing solution, but rather as one promising tool among other tools for public participation that should be deployed when appropriate. This suggests that the relationship between DMPs and social movements, and the role they could play in collaboratively strengthening democratic governance for climate action, merits further exploration.

Table 5. Summary of key impacts across case studies

Type of Impact			
Key Characteristic of Climate Democracy	Instrumental	Capacity	Conceptual
	Participation	<i>Change in how/how much citizens participate in governance processes, both within and beyond elections</i>	<i>Change in the resources/expertise of/for citizens to participate in governance processes.</i>
		Irish assemblies fostered public engagement through involvement of assembly members and through mechanisms such as public consultations and civil society mobilisation	The CYPABL was viewed as a valuable template for how young people can participate meaningfully in policymaking
		The Brussels assembly creates a dedicated, regular platform for citizen participation. It also encourages the government to set aside resources to respond to citizens.	The Brussels assembly improved understanding of and opinions on citizen participation, especially among civil servants.
		MoK had transformative education and empowerment impact on the assembly participants	MoK impacted media coverage on public participation
Representation	<i>Change in the ability of citizens to influence outcomes, including change in who represents them, and how, and the responsiveness of the institutions that serve them</i>	<i>Change in the resources/ expertise dedicated to ensuring that diverse citizens have influence over outcomes</i>	<i>Change in thinking about citizens’ influence over outcomes</i>



	In the CYPABL enhanced representation of youth as a traditionally marginalised group within decision-making spaces		Irish assemblies broadened the sense of the ‘public’, both in terms of who participates and the diversity of perspectives they bring
			The Brussels assembly improved members’ perceptions of the institutions that serve them.
			MoK brought greater diversity of voice to the climate debate.
Knowledge and expertise	<i>Change in the forms of knowledge and expertise used to inform policy</i>	<i>Change in the resources/expertise dedicated to ensuring that diverse forms of knowledge and expertise are used to inform decision-making</i>	<i>Change in thinking about the forms of knowledge and expertise that are used to inform decision-making</i>
			The Irish assemblies demonstrated the importance of engaging, relatable forms of knowledge transmission in fostering climate and environmental action
			The CYPABL prompted a rethinking of what counts as expertise, for the reliance on experiential learning rather than a stream of formal expert presentations
		The Brussels assembly provides an avenue for citizens’ lived experience to feed into climate policy-making.	
Accountability	<i>Change in how a governance system responds to actors, including relationships between decision-makers and citizens</i>	<i>Change in the resources/expertise dedicated to the relationship between decision-makers and citizens.</i>	<i>Change in thinking about the relationship between decision-makers and citizens</i>



	In the Irish assemblies’ general sense of trust that the political system will follow up on their work and a certain level of confidence in the process, shared by both the public and politicians and rooted in the history of citizens’ assemblies in Ireland		
Deliberativeness	<i>Change in the use of “respectful and reasonable dialogue” (Lindberg et al.) to reach decisions, including deliberation with and amongst citizens</i>	<i>Change in the resources/expertise dedicated to deliberation with and amongst citizens</i>	<i>Change in thinking about deliberation with and amongst citizens</i>
	Participants engaged in a deliberative process that deepened their understanding of complex issues and shaped their final recommendations, but no obligation for government to implement recommendations as members are not elected		The CYPABL promoted learning through democracy and triggered new ways of thinking about deliberative democratic processes involving youth
		The Brussels assembly creates a dedicated, regular platform for citizen deliberation. It also encourages the government to set aside resources to respond to citizens.	The Brussels assembly improved understanding of and opinions on citizen deliberation, especially among civil servants.
			MoK demonstrated the DMP model can work at the national level in Sweden for climate change. It also generated good media coverage and increased publicity for deliberative public participation.



	<i>Change in the extent to which the governance system achieves its intended climate outcomes</i>	<i>Change in the resources/expertise available for a system to achieve its intended climate outcomes</i>	<i>Change in thinking about climate change and climate action</i>
Effectiveness	Irish assemblies played a key role in shaping key policy outputs, e.g. climate and biodiversity plans, and fostering consensus, even though they did not eliminate conflicts entirely	The CYPABL had personal impact on members’ lives and educational impact, as well as setting a precedent for integrating youth in decision-making	Irish assemblies were viewed as a vehicle for capturing the “public appetite and understanding” of issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss
		The Brussels assembly fed civil servants with new policy ideas related to home renovation and allowed them to strengthen their relationships in government and beyond. It also increased the expertise of assembly members on climate change.	The Brussels assembly demonstrated that citizens are equally, if not more, ambitious on climate issues than the government.
			MoK showed people care about climate change and support greater ambition than politicians lead to believe. It also demonstrated polarisation on climate change can be overcome through deliberation. Used reference to Mok to criticise inaction and low ambition. Policy community expects it can help increase legitimacy for bolder climate policies in the future.
Justice	<i>Change in the extent to which the governance system addresses spatial, temporal, and intersectional injustices associated with climate change</i>	<i>Change in the resources/expertise dedicated to promoting climate justice</i>	<i>Change in thinking about climate justice</i>



	The CYPABL enabled youth to engage with the public sphere and participate in political processes, as well as to bring their deeper perspective on justice	The CYPABL promoted the inclusion of youth voices in climate and biodiversity governance	
			The Brussels assembly stimulated discussions around the fairness of certain climate policies.
	MoK was seen as a procedural justice tool.		

ANNEX

Annex 1 - Literature selected for systematic literature review

Title	Year	Authors	Source Title
Distrust and reflexive impotence in the net zero transition: findings from a longitudinal deliberative mini-public	2024	Ainscough et al.	Climatic Change
Embedding deliberation: guiding the use of deliberative mini-publics in climate policy-making	2024	Ainscough and Willis	Climate Policy
The Emotional Experience of Members of Scotland's Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change	2022	Andrews	Frontiers in Climate
It's not too late to do the right thing: Moral motivations for climate change action	2020	Bain and Bongiorno.	Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change
Beyond the echo chamber: modelling open-mindedness in citizens' assemblies	2024	Barrett et al.	Autonomous Agents and Multi-Agent Systems
Representing global public concern: A critical analysis of the danish participatory experiment on climate change	2015	Blue	Environmental Values
Public Deliberation with Climate Change: Opening up or Closing down Policy Options?	2015	Blue	Review of European, Comparative and International Environmental Law
Co-Creation and Participatory Research: Climate Assemblies in Schools as a Means to Sustainability Transitions	2024	Boqué-Ciurana et al.	World Sustainability Series
Integrating citizen deliberation into climate governance: Lessons on robust design from six climate assemblies	2023	Boswell et al.	Public Administration
Julia Gillard's Citizens' Assembly Proposal for Australia: A Deliberative Democratic Analysis	2013	Boswell et al.	Australian Journal of Political Science
Mobilizing mini-publics: The causal impact of deliberation on civic engagement using panel data	2020	Boulianne et al.	Politics
Conflicts of Legitimacies in Representative Institutions: The Case of the French Citizen Convention for Climate	2023	Buge and Vandamme	Representation
Relational values and citizens' assemblies in the context of adaptation to sea-level rise	2023	Burger et al. .	Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability
Global Climate Governance, Short-Termism, and the Vulnerability of Future Generations	2022	Caney	Ethics and International Affairs
Responsible innovation: an approach for extracting public values concerning advanced biofuels	2015	Capurro et al.	Journal of Responsible Innovation



How not to introduce deliberative democracy: The 2010 citizens' assembly on climate change proposal	2013	Carson	The Australian Citizens' Parliament and the Future of Deliberative Democracy
School climate assemblies: an educational tool for empowering pupils and youth to take climate and sustainability action	2025	Cebrián et al.	Sustainability Science
Citizens' assemblies in Brazil: an analysis of the role of mini-publics on building democratic participatory climate public policies	2024	Cervellini et al.	Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research
Are local climate assemblies politically representative of the macro-public they represent, and does this matter?	2024	Coxcoon	Environmental Research Communications
Deliberative democracy in the age of serial crisis	2022	Curato et al.	International Political Science Review
Environmental literacy and deliberative democracy: a content analysis of written submissions to the Irish Citizens' Assembly on climate change	2020	Devaney et al.	Climatic Change
Re-imagining the Making of Climate Law and Policy in Citizens' Assemblies	2022	Duvic-Paoli	Transnational Environmental Law
Green politics beyond the state: radicalizing the democratic potentials of climate citizens' assemblies	2023	Ejsing et al.	Climatic Change
A Strange Defense of Climate Democracy	2025	Ellis	Journal of Democracy
The scope of climate assemblies: Lessons from the climate assembly uk	2021	Elstub et al.	Sustainability (Switzerland)
DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION IN THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT: AN EVALUATION OF COMMITTEE MINI-PUBLICS	2021	Elstub et al.	Scottish Affairs
What change? Assessing the Extinction Rebellion's support for climate assemblies	2025	Falanga and Carvalho	Environmental Science and Policy
The 'stifling' of new climate politics in Ireland	2021	Fitzgerald et al.	Politics and Governance
The atelier climat, a French citizen consultation process set up to promote sustainable development: A local democratic innovation?	2014	Galateau	Field Actions Science Report
Behind the curtains of deliberation: unveiling climate policy and behavioural challenges through a mini-public in Spain	2024	Galende-Sánchez et al.	Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning
Empowerment and disempowerment in climate assemblies: The French citizens' convention on climate	2024	Galván Labrador and Zografos	Environmental Policy and Governance
"Co-construction" in deliberative democracy: lessons from the French Citizens' Convention for Climate	2022	Giraudet et al.	Humanities and Social Sciences Communications
Deliberation and civic virtue: Lessons from a citizen deliberation experiment	2010	Grönlund et al.	European Political Science Review





The challenge of deliberative democracy online-A comparison of face-to-face and virtual experiments in citizen deliberation	2009	Grönlund et al.	Information Polity
The role of UK local government in delivering on net zero carbon commitments: You've declared a Climate Emergency, so what's the plan?	2021	Gudde et al.	Energy Policy
Democratic deliberation for sustainability transformations: between constructiveness and disruption	2020	Hammond	Sustainability: Science, Practice, and Policy
Democratic innovations and policy analysis: Climate policy and Ireland's Citizens' Assembly (2016-18)	2021	Harris	Policy Analysis in Ireland
Looking to the future? Including children, young people and future generations in deliberations on climate action: Ireland's Citizens' Assembly 2016-2018	2021	Harris	Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research
Reimagining Democracy in an Era of Deep Transition	2020	Harris and Hughes	Irish Studies in International Affairs
The influence of political knowledge on opinion polarization in citizen deliberation	2019	Herne et al.	Political Research Exchange
Deliberation and opinion change: Evidence from a deliberative mini-public in Finland	2014	Himmelroos and Christensen	Scandinavian Political Studies
Citizens' panels as a form of deliberative technology assessment	1999	Hörning	Science and Public Policy
Building a Social Mandate for Climate Action: Lessons from COVID-19	2020	Howarth et al.	Environmental and Resource Economics
Transformative power production futures: citizen jury deliberations in Saskatchewan, Canada	2023	Hurlbert et al.	Energy, Sustainability and Society
The Extinction Rebellion and going beyond politics: can deliberation be the answer in climate mitigation?	2024	Huttunen	Fennia
Climate Justice and Political Feasibility	2024	Ibsen	Political Studies Review
When Digital Mass Participation Meets Citizen Deliberation: Combining Mini-and Maxi-Publics in Climate Policy-Making	2022	Itten and Mouter	Sustainability (Switzerland)
Have a little faith in deliberation? Examining the effect of participation in a citizens' assembly on populist attitudes	2024	Jacobs	Contemporary Politics
Populists and citizens' assemblies: Caught between strategy and principles?	2023	Jacobs	De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies
Explaining non-participation in deliberative mini-publics	2017	Jacquet	European Journal of Political Research
Establishing the use of climate citizens' assemblies in Japan: their significance and challenges	2024	Kainuma et al.	Sustainability Science
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTITUTIONALISM: A	2023	Kelleher	Irish Judicial Studies Journal





TRANSFORMATIVE LEGAL DISCOURSE?			
Do the origins of climate assemblies shape public reactions? Examining the impact of partisanship	2024	Keivins and Robison	European Journal of Political Research
Local government and democratic innovations: reflections on the case of citizen assemblies on climate change	2023	King and Wilson	Public Money and Management
Effects of opinion statements on laypeople’s acceptance of a climate engineering technology. Comparing the source credibility of researchers, politicians and a citizens’ jury	2021	Klaus et al.	Journal of Science Communication
Between hopes and systemic unsustainability: An analysis of citizens assemblies' potential on climate change	2023	Knops and Vrydagh.	De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies
Exploring transformative social innovations for a wellbeing economy: insights from citizens’ juries in Vienna and Oxford	2025	Krisch et al.	Review of Regional Research
Citizens call for sufficiency and regulation — A comparison of European citizen assemblies and National Energy and Climate Plans	2023	Lage et al. .	Energy Research and Social Science
Learning from practice: Expanding the OECD’s impact evaluation criteria based on experiences of subnational climate assemblies in France, Spain and Portugal	2025	Lancha-Hernández and ; Becerril-Viera	Environmental Science and Policy
Worcester educator climate assembly: promoting sustainability leadership through participation. A community approach to education in climate emergency	2021	Lengthorn and Asbury	Discover Sustainability
The messy politics of local climate assemblies	2023	Lewis et al.	Climatic Change
Assessing the quality of a deliberative democracy mini-public event about advanced biofuel production and development in Canada	2016	Longstaff and Secko	Public Understanding of Science
Challenging public engagement: participation, deliberation and power in renewable energy policy	2016	MacArthur	Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences
Democracy, Agony, and Rupture: A Critique of Climate Citizens’ Assemblies; [Demokratie, Agonie und Disruption: eine Kritik an Klimabürgerräten]	2023	Machin	Politische Vierteljahresschrift
Understanding undergraduate students’ perceptions of dynamic pricing policies: An exploratory study of two pilot deliberative pollings (DPs) in Guangzhou, China and Kyoto, Japan	2018	Mah et al.	Journal of Cleaner Production
Children and young people’s assemblies against the backdrop of the European Green Deal:	2025	Mallon et al.	Journal of European Integration





opportunities for consolidating and extending a sustainable and democratic transition			
Citizens assemble: a study on the impact of climate reporting in the Irish media 'before', 'during' and 'after' the Citizens' Assembly on 'how the state can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change'	2021	McGovern and Thorne	Irish Political Studies
Integrating Artificial Intelligence Into Citizens' Assemblies: Benefits, Concerns and Future Pathways	2024	McKinney	Journal of Deliberative Democracy
Deliberative Quality and Expertise: Uses of Evidence in Citizens' Juries on Wind Farms	2021	Mehrtretter Drury et al.	Journal of Deliberative Democracy
Public perceptions of climate engineering Laypersons' acceptance at different levels of knowledge and intensities of deliberation	2019	Merk et al.	GAIA - Ecological Perspectives for Science and Society
Carbon Pricing is not Unjust	2024	Mintz-Woo	Global Challenges
How to Confront No Ordinary Danger	2025	Mittiga	Journal of Democracy
Lessons from a Climate Citizens' Assembly Kawasaki, Japan	2024	Mori	Sustainability Science
Sortition-infused democracy: Empowering citizens in the age of climate emergency	2021	Mulvad and Popp-Madsen	Thesis Eleven
Climate change communication and public engagement in interpersonal deliberative settings: evidence from the Irish citizens' assembly	2020	Muradova et al.	Climate Policy
The Dynamics of Social Identity: Evidence from Deliberating Groups	2022	Myers	Political Psychology
Community deliberation to build local capacity for climate change adaptation: The rural climate dialogues program	2017	Myers et al.	Climate Change Management
Evaluating deliberative participation from a social learning perspective: A case study of the 2012 National Energy Deliberative Polling in post-Fukushima Japan	2021	Ngar-yin Mah et al.	Environmental Policy and Governance
Knowledge and the Deliberative Stance in Democratic Systems: Harnessing Scepticism of the Self in Governing Global Environmental Change	2020	Niemeyer	Knowledge and Space
Democracy and climate change: What can deliberative democracy contribute?	2013	Niemeyer	Australian Journal of Politics and History
When citizen deliberation enters real politics: how politicians and stakeholders envision the place of a deliberative mini-public in political decision-making	2019	Niessen	Policy Sciences
Sustainability and politics: Explaining the emergence of the 2020 Budapest climate assembly	2021	Oross et al.	Sustainability (Switzerland)
Saskatchewan's energy future: Risk and pathways analysis	2020	Osazuwa-Peters et al. .	Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions





Public views of Scotland's path to decarbonization: Evidence from citizens' juries and focus groups	2020	Ostfeld and Reiner	Energy Policy
How the climate movement shaped the EU: protest cycles and democratic spaces in the European green deal	2025	Parks	Journal of European Integration
Deliberative mini-publics as learning schools for democracy? Examining deliberation impact on dissatisfied and radical participants of a citizens' assembly in Poland		Paulis and Pospieszna	Democratization
Fair Enough? Mini-Public Composition and Outcome Acceptance from the Maxi Public	2024	Paulis et al.	Journal of Deliberative Democracy
Unveiling citizens' perspective on citizen assemblies among participants and non-participants of a citizen assembly on energy	2024	Perlaviciute et al.	Environmental Research Communications
Citizen assemblies should involve citizens as experts on their own values	2024	Perlaviciute	One Earth
Political embedding of climate assemblies. How effective strategies for policy impact depend on context	2025	Pfeffer and Newig	Environmental Science and Policy
Setting the agenda for climate assemblies. Trade-offs and guiding principles	2024	Pfeffer	Climate Policy
Diverse roles and perceptions of public officials and NGOs in local citizens' assemblies—A comparative analysis of the cases of Poland and Hungary	2025	Pospieszna et al.	Local Government Studies
Experts and evidence in deliberation: scrutinising the role of witnesses and evidence in mini-publics, a case study	2020	Roberts et al.	Policy Sciences
Engaged, indifferent, skeptical or critical? Disentangling attitudes towards local deliberative mini-publics in four western european democracies	2021	Rojon and Pilet	Sustainability (Switzerland)
Deliberative democracy and environmental justice: evaluating the role of citizens' juries in urban climate governance	2021	Ross et al.	Local Environment
The Washington Climate Assembly: note-taking modalities as deliberative guidance in an online citizens' assembly	2024	Rountree et al.	Journal of Applied Communication Research
The internal dynamics of "scaling up" deliberative mini-publics	2022	Rountree et al.	Communication and the Public
Deliberating just transition: lessons from a citizens' jury on carbon-neutral transport	2023	Saarikoski et al.	Sustainability: Science, Practice, and Policy
Contrasting views of citizens' assemblies: Stakeholder perceptions of public deliberation on climate change	2021	Sandover et al.	Politics and Governance





Creating pathways to just and sustainable food systems with citizen assemblies	2024	Schmid et al.	Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research
Deliberative minipublics and climate change policy	2023	Setälä et al.	Democracy and the Future: Future-Regarding Governance in Democratic Systems
Foregrounding citizen imaginaries Exploring just energy futures through a citizens' assembly in Lebanon	2022	Shehabi and Al-Masri	Futures
Credible Empowerment and Deliberative Participation: A Comparative Study of Two Nuclear Energy Policy Deliberation Cases in Korea	2021	Shin and Lee	Review of Policy Research
Taking deliberation seriously: Institutional design and green politics	2001	Smith	Environmental Politics
Climate change as the subject of citizens' assemblies in Polish cities	2024	Sobol	Ochrona Srodowiska i Zasobow Naturalnych
Climate change assemblies as spaces for the potential mitigation of climate policy misperceptions: A survey experiment	2025	Suiter et al.	Environmental Science and Policy
The importance of context and the effect of information and deliberation on opinion change regarding environmental issues in citizens' juries	2021	Thompson et al.	Sustainability (Switzerland)
Deliberative mini-publics and the european green deal in turbulent times: The irish and french climate assemblies	2021	Torney	Politics and Governance
Ireland's citizens' assembly on climate change: Institutional pioneership by a climate laggard?	2020	Torney et al.	Climate Governance across the Globe: Pioneers, Leaders and Followers
Fostering Reasoning in the Politically Disengaged: The Role of Deliberative Minipublics	2024	Veri	Political Studies Review
The green case for a randomly selected chamber	2022	Verret-Hamelin and Vandamme	Contemporary Political Theory
Towards Global Cooperation: The Case for a Deliberative Global Citizens' Assembly	2020	Vlerick	Global Policy
What is the normative added value of deliberative mini publics in the context of climate policy making?	2024	Walkenhorst and Schuppert	Swiss Political Science Review
Are citizen juries and assemblies on climate change driving democratic climate policymaking? An exploration of two case studies in the UK	2021	Wells et al.	Climatic Change
Citizens' Assemblies and Juries on Climate Change: Lessons from Their Use in Practice	2021	Wells	Addressing the Climate Crisis: Local Action in Theory and Practice
Citizens' assemblies: Beyond utopian and dystopian approaches	2023	Welp	De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies
Taking deliberative research online: Lessons from four case studies	2023	Willis et al.	Qualitative Research





Deliberative democracy and the climate crisis	2022	Willis et al.	Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change
What do you mean 'Climate Change'? An analysis of climate change framings in three climate assemblies	2024	Zeitfogel et al.	Environmental Science and Policy
Experts and expertise in practices of citizen engagement in climate policy: a comparative analysis of two contrasting cases	2024	Van Beek et al.	Climatic Change
The European Green Deal: The future of a polycentric Europe?	2020	Van Zeben	European Law Journal



Annex 2 - Recommendations from Irish CABL

The table below outlines selected recommendations from the Irish CABL referred to as examples of innovative governance mechanisms, together with the responses from the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action (JCECA) and the government.

Recommendation March 2023	Response from JCECA 14 December 2023	Response from govern 1 November 2024
<p>22. There should be a senior ministerial position, with an associated department, with responsibility for biodiversity</p>	<p>15. The concern that fragmentation of responsibility and conflicting objectives are an obstacle to an effective strategy and the Assembly’s call for new structures, such as a dedicated Oireachtas Committee on Biodiversity and a Cabinet Minister responsible for Biodiversity, should be reviewed as a matter of urgency, and proposals from government should be presented to the Oireachtas before October 2024.</p> <p>16. The Committee recommends a fundamental change in approach to environmental governance across government departments</p>	<p>The establishment of a senior ministerial position is a matter for consideration at Government formation.</p> <p>Status: not being implemented</p>
<p>23. There should be a permanent, cross-party Standing Oireachtas Committee on Biodiversity Loss, which will consider and respond to the recommendations of this Assembly, within 6 to 12 months</p>		<p>Biodiversity is considered under the remit of the Joint Oireachtas Committee for Climate and the Environment and this committee has considered and responded to the recommendations of the CABL. It is a matter for the Oireachtas to give further consideration to this recommendation.</p> <p>Status: in progress</p>
<p>24. There should be a new national independent agency to act as a centralised biodiversity coordinating structure (...)</p>		<p>The NPWS has been established as an executive agency and is responsible for most of these functions. The Biodiversity Forum provides independent oversight for the NBAP, however it does not have a statutory footing. The establishment of Biodiversity Advisory Council (to align with the Climate Change Advisory Council) is a matter for Government.</p> <p>Status: in progress</p>

<p>27. In addition to recent developments in judicial structures in environment and planning, the State must develop an environmental court at Circuit and District Court levels, in order to hold policy makers, businesses and citizens to account</p>	<p>18. The Committee notes the assembly’s recommendation that the State would examine the development of an environmental court at Circuit and District Court levels. The Committee recommends that further examination of specialised environmental courts should be undertaken with a view to implementing specialised model that fits appropriately into Ireland’s existing court structure</p>	<p>The planning system is the most appropriate and effective place to deal with planning concerns and there are established processes in place already (that are subject to ongoing review). Furthermore, it would not appear that there is a sufficient volume of work at Circuit or District level to justify a separate environmental court. The major litigation in the environmental and planning area is in the area of Judicial Review, where the High Court has exclusive first instance jurisdiction under the Constitution. To that end, a dedicated Planning and Environmental Court has recently been established in the High Court.</p> <p>Status: not being implemented</p>
<p>29. Each local authority must have at least one full-time dedicated biodiversity officer, the total number of which should be determined by population density, land mass and coastline</p>		<p>At least one full time Biodiversity Officer is now in place in 24 Local Authorities (March 2024), with a target to have a Biodiversity Officer in all 31 Local Authorities by the end of 2024. The total number of Biodiversity Officers is not linked to population density, landmass, coastline or to biodiversity hotspots.</p> <p>Status: in progress</p>
<p>30. All relevant Departments, bodies and agencies that deal with biodiversity should have in-house ecological expertise to advise on all biodiversity related policies and activities</p>		<p>Action 1B3 of the 4th NBAP is for all relevant Departments and Government Bodies to explore the biodiversity expertise and training requirements across Government to ensure the appropriate expertise is available to implement the Plan – this is the first step towards implementing this recommendation. Some Departments have increased biodiversity expertise in recent years</p> <p>Status: in progress</p>

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