Oversight of deliberative democracy initiatives

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Acknowledgements

This document serves as annexes to the Policy Brief « 14 questions to ask oneself before launching participatory processes and citizens' deliberations such as citizens' panels, citizen conference or citizen assembly ».

It presents real-life case studies of deliberative democracy initiatives with random sortition of citizens, and indicate how these initiatives position themselves in relation to some of the fundamental questions addressed in the note.

This version will soon be updated and expanded with additional cases and information, providing an oversight of a variety of existing practices.

▶ National level: Irish Citizens' Assembly

In July 2016, the Irish Parliament voted a resolution to install a Citizens Assembly that consists of 99 citizens "broadly representative of the Irish People". In the resolution, the CA was given a number of distinct tasks.

The first one of these was to review the eight amendment of the Irish constitution, which dealt with **abortion** (Eight amendment of the constitution) and directly led to the well-known referendum. Other topics in the resolution are how Ireland should deal with an **ageing population** and how Ireland can tackle **climate change**, and (still ongoing) fixed term parliaments and referendums.

The Citizens' Assembly dealt with this latter question in September and November 2017. The assembly members were informed on different perspectives on how to tackle climate change and over two full weekends then questioned experts. After deliberation they came up with 13 recommendations on climate change to parliament and government (Full report, pages 4-6). The members of the CA also voted on these recommendations (anonymously) and so this gave an indication how many members of the CA supported a final recommendation. Almost all had a support of 90% or more. Even the support to pay higher taxes on "carbon intensive activities" was 80%. The recommendations look at areas as diverse as agriculture, transportation, energy or infrastructure. The recommendations of the CA are discussed in the relevant committee of the parliament and debated. The government provides a response in parliament to each

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[1] Available online on https://www.foundationfuturegenerations.org/en/project/g1000-deliberative-democracy

recommendation and if it accepts one, the resolution states that it should give a timeframe for the implementation of that resolution. The Citizens' Assembly is not a permanent body, but for these separate tasks as listed in the resolution, the same citizens could remain in the Citizens Assembly. In reality, there was a significant turnover as every topic required a strong effort of these citizens and personal circumstances did not allow remaining active in the CA for almost two years. Nevertheless, about a third of the citizens in the climate change CA, were also part of the 'Eight amendment' work of the CA. This shows that once citizens have committed to this, they take the work very serious and invest energy and time in it. To give an example, without the reading of information and preparing, the Climate Change work of the CA took 26 hours of meetings from the members. Almost all who started on that process remained until the end of it.

More information:

- Website: https://www.citizensassembly.ie
- Youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2DgyetL9aUTMry_F9B9yUw
- Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizens%27_Assembly_(Ireland)

▶ Regional level: The Bürgerdialog in Ostbelgien

On the 25th of February 2019, the parliament of the German Speaking Community of Belgium voted unanimously to install a permanent form of citizens' participation in the policy work of the parliament and government. This process, which has the overarching name «Burgerdialog», will consist of a permanent Citizen Council with 24 members and separate Citizen Assemblies, which will be held throughout the year. The Citizen Council (CC) consists of 24 citizens and has two tasks: the first task is that once a year (in September) it meets to select the topics on which separate Citizens' Assemblies (CA) will be held that year. The CC can decide on the number of these CA's within bounds set by the decree (one to three every year) and on the number of members it should have (between 25 and 50). The second task is to connect with the parliament to see how recommendations from previous CA's have been followed-up.

The individual Citizens Assemblies will each consist of citizens drawn by lot and will look at the issue/question put forward by the CC. They will hear experts and stakeholders, inform themselves and deliberate on the topic. At the end of their session, they will draft a number of recommendations towards the parliament. They will also vote (anonymously) on their own recommendations and if these reach a certain threshold, this has implications on how parliament should treat them. Below the threshold, they are mere informative, but if they reach the threshold, parliament must discuss them and also justify what has been done to follow-up on them. The decree stipulates that this is especially the case if the parliament decides not to follow up on a recommendation that reached the threshold. As has been said above, the Citizen Council will be the instance to control this follow-up.

Finally, the preparation and administrative follow up is important in these processes and therefore a third element of the design is a Permanent Secretariat, which in this case will consist of one person engaged full time to work for the Burgerdialog.

More information:

- https://www.foundationfuturegenerations.org/sites/www.foundationfuturegenerations.org/files/documents/news/20190226_dgpermanentcitizensassembly_pressrelease.pdf (with a longer explanation, including a graph of the design)
- Decree by the German-speaking Community Parliament installing a permanent citizen involvement in the policy-making of the German-speaking community (DE, FR, NL).