



# Compendium

## Mini-Publics in Austria

Lessons from Three Case Studies

### **MANTA**

Mini-Publics And Other New Forms  
Of Participation In Civic Education

# Imprint

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# 1. Introduction: Why this booklet?

## 1.1. Info on the MANTA project

The project “Mini-publics and Other New Forms of Participation in Civic Education” (MANTA)<sup>1</sup> is financed by the European Erasmus+ programme. Seven partners, including research institutions, civil society organisations and schools from Austria, Croatia and Germany, work together to promote education for democracy and to provide educators with training and tools that enable them to teach about new(er) forms of democracy, which seem to be more appealing to young people than traditional party politics.

One instrument of deliberative democracy gaining traction internationally is mini-publics, i.e., organised fora in which citizens debate political problems and formulate recommendations for political actors like parliaments and governments. An example from Ireland became particularly well-known for turning the country's stance on abortion from one of the most restrictive in Europe to a liberal one, thereby proving that citizen deliberation might really foster change.

The materials, which have been developed in the MANTA project and can be found online, include a blended learning training, a webinar, materials for research-based learning in the classroom, and podcasts. Together, they form a package that can be used by educators for self-training and as inspiring tools to teach about democratic participation.

## 1.2. About the compendium

This booklet was designed mainly as a resource for educators and students (age 16+ or university), journalists, and the general public interested in concise information on mini-publics as one specific form of deliberative democracy. The second chapter provides some theoretical and conceptual background on deliberative democracy and the specificities of mini-publics and citizens’ assemblies. It briefly summarises the most important findings and current debates from academic literature and includes references to further readings for those who want to dive into democracy theory.

The central part of the booklet, however, aims to get closer to the actual practice of deliberative democracy by focusing on three case studies from Austria, which are used to explore the strengths and weaknesses of these citizens’ assemblies in different settings. First, regional and local mini-publics in Vorarlberg, where 13 mini-publics on various topics have been held since 2011, show how this instrument can be successfully incorporated into regional and local decision-making processes. Second, the first national mini-public on the future of democracy, held in September 2021 in Upper Austria, is analysed as an example of a bottom-up approach to deliberative democracy. Third, the national climate assembly held from January to June 2022 provides an example of a high-profile citizens’ assembly implemented by parliament. The structure of the case studies broadly follows the chronological arc of a mini-public from its commissioning to the uptake of results by the broader political system. Thus, each subchapter is devoted to a specific (set of) question(s) that can be relevant for debates in the classroom. While not all questions allow for definitive answers, readers are provided with information to engage in evidence-based debates about mini-publics as one instrument of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.demokratiezentrum.org/bildung/angebote/projekte/aktuelle-projekte/manta/> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

deliberative democracy. A [concluding summary](#) draws the three cases together and compares the different designs and their pros and cons.

Readers find a list of resources at the end of the compendium, which provides further information on deliberative democracy and mini-publics.

## 2. Mini-Publics as instruments of deliberative democracy

### 2.1. The idea: Deliberative democracy in a nutshell

Deliberative democracy is a “school of thought in political theory that claims that political decisions should be the product of fair and reasonable discussion and debate among citizens.”<sup>2</sup> In this view, the ideal of democracy does not consist of decision-making by voting but of the informed, rational and power-free exchange of arguments on any given problem or policy, with each participant striving for the public good rather than seeking individual advantages. The goal is to reach a consensus, not to secure a majority decision. Personal opinions are thus formed in the deliberative process, i.e. by the force of the better (rational) argument rather than following from individual interests.

Trying to put this ideal into practice entails a focus on the process of decision-making. According to philosopher Jürgen Habermas<sup>3</sup>, whose discourse ethics greatly influenced the development of deliberative democracy, fair procedures and unimpeded communication within the deliberative process are precisely what ensures democratic legitimacy. Ideally, only decisions and norms accepted by all participants in the respective discourse (e.g. all citizens in the case of decision-making on the national level) can be called legitimate.

In the real world, ideal conditions for deliberation are never met, as human beings hardly fulfil the ideal of detached, purely rational citizens who are immune to power as well as rhetoric manoeuvres and are sufficiently informed to assess the effects of their decisions. Important questions remain as to how and by whom problems and questions are defined – who has the power to set the agenda? – before deliberation even starts. Even more basic questions about the conceptual exclusion of anyone not mastering the social and cultural criteria for rationality (e.g. because of age or cognitive ability) as well as the possibility of particular situations deviating from the alleged public good, which might, therefore, be ignored. This raises the problem of how deliberative instruments can safeguard the rights of marginalised groups as well as minorities with dissenting viewpoints. Other political theories stress that complex societies are characterised by agonistic relations, i.e., contradictions that impede consensual solutions.

Such criticism notwithstanding, the idea of democracy as an ongoing deliberative forum has an obvious charm for at least two reasons. First and foremost, proponents see a specific epistemic value

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<sup>2</sup> Eagan J.L. deliberative democracy. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/deliberative-democracy> [retrieved 15.2.2023]. In accordance with the literature we continue to use the term “citizen”, but it is important to note that deliberative democracy mostly targets residents rather than just people holding formal citizenship.

<sup>3</sup> Finlayson, J.G./Rees, Dafydd Huw. 2023. Jürgen Habermas. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/habermas/> as well as <https://contemporarythinkers.org/jurgen-habermas/> [both retrieved 06.12.2023]

in deliberation,<sup>4</sup> which means that deliberative instruments promise better solutions (in the form of recommendations or even binding decisions) than those of representative democracy. Reasons for this optimism include the absence of strategizing by parties or interest groups, the diversity of viewpoints represented and the independence from electoral cycles, which might lead politicians or members of parliament to prefer short-term fixes over sustainable long-term solutions. This is especially problematic with regard to highly contested and value-laden issues (e.g. sexual and reproductive rights) or existential but long-term problems (like climate change), where measures have to be taken now to mitigate threats in the future. Secondly, deliberative democracy offers citizens a voice beyond the picking of predefined choices. Deliberative democracy has gained traction since diagnoses of political apathy, lack of trust in political representatives and a resulting “crisis of democracy”<sup>5</sup> (or “crisis of representation”) abound and are exploited by right-wing populism. It is hoped that, once people see that they – or at least someone like them – can directly influence policy-making, they will become less sceptical about the alleged elitism of politics and start to think of themselves as effective citizens rather than as victims of a detached political class. The frequent use of the term “citizen” notwithstanding, deliberative democratic instruments mostly target residents rather than just people holding formal citizenship. They are also seen as a possibility to circumvent the problem of restrictive citizenship laws impeding democratic participation.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, a number of instruments have been developed that strive to approximate the free, unimpeded and rational discourse that the ideal of deliberative democracy presumes. Rather than replacing existing instruments of representative and/or direct democracy, deliberative democratic processes are embedded in the political system in different ways, ranging from providing information to elected representatives to joint decision-making with citizens.

## 2.2. How it works: Deliberative democratic instruments

There is a broad range of deliberative democratic instruments that can be used on different levels of the political system. Examples of local decision-making include, e.g., the design of public spaces, but citizens’ assemblies or mini-publics might also be held on the national level, as has been the case with assemblies on climate change in many European countries. Besides these political uses, deliberative democratic processes are often implemented on a smaller scale within organisations, for instance, in the form of school councils, student-centred decision-making in the classroom or participatory budgeting in enterprises or schools. However, while in these cases, it is often possible for everyone

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<sup>4</sup> See e.g. the chapter by Estlund, D./Landemore, H. 2018. The Epistemic Value of Democratic Deliberation. In: Bächtiger, A. et al. (eds). The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy, <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/28086/chapter-abstract/212134018> [retrieved 29.03.2023]

<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that the phrase was first used as title for a 1975 report that blamed the difficulty of governance in industrialised countries on an “excess of democracy”, rather than too little public involvement (Crozier, M.J. et al. 1975. The Crisis of Democracy. Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission. [https://archive.org/details/crisis\\_of\\_democracy](https://archive.org/details/crisis_of_democracy) [retrieved 15.02.2023]). For a critical overview of academic debates on the issue see: Merkel, W. 2014. Is There a Crisis of Democracy? In: Democratic Theory 1(1), 11-25. <https://doi.org/10.3167/dt.2014.010202> (Fulltext available from: [https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/mobilized\\_contention/files/democratic\\_theory\\_merkel\\_2014.pdf](https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/mobilized_contention/files/democratic_theory_merkel_2014.pdf) [retrieved 15.02.2023]).

<sup>6</sup> One rather extreme case in point is Vienna, where about one third of the adult population lacks Austrian citizenship and therefore the right to vote. <https://www.wien.gv.at/menschen/integration/daten-fakten/bevoelkerung-migration.html> [retrieved 16.10.2023]



affected to take part in the deliberation, representation becomes one of the major challenges for deliberative democracy in politics.

In the following, we give an overview of some of the main deliberative instruments used to include citizens in political decision-making. Rather than exhaustive, the list is meant to show the range of possibilities and give a first impression of the different ways deliberative instruments are intertwined with other forms of democratic decision-making.

- Mini-Publics: Citizens' assemblies are the deliberative instrument most commonly associated with mini-publics. These bring together a diverse sample of citizens chosen by lot to deliberate on pre-defined issues and make recommendations (of a more or less binding character) to policy-makers. Mini-Publics strive to include participants who are representative of the population in socio-demographic terms and of the diversity of possible views on the issue under deliberation.<sup>7</sup> As citizens' assemblies are at the centre of this compendium, we will elaborate on them below.

A completely different form of mini-public is deliberative polling.<sup>8</sup> This is a form of public opinion research in which a randomly selected sample of citizens is first educated about the issue at hand before deliberating in small groups and lastly providing their opinions. The idea is that people often lack in-depth information as well as time and incentives to become more knowledgeable on specific issues. Therefore, a standard opinion poll will produce skewed results and may lead to bad outcomes if policymakers base their decision on these results. Deliberative polls allow citizens to develop an informed opinion and allow scholars to measure the impact deliberation itself might have on public opinion.

- Public consultations and hearings: These are more informal forms of deliberation designed to gather public feedback and input on specific issues or policies. They may involve a variety of instruments, including open meetings or online platforms for collecting ideas and/or feedback. Typically, participants are self-selected, meaning that any interested person can join. Although this may seem the most inclusive option at first glance, it often leads to an over-representation of well-educated, older, middle-class participants. At the same time, other groups tend to lack access to these processes. Results of consultations and hearings are not binding but will, in most cases, at least be referenced when decisions are presented.
- Participatory budgeting: Budgets are often referred to as "policy in figures", and indeed, the allocation of public funds is among the most fundamental of political decisions. Participatory budgeting – first implemented in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre in 1989 – allows citizens to propose projects or initiatives and vote on the allocation of resources at a later stage of the process. It is most commonly implemented on a regional or municipal level, but there have also been projects on the national level (e.g. Portugal). Participatory budgeting aims to

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<sup>7</sup> For a critical discussion of mini-publics' claim to representativeness see: Peixoto, T.C/Spada, P. 2023. Reflections on the representativeness of citizens' assemblies and similar innovations. <https://democracyspot.net/2023/02/22/reflections-on-the-representativeness-of-citizens-assemblies-and-similar-innovations/> [retrieved 29.03.2023]

<sup>8</sup> Deliberative polling is a trademark of James S. Fishkin. For an introduction see: <https://deliberation.stanford.edu/what-deliberative-pollingr> [retrieved 1.03.2023]

increase transparency and accountability as well as citizens' engagement. Among the difficulties is the fact that, typically, large parts of budgets are not freely dispensable.<sup>9</sup>

- Collaborative governance: While the instruments mentioned so far target citizens in general, collaborative governance focuses on the involvement of stakeholders, including government officials, civil society organisations, residents of specific areas, and representatives of industry and businesses. These stakeholders are invited to dialogues or workshops to collaborate and/or find common ground in relation to specific questions. Typically, such forms of involvement are used in the preparation of political decision-making processes.

As these examples show, deliberative democracy offers various instruments which can be tailored to different needs. Deliberation might be adapted at any stage of a policy cycle, starting with problem definition (e.g. why are girls hardly using this public park while boys do?) and the development of creative solutions (thinking 'outside the box' about what could be done), all the way to decision making (what should actually be done?) and evaluation (does this solution actually work?). All forms of deliberation come with advantages and disadvantages, among them questions relating to the selection of participants, agenda-setting and moderation, participants' information and knowledge about the issue at hand and the uptake of results.

### 2.3. What makes Mini-Publics special?

The term "mini-public" goes back to political scientist Robert Dahl, who in 1989 envisioned a "minipopulus", i.e. an assembly of citizens that is representative of the larger population and would come together and deliberate on a given topic to inform public opinion as well as decision making. While the size of a mini-public may vary from as few as ten to as many as a few hundred participants according to its local, regional, national or even supra-national outlook,<sup>10</sup> mini-publics always aim to reflect the diversity of the affected population typically through some kind of random sampling. Since the 1990s, a number of innovative forms of public participation have been developed, which came to be grouped under the label 'mini-public' together with already established forms like citizens' juries (first established in the US in 1971), consensus conferences (originating in Denmark in the late 1980s), planning cells (mainly debating issues of urban planning since the 1970s) and deliberative polls (first held in the US in 1988). More recently, the term mini-public has become strongly associated with citizens' assemblies, which differ from the types mentioned above by their stronger – although varying – ties to the political system and, therefore, stronger influence on decision-making. Instruments to transfer citizens' assemblies' decisions to the legislative sphere have i.a. included referenda delivering a binding verdict (for example on the liberalisation of the Irish abortion law – which was confirmed by voters – or electoral reform in Ontario, Canada – where voters rejected the proposal of the citizens' assembly), an obligation for parliaments to respond and publicly justify why they refrain from acting on certain recommendations (e.g. in the case of the Scottish Climate Assembly) or at least a moral authority that compels politicians to take the outcomes seriously (e.g. in the case of the German

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<sup>9</sup> For information on the global state of participatory budgeting see: <https://www.pbatlas.net/index.html>. On participatory budgeting in schools see: <https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/what-is-pb/pb-in-schools/> [both retrieved 1.3.2023].

<sup>10</sup> For more information on different forms of mini-publics see Escobar, O./Elstob, S. 2017. Forms of Mini-publics. <https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/2017/05/08/forms-of-mini-publics/> [retrieved 2.3.2023]

Climate Assembly, which was organised bottom-up, i.e. by civil society, and not formally linked to the political system).<sup>11</sup>

To sum up, in this compendium, we focus mainly on citizens' assemblies as one specific deliberative democratic instrument for three equally important reasons. First, in contrast to more common forms of public consultation, mini-publics in general and citizens' assemblies specifically strive to be more representative of the affected population in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, e.g. social status, region, education, ethnicity, gender and age, thereby achieving stronger democratic legitimacy than formats relying on the self-selection of participants. Second, while other forms of mini-publics, e.g. deliberative polling, also require some form of representative participation, these instruments are deliberately designed to provide decision-makers with a clear picture of (informed) public opinion rather than allowing citizens to play an active part in decision-making. In contrast, citizens' assemblies strive to commit policy-makers to honour citizens' recommendations, mostly by providing formal links to the political system and some mechanism for transferring results. Still, the lack of uptake of results remains the Achilles heel of this form of participation, which we will discuss in more detail below. Last but not least, there is an empirical case to be made for the growing importance of this type of deliberative democratic instrument. It is a fact that citizens' assemblies are used more and more frequently in order to deal with contentious issues and to provide guidance for policy-makers and the public alike – the most prominent example being the Irish citizens' assembly in 2016/17 that i.a., paved the way for the liberalisation of the abortion law.<sup>12</sup> Citizens' assemblies, therefore, have the potential to become influential instruments of political decision-making – but they do come with their risks and potential caveats.

## 2.4. Why are Mini-Publics used?

As seen above, all kinds of mini-publics aim to provide decision-makers with information, insight and recommendations that reflect the opinions that the population at large would have on the issue in question if it had the time and resources to gather information, educate itself and deliberate in a rational fashion. Thus, mini-publics' first aim is to improve the quality of the decisions made. The design of an information phase as part of the deliberative process, the inclusion of expert knowledge and the diversity of participants are among the tools employed towards this end.

From the perspective of democracy, it is equally relevant that mini-publics also provide lived experiences of democratic participation. These pertain first and foremost to the participants: they gather in-depth knowledge of the issue at hand, which often also entails mastering complicated legal

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<sup>11</sup> For a systematic comparison of four different Climate Assemblies see Stack, S./Griessler, E. 2022. From a 'half full or half empty glass' to 'definitely a success'. Explorative comparison of impacts of climate assemblies in Ireland, France, Germany and Scotland. IHS Working Paper Series 39. <https://irihs.ihs.ac.at/id/eprint/6113/> [retrieved 2.3.2023]

<sup>12</sup> On the Irish case see Palese, M. 2018. The Irish abortion referendum: How a Citizens' Assembly helped to break years of political deadlock. <https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/the-irish-abortion-referendum-how-a-citizens-assembly-helped-to-break-years-of-political-deadlock/> as well as the more critical account on the Politico-Website: O'Leary, N. 2019. The myth of the citizens' assembly <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-myth-of-the-citizens-assembly-democracy/> [both retrieved 06.12.2023]

issues.<sup>13</sup> This might boost participants' confidence in their ability to take part in democratic decision-making instead of delegating complex matters to experts in a technocratic fashion. Participants get the chance to make their voices heard in politically challenging debates and to see themselves as capable of initiating change, which is probably the most important lesson in civic education. As mini-publics are most commonly held on contested topics, in relation to which there are deep cleavages in society, they also provide participants with an experience of debating and working together across these cleavages. Moderation and clear procedures alongside a shared commitment to a common task are in place to facilitate these difficult dialogues, which might, in turn, foster trust and social cohesion. In some cases, policy-makers also take part in certain debates or are obliged to answer the recommendations, so participants might also experience direct contact with politicians and members of parliament.

Proponents of deliberative democracy also hope that the effects of citizens' assemblies as the most prominent and most public form of mini-publics will not be limited to participants but will include the broader public. First, the fact that ordinary citizens ("people like me") take part in political decision-making should render politics less abstract and reinforce the notion of democracy as "rule by the people". Second, citizens' assemblies are designed for public impact through various instruments, including making (expert) information received by participants as well as the proceedings of the deliberative process public and devising comprehensive media strategies. In some cases, participants hold local assemblies between deliberations in order to include yet more viewpoints and, even more importantly, in order to be ambassadors for deliberative participation itself. In effect, citizens' assemblies have three target groups: Decision makers, who are to be provided with well-reasoned recommendations. Participants, who experience the possibilities of deliberative democracy and become multipliers in terms of factual knowledge as well as competency for dialogue. And the broader public is to be engaged in a meaningful, less partisan way, thereby strengthening belief in democracy as such. However, it has to be noted that engaging the public has proved difficult in practice unless the issue under deliberation had already been of high interest before.

Typically, the commissioning of a citizens' assembly entails at least three main areas of concern to organisers: First, they have to define the purpose and scope of the instrument and plan accordingly in terms of the number and composition of participants, the timeframe of the process, the agenda that is to be debated and the expert input needed as well as the transfer of results into established processes of political decision making. Second, potential participants have to be identified in terms of the demographic characteristics that need to be represented in order to ensure diversity. To this end, the typical approach consists of two steps. As a first step, a large sample of citizens is randomly selected from population registers and invited to take part in the assembly. Then, another selection is drawn from the pool of positive respondents, making sure that the final selection reflects the distribution of certain traits (i.e. age, gender, income, education, residence) in the population at large. In an analysis of 105 European mini-publics, the authors found that in a vast majority of cases (75%), "organisers applied representation criteria correcting for the underrepresentation of certain social groups".<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In its rather critical account of the Irish Citizens' Assembly Politico cites a participant on how "banter with younger women members about going on to study law began to turn serious as they realised they were able to grapple with complex legal matters". O'Leary, N. 2019 (see footnote 12).

<sup>14</sup> Paulis, E. et al. 2020: The POLITICIZE dataset: an inventory of deliberative mini-publics (DMPs) in Europe. In: European Political Science 20(3), 521-542. <https://europepmc.org/article/PMC/PMC7371796> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

While the exact methods vary, the goal remains the same: to correct for the bias that comes with the self-selection of participants for deliberative participation, which typically leads to an over-representation of well-educated, socially privileged and older participants. Inviting and motivating participants, in many cases, proves to be the first difficult step as potential participants might be reluctant due to time constraints, lack of interest, or the assumption that they lack qualifications. Third, the provision of resources and support for the whole process has to be organised, including the provision of suitable venues (e.g. accessible by wheelchair), logistics (e.g. provision of childcare for participants), (expert) information and professional facilitation to safeguard the open dialogue at the heart of deliberative democracy. While participants' expenses are typically reimbursed, practices with regard to the payment of a small fee in recognition of participants' time and effort vary.

## 2.5. Criteria for “successful” Mini-Publics

The exact criteria for the success of a mini-public, of course, depend on the aims and scope of the instrument defined in the commissioning phase. At first glance, measuring the impact of citizens' assemblies on policy-making seems a straightforward task: Either its recommendations are put into practice or they aren't. But in practice, things tend to be less clear-cut. Often, policy-makers refer to the results of a citizens' assembly in order to draw additional legitimation for policies they have been favouring all along while neglecting propositions that contradict their preferences. Politicians' statements of intent might or might not be followed by legislative action, recommendations might get adapted (or watered down) in parliamentary proceedings or might run into legal difficulties, policy implementation might take a long time, etc. Some researchers even argue that the most important impact climate-related citizens' assemblies have had so far was allowing policy-makers to attack more ambitious climate policies, as they could partly deflect responsibility. They warn that a narrow view, which only takes into account the direct transfer of citizens' recommendations into policy-making, fails to understand the profound impact deliberative democratic instruments can have, even in the absence of direct (and measurable) effects.<sup>15</sup> In this compendium, however, we follow a somewhat more narrow approach, focussing on effects that can be directly related to the mini-public assembly in question.

Broadly speaking, four areas can be identified that need to be taken into consideration when evaluating deliberative projects:

The first question is whether the mini-public is representative of the population affected by the topic under discussion. This mainly includes a balance of socio-demographic factors like gender, age, ethnicity, migration history or background, education and socio-economic status or urban-rural residency among the participants. Importantly, representativeness needs to be sought among actual participants rather than just among the invitations, as rejection rates vary among different groups, e.g. parents of young children might find it more difficult to commit to a lengthy process of deliberation. In practice, citizens' assemblies can hardly ever satisfy the criteria for statistical representativeness due to the limited number of participants.<sup>16</sup> But they can (and should) strive to be inclusive in terms of

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<sup>15</sup> Wells, R. et al. 2021. Are citizen juries and assemblies on climate change driving democratic climate policymaking? An exploration of two case studies in the UK. In: *Climatic Change* 168(5) <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-021-03218-6> [retrieved 21.3.2023]

<sup>16</sup> Statistik Austria offers a number of graphs on the distribution of chosen socio-demographic characteristics in the Austrian Climate Assembly vis-à-vis the general population. In German: Rieger, R. 2022. Auswahlverfahren

different perspectives and opinions on the topic in question and consciously address “inclusion failures”<sup>17</sup> through the invitation of members of minority groups and/or by providing specific incentives for engagement to underrepresented groups.

The second consideration is the deliberative quality of the process, ranging from providing adequate, i.e. balanced and accurate information to all participants to provisions enabling respectful and informed deliberation and skilled facilitation that ensures a fair process. In short, the closer the actual proceedings are to the ideal of an open dialogue not distorted by unequal power relations, the better. The concept of rationality, however – even though it is central to abstract definitions of deliberation discussed above – is more complicated in practice as the exclusion of affect and emotion can itself be seen as an act of power. Thus, centring rationality runs the risk of unduly privileging forms of debate that are typically learnt in formal education and associated with a stereotypically male debate style. The need for emotional engagement is therefore recognised in practice facilitation.<sup>18</sup> One important question in this regard is which provisions are in place to deal with dissenting opinions – even though the goal of deliberative democratic instruments is consensus, this should not be reached through silencing critical voices or through the (self-)removal of participants from the deliberation.

A third crucial area is the direct effects of the mini-public/citizens’ assembly on policy-making, i.e. its influence on policies. Even though this criterion seems straightforward, it is tricky in practice, especially in cases where the transfer of results into the political process is not strongly institutionalised. In a comparative study of climate assemblies,<sup>19</sup> seven important context factors were identified that might foster or hinder the impact of citizens’ assemblies:

- Political power might favour elite interests over the recommendations of citizens, who themselves don’t have the means to address this asymmetric relation.
- Stakeholders and interest groups in specific policy areas might trump broader societal interests.
- The costs of proposed measures might be forbidding (or at least be used as an argument against citizens’ recommendations).
- Time might be a relevant factor, as policy development is typically a slow process. Citizens’ recommendations might, therefore, trigger processes that take years to lead to concrete outcomes.
- The interface with the political systems might not be defined clearly enough to safeguard against being ignored by politicians or members of parliament.
- The broader political context, e.g. the political situation in general, election cycles, the relation between government and opposition, etc., might influence whether and how results are taken

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für den Klimarat der Bürgerinnen und Bürger 2021/22. Methodische Dokumentation und Ergebnisse. [https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/pages/300/methodenbericht\\_auswahlverfahren\\_klimarat.pdf](https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/pages/300/methodenbericht_auswahlverfahren_klimarat.pdf) [retrieved 29.03.2023].

<sup>17</sup> Peixoto, T.C/Spada, P. 2023. Reflections on the representativeness of citizens’ assemblies and similar innovations. <https://democracyspot.net/2023/02/22/reflections-on-the-representativeness-of-citizens-assemblies-and-similar-innovations/> [retrieved 06.12.2023]

<sup>18</sup> Bryant, P./Stone, L. 2020. Climate Assemblies and Juries. A people powered response to the climate emergency. A guide for local authorities and other bodies. <https://sharedfuturecic.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Shared-Future-PCAN-Climate-Assemblies-and-Juries-web.pdf> [retrieved 21.3.2023]

<sup>19</sup> Stack, S./Griessler, E. 2022. From a ‘half full or half empty glass’ to ‘definitely a success’. Explorative comparison of impacts of climate assemblies in Ireland, France, Germany and Scotland. IHS Working Paper Series 39. <https://irihs.ihs.ac.at/id/eprint/6113/> [retrieved 2.3.2023]

up for reasons completely unrelated to the citizens' assembly and the quality of recommendations themselves.

- A lack of legitimacy in the eyes of the public might weaken the moral standing of the citizens' assembly. Doubt of the instrument might be voiced on a general level – e.g. when deliberative democratic instruments are regarded as a weakening of elected parliaments – or more specifically pertaining to the citizens' assembly itself, if, e.g. its representativeness or the process of deliberation itself is questioned. Transparency throughout the process is, therefore, paramount.

Last but not least, one can try to assess the effects of the deliberative process on participants and the larger public. Participants have to experience the process as fair, i.e. they have to see that their voices were heard on an equal footing with others, that they had the information and the time necessary to come to an informed decision and argue their point, that they were given time and space to revisit and possibly change their opinion and that their input was reflected accordingly in the final output and recommendations. Effects on the broader public are even more difficult to assess but might be approached through an analysis of media coverage with a focus on how the results of the deliberative process are used to legitimate further demands and actions.

As researchers have noted, the effectiveness of a mini-public might have repercussions far beyond the specific case, as “[f]ailure to implement policy recommendations or explain the response to them delegitimizes citizen assemblies.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 37

### 3. Case Study 1: Mini-Publics in Vorarlberg

Vorarlberg – the westernmost province of Austria with the second smallest population – implemented mini-publics as a political tool in 2006 and is, therefore, a pioneer in Austria. So far, more than 60 mini-publics have taken place, 14 of which were regional and the others communal. Two of them even crossed national borders: One for a specific region at the border between Vorarlberg and Switzerland and the other one between Vorarlberg and Liechtenstein. Throughout the last decade, mini-publics in Vorarlberg were increasingly institutionalised and covered various complex and conflictual topics, including education, migration, mobility, agriculture, climate change and elections.



Mini-publics vary by geographical level. They can be **nation-wide** (as in Case Studies 2 and 3) or, as in Case Studie 1, **provincial, regional or transnational**. The geographical level limits possible implementations of the results of mini-publics: As for mini-publics in Vorarlberg, only suggestions that fall under the jurisdiction of the provincial government of Vorarlberg, which are limited.

The main sources used for this case study are documents on each mini-public provided publicly by the Vorarlberg state government<sup>21</sup>, the website [buergerrat.net](http://buergerrat.net) that provides resources on mini-publics as a tool as well as its history of implementation in Vorarlberg, the YouTube of the *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation*<sup>22</sup> which is used to promote and document the process of mini-publics in Vorarlberg, as well as an online seminar<sup>23</sup> about the mini-publics in Vorarlberg that was organised by *Mehr Demokratie* in Germany.

#### 3.1. The initiative

*How, by whom and with what aim was the mini-public commissioned?*

All mini-publics in Vorarlberg are organised by the *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation*, an official Vorarlberg state administration body. Its main goal is to increase political participation among Vorarlberg's citizens, and it has done so through mini-publics for 17 years.

The *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation* was founded in 1999 by Manfred Hellrigl, who acted as its director and project coordinator and, as such, was crucially involved in developing and establishing mini-publics in Vorarlberg. In the beginning, the office was responsible for awareness campaigns around the topic of environmental protection. Five years later, in 2004, the mission of the *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation* changed towards more collaboration between the

<sup>21</sup> Documentation on distinct mini-publics is accessible on <https://vorarlberg.mitdenken.online/imprint> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

<sup>22</sup> Link to the YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@FEB-Vorarlberg/videos> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

<sup>23</sup> Mehr Demokratie. 2020. Online Seminar: Der Bürgerrat in Vorarlberg – von Österreich lernen. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEmUn\\_1PP\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEmUn_1PP_Y) [retrieved 31.10.2023]



provincial government and the population in Vorarlberg. At that time, the governor of Vorarlberg, Herbert Sausgruber (ÖVP<sup>24</sup>), issued a statement that Vorarlberg should become the most child-friendly state of Austria. Therefore, the *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation* organised a Citizens' Assembly<sup>25</sup> called *Children to the Centre* (Orig.: *Kinder in die Mitte*). This experiment turned into a lighthouse project and marked the beginning of new forms of political participation in Vorarlberg.

At the Citizens' Assembly, a total of 140 people took part, including children, grownups and experts. Although it led to constructive results that were partly implemented by the government, the costs of this format were too high to be established within the political structure. Building on the experiences of this project, Hellrigl redesigned the concept into a smaller and more feasible package. He adapted the concept of the Wisdom Council – an early form of mini-publics implemented in the United States by Jim Rough – to the prerequisites and requirements in Vorarlberg, convinced that even a small sample of people can get to the core of a problem, as well as to the core of a good solution that is highly likely to be accepted by the larger public. Two years later, in 2006, the *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation* organised the first-ever mini-public in Europe in the small and rural municipality of Wolfurt.

Since 2013, the Vorarlberg constitution has committed to deliberative democratic processes, in addition to direct and representative democratic tools (Article 1, Paragraph 4). In the same year, Vorarlberg also introduced specific guidelines<sup>26</sup> on how mini-publics can be initiated and implemented, which was an important milestone for the firm establishment of the tool within the political process.

According to the guidelines, there are now three different ways a mini-public can come into existence. For issues concerning state administration, a mini-public can be called in by three different bodies: (1) by the citizens of Vorarlberg if at least 1.000 people sign a petition, (2) by resolution of the Vorarlberg state parliament and (3) by resolution of the Vorarlberg state government. For issues concerning municipal administration, a mini-public can be called in by a resolution of the councils in the concerned municipalities. One of the biggest changes that was introduced in 2013 was the chance to initiate a mini-public in a bottom-up process with just 1.000 signatures. People are not required to have Austrian citizenship in order to sign; they are only required to (legally) live in Vorarlberg.

To this day—around ten years later—five mini-publics have been initiated using the bottom-up method: The first was on land and soil in September 2017, followed by another one on agriculture two years later (October 2019). Since 2021, one bottom-up mini-public has been organised every year: Climate Change (July 2021), Fair Elections (July 2022), and Care Work (June 2023; results are still outstanding).

With the help of online tools, it is relatively easy to reach 1,000 signatures. For example, the initiator of the mini-public on climate change achieved the goal with the help of just two of her friends. Most initiatives from civil society actually overreached the goal by a couple of hundred signatures.

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<sup>24</sup> The *Österreichische Volkspartei* – or *Austrian People's Party* – is a liberal-conservative political party in Austria.

<sup>25</sup> Dienel, P. C. 2002. *Die Planungszelle. Der Bürger als Chance*. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.

<sup>26</sup> Richtlinien der Vorarlberger Landesregierung zur Einberufung und Durchführung von Bürgerräten. <https://vorarlberg.at/documents/302033/472141/Richtlinie+B%C3%BCrgerrat.pdf/4d1dc47a-d15e-18ad-e65f-11baa9b8624e?t=1620229041400> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

### 3.2. The representatives

#### *How were representatives chosen?*

Eligible representatives are all people 16 or older and have a main residence in the respective region. Child care and transportation costs are covered by the organisers, who also provide confirmation of participation for employers, but there is no financial remuneration.

Citizens of a town or region are selected randomly from the civil register, taking into account their age, gender and place of residence. Other sociodemographic factors, such as formal education or migration background, are not taken into account because this information is not included in the civil register. Austrian citizenship is not needed to participate – but government representatives are blacklisted as participants.

The *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation* sends out letters to a number of people evenly distributed among men and women in different age cohorts. The letters<sup>27</sup> make a formal and reliable impression since they are being sent by the provincial government itself.

As regulated by the state government's guidelines on mini-publics, a statewide mini-public in Vorarlberg is supposed to consist of at least 12 to 16 citizens. Depending on the topic, the response rate fluctuates between five and 15 per cent. Statewide, the *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation* sends out around 600 invitations in order to recruit 30 participants. The organisers register that the response rates between different groups tend to differ. Overall, young adults below the age of 30 are more difficult to reach than the older population. Furthermore, there is a gender gap: While it is relatively easy to reach men, especially older men, women are less likely to participate. The hardest-to-reach group are women below the age of 30. The organisers are well aware that a small group of 12 to 16 citizens are not enough to ensure statistical representativity – instead, the overall goal is to ensure heterogeneity within the group.

Throughout, the factors of age, gender and place of residence, the mini-publics tend to lack people with low levels of education. In their scientific evaluation<sup>28</sup> of one of the mini-publics, Tamara Ehs and Katharina Toth suggest rephrasing the invitation letters in more accessible language and, furthermore, including a short and simple explanation of the mini-publics themselves. Although the tool has a long history in Vorarlberg, not all citizens know about its existence. This concurs with the report of a participant in the mini-public: After receiving the letter, the first thing he did was to google: *What is a mini-public?*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> A blueprint for the letter (in German) can be downloaded online: <https://www.buergerrat.net/english-version/#undefined> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

<sup>28</sup> Only the short version of this evaluation is publicly available, in German language. Ehs, T./Toth, K. 2022. Schlussfolgerungen und Empfehlungen. [https://vorarlberg.at/documents/302033/472141/Evaluation+B%C3%BCrgerrat+Klimazukunft\\_Empfehlungen.pdf/8adcf8cb-1118-abb1-34cf-aa1e36cee5e6?t=1647866834762](https://vorarlberg.at/documents/302033/472141/Evaluation+B%C3%BCrgerrat+Klimazukunft_Empfehlungen.pdf/8adcf8cb-1118-abb1-34cf-aa1e36cee5e6?t=1647866834762) [retrieved 31.10.2023]

<sup>29</sup> Mehr Demokratie. 2020. Online-Seminar: Der Bürgerrat in Vorarlberg – von Österreich lernen. Online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEmUn\\_1PP\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEmUn_1PP_Y) [retrieved 31.10.2023]

### 3.3. The deliberation

*Which practices of deliberation were established? Who set the agenda? Which experts were invited, and who decided on that? How were discussions moderated? What methods were used? Was a consensus reached? If not, how were minority positions represented?*

In the case of top-down mini-publics, the *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation* sets the agenda in accordance with the state government Vorarlberg. The most important requirement is to choose questions that can be tackled by the provincial government in order for results to have a chance of implementation. Especially in the case of bottom-up mini-publics initiated by 1.000 signatures, agenda setting can become more difficult because it requires a good understanding of Austria's government structure and its distribution of responsibilities between national and state institutions. Therefore, the *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation* assists the initiators in the formulation of the specific topic (ideally) before signatures are collected and organises meetings between political and administrative representatives.

All mini-publics in Vorarlberg are moderated using the Dynamic Facilitation method. Dynamic Facilitation<sup>30</sup> is a specific form of working with groups that help participants engage creatively with divergent perspectives. The method was developed in the early 1980s by Jim Rough in Washington, United States. At that time, the workers of a sawmill, the Simpson Timber Company, organised an uprising against the atrocious working conditions at the company. In response, the management brought in Jim Rough. Their plan was merely to make the workers feel better; they did not expect major changes. In that role, Rough developed dynamic facilitation as a method to collect and protocol the workers' discontent strategically.



**Dynamic facilitation** is a structured step-by-step problem-solving procedure where the facilitator uses charts to record the participants' inputs in a structured way. Usually, there are four different charts: (1) problems, (2) options / solutions, (3) concerns and (4) data / facts.

The job of the facilitator is to listen to the core of every input, to reflect it back to the speaker, have the reflection confirmed and then to put it to the respective chart. In the process, emotions and different views are to be welcomed and useful to promote choice creation.

A key element of the moderation method is the "empathetic listener" technique. The goal of this technique is to understand the speaker's perspective and feelings in a nonjudgmental way. Concerns,

<sup>30</sup> For an overview on the method in English, see: Dynamic Facilitation Associates: Our History. [https://dynamicfacilitation.com/about\\_us/About/history.html](https://dynamicfacilitation.com/about_us/About/history.html) [retrieved 31.10.2023]

For detailed information on the method in German, see: Zubizarreta, R./Bonsen, M. 2014. Dynamic Facilitation. Die erfolgreiche Moderationsmethode für schwierige und verfahrenere Situationen. Weinheim Basel: Beltz Verlag.

resistance, and strong feelings, which are otherwise often perceived as disturbing in group processes, are considered valuable for developing suggestions and improvements.

In the case of the sawmill, the charts formed like this<sup>31</sup>:

*Problem: We hate the foreman; he is cruel.*

*Solution: The foreman should be fired.*

*Concern: I know the foreman privately; he is a nice person.*

*Fact: The foreman is cruel to the employees because management pressures him to do so.*

*Solution: We should include the foreman in the conversations.*

Including the foreman in the employees' conversations was a breakthrough in the process and not only changed the understanding of the issues at the sawmill but also opened up a new thought process on possible solutions. Rough's intervention at the sawmill was a huge success; against the management's expectations, it resulted in constructive suggestions made by the workers that were actually implemented by the management, leading not only to improved working conditions and health conditions of the employees but also to an increase in productivity by 30 per cent.

After the successful implementation of Dynamic Facilitation at the sawmill, Jim Rough used the method to develop the so-called Wisdom Councils, which are the first form of mini-publics held in the United States. Consequently, from the very beginning of mini-publics, Dynamic Facilitation was at the core of the process and, to this day, is seen as a method to create consent when larger groups (e.g., nations) are confronted with contentious and seemingly impossible-to-solve problems. Acknowledging the difference between consensus and consent is relevant: consensus means that everyone agrees on a solution; consent, on the other hand, means that nobody objects to the proposed solution. Therefore, the goal of Dynamic Facilitation is to find solutions that can be accepted by everyone involved.

In the case of mini-publics in Vorarlberg, the goal is to reach consent on (around) 10 results. As soon as one participant opposes one of these results, it is either reworked or dropped completely. One disadvantage of this approach is that results tend to get rather generic because more specific statements are also more likely to evoke opposition.

Dynamic facilitation is successful at reaching consent partly because participants do not discuss with each other. They communicate with the moderators instead of other members of the group. As one participant<sup>32</sup> reported, this can make the deliberation frustrating at times. The process requires tremendous patience from the participants because even if somebody makes a statement completely contrary to their perspective, they cannot respond to the statement directly. Although the rules set by the moderators made participation frustrating at times, the same participant also observed that they led to a more inclusive deliberation. For some people, it was easier to state their opinion because it

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<sup>31</sup> For a short and simple explanatory video on this process in English, see: Büro für Freiwilliges Engagement und Beteiligung. 2021. Dynamic Facilitation – A Short Introduction to the Process and its History. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lradZ5ZMf4> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

<sup>32</sup>Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation

was not up for discussion. That way, confrontation between participants was avoided, which is important in order to enable them to reach consent at the end.

### 3.4. Experts

*Which role(s) did experts and expert knowledge play for the mini-public?*

Usually, mini-publics in Vorarlberg barely provide expert knowledge before or during the deliberation. Instead, expert knowledge is implemented at a later stage of the process as part of the responder group and, in some cases, also during the World Café. (More details below.) The same is true for political and administrative representatives: Although they are tightly embedded in the process around the mini-public, they are not present at the deliberation itself.

Prior to some mini-publics, the invitation letter also included a fact sheet, like the mini-public on the future of agriculture<sup>33</sup>. One participant of this mini-public later reported<sup>34</sup> that the letter had a deterrent effect on him because the fact sheet seemed very detailed – on a specific topic he did not know much about.

In the case of the mini-public on the future of agriculture, expert knowledge played a particular role: Since the representatives were chosen randomly, it could not be guaranteed that farmers would partake in the mini-public itself, and the organisers determined it would not be reasonable to talk about the future of agriculture without including farmers to the conversation. Therefore, they randomly selected farmers in Vorarlberg, using the same method as the representatives of the mini-public. The 32 selected farmers built small expert councils split into three workshops that took place in different regions of Vorarlberg prior to the actual mini-public itself. Like the mini-public, the expert councils were moderated using the method of dynamic facilitation. Although the results of the expert council were not initially shared with the representatives of the mini-public, the issues raised were very similar in both formats. At the World Café, both formats and the results were discussed together, including respective representatives. As an open forum, anybody is welcome to participate at the World Café, and all willing participants from the mini-publics and expert councils can act as representatives.

The bottom-up mini-public on climate change in 2021 was accompanied by a scientific evaluation by Tamara Ehs and Katharina Toth<sup>35</sup>. One of their recommendations was to provide expert knowledge in various ways: First, prior to the deliberation in various forms, e.g., including podcasts or videos, as well as text-based information, which can be discouraging for people with low levels of formal education. Second, the deliberation could be kicked off with short inputs by experts on the topic. Having experts present during the deliberation itself would enable the representatives to ask questions arising in the course of the process.

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<sup>33</sup> Landwirtschaft in Vorarlberg 2019. <https://www.buergerrat.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Infoblatt-Daten-und-Fakten-Landwirtschaft.pdf> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

<sup>34</sup> Mehr Demokratie. 2020. Online-Seminar: Der Bürgerrat in Vorarlberg – von Österreich lernen. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEmUn\\_1PP\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEmUn_1PP_Y) [retrieved 31.10.2023]

<sup>35</sup> Only the short version of this evaluation is publicly available, in German language. Ehs, T./Toth, K. 2022. Schlussfolgerungen und Empfehlungen. [https://vorarlberg.at/documents/302033/472141/Evaluation+B%C3%BCrgerrat+Klimazukunft\\_Empfehlungen.pdf/8adcf8cb-1118-abb1-34cf-aa1e36cee5e6?t=1647866834762](https://vorarlberg.at/documents/302033/472141/Evaluation+B%C3%BCrgerrat+Klimazukunft_Empfehlungen.pdf/8adcf8cb-1118-abb1-34cf-aa1e36cee5e6?t=1647866834762) [retrieved 31.10.2023]

At this point, it is still unclear if the implementation of more expert knowledge would lower the threshold for people with low levels of education (e.g., *I can take part because I don't need to have the knowledge at hand.*) or if it would further increase the threshold (e.g., *This topic is so complicated, I don't know enough to participate.*). In any case, the inclusion of experts would prolong the process of deliberation and run the risk of participants transferring the process of finding possible solutions to the experts, which goes against the very idea of the mini-public.

### 3.5. Political embedding

*How was the mini-public embedded in the political system? How was the "interface" with representative democracy designed? How did the relationship evolve during the duration of the mini-public?*

Mini-publics in Vorarlberg are well embedded in the political system. As mentioned above, the provincial government of Vorarlberg formulated official guidelines in 2013<sup>36</sup> that regulate the process. These include not only the planning and implementation of the deliberation but also the treatment of results. The World Café and the (obligatory) feedback loop by decision makers are determined in the document and, therefore, take place after each deliberation.

The results of the mini-public are presented in the so-called World Café. This format is open to the public and is attended by political and administrative representatives. The event, or sometimes multiple events in different locations, is not reduced to a presentation of the results but is also designed as a public forum to discuss the results and communicate concerns. All participants are granted free transportation within Vorarlberg. Reports by representatives of the mini-public are favourable towards the World Café: These events are not only large scale (e.g., 240 participants for the mini-public on the future of agriculture) but also attended by decision makers, which makes them feel heard and taken seriously. This, in turn, also activates a broader public because the population is more engaged when involved in co-creating solutions.

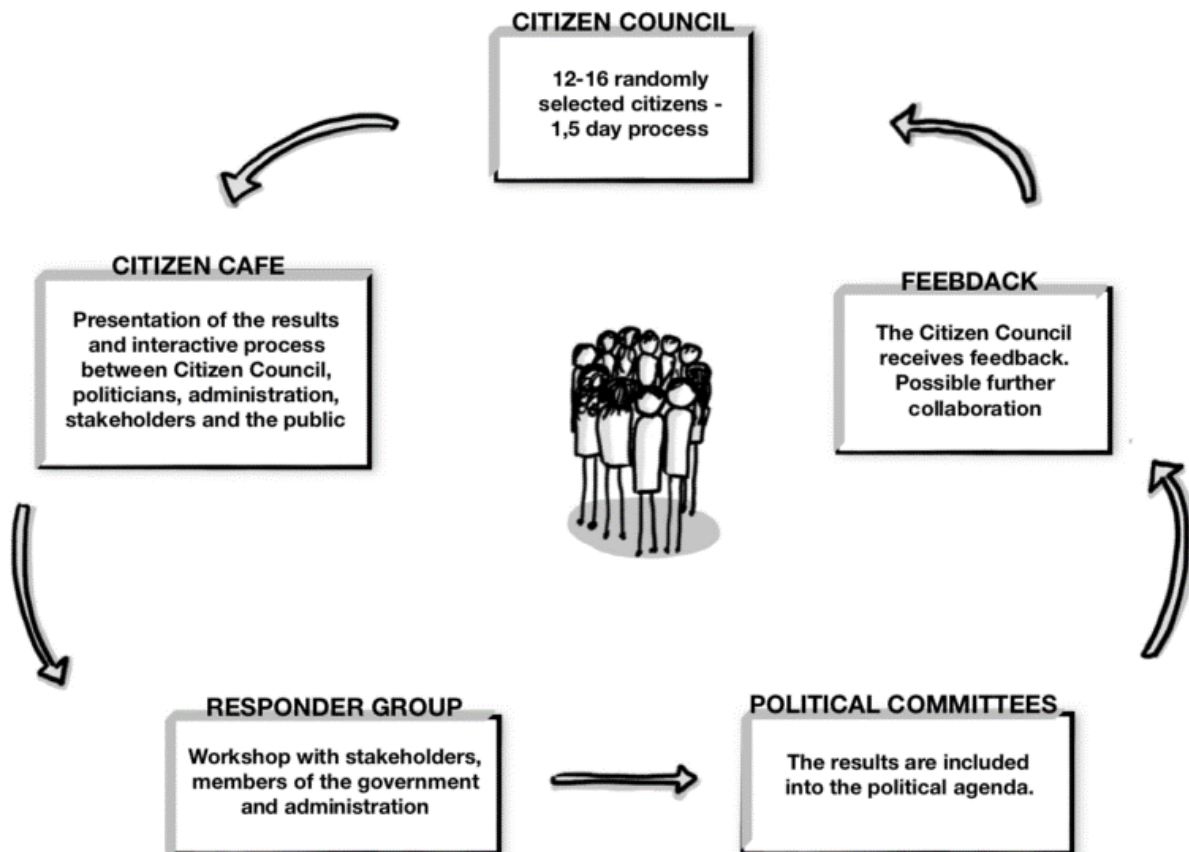
In the next step, political and administrative representatives discuss the results in a closed workshop called the responder group (Orig.: Resonanzgruppe). Decision makers assess if the specific recommendations by the mini-public can be implemented and, if so, in what way. In the case of the mini-public on refugees, the responder group consisted of one mini-public representative, the Chamber of Commerce, the Agency for Refugee Support, the Agency for Integration and Migration, four governmental departments, the Association of Local Authorities and the Catholic Church.

The stakeholders, government, and administration members then introduce the results of the responder group to the political bodies responsible for the derived course of action. Subsequently, the political bodies have to provide a written statement for the participants of the mini-public in which they account for the course of action and explain in what way their suggestions were implemented – or why not. In most cases, this feedback happens in two stages: First, around one or two months after the deliberation, and second, around six to twelve months later. In that way, decision-makers not only have to react to the results, but they also have to justify their actions accordingly.

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<sup>36</sup> Vorarlberger Landesregierung. 2023. Richtlinien der Vorarlberger Landesregierung zur Einberufung und Durchführung von Bürgerräten.

<https://vorarlberg.at/documents/302033/472141/Richtlinie+B%C3%BCrgerrat.pdf/4d1dc47a-d15e-18ad-e65f-11baa9b8624e?t=1620229041400> [retrieved 31.10.2023]



Graphic: Moritz Kempf<sup>37</sup>

The strong embedding in the political system of Vorarlberg led to a refinement of the tool. Mini-publics are organised in a transparent step-by-step process; participants know what to expect right from the start and are included in further steps after the deliberation. Also, through the professionalisation of mini-publics, Vorarlberg introduced the option to initiate mini-publics bottom-up by collecting signatures. In the case of Vorarlberg, the embedding within the political structures also made the mini-publics more transparent and participatory in the sense that every person within the region can raise a topic.

### 3.6. Implementation of results

*Were recommendations/results from the mini-public implemented by policymakers? If yes, which ones are available and in which way? Were results used in other forms by policy-makers (e.g., legitimating existing policies as a rhetorical device)?*

Vorarlberg's provincial government supports the mini-publics and has issued multiple statements over the years promising to listen to the results. In some cases, the suggestions made by the representatives were even established in the government programme. More often, suggestions were

<sup>37</sup> Büro für Freiwilliges Engagement und Beteiligung. 2020. Citizen Council Vorarlberg Model. Graphic design by Moritz Kempf. <https://www.buergerrat.net/english-version/#undefined> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

implemented in the form of government initiatives. For example, one suggestion made by the mini-public on the future of agriculture was to serve more regional products in public canteens, such as schools, hospitals and social centres. The government responded to this suggestion by implementing the initiative *Vorarlberg on the plate* (Orig.: *Vorarlberg am Teller*) that awards good practice canteens using mainly regional products, leading to stronger cooperation between the canteens and local producers. Furthermore, the government implemented a “calf bonus”, which is a financial incentive to let calves stay longer on the farm and drink their mother’s milk. In another case, subsequent to the mini-public on soil, an amendment in the spatial planning law (Orig.: Raumplanungsgesetz) was implemented. The amendment was a response to the critique on low transparency around the green zones Rheintal and Walgau. The government introduced new and transparent rules when it comes to the reclassification of land within the green zones.

Although some changes were implemented that can have positive effects on the local level, it is worth noting that the response to many suggestions made by the mini-publics is actually: The legal framework has been exhausted at the provincial level.



Tip: An overview of the important roles deliberative democracy might play besides producing recommendations for policy-making can be found in the in the MANTA-webinar on the [MANTA-Website](#).

### 3.7. Broader public

*How did the media/public discourse react to the mini-public? Did media coverage change over the course of the mini-public? How did the mini-public communicate to the broader public (e.g., use of social media)? Has there been an effect on public discourse?*

The official guidelines on the mini-publics in Vorarlberg<sup>38</sup> state that the *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation* has to document the process of each mini-public and make the documentation publicly available on the website of the province Vorarlberg<sup>39</sup>. Every mini-public has been well documented in various forms. The articles on each mini-public published on the website of the province Vorarlberg include a PDF file with rather detailed documentation of the deliberation.

Furthermore, the organisers issued press releases on the events. Depending on the topic and – possibly – the timing, the response by the media varied in quantity, although reporting portrayed the mini-publics continuously in a positive light.

The *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation's* YouTube channel provides various kinds of useful and engaging information, ranging from short informational videos to long, in-depth

<sup>38</sup> Vorarlberger Landesregierung. 2023. Richtlinien der Vorarlberger Landesregierung zur Einberufung und Durchführung von Bürgerräten. <https://vorarlberg.at/documents/302033/472141/Richtlinie+B%C3%BCrgerrat.pdf/4d1dc47a-d15e-18ad-e65f-11baa9b8624e?t=1620229041400> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

<sup>39</sup> Bürgerräte in Vorarlberg. Demokratie lebt von Beteiligung. <https://vorarlberg.at/-/buergerraete-in-vorarlberg> [retrieved 31.10.2023]



documentation of the respective mini-public processes. In recent years, the organisers have made more use of other forms of social media, namely Facebook and Instagram.

The *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation* is also responsible for the platform Thinking Vorarlberg (Orig.: Vorarlberg mitdenken), which serves multiple purposes. Primarily, it is used to document deliberative processes and for internal and external use. Furthermore, the platform itself can be used as a tool for participation because it allows people to create accounts and post statements on specific issues. However, until now, the latter function has rarely been used.

### 3.8. Prospects

*Mini-publics—the future of democracy? Are there plans to institutionalise mini-publics further? Did the mini-public impact (opinions about) deliberative democracy? Which lessons can be drawn for future projects?*

Mini-publics are a well-established tool in Vorarlberg, and there are no plans to stop organising them. On the contrary, Vorarlberg is a model of how deliberative democratic tools can be used on a provincial level. On this level, mini-publics in Vorarlberg led to a number of initiatives and small changes, although limited by the competencies of the provincial government. The questions debated are related to better regulation and administration on the local level rather than value-loaden policies. Other provinces in Austria (Salzburg and Upper Austria) already followed the model and carried out similar mini-publics. Even on an international level, people show interest in Vorarlberg's case. There have been seminars<sup>40</sup> on how the tool is implemented and established, and the *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation* provides many explanatory and informational videos in German and English. Finally, the second-smallest province in Austria turned into an internationally recognised good-practice example for civic participation<sup>41</sup>. The case shows that it is possible to establish mini-publics within the Austrian political system, provided decision-makers are willing to support the initiative.

The fact that the government of Vorarlberg implemented a mandatory feedback loop between the mini-publics and the decision-makers led to a better relationship and, according to the government of Vorarlberg<sup>42</sup>, increased trust between the civil society and the government. There have been a number of (small) changes and initiatives that mark the effectiveness of the tool. Because the process is consent-based and avoids conflict, the results of the mini-publics tend to be vague and generic; therefore, the most revolutionary and provocative ideas might not originate from this model. Instead, it leads to feasible suggestions that citizens can compromise on.

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<sup>40</sup> Mehr Demokratie. 2020. Online Seminar: Der Bürgerrat in Vorarlberg – von Österreich lernen. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEmUn\\_1PP\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEmUn_1PP_Y) [retrieved 31.10.2023]

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Vorarlberger Landesregierung. 2023. Richtlinien der Vorarlberger Landesregierung zur Einberufung und Durchführung von Bürgerräten. <https://vorarlberg.at/documents/302033/472141/Richtlinie+B%C3%BCrgerrat.pdf/4d1dc47a-d15e-18ad-e65f-11baa9b8624e?t=1620229041400> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

## 4. Case Study 2: Mini-Public on the future of democracy

The mini-public on the future of democracy was the first nationwide mini-public in Austria. On September 18 and 19 2021, ten people discussed the following question for one and a half days at a retreat in Salzburg: *How could or should a democratic system look like in order to be worth living and fair for everyone, including future generations?* One of the main goals was to show that nationwide mini-publics are feasible and to start the process of establishing the tool on this larger scale. Another distinguishing feature of the mini-public on the future of democracy lies in the fact that it was a bottom-up process.

The main resources for the case studies can be found on the corresponding website [zukunftsrat.at](http://zukunftsrat.at) and on the YouTube channel of the co-organiser [Respekt.net](https://www.youtube.com/@respektnet)<sup>43</sup>. The latter includes full recordings of two events<sup>44</sup> where the process and the results of the mini-public were presented in detail. Additionally, an interview with one of the organisers was conducted on 21 June 2023 in Vienna.

### 4.1. The initiative



Mini-publics can be initiated and implemented in a **bottom-up or a top-down process**.

Top-down means that established political structures (e.g., a ministry or political parties) plan and organise the event. This was the case for the Austrian Climate Citizens' Assembly (Case Study 3).

In a bottom-up process, planning and organising is independent of traditional political structures, as it was done for the mini-public on the future of democracy (Case Study 2).

Some mini-publics are organised in a combination of bottom-up and top-down, like those in Vorarlberg (Case Study 1): Here, the initiation can arise from a bottom-up process, while the implementation is taken care of top-down by a specific office tasked with the job.

*How, by whom and with what aim was the mini-public commissioned?*

The mini-public on the future of democracy was initiated by three small grassroots organisations: *Respekt.net*<sup>45</sup>, *IG Demokratie*<sup>46</sup> and *mehr demokratie! Österreich*<sup>47</sup>. All of them are civic society

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/@respektnet> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

<sup>44</sup> Verein Respekt.net. 2022. Zukunftsrat Demokratie: Präsentation der Ergebnisse, 17.2.2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqAQRDhmW6c> [retrieved 31.10.2023] and Verein Respekt.net. 2021. Präsentation der Ergebnisse des Zukunftsrats Demokratie am 14.10.2021. Hybrid Veranstaltung. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1N25r6d7-4> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.respekt.net/crowdfunding-fuer-eine-bessere-gesellschaft/> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

<sup>46</sup> <https://ig-demokratie.at/> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

initiatives independent of political parties. The organiser's expectation was mainly to show that a nationwide bottom-up mini-public is possible and to pave the way for similar initiatives in the future.

Although the bottom-up process makes this mini-public remarkable, it also comes with challenges, notably the initiative's financing. The main source of funds came from a crowdfunding initiative, through which the organisers managed to raise almost 40.000 Euros. Additionally, the mini-public was granted 10.000 Euros by the *Future Fund of the Republic of Austria*, and the *Land Salzburg* took over the accommodation costs of around 3.000 Euros. With little over 50.000 Euros, the mini-public struggled with finances, which impeded the whole process. Although this might seem like a lot of money, the amount quickly dwindles when taking into account the costs for travel, accommodation and food for experts (e.g., moderators, scientific evaluation), as well as for the time it takes to prepare and organise such an event. Another challenge was COVID-19, which emerged shortly after the planning process started and introduced additional uncertainty to the project.

## 4.2. The representatives

*How were representatives chosen?*

Representatives were chosen by random selection from the address register of the Austrian postal service. In total, 895 people were invited via written letters. The selection of the representatives was aligned with three sociodemographic factors: province, age and gender. Fourteen representatives were selected that way.

In the next step, the organisers visited people who did not respond to the invitation at their addresses. The idea behind the outreach in person was to recruit representatives of minorities that are harder to reach, e.g. people from migrant communities or people with disabilities. Through this time-consuming step, the organisers managed to recruit a middle-aged woman with a Latin American background. As the mother of a young child, she decided to participate when she was allowed to bring her daughter. In the hope of reaching young apprentices, the organisers furthermore contacted youth organisations – without success. In the end, a total of 15 people confirmed their participation as representatives for the mini-public.

The bottom-up approach made some recipients sceptical; since there was no connection to a political party, they suspected other hidden ulterior motives, as the representatives reported later.

On September 18 and 19 2021, ten of those 15 people actually participated; three had to cancel due to COVID-19, one due to personal reasons, and another person did not show up. Due to a combination of the pandemic and budgetary limitations, the mini-public was smaller than the organisers hoped; initially, the organisers planned for a group of 20 representatives, but the actual group was half that size.

The group consisted of five women and five men, age 19 plus, from the provinces of Carinthia, Upper Austria, Salzburg, Lower Austria and Vienna. Although reaching gender parity (in a binary understanding), the organisers did not succeed in reaching people from the other four Austrian provinces nor in reaching the older population (age 70+). Bettina Reiter, one of the organisers,

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<sup>47</sup> <https://mehr-demokratie.at/> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

explained in an interview that people with low levels of formal education and low income are especially hard to reach and are missing in the mini-public.

### 4.3. The deliberation

*Which practices of deliberation were established? Who set the agenda? Which experts were invited, and who decided on that? How were discussions moderated? What methods were used? Was a consensus reached? If not, how were minority positions represented?*

The agenda was set by the organising initiatives; all three of them are concerned with various forms of political participation. They chose to set a broad agenda rather than an input for an open discussion in order to allow the representatives to introduce their own problems, ideas, and solutions to the mini-public. While this strategy is in line with the bottom-up approach of the whole process, it also meant that the mini-public on the future of democracy was less targeted than most other mini-publics. Representatives brought various broad topics to the table, including climate change, health care, care work, civic education, media and others – topics that were too vast and too complex to tackle all together in one and a half days. In retrospect, the representatives themselves stated that there was not enough time to actually dive deep into the various issues because, as soon as they came up, another big topic was introduced to the conversation.

The deliberation was moderated using the dynamic facilitation method already established for mini-publics, e.g., in Vorarlberg. Additionally, the process was accompanied by graphic recording: During the process, one person drew the main topics and solutions on a flipchart as a protocol in pictures. Meanwhile, the deliberation was observed and recorded in written form, which will be later evaluated by Tamara Ehs<sup>48</sup>.

One of the main issues that arose during the process was the uneven distribution of speaking time between men and women. This is also reflected in the reports made by the representatives at the end of the process: The five men experienced the mini-public as more positive than the five women. Unfortunately, the moderators did not tackle this issue adequately.

One consensus that was reached by the participants – and the main result of the mini-public on the future of democracy – was that they all wished for more political participation. Two of the representatives even came up with a specific model in which mini-publics could be introduced to the political system in Austria. In this model, the role of the mini-public is to express the goals and the political willingness of the civil society. At the same time, solutions and specific suggestions are made as the next step in a collaboration between the mini-public and experts. The role of the politicians would then be to give feedback to the mini-publics and – if needed – ask further questions. In case the suggestions made by the mini-public and the experts are not viable for the politicians, they would have to justify their reasoning, giving them another chance to come up with viable solutions.

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<sup>48</sup> Ehs, T. 2021. Evaluation Zukunftsrat Demokratie. Short version online: <https://zukunftsrat.at/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Kurzfassung-Evaluation-Zukunftsrat.pdf> [retrieved 23.6.2023] The full version of the evaluation is not publicly available.

Graphic: own illustration based on Verein Respekt.net<sup>49</sup>

#### 4.4. Experts

*Which role(s) did experts and expert knowledge play for the mini-public?*

No expert knowledge was introduced in the process. One reason for that was the broad and intentionally vague agenda.

#### 4.5. Political embedding

*How was the mini-public embedded in the political system? How was the “interface” with representative democracy designed? How did the relationship evolve during the duration of the mini-public?*

One weakness of the mini-public on the future of democracy lies in the fact that it was not embedded in the political system at all. The organisers made efforts to get politicians of all parties involved: constitutional speakers of all parties (orig.: “Verfassungssprecher”) were approached, and all members of parliament were contacted via email and invited to the event at which the results were presented and discussed. Unfortunately, most political representatives did not even respond to the invitations; others expressed interest but excused themselves.

#### 4.6. Implementation of results

*Were recommendations/results from the mini-public implemented by policymakers? If yes, which ones are available and in which way? Were results used in other forms by policy-makers (e.g., legitimating existing policies as a rhetorical device...)?*

<sup>49</sup> Verein Respekt.net. 2021. Präsentation der Ergebnisse des Zukunftsrats Demokratie. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1N25r6d7-4> [retrieved 2.11.2023]

No results from the mini-public on the future of democracy were implemented by policymakers. The reasons behind this are diverse; a big factor was definitely the missing link to the political system and decision-makers. The one result that participants could consent to was the wish for more political participation – which is, in the end, too generic in order to inspire specific political change.



Tip: An overview of the important roles deliberative democracy might play besides producing recommendations for policy-making can be found in part 3 of the MANTA-webinar on the [MANTA-Website](#).

#### 4.7. Broader public

*How did the media/public discourse react to the mini-public? Did media coverage change over the course of the mini-public? How did the mini-public communicate to the broader public (e.g., use of social media)? Has there been an effect on public discourse?*

The media paid only a little attention to the mini-public on the future of democracy, which was a disappointment for the organisers. Their goal was to show that a nationwide, bottom-up mini-public was feasible – but delivering this message to the general public turned out difficult. The most relevant in-depth media report was a one-hour segment by the radio station Ö1, operated by the public broadcaster ORF. In this segment, the mini-public's organisers and representatives were interviewed, and the process was explained. The most noteworthy report in print media was done by the daily paper Der Standard, but this two-page segment was only run because a private citizen financed it.

The organisers used social media, namely YouTube, to reach a broader public. At the end of February 2021, prior to the deliberation, they posted a one-minute video asking people living in Austria to send their input on the following questions: What is democracy? What should change in Austria? Unfortunately, the video did not get a lot of attention; to this day, it has 330 hits.

On YouTube, they also published longer videos (around one hour) documenting the presentation of the results. One video was produced during the presentation on September 19 at the hybrid event (140 hits). Another is the recording of a Zoom event<sup>50</sup>, where the results were presented again (41 hits).

#### 4.8. Prospects

*Mini-publics – the future of democracy? Are there plans to institutionalise mini-publics further? Did the mini-public have an impact on (opinions about) deliberative democracy? Which lessons can be drawn for future projects?*

Subsequent to the first nationwide mini-public on the future of democracy, some of the organisers initiated another bottom-up mini-public on the transport system across the provinces of Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland that took place in October 2022. They managed to address some of the

<sup>50</sup> Verein Respekt.net. 2022. Zukunftsrat Demokratie: Präsentation der Ergebnisse, 17.02.2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqAQRDhmW6c> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

issues that surfaced at the mini-public on the future of democracy, namely: they managed to reach almost 30 representatives (instead of 10), they started the process with a more specific question, implemented expert knowledge, provided child care and expanded the time frame from one to two weekends. Although this mini-public resulted in more specific recommendations, politicians and decision-makers still showed little to no interest in getting involved in the process and in taking the results seriously enough to implement respective changes.<sup>51</sup>

After having organised two bottom-up mini-publics in Austria, Bettina Reiter<sup>52</sup> expresses doubt on the political viability of the tool itself. In her expert opinion, it is barely possible to embed bottom-up mini-publics in the Austrian political system nationwide. Without some formal establishment, it is unlikely for politicians and decision-makers to take the results of the mini-publics seriously enough to let them impact their decisions or even pay attention to initiatives as such. In top-down mini-publics, she sees a danger in politicians only “hearing” results that can be used as a justification and legitimisation for their political agendas, turning the process into a rhetorical device rather than a democratic tool of participation. She suggests turning the process upside down: Instead of having the representatives of the mini-public come up with solutions, and the politicians evaluate those results, mini-publics could (or should) be used as a tool for civil society to evaluate solutions proposed by politicians.

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Bettina Reiter on 21 June 2023, Vienna.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Bettina Reiter on 21 June 2023, Vienna.

## 5. Case Study 3: Austrian Climate Citizens' Assembly (CCA)

Our third case study was the Austrian Climate Citizens' Assembly (CCA), which took place on six weekends from January to June 2022. It was established by a parliamentary vote in March 2021 and was an outcome of the popular petition on climate issues ('Klimavolksbegehren'), which had, i.a., demanded the establishment of a citizens' assembly on climate protection. The following descriptions of the CCA are mainly based on desk research, with the final report of the citizens' assembly and the two academic evaluation reports being the most important sources.<sup>53</sup> For specific information on the selection process, the report by Statistik Austria,<sup>54</sup> which was in charge of recruitment, was used. In order to capture reflections of members one year after the conclusion, further information was sought through three interviews with representatives of the independent association founded by former CCA members ('Verein des österreichischen Klimarat der Bürger:innen')<sup>55</sup> to take care of the treatment of results, monitor implementation and spread awareness of climate issues by means of education and lobbying, who kindly shared their experiences (IP 1, 2, 3).



Tip: More information as well teaching materials on the Austrian Climate Citizens' Assembly can be found on the [MANTA-Website](#), see especially section 3 of the working material.

### 5.1. The initiative

*How, by whom and with what aim was the mini-public commissioned?*

On 26th March 2021, the Austrian parliament voted on a resolution to establish a climate citizens' assembly, thereby fulfilling one of the demands of the popular petition on climate issues, which had been signed by 380.590 citizens in June 2020.<sup>56</sup> The resolution was adopted with the votes of the governing coalition (Austrian People's Party and Green Party) and one of the opposition parties (NEOS), while the Social Democratic Party as well as the Austrian Freedom Party opposed it (albeit for different reasons).

<sup>53</sup> ARGE Klimarat/Küblböck, K. 2022. Klimarat der Bürgerinnen und Bürger: Gemeinsam fürs Klima, <https://klimarat.org/wp-content/uploads/Klimarat-Endbericht-WEB.pdf> [retrieved 18.09.2022], Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report of the Austrian Climate Citizens' Assembly: Assessment of Input, Process, and Output. <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/83184> [retrieved 30.05.2023] and

Praprotnik, K. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report of the Austrian 'Klimarat'. Assessment of the Perspectives of the Members and the Public. [https://www.donau-uni.ac.at/dam/jcr:f8f52750-1594-485e-9f4f-89efc0ad2d32/SACCA\\_final%20report\\_UWKpart.pdf](https://www.donau-uni.ac.at/dam/jcr:f8f52750-1594-485e-9f4f-89efc0ad2d32/SACCA_final%20report_UWKpart.pdf) [retrieved 30.05.2023]. In order to keep footnotes to a minimum, in the following we only reference these publications when quoted verbatim.

<sup>54</sup> Rieger, R. 2022. Auswahlverfahren für den Klimarat der Bürgerinnen und Bürger 2021/22. Methodische Dokumentation und Ergebnisse. [https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/pages/300/methodenbericht\\_auswahlverfahren\\_klimarat.pdf](https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/pages/300/methodenbericht_auswahlverfahren_klimarat.pdf) [retrieved 29.03.2023]

<sup>55</sup> <http://klimarat-verein.at> [07.06.2023]

<sup>56</sup> <https://klimavolksbegehren.at> [retrieved 06.06.2023]



The aim of the citizens' assembly was defined as "discussion and development of concrete proposals for climate protection measures necessary to reach the goal of climate neutrality by 2040".<sup>57</sup> Proposals made by the popular petition on climate issues, as well as measures and aims already included in the government coalition agreement, were defined as the basis for debate. As the evaluation report states, "[t]his approach resulted in 1) a relatively weak mandate given to the CCA and 2) only partial political support for the CCA project".<sup>58</sup> This critical sentiment was echoed by one of our interviewees, who argued that for future projects, clear and binding rules for institutions commissioning mini-publics, as well as for those addressed by the resulting recommendations, were important (IP 1).

## 5.2. The representatives

### *How were representatives chosen?*

The resolution by the Austrian parliament commissioning the CCA stipulated the composition of the assembly: It should consist of at least 100 members who have resided in Austria for at least five years, were at least 16 years old and were representative of the population in terms of gender, age, education, income and place of residence.<sup>59</sup>

Statistik Austria was tasked with recruiting 100 members and 20 substitute members, which they did through a two-stage process. At first, 1.003 persons chosen by stratified random sampling according to the predefined criteria were contacted by letter. After the results of this first round showed which groups were over- or underrepresented in terms of willingness actually to participate in the CCA, another 1.000 letters were sent out. Again, the addressees were randomly selected, but this time, probabilities were tweaked in order to reach representativeness as defined by the parliamentary resolution.<sup>60</sup>

The letters contained information on the CCA in general, the planned dates, the remuneration 100,- Euro participants would receive per weekend (besides the coverage of costs for travel, accommodation and food) and the possibility of on-site childcare as well as a link to an online survey and information on the possibility to do the survey via phone. In the survey, Statistik Austria asked respondents not only whether they were willing to participate in the CCA in general but also whether they were willing to do so under "current Covid regulations". Furthermore, they were questioned about their socio-economic background and their political views on climate issues.

In the end, 98 participants were recruited before the start of the first session, which was planned for November 2021 but had to be postponed to January 2022 due to the Covid situation. Another obstacle was the tightening of Covid regulations, which meant that only people who got vaccinated or had recovered from the illness were allowed to take part. At the start of the first weekend, 82 of the 98 members were present, and until the end of the CCA in June 2022, participation fell to 84 members. On average, 76 people were in attendance during all six weekends of deliberation.

<sup>57</sup>[https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/UEA/503/imfname\\_936660.pdf](https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/UEA/503/imfname_936660.pdf) [retrieved 06.06.2023; translation by the authors]

<sup>58</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 14

<sup>59</sup> [https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/UEA/503/imfname\\_936660.pdf](https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/UEA/503/imfname_936660.pdf)

<sup>60</sup> For detailed information see Rieger, R. 2022. Auswahlverfahren

But how well did participants actually represent the Austrian population? All of our interviewees (IP 1, 2 and 3) shared a favourable impression of the CCA as a real “mini-Austria” composed of people of all ages, different socio-economic and educational backgrounds and coming from all walks of life. One especially stressed the fact that facilitators managed to work across differences, facilitating, e.g. the inclusion of people with disabilities, including cognitive impairment (IP 1). Another one vividly remembered the controversial discussions, especially early on in the process, which showed members’ varying backgrounds and needs – e.g. the different situations regarding mobility between densely populated areas with good public transport and rural areas (IP 2). The evaluation report draws a somewhat more mixed picture: Some criteria – especially gender,<sup>61</sup> education and income – were well met, while difficulties arose in other areas.

First, there were issues around age and place of residence: the age limit arbitrarily set at 16 to 84 years meant that older as well as younger people were excluded, and the age distribution shows that age groups 16-29 as well as 45-59 were overrepresented. In terms of place of residence, rural parts of the country were overrepresented vis-à-vis suburban and urban places.

Interestingly, the evaluation found more profound problems relating to issues that were *not* used for selection. While the criteria ‘living in Austria for at least five years’ would have included migrants irrespective of their nationality, people born in Austria were clearly overrepresented in the end, while especially people born outside the EU were heavily underrepresented. The evaluation found that accompanying the invitations with translations in some of the most common languages besides German, as well as a version in an easy-to-use language, might have been helpful in this regard.

The latter might also have been one tool to help mitigate a third problem: Disability also was no criteria for selection, and inclusiveness was seemingly not given the attention needed throughout the process. The CCA’s own website had an information page, which stated that accessibility was ‘under review’ until the end of the CCA and the online platform meant to engage with the broader public – besides being too complicated and overwhelming for all users – did not provide subtitles for videos, webinars or lectures that were made available via YouTube (besides the error-prone automatic feature YouTube itself offers). The evaluation report notes that “[t]he members themselves also discussed the representativeness and inclusiveness of the Austrian CCA. [...] weaknesses of the process, such as lacking diversity, were addressed and linked to the anticipated lack of political and societal impact of the Austrian CCA.”<sup>62</sup>

Maybe the most decisive difficulties arose in terms of a bias towards certain political stances. The COVID regulations in place in January 2022 meant that people who refused to get vaccinated (many of whom were more prone to distrust science) were prohibited from taking part in the CCA. On top of that, the wording of the invitation, as well as the survey, was biased towards people believing in human-made climate change and being worried and eager to do something about it. The very first line of the invitation letter, which read “[w]hat do we have to do today in order to live in a climate-friendly future?”<sup>63</sup> might serve as an example here. Participants’ opinions on climate change were surveyed by

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<sup>61</sup> The evaluation on participants’ views mentions a queer person (besides four men and three women) being interviewed for the evaluation report (Praprotnik, K. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 10). The other reports building on Statistik Austria’s data do not mention genders besides male and female.

<sup>62</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 28

<sup>63</sup> Appendix to Rieger, R. 2022. Auswahlverfahren.

Statistik Austria but were not used for selection. Data gathered in the course of the evaluation i.a., shows that members of the CCA were significantly more interested in politics than the population on average (94% versus 82%), were more worried about climate change (96% versus 76%) and more likely to have a lot of trust in science (75% versus 35%). Thus, the evaluation states, “We can conclude that the CCA assembly members were not fully representative of the Austrian population regarding characteristics of political interest, political participation, and attitudes toward climate change”.<sup>64</sup>

### 5.3. The deliberation

*Which practices of deliberation were established? Who set the agenda? How were discussions moderated? What methods were used? Was a consensus reached? If not, how were minority positions represented?*

As stated above, parliament clearly set the framework when it inaugurated the CCA: The forum was meant to discuss and propose measures to achieve the country’s climate goals (i.e. climate neutrality) by 2040. The evaluators concluded: “[I]t was not the citizens’ task to discuss Austrian climate policy in general”.<sup>65</sup>

It was also not the citizens’ task to define the broad agenda of the CCA or choose the experts providing information. The agenda split the complex issues into five predefined fields of action (energy, production/consumption, food/agriculture, mobility, and habitation), which were debated in two working groups each.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, social justice, education, health and global responsibility were defined as cross-cutting issues. In the evaluators’ view, this predefined structure translated to a lack of cross-cutting recommendations, which might have called for more radical and disruptive changes rather than the incremental steps proposed in the final report of the CCA. They concluded that “coherent system thinking was not promoted on the part of the participants.”<sup>67</sup> The structuring of the process might explain why a sizeable minority of 16% of participants agreed (fully or somewhat) with the statement, “I felt pressured to think of the issue of climate change from a certain perspective”.<sup>68</sup> Our interview partners, however, took little issue with being confronted with a predefined structure, rather welcoming it as a starting point and a way to enter deliberation on this complex topic (IP 1).<sup>69</sup>

The proceedings of the citizens’ assembly were organised and facilitated by a team of 12 members from three different organisations, which formed the ‘ARGE Klimarat’. In addition, 17 moderators and eleven moderation assistants worked with participants during the six weekends of deliberation. On the first weekend, the members of the CCA agreed on two guiding documents. The “Agreement for

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[https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/pages/300/Anhang\\_Methodenbericht\\_Auswahlverfahren\\_Klimarat\\_Neu.pdf](https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/pages/300/Anhang_Methodenbericht_Auswahlverfahren_Klimarat_Neu.pdf)  
[retrieved 07.06.2023, translation by the authors]

<sup>64</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 29; see also Praprotnik et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 18

<sup>65</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 17

<sup>66</sup> ARGE Klimarat. 2022. Klimarat der Bürgerinnen und Bürger, 25ff

<sup>67</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 40

<sup>68</sup> Praprotnik, K. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 15

<sup>69</sup> Interestingly our interviewees remembered the process of group formation slightly differently. While two of them (IP 1, 3) recalled that thematic groups were formed following members’ interests and a process of self-selection, our third interviewee (IP 2) recalled people being assigned according to their individual backgrounds and expertise and in a way that guaranteed diversity within the groups. However, none of them recalled any difficulties or discontent with the formation of the working groups among the participants.

Cooperation” (“Vereinbarung für’s Miteinander”) defined guidelines for how members wanted to work together, and the “Impact Manifesto” (“Wirkungsmanifest”) defined four overarching goals. In this manifesto, participants agreed to strive 1.) for actionable, effective and socially just recommendations; 2.) to generate attention; 3.) to foster change in public opinion, and 4.) to increase willingness for quick and effective climate measures in politics.<sup>70</sup> Our interview partners confirmed that all participants took the guidelines for deliberation seriously throughout the process (IP 1).

During the CCA, the main venues for deliberation included plenary sessions and the aforementioned thematic working groups, which were complemented by small groups dealing with specific issues and tasks. The main work of hammering out recommendations was done in the thematic working groups. Facilitators worked on the exact phrasing between the weekends, but – as one of our interviewees assured us (IP 3) – without ever interfering with the content in any way. Communication between the groups was facilitated via the so-called ‘marketplace’ held every weekend, where each group presented current developments, and all participants were invited to comment and add their ideas.

Overall, the evaluation report paints a favourable picture of the work of moderators and facilitators, many of whom were highly experienced in moderation techniques, e.g. ‘Art of Hosting’<sup>71</sup> and ‘Dynamic Facilitation’<sup>72</sup>. Moderators were emphatic of participants’ needs, facilitated a respectful working environment and adopted a suitable language. Our interviews reflected this positive sentiment, with an interviewee stating that – although they had ample experience in workshop-, training- and adult education settings of different types – the CCA was the best experience in terms of moderation (IP 1, similar expressions by IP 2 and 3).<sup>73</sup> The evaluators’ report concludes that “some debates in the working groups were dominated by male and older participants, which was challenging, especially for young female moderators. In general, the moderators dealt with such situations gently but firmly.”<sup>74</sup> The fact that two elected members of the CCA joined the “the core managing team as equal partners”<sup>75</sup> after the first weekend testified to the quality of the facilitation process. Our interview partners also stressed the sense of community that arose from the common work among participants of the CCA. Discussions between participants separated, e.g. by age and different backgrounds, flowed freely, and, over time, a common responsibility for the shared project shaped the way debates were conducted (IP 1, 2, 3). There were, however, also a few more critical voices within the overall praise, with one member telling evaluators “that academics and people who often present at their work were more eloquent and thus were listened to more frequently than others”.<sup>76</sup>

On the sixth and last weekend, the CCA finally adopted the recommendations one by one, using a form of consent principle. In line with the principles of deliberative democracy, the main tool to reach consent was debate: If a specific recommendation failed to reach (near-)consensus, the groups went back to work to find a solution. Still, in order to offer a feasible process rather than requiring full consensus, recommendations could, in the end, be accepted if not more than nine grave objections were raised. Such objections by a small minority of participants had to be well-reasoned and

<sup>70</sup> ARGE Klimarat. 2022. Klimarat der Bürgerinnen und Bürger, 31

<sup>71</sup> See e.g. <https://artofhosting.org/> [retrieved 20.06.2023]

<sup>72</sup> See e.g. <https://dynamicfacilitation.org/dynamic-facilitation/?lang=en> [retrieved 20.06.2023]

<sup>73</sup> Nearly identical formulations to those used by our interview partners can be found in the evaluation report (Paprotnik, K. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 15).

<sup>74</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 42

<sup>75</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 34

<sup>76</sup> Paprotnik, K. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 13

documented in the CCA's final report. While the evaluators assessed this decision-making method and adapted it to the needs of the CCA, they critically remarked that the method was solely decided by facilitators without the involvement of members. Again, the former members we talked to were less critical: They rather welcomed having been presented with what they experienced as a pragmatic and well-working solution to the problem of reaching a decision with all participants (IP 1, IP 3).

In the end, all 93 recommendations were accepted,<sup>77</sup> with 14 objections raised in relation to seven of them. Of these 14 objections, no less than 10 targeted the action field 'mobility', which generally raised the most debates within the CCA and in public. One hotly debated issue was the question of lowering tempo limits on highways from 130 km/h to 100 km/h. As no consent was reached by the working group, this recommendation was amended to a call for stricter limits on other roads, leaving out the contentious highway speed limit (IP 1, 2). These changes, in turn, led to a few objections to this recommendation, calling for stricter measures, which are documented in the final report.

The evaluators' report concludes that compared to current Austrian climate policies defined by the coalition agreement between the ruling Austrian Peoples' Party and the Green Party in 2020, about half of the measures recommended by the CCA were new. It also stated that "when the CCA recommendations are not new but build on existing or planned policies, over one-third of these recommendations are more demanding in terms of policy content".<sup>78</sup>

## 5.4. Experts

*Which role(s) did experts and expert knowledge play for the mini-public?*

The whole deliberative process was accompanied by a multi-disciplinary scientific advisory board consisting of 15 members. Again, the evaluators favourably comment on the composition of the advisory board but criticise that members of the CCA were not included in the choice of experts or disciplines.

In cooperation with science communicators, the experts prepared information packages consisting of text and video statements on each of the five action fields. The first three weekends of the CCA were dedicated mainly to experts' inputs on their respective fields of expertise. They also provided information on possible directions for political measures, e.g. supply- versus demand-side policies, push-factors and incentives or technological innovations, but were careful to avoid proposing specific instruments in order not to direct the formation of positions and opinions by CCA's members. In the final report, the experts' information on the main leverage points for effective measures in each of the five action fields is presented as an introduction to the CCA's recommendations in each field.

The evaluation team noted that the experts' input changed considerably after the first weekend. "At the beginning of the CCA, the scientific lectures were demanding for non-expert audiences and structured more like university lectures. [...] following the first weekend, the facilitators and scientists successfully invested much time and effort in making the scientific input more accessible and

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<sup>77</sup> The full list of recommendations can be found in the final report. They start with principles for political action and six general recommendations before turning to the bulk of measures addressing the five action fields. ARGE Klimarat. 2022. Klimarat der Bürgerinnen und Bürger, 57ff

<sup>78</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 49

understandable for the target audience.”<sup>79</sup> They also found that – while the lectures provided important information – the most profound impact was made by the informal exchange between scientists and CCA members later in the day. This was echoed in one of our interviews describing long evenings of discussion between CCA members and experts (IP 2). Our interviewees valued the experts’ work very highly, especially stressing that they were available for questions even between weekends (IP 1). They also rated the importance of expert information for their own learning experience very highly, stressing that their knowledge about climate change and especially about the urgency of the problem had been greatly improved (IP 3). A critical point raised by the evaluation was the lack of inclusion of social and especially political scientists, who could have provided members with in-depth knowledge of the workings of the political system, policy-making and deliberation.

Another role of the scientific advisory board was to assess the provisional citizens’ recommendations overnight on the fifth weekend and give feedback on whether they deemed those recommendations feasible, effective, and comprehensive with respect to the five action fields. The CCA thereby showcased the importance of an intense dialogue between science and citizens in developing sound recommendations on complex issues. In the final report, members of the scientific advisory board reflected on their work for the CCA. They wrote that, on the third weekend, some citizens called on them to “tell them what to do” – a role the scientists were not willing to take. Over the next weekends, the setting changed: The citizens acted a lot more self-assured, which in turn made the scientists nervous: “Would they decide on an effective list of recommendations? Would they recognise that some measures looked more promising than they were? Would they include European and global perspectives?”<sup>80</sup> In the end, the scientific advisory board could not only agree with the list of recommendations presented by the citizens, but they even commented favourably on the process, which they had experienced as “a model, which should be used for decision making for other important questions of social transformation from the local up to the European level.”<sup>81</sup>

## 5.5. Political embedding

*How was the mini-public embedded in the political system? How was the “interface” with representative democracy designed? How did the relationship evolve during the duration of the mini-public?*

After the CCA had been instituted by parliamentary resolution, responsibility for its implementation lay with the *Ministry for Climate-protection, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology* (BMK) led by Green Party member Leonore Gewessler. Partly due to time constraints, there was no inter-ministerial cooperation during the implementation of the CCA – a fact the evaluators’ report mentions rather critically, as this led to a close association between the CCA, the ministry and even more importantly, the person of the minister and her party in the eye of the public. One of the main points of criticism concerned the weak provisions in terms of the treatment of results: „Although the federal government was the main addressee of the resolution, the further procedure for dealing with

<sup>79</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 37

<sup>80</sup> ARGE Klimarat. 2022. Klimarat der Bürgerinnen und Bürger, 54. See also members’ assessment of this change in Praprotnik, K. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 14

<sup>81</sup> ARGE Klimarat. 2022. Klimarat der Bürgerinnen und Bürger, 55

the recommendations has not been explicitly regulated.<sup>82</sup> In this sense, the CCA lacked a clear institutional place in the Austrian political system.

During the deliberative phase, a novel approach was chosen to include stakeholders: A number of organisations—including social partner organisations, NGOs working on ecology and social policies, and the federal representation of youth organisations—formed a so-called ‘Stakeholder Advisory Board’. Unlike the scientific advisory board, the stakeholders’ board played a little role during the process, as the organisations did not succeed in clarifying their roles, and differences were hard to overcome.

On the fourth weekend, the CCA scheduled talks with representatives of these and a few additional organisations, as well as representatives of the parliamentary parties. Our interviewees were less than impressed by these talks, stating that stakeholder representatives and, even more so, party members mainly stuck to well-rehearsed lines and showed little interest in real deliberation (IP 1, 2, 3).<sup>83</sup> Just one political representative was remembered favourably for “talking straight” (IP 3) and not resorting to what was deemed typical politicians’ rhetoric. While the evaluator’s report paints a somewhat more nuanced picture, they also found that “[s]ome stakeholders seemed unprepared to face such a large variety of informed opinions, compared to the echo chambers they are usually acting in.”<sup>84</sup>

## 5.6. Implementation of results

*Were recommendations/results from the mini-public implemented by policymakers? If yes, which ones are available and in which way? Were results used in other forms by policy-makers?*

In terms of the implementation of recommendation, the evaluation report for the CCA clearly identifies the main problem, which was a lack of binding regulations: “The resolution of the National Council stipulates that the concrete proposals developed by the CCA will be forwarded to the government and that the final report will be submitted to the Climate Cabinet and the National Climate Committee for discussion. There is no legal obligation to implement the CCA’s proposals.”<sup>85</sup>

On 4 July 2022, the recommendations were formally presented at the Austrian parliament and handed to the ministers Leonore Gewessler (BMK) and Martin Kocher (Ministry for Labour and Economy) as representatives of the Austrian government. Members’ expectations were already ambivalent, as the evaluation report shows. Evaluators i.a., “asked whether respondents agree with the statement that politicians will try to implement their measures. 13 per cent ‘fully agreed’, 41 per cent ‘rather agreed’, 37 per cent ‘rather disagreed’ and four per cent ‘fully disagreed’. Four per cent did not answer this question”.<sup>86</sup>

In November 2022, the BMK responded to the recommendations one by one in a lengthy document, which also included other ministries’ responses “in an adequate fashion,” as the title of the document

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<sup>82</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 14

<sup>83</sup> Again our interviews echoed the opinions voiced in the evaluators’ report (Praprotnik, K. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 16).

<sup>84</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 38

<sup>85</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 45

<sup>86</sup> Praprotnik, K. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 17

states.<sup>87</sup> On the side of the participants we interviewed, the response left mixed emotions (IP 1, 2, 3): On the one hand, they appreciated getting a response at all, as there had been uncertainty about the political treatment of the CCA's results.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, the document was a description of the status quo, explaining which measures had already been taken by the ministries and/or where responsibility for taking steps would lie rather than a bold declaration of vigorous new climate policies.

One year after formally handing the results of their deliberation to the government, about half of the CCA's members are still active in their association (see below). In terms of policy decisions, there have not been any grand developments – partly because the coalition government consisting of the conservative People's Party and the Green Party can't find a compromise, partly because the opposition blocked the necessary majority of two-thirds of the votes in parliament for policies changing the Austrian constitution. The Climate Ministry (BMK) tends to point to the CCA's recommendation when announcing new initiatives and claims that they also form part of ongoing work at the ministry, but until the time of writing in June 2023, hardly any policy outcome can be found.<sup>89</sup>



Tip: An overview of the important roles deliberative democracy might play besides producing recommendations for policy-making can be found in part 3 of the MANTA-webinar on the [MANTA-Website](#).

## 5.7. Broader public

*How did the media/public discourse react to the mini-public? Did media coverage change over the course of the mini-public? How did the mini-public communicate to the broader public? Has there been an effect on public discourse?*

The evaluation report of the CCA included an evaluation of press coverage. In bare numbers, there were “[a]round 500 newspaper articles [...] published in the Austrian press focusing on the CCA between 01.07.2021 - 31.10.2022.”<sup>90</sup> Two quality media outlets – *Der Standard* and *Die Presse* – were chosen for in-depth analysis, revealing that besides neutral documentation of the deliberative process and its results, there was positive as well as negative coverage of the citizens' assembly as an

<sup>87</sup> Bundesministerium für Klimaschutz, Umwelt, Energie, Mobilität, Innovation und Technologie (BMK). 2022. Rückmeldung zu den Empfehlungen des Klimarats der Bürgerinnen und Bürger. Eine Einschätzung des BMK unter angemessener Berücksichtigung von Beiträgen der betroffenen Bundesministerien, insbesondere BMAW, BMBWF, BMF, BMKÖS, BML und BMSGPK. [https://www.bmk.gv.at/dam/jcr:438f077e-1e72-4710-b270-8b3e9b8950be/BMK\\_Klimarat\\_Antworten\\_UA.pdf](https://www.bmk.gv.at/dam/jcr:438f077e-1e72-4710-b270-8b3e9b8950be/BMK_Klimarat_Antworten_UA.pdf) [retrieved 22.06.2023]

<sup>88</sup> This feeling of a lack of commitment by politicians had been enhanced by a statement by conservative MP and climate spokesman for his party Johannes Schmuckenschlager, who shortly after the end of the CCA declared that, he the citizens' assembly lacked legitimacy and that the recommendations had no relevance for him. Although party colleagues took a different position and Schmuckenschlager later changed his point of view, the damage was already done. Orf.at. 3.7.2022: Klimarat präsentiert seine Empfehlungen an die Politik. <https://orf.at/stories/3274360/> [retrieved 26.6.2023]

<sup>89</sup> Prager, A. 05.06.2023. Was bleibt vom Klimarat? <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000172694/93-empfehlungen-des-klimar> [retrieved 26.06.2023]

<sup>90</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 51



instrument of deliberative democracy. Negative views were often voiced in letters to the editor and, e.g., criticised the CCA for being “populist”, for following party interests or for being a waste of taxpayers’ money. The same sentiments also surface in reader comments in the online version of the two newspapers. Broadly speaking, two – contradictory – critical views dominate there: One is questioning the democratic legitimacy of the CCA either in principle or because of its alleged lack of representativeness (e.g. calling it an “echo chamber” of the Green Party), and the other is refuting its demands because of an alleged lack of expertise on the side of participants. In terms of citizens’ assemblies as a tool for democratic development, this shows that deliberation is not yet understood as a democratic exercise in its own right.

Due to its media strategy that included a strong focus on regional media, „the Austrian CCA gathered strong media attention and was known to reasonably large parts of the Austrian population as early as January 2022.”<sup>91</sup> More than half of the population (53%) had heard of the CCA’s existence, according to a poll at the time of the closing session in June 2022, up from 45% at the beginning of the process – however, 44% still claimed never having heard of the CCA.<sup>92</sup>

The CCA’s efforts to reach out to the population directly were somewhat less successful. The online tool “Climate Assembly Asks for Advice” (“Klimarat fragt um Rat”), which was designed to let the public discuss and vote for the CCA’s recommendation and add their ideas, was assessed critically by participants. According to the organisers’ assessment, about 5.000 to 6.000 people took part in the public consultation, and CCA participants’ were generally in favour of involving the broader public in order to not only inform about the CCA but also raise awareness of climate change as such (IP 2). However, in the end, this public consultation had little impact on the process (IP 1, 3). According to the evaluators’ report, a deluge of new ideas was collected, proving impossible to integrate into the deliberations fully.<sup>93</sup>

## 5.8. Prospects

*Are there plans to institutionalise mini-publics further? Did the mini-public have an impact on (opinions about) deliberative democracy? Which lessons can be drawn for future projects?*

Rating the overall success of the CCA is difficult. Measurable results in terms of a clear impact on policies or a sustainable change in public debates on climate policies are lacking, yet there are a number of positive developments. First, participants generally rated their experience of this form of deliberative democracy as very positive. A lot of credit needs to be paid to facilitators and moderators, who accompanied the hard work of hammering out recommendations in a professional manner and guided the process itself smoothly. The evaluators noted: “A good indicator of attitudes towards this participatory instrument is the interviewees’ indication that they would immediately join in if they were invited to another citizens’ council one day.”<sup>94</sup> Another indicator might be that even though participants (including our interviewees) were in accordance that they had learned a lot about the harsh reality of climate change and especially about the urgency of decisive action, according to the evaluators’ polls, most of them did not become more worried about climate change over the course of

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<sup>91</sup> Buzogány, A. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 15

<sup>92</sup> Praprotnik, K. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 4f

<sup>93</sup> Praprotnik, K. et al. 2022. Evaluation Report, 26

<sup>94</sup> Praprotnik K. et al. 2022, Evaluation Report, 25

the CCA. Knowledge gains and the possibility to act upon that knowledge as a community seemingly let worries about the imminent danger turn into engagement and passion.

During the process, several participants became involved in public outreach, holding talks, giving interviews, and addressing political actors, especially at the regional and local levels. The evaluation report rates this strategy, which “was explicitly oriented towards all political forces [as] an important best practice on the way to build broad societal coalitions concerning climate change related issues.”<sup>95</sup> At the end of the process, about half of the members of the CCA decided to continue their work in the form of an independent association (“Verein des österreichischen Klimarat der Bürger:innen”)<sup>96</sup>, which can be seen as “the strongest signal in taking the initiative, assuming responsibility and empowering the participating citizens.”<sup>97</sup> At the time of writing, about a year after the conclusion of the CCA, the association is active in education and lobbying in a broad array of fields – including, e.g. meetings with political representatives on different levels from the local to the European or giving talks to audiences as diverse as the Austrian Academy of Science and kids in elementary schools. One topic adopted was exactly the recommendation that did not find consent in the final report of the CCA: a voluntary speed limit of 100 km/h on highways is promoted by means of a sticker campaign (IP 1, 2, 3). At the time of the interviews, an event to mark the anniversary of the formal deliverance of recommendations to the Austrian government was in planning.

The CCA was the first citizens’ assembly in Austria of substantive size on the national level and, therefore, holds a number of lessons for future deliberative democratic innovation. Among the many important recommendations that can be gleaned from participants’ experiences and can be found in the evaluation reports, two seem to be the most important. First, future citizens’ assemblies need to be installed with a stronger mandate and clear rules for using their recommendations. Second, clear and realistic expectations must be set beforehand among participants and the broader public. Rather than assuming that deliberative processes throw up completely new, unprecedented solutions, it needs to be understood that, more than anything else, they have an important function in providing legitimacy for courageous policies. As one of our interviewees put it: “Politicians could have just said: ‘It’s not us, it’s been the citizens’, who demanded these strict measures” (IP 3). Austrian policy-makers unfortunately missed that chance.

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<sup>95</sup> Buzogány A. et al. 2022, Evaluation Report, 51

<sup>96</sup> <https://klimarat-verein.at/> [retrieved 30.11.2023]

<sup>97</sup> Buzogány A. et al. 2022, Evaluation Report, 42

## 6. Summary



Tip: For more examples on mini-publics around the world see part 3 of our the MANTA-webinar on the [MANTA-Website](#). Material for research-based activities in the classroom can be found in part IV of the working material.

Our three case studies show that mini-publics have been implemented in Austria through vastly different processes that define if and how they are tied to the political system.

In Vorarlberg, the tool is well established and forms part of the political system on the state level. Since 2006, more than 60 mini-publics have taken place, 14 of which debated issues on the regional (state) level, while the rest dealt with local issues. The *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation*, a regional government body, is responsible for the organisation and implementation of the mini-publics. Since 2013, the tool has been incorporated into Vorarlberg's state constitution, and specific guidelines have been developed for initiating and implementing citizens' assemblies at the regional and local levels. On the regional level, mini-publics can be initiated bottom-up (by 1.000 citizens) as well as top-down (by the provincial parliament or the provincial government).

The mini-public on the future of democracy, which took place on 18 and 19 September 2021, was the first mini-public in Austria on the national level. It was initiated bottom-up by three non-governmental organisations (NGOs): *Respekt.net*, *IG Demokratie* and *mehr demokratie! Österreich*. The assembly was not embedded in any governmental structures and was primarily financed through crowdfunding.

The *Austrian Climate Citizens' Assembly (CCA)* was another nationwide public in Austria, but in contrast to the mini-public on the future of democracy, it was initiated top-down by a resolution of the Austrian parliament. Its implementation realised one of the demands of a popular petition on climate issues in June 2020. The CCA took place on six weekends from January to June 2022. The parliamentary motion defined the *Ministry for Climate-protection, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology (BMK)* as being mainly responsible for the process, which led to the CCA being associated with the person of the minister and her (Green) party. While institutional support was thereby provided to the mini-public, an overarching commitment to the deliberative process by all main political actors was lacking. Even though the CCA directly included party representatives and stakeholders on one weekend, the relationship with the political system at large remained fraught.

Implementation procedures also determine who sets the agenda for mini-publics, thereby defining questions for debate and partly preconfiguring outcomes.

In Vorarlberg, agenda-setting depends on whether it is a top-down initiative – in this case, the agenda is set by either the provincial parliament or the provincial government – or a bottom-up initiative – in this case, citizens also define the agenda. In both cases, convenors are assisted by the *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation*, which offers professional guidance. Importantly, the agenda is limited to issues that fall within the competency of the province or the municipalities rather than the national level.

For the mini-public on the future of democracy, the three organising NGOs merely raised a broad topic, giving participants the chance to form their own more specific agendas throughout the process. This led to a myriad of huge topics being raised, which were too complex to process within the two-day event properly. Therefore, the mini-public ended with barely any specific recommendations besides a general wish for more democratic participation.

In the case of the CCA, agenda setting was top-down. The parliamentary motion already defined the scope and the goal of the deliberation as well as the basis for discussion. The agenda for the CCA weekends was set in a rather detailed fashion by the organisers, who also structured the issues and chose experts accordingly. Interestingly, while the evaluation took a rather critical stance towards this top-down approach, participants were quite content to be provided with a clear structure as well as starting points for deliberation.

One important measurement of mini-publics success is how results are taken up in the political system. Can a mini-public influence policies and maybe even foster political change?

In Vorarlberg, the results of every mini-public are first presented and discussed in a World Café-format, i.e. a public forum, which includes political and administrative decision-makers. Next, the results of the mini-public and these public events are further evaluated in a so-called resonance group involving decision-makers and experts who determine which recommendations can be implemented. The results of the resonance group have to be explained to representatives of the mini-public (usually in two rounds of feedback). In some cases, the suggestions made by the mini-publics are established in the government programme and implemented through legislative changes, but more often, they take the form of smaller government initiatives.

As a purely bottom-up initiative, the mini-public on the future of democracy had no connection to the political system. Although political representatives were contacted, the organisers did not succeed in getting them involved in the process. The event's small size, ignorance by political decision-makers, and a lack of media coverage all contributed to the political system's limited responsiveness. This was further aggravated by the fact that the mini-public failed to produce clear-cut recommendations or demands due to the broad agenda.

In the case of the CCA, the parliamentary motion failed to stipulate a clear process for implementing results. In this case, the mini-public arrived at a catalogue of very concrete recommendations, which had already been approved by experts as part of the process, but still, the political system's responsiveness remained lacking. Even though the BMK provided a lengthy document in response, it mainly listed the status quo rather than offered any tangible policy change.

On the institutional level, our three case studies exemplify three different types of mini-publics: Vorarlberg shows the potential of deliberative democratic instruments if implemented as part of the political system with a long-term perspective on the regional and local levels. In this case, deliberation by citizens can cease to be an experiment and become a regular tool of democratic governance. The example also shows that top-down and bottom-up initiatives are not necessarily opposed to one another as a specialised government branch is always involved and safeguards defined standards. While this example shows the potential of mini-publics most clearly, questions remain regarding the possibility of scaling this system to the national (or even European) level, as the regional and local

focus not only simplifies organisational issues but also limits the complexity of questions for deliberation.

As the first such event on the national level, the bottom-up mini-public on the future of democracy was very much a democratic experiment. While it can hardly be deemed a success, it provides valuable insights for future initiatives. First, it proved that it is possible to organise a mini-public purely bottom-up, including the financing of the event. This shows that citizens are interested in participation and are ready to invest money as well as time. Second, while more open to participants' preferences, a very broad agenda brings the risk of weakly defined results that do not translate well to clear recommendations for political actors. Third, if a mini-public aims to influence policies, it needs some institutional connection to the political system in order to ensure decision-makers cannot simply ignore it.

Institutionally speaking, our last example, the CCA, occupies a middle ground in terms of being a top-down initiative with a political mandate but lacking clear provisions for implementing results. In this case, ambivalences are most pronounced, and questions prevail: In which way could the uptake of results be guaranteed without raising questions of democratic legitimacy? Should a citizens' assembly be able to make decisions that are binding for democratically elected members of parliament? Or should it rather be understood as a forum for decision-makers to collect informed opinions? Can a popular referendum on results - like it has been staged, e.g. in Canada and Ireland - solve this issue? Our analysis does not provide clear answers to these questions, but it shows that the relation between citizens' deliberative formats and the political system needs to encompass the treatment of results. Without clear rules in place, mini-publics run the risk of raising unfounded expectations and fears.

In terms of the democratic legitimacy of deliberative instruments, the selection of representatives plays a pivotal role. In all three case studies, the participants were randomly selected in an attempt to represent the diversity of Austrian society, although with different approaches to the selection process. Importantly, Austrian citizenship is not required to participate, which (at least in theory) exempts deliberative democratic tools from the democratic deficiencies resulting from restrictive citizenship laws in a society marked by migration, i.e. where a growing part of the population is excluded from political rights. Nevertheless, all three mini-publics had difficulties in representing diversity adequately.

Mini-publics in Vorarlberg usually consist of 12-16 participants from the age of 16, who are selected randomly from the civil register. Therefore, data available to ensure diversity includes age, gender, and place of residence, but no other information, e.g., formal education, socio-economic status, or migration background, is available. Experience shows that finding female and young participants is usually more difficult. As there is also no data on occupation, skills or knowledge, organisers found another solution, i.e. expert panels, when specific expertise was needed.

Organisers of the mini-public on the future of democracy did not have access to the civil register. Therefore, they randomly selected participants from the address register of the Austrian postal service. Similar to the civil register, this includes age, gender and place of residence. In order to ensure as much diversity as possible, they also reached out to recruit members of specific socio-demographic groups, which are traditionally underrepresented in deliberative endeavours. Due to the Covid situation, they ended up with just ten participants instead of 20, and they did not fully reach the diversity they had envisioned.

The recruiting process of the CCA was implemented by *Statistic Austria*, which, of course, had much more comprehensive data and more resources available. Adding to the categories mentioned above, recruiters included formal education and income in the process. In this case, the goal was to reach a considerably larger group of 100 participants. Following a two-step process, the organisers managed to reach representativity in relation to gender, education and income, but distribution between age groups was somewhat uneven, and people with migrant histories – especially people born outside the EU – were underrepresented. Again, the COVID situation was a limiting factor, as people who were not vaccinated could not participate. However, a more striking limitation in this case was the political bias, i.e., the preference for people already interested in and worried about climate change. While data on political preferences was gathered during the selection process, it was not used as a criterion.

Overall, the selection processes in all three cases managed to ensure the diversity of participants quite well within the constraints given by circumstances. Especially when compared to the social biases usually found in self-selected deliberative formats, i.e. the overrepresentation of older, well-educated citizens, mini-publics with their selection processes prove to be much more accessible. One additional measure recommended in evaluation reports was the use of easy-to-use language in invitation letters to be more inclusive towards migrants as well as people with cognitive disabilities. The problem of political bias, however, is not easily overcome as people are naturally more willing to participate if they have an interest and an emotional investment in the topic of deliberation. Again, this points to one of the ambivalences of the instrument: While the deliberative process itself might profit from participants' shared commitment, it might also be detrimental to democratic legitimacy if people feel that their opinions are not represented within the mini-public at all.

In terms of deliberative practices, common standards of facilitation seem to be emerging. The moderation technique of *Dynamic Facilitation* was used in all three cases. The goal of this technique is to reach consent, which means establishing results and recommendations to which none – or at least not many – of the participants strongly object. This differs from reaching a consensus, which would require all participants to agree fully. In the case of the CCA, objections raised in relation to some of the recommendations were included in the final document. The deliberative process during the mini-public on the future of democracy shows that – even with professionally trained moderators – group dynamics that grant unequal speaking time to different groups of participants might occur. In this case, it was observed that women took less time than men, mirroring broader gender inequalities. Nevertheless, the case studies show that proper facilitation allows for an open exchange of ideas among diverse groups of participants. The CCA, which featured a longer process, provided participants with the opportunity to form a shared commitment towards the deliberative work.

Interestingly, the role of expert knowledge within the deliberative processes varied widely. In Vorarlberg, participants are routinely provided with informational material prior to the deliberation, but no experts are present during deliberation. Instead, they are introduced at a later stage of the process when it comes to evaluating results in terms of the possibility of implementation. At the mini-public on the future of democracy, no expert knowledge was brought in at all – partly due to the broad agenda set. The opposite is true for the CCA, where experts were involved throughout the process in different roles. Not only did they provide input at the beginning of the process, but they also provided feedback on the recommendations of the citizens' assembly. Again, one of the ambivalences of deliberative processes can be highlighted: While the experts helped to guide the process and to ensure the feasibility of recommendations, their involvement also runs the risk of biasing the citizens and of pre-configuring results. Still, when striving for the deliberative ideal of

rational deliberation, i.e. one based on arguments rather than preconceived opinions, there is no alternative to providing participants with factual information on complex topics.

Last but not least, mini-publics also strive to have an impact on the broader public. In Vorarlberg, detailed documentation of each mini-public is publicly available online using a specific deliberative democratic tool provided by the state government. The *Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation* makes great efforts to promote the tool (e.g. via YouTube). Although mini-publics have a relatively long history in Vorarlberg, it is worth noting that some participants reported they never heard of these deliberative forums before they got the invitation to participate. Media reports can be found primarily on smaller local news since most agendas are limited to the regional or even local level. In the case of the mini-public on the future of democracy, media response and public awareness of the process did not meet the organisers' expectations. The vague agenda, the unspecific results, and the lack of political embedding did not help stir interest among journalists. The CCA, on the other hand, was subject to many media reports and led to heated public discussions in commentary sections. Similar to the mini-publics in Vorarlberg, the CCA also provided an online tool to include the broader public in the discussion. In this case, the organisers were flooded with suggestions and comments to the extent that including them in the deliberative process was impossible. In summary, mini-publics' relation to the broader public appears to be difficult to manage. Opening the process by including the broader public as an active participant in the deliberation seems difficult and resource-intensive or might even be detrimental to the deliberative process as such. Yet, engagement and interest by the public can be important factors to safeguard the legitimacy and sustainability of results and, in the long run, instruments of deliberative democracy themselves. Debates around the CCA also showed that public opinion has yet to be convinced of the usefulness and legitimacy of the instrument.

Summing up and daring to peek into the future, we conclude that mini-publics in Vorarlberg have already proven that they can be a valuable tool for deliberative participation on the regional or local level. They can provide impetus for change and foster innovative initiatives but are limited in their scope due to being bound to the competencies of the state government. The question thus remains how these tools can be adapted to broader, more complex and more contentious questions on the national (or even European) level. While the mini-public on the future of democracy did not lead to tangible results, it can be seen as a pioneer project: Not only was it the first nationwide, but also the first entirely bottom-up mini-public in Austria. In their follow-up mini-public on the transport system across the provinces of Vienna, Lower Austria, and Burgenland, the organisers have already addressed some of the issues that surfaced at the mini-public on the future of democracy. All differences notwithstanding, the CCA also suffered from a lack of tangible impact on policies or even public debate. However, the fact that many participants continue their work in a voluntary association clearly indicates the change it brought about for the people directly involved. Learnings from both national mini-publics clearly indicate that their effectiveness hinges on their embeddedness in the political system, a clear mandate and decision-makers willingness to take results seriously.

## 7. A step-by-step approach to your own Mini-Public

As a reader of the compendium, you are now equipped with a lot of information on how mini-publics work. We hope that combining debates from academic literature with an analysis of practices in citizens' assemblies in Austria provides a good basis to develop your own educational practices.



Tip: For even more information and especially for exercises for the classroom see the different materials on the [MANTA-Website](#). Exercises on how to design your own mini-public can be found in the Blended Learning Training, and in section 5 of the working material.

At the end of the compendium, we would like to ask readers to think through the process of designing a mini-public in a step-by-step fashion, building on the case studies we presented in this compendium. The following questions are meant to help structure this process and make sure that important aspects are fully covered.

**Task:** How would you – leaving practical consideration aside – organise your own mini-public?

**Question 1:** Which issue(s) would you like to see deliberated on in a mini-public?

**Reflection:** What are the specific features of mini-publics compared to other tools for citizens' participation? What are the advantages and disadvantages of mini-publics as a specific form of deliberative democracy? Are there specific topics especially suited (or especially unsuited) for this kind of deliberative forum? Is there a limit to the instrument's applicability in terms of size or political level (e.g., national, European, global)?

**Question 2:** Why do we need a mini-public on this issue/these issues?

**Reflection:** Why would a mini-public be better suited to resolve the issue than representative democratic processes? How and in which role can deliberative democracy be included in policy-making processes within representative democracy? Under which circumstances is deliberation by (non-elected) citizens a legitimate tool for arriving at recommendations or even decisions on policies?

**Question 3:** Which goals should the mini-public try to achieve? Which form should results take, and what should happen with those after the deliberative process?

**Reflection:** What kind of power should participants have? Should policymakers be obligated to follow citizens' recommendations? Should influencing public opinion features be a goal for mini-publics? Under which conditions can a mini-public be deemed a success? Which of the three case studies would you rate as successful and why?

**Question 4:** Who should commission and organise the mini-public?



**Reflection:** What are the advantages and disadvantages of top-down and bottom-up processes when initiating a mini-public? Which strategies could be conceived to bridge the gap between the different approaches?

**Question 5:** How should participants be chosen?

**Reflection:** In its ideal form, a mini-public would be representative of the population at large. Is this possible? What steps can be taken to get close to such an ideal situation, and which difficulties persist? In practice, mini-publics mostly settle to represent diversity rather than being truly representative in the statistical sense of the term. Can they still claim democratic legitimacy?

**Question 6:** What should the deliberative process itself look like?

**Reflection:** How can the deliberative ideal of power-free exchange of rational arguments be approximated in practice – i.e. how can differences in status between participants be overcome? Which role should expert knowledge play? Which role can and should the broader public have vis-a-vis mini-publics? Should stakeholders and/or politicians be directly involved?

## 8. Further resources

### 8.1. Overview & examples of Mini-Publics

Escobar, Oliver, und Stephen Elstub. 2017. Forms of Mini-publics. [https://newdemocracy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/docs\\_researchnotes\\_2017\\_May\\_nDF\\_RN\\_20170508\\_FormsOfMiniPublics.pdf](https://newdemocracy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/docs_researchnotes_2017_May_nDF_RN_20170508_FormsOfMiniPublics.pdf) [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Short paper distinguishing different forms of mini-publics

FIDE – Federation for Innovation in Democracy. <https://www.fide.eu/> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Brussels-based network and website dedicated to citizens' assemblies in Europe

Hierlemann, Dominik, and Céline Diebold. 2021. French Citizens' Convention on Climate. [https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/Projekte/Demokratie\\_und\\_Partizipation\\_in\\_Europa\\_/Shortcut/Issue\\_4\\_French\\_Citizens\\_Convention\\_on\\_Climate/210218\\_Shortcut\\_4\\_French\\_Citizens\\_Convention\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/Projekte/Demokratie_und_Partizipation_in_Europa_/Shortcut/Issue_4_French_Citizens_Convention_on_Climate/210218_Shortcut_4_French_Citizens_Convention_WEB.pdf) [retrieved 31.10.2023]

→ Fact Sheets on the French Citizens' Convention on Climate

Hierlemann, Dominik. 2020. Small Country, Big Innovation: The Irish Citizens' Assembly. [https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/Projekte/Demokratie\\_und\\_Partizipation\\_in\\_Europa\\_/Shortcut/Issue\\_3\\_Irish\\_Citizens\\_Assembly/201217\\_Shortcut-3-Irish\\_Citizens\\_Assembly\\_Web.pdf](https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/Projekte/Demokratie_und_Partizipation_in_Europa_/Shortcut/Issue_3_Irish_Citizens_Assembly/201217_Shortcut-3-Irish_Citizens_Assembly_Web.pdf) [retrieved 31.10.2023]

→ Fact Sheets on the Irish Citizens' Assembly

Journal of deliberative democracy. <https://delibdemjournal.org/> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Interdisciplinary open-access journal publishing articles on all aspects of deliberative democracy

KNOCA – Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies: <https://knoca.eu/> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ European network sharing reports and learnings on climate assemblies

Moskovic, Jonathan, Bérangère Jouret, and Anna Renkamp. 2023. Deliberative Committees: A New Approach to Deliberation between Citizens and Politicians in Brussels. [https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/Shortcut\\_9\\_Deliberative\\_Committees.pdf](https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/Shortcut_9_Deliberative_Committees.pdf) [retrieved 31.10.2023]

→ Fact Sheets on Deliberative Committees

Niessen, Christoph, and Min Reuchamps. 2019. Designing a Permanent Deliberative Citizens Assembly: The Osbelgien Modell in Belgium. <https://dial.uclouvain.be/pr/boreal/object/boreal:229726> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

→ Article on a permanent Citizens' Council in Belgium

OECD. 2020. Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave. OECD. [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/innovative-citizen-participation-and-new-democratic-institutions\\_339306da-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/innovative-citizen-participation-and-new-democratic-institutions_339306da-en) [16.10.2023]

→ OECD report on deliberative practices, including 'Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making', based on comparative empirical evidence

OECD. 2021. OECD Database of Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions. <https://airtable.com/shrHEM12ogzPsOnQG/tbl1eKbt37N7hVFHF/viwxQgJNyONVHkmS6?blocks=hide> [retrieved 16.20.2023]

→ Database of deliberative practices around the world

Paulis, Emilien et al. 2020. The POLITICIZE Dataset: An Inventory of Deliberative Mini-Publics (DMPs) in Europe. In: European Political Science 20(3): 521–42. <https://europepmc.org/article/PMC/PMC7371796> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Analysis of 105 deliberative mini-publics held between 2000 and 2020

Schmidt, Maximilian and Courtney Aitken. 2022. Citizens' Assemblies – an international comparison. SPICe Briefing SB 22-07. Edinburgh: The Scottish Parliament. <https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdnep.azureedge.net/published/2022/2/1/12a76138-5174-11ea-8828-000d3a23af40/SB%2022-07.pdf> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Paper for the Scottish Parliament providing background on citizens' assemblies as well as discussing the Scottish examples in detail

TU Berlin. 2021. Doing Mini-Publics Database. The Spread of Mini-Publics across the World. <https://sfb1265.github.io/mini-publics/> and [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Ue4Mdwf6ngzPCKmz5tKW9FavoeXLEZPEFbJI2mnAX\\_E/edit#gid=2061509366](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Ue4Mdwf6ngzPCKmz5tKW9FavoeXLEZPEFbJI2mnAX_E/edit#gid=2061509366) [retrieved 16.20.2023]

→ Database and map of mini-publics around the world

## 8.2. Recommendations for practitioners

Berg, Carsten et al. 2023. The European Citizens' Assembly: Designing the Missing Branch of the EU Carsten. European University Institute and DemocracyNext. <https://www.demnext.org/papers> [retrieved 17.10.2023]

→ The authors outline arguments for a European Citizens' Assembly, explore its core principles and design features and suggest pathways for implementation

Bryant, Peter, and Lucy Stone. 2020. Climate Assemblies and Juries: A people-powered response to the climate emergency. Shared Future. <https://sharedfuturecic.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Shared-Future-PCAN-Climate-Assemblies-and-Juries-web.pdf> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Guide for local authorities to create successful citizens' assemblies that can address climate issues

CCA-Project: Climate Citizens' Assemblies. Aiming for impact by learning with, from and for European practices. <https://www.cca-project.org/> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Recommendations for successful citizens' assemblies on climate issues

CDDG/COE. 2023. Report on Deliberative Democracy. <https://rm.coe.int/report-on-deliberative-democracy-eng/1680aaf76f> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Report and recommendations by the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG) of the Council of Europe

DemocracyNext. 2023. Assembling an Assembly Guide. <https://www.demnext.org/uploads/DemocracyNext-Assembling-an-Assembly-Guide-print-version.pdf> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

→ Guide for institutions, organisations, city administrations or policymakers interested in running a Citizens' Assembly

Flanigan et al. n.d. Panelot - Everyone Deserves a Fair Chance. <https://panelot.org/> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

→ Tool to select a representative citizens' panel

newDemocracy Foundation. n.d. Stratified Random Selection Tool. <https://selection.newdemocracy.com.au/> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

→ Tool to perform stratified random selections

OECD. 2020. Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes. OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/good-practice-principles-for-deliberative-processes-for-public-decision-making.pdf> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Short guide summing up the most important principles for the implementation of deliberative processes

UN Democracy Fund & NewDemocracy Foundation. 2019. Enabling National Initiatives to Take Democracy Beyond Elections. <https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/New-Democracy-Handbook-FINAL-LAYOUT-reduced.pdf>

→ A 'how-to' guide for the design and operation of citizens' assemblies

University of British Columbia: Participedia. <https://participedia.net/> [retrieved 17.10.2023]

→ Multi-lingual crowd-sourcing platform on participation projects all around the world

Westminster Foundation for Democracy. <https://www.wfd.org/openness-and-participation> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ The WDF page provides a wealth of materials on democracy in general. Tip: use the search function to find resources on "deliberative democracy."

White, Kimbra, Nicole Hunter, and Keith Greaves. 2022. Facilitating Deliberation – A Practical Guide. MosaicLab.

→ Handbook with a step-by-step guide to facilitating deliberation

### 8.3. Background, theory & academic debate

Bächtiger, Andre et al. 2018. The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198747369.001.0001> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Academic handbook on deliberative democracy

Bech-Pedersen, Palle. 2023. On blind deference in Open Democracy. European Journal of Political Theory. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/14748851231174166> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

→ Critical assessment of blind deference in the context of mini-publics

- Carson, Lyn. 2007. Creating Democratic Surplus through Citizens' Assemblies. In: *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.64> [retrieved 16.10.2023]  
→ Article on an Australian citizens' assembly tackling the democratic deficit
- Courant, Dimitri. 2022. Institutionalizing Deliberative Mini-Publics? Issues of Legitimacy and Power for Randomly Selected Assemblies in Political Systems. In: *Critical Policy Studies* 16(2): 162–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19460171.2021.2000453>  
→ Article exploring different possibilities for the institutionalisation of mini-publics and critically assessing intended and unintended consequences
- Dryzek, John S. et al. 2019. The Crisis of Democracy and the Science of Deliberation. In: *Science* 363(6432): 1144–46. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aaw2694> [retrieved 16.10.2023]  
→ The authors argue that the crisis of democracy can only be solved through citizens' involvement. While the real world of democratic politics is currently far from the deliberative idea, they say that the gap might be closed
- Elstub, Stephen/Rodríguez, Óliver Escobar (eds.). 2019. *Handbook of Democratic Innovation and Governance*. Edward Elgar Publishing.  
→ Collection of articles on democratic innovation, including mini-publics as one possible innovative form
- Font, Joan et al. 2018. Cherry-Picking Participation: Explaining the Fate of Proposals from Participatory Processes. In: *European Journal of Political Research* 57(3): 615–36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12248> [retrieved 16.10.2023]  
→ Article exploring which factors influence if and how policy proposals by citizens' are taken up and implemented
- Gleason, Laurel S. 2011. Revisiting 'The voice of the People': An evaluation of the claims and consequences of deliberative polling. *Critical Review* 23 (3): 371–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2011.635872> [retrieved 31.10.2023]  
→ Examination of the claim that political polling leads to a better-informed general public
- Grönlund, Kimmo et al. (eds.). 2014. *Deliberative mini-publics: Involving citizens in the democratic process*. ECPR Press.  
→ Collection of essays on theoretical debates and practical experiences with mini-publics
- Hendriks, Frank/Wagenaar, Charlotte. 2023. The Deliberative Referendum: An Idea Whose Time Has Come? In: *Administration & Society*, 55(3): 569-590. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00953997221140898> [retrieved 17.20.2023]  
→ The authors explore how citizens' assemblies and referenda might be linked for better-connecting society and administration
- Lafont, Cristina. 2015. Deliberation, Participation, and Democratic Legitimacy: Should Deliberative Mini-Publics Shape Public Policy? In: *Journal of Political Philosophy* 23(1): 40–63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12031> [retrieved 16.10.2023]
- Lafont, Cristina. 2020. *Democracy without Shortcuts: A Participatory Conception of Deliberative Democracy*. Oxford.

→ In both publications, Lafont explores a critical view of mini-publics and their role vis-a-vis an ideal of deliberative democracy

Niemeyer, Simon and Julia Jennstål. 2016. The Deliberative Democratic Inclusion of Future Generations. In: González-Ricoy, Iñigo/Gosseries, Axel (eds.). *Institutions For Future Generations*. Oxford University Press: 247–65. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198746959.003.0015> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Chapter arguing for the institutionalisation of deliberative mini-publics as a mechanism for both improving the standing of future generations in the decision-making process and the representation of these interests in the public imagination

Niemeyer, Simon et al. 2023. How Deliberation Happens: Enabling Deliberative Reason. In: *American Political Science Review*: 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423000023> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Article discussing under which conditions high-quality deliberative reasoning can be achieved

Niessen, Christoph. 2019. When Citizen Deliberation Enters Real Politics: How Politicians and Stakeholders Envision the Place of a Deliberative Mini-Public in Political Decision-Making. In: *Policy Sciences* 52(3): 481–503. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-018-09346-8> [retrieved 17.10.2023]

→ The article explores how other political actors regard mini-publics as ‘newcomers’ to the political system

O’Flynn, Ian. 2021. *Deliberative democracy*. Polity Press.

→ Background on deliberative democracy theory and the academic debates around the subject

O’Flynn, Ian. 2022. *Deliberative Democracy and Citizens’ Assemblies – Rules of the Game* (Podcast). <https://rulesofthegame.blog/deliberative-democracy-and-citizens-assemblies/> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Episode #22 of the “Rules of the Game”-podcast with Ian O’Flynn, a leading expert on deliberative democracy

Peixoto, Tiago C. and Paolo Spada. 2023. Reflections on the Representativeness of Citizens’ Assemblies and Similar Innovations. In: *DemocracySpot*. <https://democracyspot.net/2023/02/22/reflections-on-the-representativeness-of-citizens-assemblies-and-similar-innovations/> [retrieved 17.10.2023]

→ Reflections on the “representativeness” of mini-publics and arguments for why they are useful despite being imperfect

Percy-Smith, Barry et al. (eds.). 2023. *A Handbook of Children and Young People’s Participation: Conversations for Transformational Change*. Routledge.

→ Collection of the specific challenges for participatory processes involving children and young people

Pow, James et al. 2020. It’s Not Just the Taking Part That Counts: ‘Like Me’ Perceptions Connect the Wider Public to Minipublics. In: *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 16(2). 43-55. <https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.368> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Answering Lafont’s critical stance, the authors explore under which conditions mini-publics are seen as an adequate representation by the broader public

Reuchamps, Min et al (eds.). 2023. *De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens’ Assemblies*. Berlin: De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110758269> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Edited volume showcasing current debates on citizens' assemblies

Setälä, Maija. 2017. Connecting Deliberative Mini-Publics to Representative Decision Making. In: European Journal of Political Research 56(4): 846–63. <https://ejpr.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1475-6765.12207> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Research article detailing how mini-publics can be accommodated within existing representative democratic systems

Setälä, Maija. 2018. Deliberative Mini-Publics in Democratic Systems. In: Morel, Laurence/Qvortrup, Matt (eds.): The Routledge Handbook to Referendums and Direct Democracy. London. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203713181> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Overview of different designs for mini-publics and the respective quality of deliberation

Stack, Shauna and Erich Griessler. 2022. From a “Half Full or Half Empty Glass” to “Definitely a Success”. Explorative Comparison of Impacts of Climate Assemblies in Ireland, France, Germany and Scotland. Wien: IHS. <https://irihs.ihs.ac.at/id/eprint/6113/> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Paper comparing citizens' assemblies on climate issues with a focus on their impacts

Vrydagh, Julien and Didier Caluwaerts. 2023. How Do Mini-Publics Affect Public Policy? Disentangling the Influences of a Mini-Public on Public Policy Using the Sequential Impact Matrix Framework. In: Representation 59(1): 117–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2020.1862901>. [retrieved 17.10.2023]

→ The authors use a complex framework to measure the potential impacts of mini-publics more coherently

Wells, Rebecca et al. 2021. Are Citizen Juries and Assemblies on Climate Change Driving Democratic Climate Policymaking? An Exploration of Two Case Studies in the UK. In: Climatic Change 168(1–2): Article nr 5. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10584-021-03218-6> [retrieved 16.10.2023]

→ Article discussing if and how citizens' assemblies impact climate policies

Willis, Rebecca, Nicole Curato, and Graham Smith. 2022. Deliberative democracy and the climate crisis. WIREs 13(2): <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.759> [retrieved 31.10.2023]

→ The article examines the potential role of Citizens' Assemblies in meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement

## 8.4. Foundational concepts

Dahl, Robert A. 1989. Democracy and Its Critics. Yale University Press.

→ Background reading on modern democracy, in which Dahl also suggested the idea of a “minipopulus.”

Fishkin, James S. 1991. Democracy and Deliberation: New Directions for Democratic Reform. New Heaven / London.

→ The author i.a. asks how democracy can foster equality and high-quality deliberation simultaneously

Fishkin, James S. 2009. *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation*. Oxford University Press.

→ The book, based on real-world examples of deliberative processes, shows how deliberation can revive our modern democracies.

Habermas, Jürgen. 1984/1987. *Theory of Communicative Action*. Beacon Press.

→ Probably the most important philosophical foundations of deliberative democracy



This booklet was designed as a resource for educators, but also for students, journalists and the general public interested in concise information on mini-publics as one specific form of deliberative democracy.

It provides theoretical and conceptual background on deliberative democracy and the specificities of mini-publics and citizens' assemblies.

The main part of the booklet aims to get closer to the actual practice of deliberative democracy by focusing on three mini-publics in Austria, which are used to explore the strengths and weaknesses of the tool in different settings:

- Regional and local mini-publics in Vorarlberg
- National mini-public on the future of democracy
- Austrian Climate Citizens' Assembly (CCA)

A list of recommended readings and links provides pathways to further information on deliberative democracy and mini-publics.



**MANTA**

Mini-Publics And Other New Forms  
Of Participation In Civic Education