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Research proposal – Ph.D. Dissertation

PLANNED TITLE OF PHD DISSERTATION:

Setting Minipublics' Remits for Impact on Public Policies: A Comparative Analysis of Local Citizens' Assemblies in Poland

STATE OF THE ART AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISSERTATION:

Deliberative minipublics (DMPs), particularly citizens' assemblies (CAs), have become increasingly popular in CEE countries and elsewhere as a potential solution to challenges faced by representative democracies and as a possible way of "improving the public sphere" (Fung, 2003, p. 339) by realizing the theoretical goods of deliberative democracy through institutionalized practice (Smith, 2009). The potential advantages of deliberative instruments to strengthen democratic values (Curato et al., 2017) in policy-making lay in both widening and deepening citizen participation (Harris, 2019, p. 45). After the initial enthusiasm, however, recent research has raised critical questions about the real potential of CAs to strengthen democracy, highlighting the need to examine them as part of a broader political system. For example, when applying the problem-based approach to democracy to minipublics to find out how much they actually serve the democratic functions of inclusion, collective will-formation, and decision-making (Warren, 2007; Lacelle-Webster & Warren, 2023; Geißel, 2023), the connection between minipublics' internal processes of will-formation and the political decision-making needs to be better understood. Minsart and Jacquet (2023) stress that in order to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the system, CAs need to have an actual impact on political decisions, which is still insufficiently understood and researched. However, scholars in deliberative democracy have been stressing the ambivalent nature of minipublics, with their value being dependent on both their internal quality and their fit with the external political context, therefore calling for more focus on identifying conditions under which they can best fulfill their democratic potential and allow us to make the appropriate use of their strengths (Curato & Böker, 2016; Lacelle-Webster & Warren, 2023).

Deliberative minipublics have been frequently analyzed for their internal effects, especially for the effects of deliberation on their participants, and less for their external consequences (e.g., Jacquet & van der Does, 2021). Therefore, deliberative democrats have been criticized for paying too much attention to the internal procedural aspects of minipublics and not enough to their embeddedness in the broader political structures (see, e.g., Papadopoulos & Warin, 2007). As a response to these critiques, the systemic approach to deliberative democracy (see, e.g., Mansbridge et al., 2012) was developed, which studies the integration of deliberative minipublics into the political system as a whole and their interactions with the systems' other elements and institutions. However, many aspects of a minipublic's design have implications for more than just its internal functioning (Niemeyer & Felicetti, 2023).

A central yet insufficiently researched aspect of any minipublic is the topic and the question it should address. Theoretical papers and publications aimed at practitioners (e.g., Rovers & Dejaeghere, 2022) point to selecting and formulating a minipublic's remit as one of the main determinants of its subsequent influence on policy-making. In a classic article considering institutional design choices in minipublics and their consequences on minipublics' internal functioning and external impacts, Fung (2003, p. 353) considered the choice of the topic of deliberation a vital factor for nine out of ten types of qualities and consequences of minipublics,

including the deliberative quality, efficacy of policy and informing officials and citizens (see also Bua, 2012; Elstub et al., 2021; Parkinson, 2006).

As the choice of the scope affects the whole assembly's process, it also plays a crucial role for its legitimacy. Following the application of the input-, throughput- and output-legitimacy framework to deliberative minipublics by Harris (2019; see also Papadopoulos & Warin, 2007), the choice of the assembly's scope matters for all these aspects of the assembly's legitimacy:

- how CA's scopes are decided and by whom (input-legitimacy, i.e., openness and access to setting the scope);
- how the scopes shape the internal processes (throughput-legitimacy, i.e., quality of the deliberative activity);
- how the scopes determine the ability of minipublics to have a meaningful influence on policy-making (output-legitimacy, i.e., quality of recommendations and their policy impact).

The formulation of the problem is also relevant from the framing perspective. It sets boundaries for what kind of decisions or recommendations the process should produce and in what specific policy fields. By necessity, any formulation of a question to be answered by a deliberative body (i.e., the remit), whether designed in advance or allowing for changes introduced by participants, limits the scope. The scope, together with its application for the internal design of the deliberative process, might also "construct the frame of the discussion by selecting the legitimate viewpoints that are admitted into the procedure, defining alternatives at stake, emphasizing some elements at the expense of others, or suggesting interpretative connections among certain ideas and symbols" (Barisione, 2012, p. 1). Without assuming (nor ruling out) manipulative or instrumental motivations behind particular framings of deliberation topics, which could lead to a biased deliberation, it is safe to expect that any chosen remit will organize the discussion and determine the character of the final recommendations. Given this central role played by the minipublic's scope, it is crucial to investigate more closely what results follow from these limitation choices.

The importance of both the general topic and the more specific phrasing of an assembly's guiding question and the challenges they create to the deliberative process have been previously stressed in research reports on individual cases. For example, Michels and Binnema (2018) describe how the very generally phrased questions of Dutch citizens' forums (G1000) led to superficial discussions and vague recommendations, resulting in a low political impact of the deliberations. In the recently published report presenting the results of research accompanying the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland, Elstub et al. (2022) describe the assembly's remit as a "key challenge (…) [that] permeated through all aspects of the Assembly" (p. 8). Correctly recognizing the scope's impact on various elements of an assembly when deciding its remit is also their number one recommendation for future minipublics (Elstub et al., 2022, p. 9).

Moreover, with the assembly's remit carrying such significance, the question of who has the power to set the agenda arises. The procedures and actors involved in setting assemblies' remits vary greatly (Carrick, 2022), and further research is needed to gain a better overview of who and in what role is involved in these decision-making processes and to what different outcomes these approaches might lead (Pfeffer, 2023; Pfeffer, 2024). Both will have consequences for the input-legitimacy of the process and the successive policy impacts. The question of agenda-setting becomes even more pertinent in the case of minipublics that are not merely consultative but binding or semi-binding, as those organized up to date in Poland. Agenda-setting processes and motivations guiding these choices and strategies applied by the

involved actors create an interesting tension with the normative considerations about CAs' appropriate (binding or consultative) power (on the latter, see, e.g., Lafont, 2015; Niemeyer & Felicetti, 2023).

Deliberative minipublics can serve various functions and objectives (Fung, 2003; Geißel, 2023). Assemblies meant to deliver policy guidance can aim to, e.g., set strategic targets, develop long-term strategic recommendations, create guiding principles, or deliver specific policy measures (Brancaforte & Pfeffer, 2022, p. 5). The guiding question set for an assembly should be logically related to the outcomes that it should produce. Scopes and formulations observed in practice range from very broad questions (e.g., "A safer Spain in the face of climate change - how do we do it?") to very narrow ones (e.g., "How to adapt forests and green areas in Poznań to the changing climate?"). A few case studies have begun exploring what motivations guide the decisions to organize a citizens' assembly in general (see, e.g., Oross et al., 2021; Sandover et al., 2021). However, beyond the notable example of Elstub et al. (2021), there is a lack of empirical studies examining more specifically the CA's remits and their internal and external consequences, especially in a comparative context. The theoretical assumptions expect broader scopes to lead to more generally formulated recommendations, which end up having a less evident impact on policy-making, while more narrowly phrased remits would result in more specific and potentially more directly implementable policy recommendations. This has, however, never been analyzed systematically. In their practice-oriented paper based on the knowledge and experience of scholars and practitioners of deliberative democracy, Brancaforte and Pfeffer analyze the types of climate assemblies' objectives and their corresponding guiding questions. They list the strengths and challenges of each type of scope, along with advice on who should be involved in setting the remit and how to adjust other aspects of an assembly's design to ensure its delivery. The paper demonstrates the scope's importance for the entirety of the design, execution, and outcomes of an assembly. While aimed at future assemblies' practitioners and commissioners, it demonstrates a clear need for empirical research. There is, therefore, a need for a comparative study (generally still lacking in the field of studies on deliberative innovations, Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018; and on the impacts on policymaking, Minsart & Jacquet, 2023) of these aspects that are crucial for the execution and broader reception of any citizens' assembly (Elstub et al., 2021).

The study aims to fill this gap in the literature by first, an exploration of the processes guiding the scope-setting processes and, second, comparatively analyzing CAs' policy scopes and remits (i.e., the specific topic formulations) in relation to the CAs' outcomes and tracking of their policy impacts. The latter will be done by comparing public policies post-CA with CA's recommendations and policy-makers' pre-CA policy preferences. The research will thus contribute to our understanding of whether CAs with narrower policy scopes tend to develop recommendations that are more successfully implemented into public policies.

Since minipublics have been increasingly employed not only as research experiments but also in policy-making on local, regional, and national levels (OECD, 2020), investigating their actual qualities and consequences with reference to their legitimacy claims becomes even more crucial. Within the last decade, we have observed a distinctive tradition of CAs that has developed in Poland, where all the CAs organized so far at the local government level had a semi-binding character, i.e., the local mayors promised to implement the policy recommendations that reached a certain level of participant support. However, minipublics' effectiveness in influencing public policies, especially how particular aspects of institutional design impact such policy outcomes, are still under-researched (Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018). Measuring specific policy impacts of minipublics' recommendations is a time- and work-intense undertaking, which is probably why such analyses are still rare. Especially in the Polish context,

despite the growing number of citizens' assemblies organized at the local level, their policy impact has only been analyzed in one such case (Gąsiorowska, 2022). While commissioners of these CAs in Poland (i.e., city mayors) commit themselves to implementing all the final recommendations that reach a certain level of support, they are not legally obligated to do so, and we still do not know how many of these recommendations are implemented, and what characterizes those that are not. To fill this knowledge gap, the study will track the level of recommendations' implementation for each case and investigate how the policy impacts are correlated with the qualities of recommendations developed and the CA's scopes that delineated them.

Due to the limited number of local participation practitioners who specialize in coordinating such deliberative processes in Poland and to cities copying specific legal and organizational frameworks from each other when organizing CAs, the internal designs of most of the Polish cases share a high degree of similarity. The semi-binding character of these institutions, the low variety in their designs and aims (i.e., policy recommendations), and the shared legal and political context make these cases well-suited for a comparison focused on their different scopes and policy impacts. Therefore, the study will be based on an empirical analysis of selected cases of CAs organized at the level of local governments in Poland. The final selection of cases is based on two further criteria: a variation of broad and narrow CA's remits and a comparable timeframe of the cases.

The methods will include interviews with actors involved in the organization of CAs, content analysis of CAs' recommendations, and analysis of public policy documents. By providing empirical evidence and insights into the consequences of scope selection, this research will help expand the theoretical and practical understanding of how CAs' scopes and remits affect the recommendations they produce and the subsequent policy impacts.

The study will address several under-explored aspects of deliberative minipublics in relation to their scopes. Focusing on both theoretical and practical implications of procedures and consequences of setting the scope will add to the international work on developing quality standards for deliberative minipublics and offer evidence for practitioners and commissioners designing future minipublics.

RESEARCH AIMS

The doctoral project will address the following research problem:

Deliberative minipublics such as citizens' assemblies have been increasingly employed in policy-making. The breadth of their policy scopes and specific formulations of the remits vary significantly between individual CA cases. However, the procedures and motivations behind selecting their scopes and remits and the consequences of these choices for the resulting CA's recommendations and their implementation into public policies have lacked a systematic investigation.

The following primary research questions and sub-questions will guide the analysis:

RQ1: How and why were the CAs' remits selected? (Work package 1)

Sub-question 1.1: What actors and processes were involved? What processes were employed for setting the remit, and what roles did various actors play in them?

Sub-question 1.2: What were the motivations and expectations of various actors guiding the remit-setting?

Hypothesis 1: CA's commissioners and civil society actors differ in their remit preferences.

Hypothesis 2: Scope-setting procedures involving civil society actors to a greater extent lead to setting more specific remits than those decided by the commissioners alone.

RQ2: How did the CAs' scopes affect their outputs? (Work package 2)

Sub-question 2.1: What is the relation between CAs' remits and the scope and content of their recommendations?

Sub-question 2.2: What types of recommendations were developed?

Hypothesis 3: CAs with more narrowly defined remits produce more specific recommendations than those with broader remits

Hypothesis 4: CAs with more narrowly defined remits produce more cohesive lists of recommendations than those with broader remits

RQ3: How did the CAs of different scopes impact public policies? (Work package 3)

Sub-question 3.1: To what extent have the CAs' recommendations been implemented?

Sub-question 3.2: What kind of impact did the recommendations have on the existing public policies?

Hypothesis 5: CAs with more narrowly defined remits have a more direct impact on public policies than those with broader remits

Selected cases of citizens' assemblies (CAs) organized at the local level in Poland will be the subject of the study. The rationale behind this selection is that keeping a uniform legislative, temporal, administrative, and broader political context will allow for a comparison of different outcomes and policy impacts of the chosen cases in relation to their diverse scopes. Another important consideration is the distinct model of CA's integration into the policy-making process that we observe in Poland, where local administrations pledge to implement all recommendations that reach a certain level of CA participants' support. It is expected that such a semi-binding character of these minipublics would lead to a generally higher level of implementation of CAs' policy recommendations than in the case of purely advisory minipublics. Due to this particular model of CAs being organized in Poland, comparing them to non-binding CAs that are the norm elsewhere would distort the results.

The amount of time that has passed since a CA convened is one of the crucial factors for the level of implementation of its recommendations into local policies. Therefore, the cases selected for comparison should not be set too far apart from each other. Out of 12 local CAs organized in Poland since 2016, half have taken place in 2021 and 2023, providing a broad base of cases that meet the temporal comparability criterion. Considering the time frame of the planned doctoral research (see the research schedule, p. 8), the cases included in the analysis should not take place later than the end of the year 2023.

In order to observe differences linked to different breadth of scopes of Citizens' Assemblies, the selected cases should present both narrow and broad types of remits, i.e., following the logic of most similar case selection (see Case Selection below)

WORK PLAN

The study will aim to reach the following research objectives:

1. Explore the processes of setting the scopes and remits of CAs in Poland;
2. Explore motivations, justifications, and expectations behind the remit choices;
3. Analyze the substantive outcomes of CAs, i.e., their recommendations;
4. Assess the impacts of the recommendations on public policies;
5. Compare the outcomes and impacts of different CAs in relation to their remits.

Doing so will require the fulfillment of the following research tasks, divided into three work packages:

Work package 1: SCOPE-SETTING (RQ1, research objectives 1-2, Hypotheses 1-2)

1.1. Data collection: interviews, document analysis;

1.2. Data analysis: coding, qualitative analysis within and across CA cases.

Work package 2: OUTCOMES (RQ2, research objective 3, Hypotheses 3-4)

2.1. Operationalizing an analytical frame

2.2. Data collection: all recommendations of the analyzed CA cases

2.3. Data analysis: a qualitative and comparative analysis of recommendations within and across CA cases

Work package 3: IMPACT (RQ3, research objective 4, Hypothesis 5)

3.1. Operationalizing an analytical frame

3.2. Data collection: policy document analysis, interviews

3.3. Data analysis: tracking the policy impacts of CAs' policy recommendations

Concluding tasks:

4.1. Reporting the findings

4.2. Drawing conclusions across work packages

4.3. Preparing the dissertation for submission and defense

Risks: The main risk related to the planned study is the availability of the data for work packages 1 and 3, both in terms of interview partners and relevant documents. The former should be, however, moderated by the fact that the analyzed cases will have happened relatively recently. Therefore, there is a higher chance that the potential interview partners maintain an interest in talking about them and still remember a considerable amount of the information relevant to the interviews. Challenges in accessing public policy documents and documents revealing the initial decision-makers' policy preferences will be reduced by triangulating document analysis results with interviews.

METHODS

The following methods will be applied to meet the research objectives:

Work package 1: SCOPE-SETTING (RQ1, research objectives 1-2, Hypotheses 1-2)

- in-depth interviews, desk research, and document analysis;
- qualitative cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Interviews will be conducted with persons engaged in each of the analyzed CA cases in the following roles: CA coordinator, expert presenter, stakeholder, and public official. I will interview 1-3 individuals for each of these roles to get a possibly complete picture of various perspectives on the process. For example, one interview might be sufficient to learn about the CA's coordinators' experience with the agenda-setting process. In contrast, more interviews will be needed to explore different stakeholder groups' views. Similarly, more interviews with public officials will be required to investigate the perspectives of both those who were engaged in the event's preparation and those responsible for implementing the CA's recommendations.

Work package 2: OUTCOMES (RQ2, research objective 3, Hypotheses 3-4)

- document analysis, content analysis;
- analysis of the recommendations by applying a typology developed within a separate research project. (The paper aims to create a typology of DMPs' policy recommendations. It is developed in an integrative approach, built upon theory, secondary sources from DMP cases, in-depth interviews, and focus group interviews).

Work package 3: IMPACT (RQ3, research objective 4, Hypothesis 5)

- Desk research and document analysis, interviews;
- Sequential impact matrix (SIM) (Vrydagh, 2022; Vrydagh & Caluwaerts, 2020): a scheme of assessing direct policy impacts by comparing initial (pre-CA) preferences of decision-makers, the content of policy recommendations, and the post-CA policy uptake. The result is a measurement of the level of implementation but also an assessment of the type of influence that the recommendations had on policies, depending on whether the recommendations continue the initial decision-makers' agenda (1), enrich it (2), innovate by introducing something new (3), radically shifts (4) or inhibits (5) the initial policy plans. An additional investigation into the previous state of the particular policy will allow me to identify recommendations that repeat policy measures that were already in place pre-CA (0);
- Triangulation through interviews with actors involved in the organization and follow-up of the CAs.

CASE SELECTION

The table presents an overview of all the cases of CAs organized in Poland at the local government level up to date:

	Year	City	Guiding question	Issues	Days
1	2016	Gdańsk	How to better prepare Gdańsk for future heavy rains?	Water retention, social services in case of floods	3
2	2017	Gdańsk	How to improve the air quality?	reducing energy production-related air pollution from households	4
3	2017	Gdańsk	How do we support the citizens' activity in Gdańsk?	civic engagement, gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights	5
4	2018	Lublin	What can be done so that we breathe cleaner air?	reducing energy production-related and transport-related air pollution from households	6
5	2020	*Łódź	Greenery in the city: How to shape the greenery in Łódź? How should the city counter the effects of drought? How can	climate adaptation of green spaces	5

			the city and its inhabitants work together for the aim of improving the state of the city's greenery?		
6	2020	Wrocław	Considering life quality and climate protection, how can we make moving around Wrocław easier? Considering life quality and climate protection, how can we make moving around Wrocław easier?	reducing transport-related air pollution	5
7	2021	Warsaw	How can we increase Warsaw's energy efficiency and the share of renewable energy sources in the city's energy balance?	reducing energy production-related GHG emissions	~3 (online)
8	2021	Poznań	How do we adapt forests and city greenery to the changing climate? Should we abandon entirely/ban coal burning in households in Poznań? (And if so, how?)	climate adaptation of green spaces, reducing energy production-related air pollution	~4 (online)
9	2021	Kraków	How can the city of Kraków and its inhabitants reduce energy consumption and increase the use of renewable energy?	reducing energy production-related GHG emissions	~3 (online)
10	2023	*Łódź	How to reduce harmful emissions of GHG in Łódź by 55% until 2030?	reducing GHG emissions in sectors: transport, waste, energy production, buildings	5
11	2023	Kraków	Transport within the city: How to optimize moving around the city, how should parking spots be granted, how can we lower transport-related emissions, and how can we manage the movement of vehicles after finalizing the highway bypass?	reducing transport-related GHG emissions and air pollution	5
12	2023	Rzeszów	How can climate neutrality be achieved in Rzeszów by 2030?	reducing GHG emissions in transport and energy production sectors	5

*1st stage: self-selection, 2st stage: random sampling

In order not to jeopardize the comparability of cases, particularly regarding the level of recommendation implementation, I want only to consider cases that took place in 2021 and 2023. Further, I want to compare cases with varied breadth of scope to see whether they lead to different outcomes (recommendations) and policy impacts (implementation). Following the logic of the most similar case selection method (Seawright & Gerring, 2008), I want to focus on Polish local CA cases due to their high level of similarities when it comes to dimensions of design, duration, legal and institutional framework and time (years 2021 and 2023). The independent variable that differs in these cases would be the breadth of their scopes when it comes to the policy fields they tackle, which, for the available cases, would mean one policy field for a narrow scope and two policy scopes or sectors for a broad scope.

Year	Scope	City
2021	broad	Poznań
2021	narrow	Warsaw or Kraków (preferably Warsaw, to broaden the sample)
2023	broad	Rzeszów
2023	narrow	Kraków

Regarding the breadth of the CA's thematic scope, the 2023 case from Łódź would present an extreme and potentially interesting case, having considered four different policy fields within the same time frame of five days. However, I decided to exclude it from the analysis sample due to its divergent nature: first, its participant selection method was not randomized at its first stage but based on registrations of interested individuals, therefore much more prone to self-selection than the first stage of participant selection conducted in other Polish cases, where invitations were sent out to randomly selected households. Moreover, observing the process

revealed multiple further discrepancies from the broadly accepted deliberation standards and practices applied in other CA cases, leading to a poor quality of deliberation, among others. These differences impacting the internal CA process could, with a high likelihood, impact the quality of CA's outcomes, undermining any generalizable conclusions about the relation between the CA's outcomes and its thematic scope.

RESEARCH SCHEDULE

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Data analysis (1.2)</td><td>Operationalization (2.2)

Data collection (2.3)</td><td>Operationalization (3.2)</td><td></td><td>IV</td><td>2023/2024</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Data analysis (2.4)</td><td rowspan="2">Operationalization (3.2)

Data collection (3.3)

Data analysis (3.4)</td><td></td><td>V</td><td rowspan="2">2024/2025</td></tr>
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<tr><td></td><td></td><td>Data analysis (3.4)</td><td>Reporting the findings (4.1)

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