

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY, STAKEHOLDERS AND ELITES

The Positions of Associative, Economic and Political Actors on a Deliberative Mini-Public

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ABSTRACT:

The increasing use of deliberative Mini-Publics in recent years has been controversially discussed by academics and practitioners with regard to questions of design and legitimacy. Less attention has however been paid to opinions of those actors who are directly impacted by Mini-Publics and who might have equally controversial positions. Although most Mini-Publics are only consultative, their perceived impact grows, and so does the number of concerned actors. While some scholars have examined the opinions of single types of actors on different forms of participation, this paper investigates systematically what positions associative, economic and political actors develop in parallel on a Mini-Public. The research is based on an in-depth case study of the *Citizen Climate Parliament in the Province of Luxembourg*, a Mini-Public with 33 citizens that was launched in 2015 by a Belgian province to work on its energetic neutrality. Following a mixed-method design, a diversified panel of 28 actors was selected for semi-structured interviews based on surveys conducted before and after the project. Through discourse analysis, four positions among the three types of actors were identified: an “elitist”, an “expert”, a “(re)connection” and a “reinvention” position. These are mutually non-exclusive and illustrate that Mini-Publics can make use of this complementarity to enhance their own legitimacy by integrating stakeholders and elites in some way into their works. Possibilities exist before a Mini-Public, i.e. when preparing its work, during a Mini-Public, i.e. when debating sensitive issues, or even after a Mini-Public, i.e. when implementing the results.

Keywords: Mini-Publics; Stakeholders; Elites; Citizen Climate Parliament; Province of Luxembourg.

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L'emploi de plus en plus fréquent de Mini-Publics dans les dernières années a été discuté de manière controversée par des académiques et professionnels en ce qui concerne le design et la légitimité des dispositifs. Moins d'attention a par contre été accordée à des acteurs qui sont impactés directement par les Mini-Publics et qui pourraient avoir des positions tout aussi controversées. Quoique la plupart des Mini-Publics soient uniquement consultatifs, leur impact perçu croît, de même que le nombre d'acteurs concernés. Si quelques auteurs ont examiné l'opinion d'acteurs spécifiques sur différentes formes de participation, ce travail étudie de manière systématique quelles positions des acteurs associatifs, économiques et politiques développent en parallèle sur un Mini-Public. La recherche est basée sur une étude approfondie de cas du *Parlement Citoyen Climat en Province de Luxembourg*, un Mini-Public avec 33 citoyens qui a été lancé en 2015 par la Province du Luxembourg en Belgique pour travailler sur sa neutralité énergétique. À l'aide d'un mixed-method design, un panel diversifié de 28 acteurs a été sélectionné pour des entretiens semi-dirigés sur base d'enquêtes conduites avant et après le projet. Au terme d'une analyse de leur discours, quatre positions ont été identifiées parmi les trois types d'acteurs : une position « élitiste », une d'« expertise », une de « reconnexion » et une de « réinvention ». Ces positions sont mutuellement non-exclusives et montrent que les Mini-Publics peuvent utiliser cette complémentarité pour accroître leur propre légitimité en intégrant des stakeholders et élites d'une manière ou d'une autre dans leurs travaux. Des possibilités existent en amont, pendant et après un Mini-Publics.

INTRODUCTION

In today's crisis of representative democracy, a particular form of deliberative democracy, so called 'Mini-Publics', have been increasingly used by political decision makers as a democratic innovation to consult the population through the informed exchange of a small number of people coming from diverse horizons. The relationship between this small number of people and the overall population can be ambiguous when the latter contests the recommendations of the former. The design and legitimacy of Mini-Publics have in the past been discussed controversially by academics and practitioners. Less attention has however been paid to the opinion of actors that are directly concerned by the outcome of a Mini-Public and that have a democratic legitimacy which competes with that of a Mini-Public, i.e. stakeholders and elected elites. Although the results of most Mini-publics are not binding, their perceived impact grows, and so does the number of concerned actors. The question this paper addresses is hence how stakeholders and elected elites conceive the legitimacy of a Mini-Public?

In a first section, the relationship between Mini-Publics and the overall population will be clarified, especially with regard to the opinion of three types of actors: associative, economic and political actors. As shown in the second section, the research proceeds to the case study of the *Citizen Climate Parliament in the Province of Luxembourg*, a Mini-Public that was launched in 2015 by a Belgian province to work on its energetic neutrality. The opinion of its stakeholders and elected elites will be investigated with a mixed method design, i.e. through interviews with a diversified panel of actors that have been selected based on explorative surveys. With a discourse analysis, four mutually non-exclusive positions among the three types of actors will be identified in the third part, and examined from a comparative perspective in the fourth.

1. MINI-PUBLICS AND THE MACRO-PUBLIC

Representative democracy is the most common form of government in contemporary political regimes. As Manin (1995) emphasizes, its legitimacy is founded on the rational search for the general will through the principle of parliamentary representation. Beyond the electoral choice, Rosanvallon (2006) argues, the democratic system relies on citizens' confidence in those they have judged most desirable to take care of public affairs in their name. According to Dahl (1971), this confidence depends on the responsiveness of those who govern to the preferences of those who are governed. Today however, citizens' trust in their political representatives is significantly decreasing. Sintomer (2011, p. 18-36) suggests that the "democratic malaise" (Newton, 2012), as some called it, comes amongst others with the incapacity of politicians to handle the increasing socio-economic inequalities as well as with a population that turns away from political elites which are associated with a distinct social reality.

In response to this gap between elites and masses, a greater citizen participation in public affairs has been advocated to create a "strong(er) democracy" (Barber, 1984). If the number of concrete realizations (e.g. referenda, public hearings, opinion polls, etc.) has by now increased in many countries and led some to identify even a "new participatory imperative"

(Blondiaux, 2008, p. 15), this model of democracy is not uncontested. As Gourgues et al. (2013) show, elitist arguments see the general will better served by supposedly enlightened elected elites, while the social critique fears that participatory processes are instrumentalized to bypass civil society that is usually more able to defend collective societal interests.

Following the development of citizen juries, consensus conferences, deliberative surveys, citizen councils, focus groups, participatory budgets, planning cells and many more, the notion of ‘deliberative democracy’ has been developed to broaden the concept of participation and, as Benhabib (1996) explains, to require an informed rational exchange among citizens that are equal in rights. That led some to identify also a “deliberative imperative” (Blondiaux, & Sintomer, 2002) as a possible solution to renew the eroding legitimacy of contemporary representative democracy.

The relation between participation and deliberation did however not remain uncontested, nor did the concept of deliberation as such. Some underlined indeed the potentially conflicting trade-off of more participation leading to less deliberation and vice-versa (Mutz, 2006; Pateman, 2012). Moreover, Mouffe (1999) criticized the ambition of rational exchange for not acknowledging conflict as an inherent part of democracy, while scholars like Young (2000) and Mansbridge et al. (2010) questioned the equality of the procedural ideal for disfavoring unconventional discourses.

a) Mini-Publics – Dusting an Old Principle of Governance

One particular realization of deliberative democracy is a so called “Mini-Public”. As defined by Ryan and Smith (2014), they are citizen assemblies that deliberate on a particular (private or public) issue and that, after detailed discussions on the different dimensions of the topic, translate the results of their debates into recommendations. Different forms (citizen juries, consensus conferences, planning cells, etc.) and sizes (20-100 participants) exist depending on the topic, but as Goodin and Dryzek (2006, p. 220) put it, these citizen assemblies are “small enough to be genuinely deliberative, and representative enough to be genuinely democratic”. Rather than to attempt statistical or electoral representation, they say, the objective is to compose a diversified citizen panel with societies’ most various opinions. Smith (2009) would add that the participant selection has to be as random as possible, that participants get financial compensation for their voluntarily participation, that an independent facilitation of the debates has to assure equal opportunities for expression, that debates are based on expert information and that discussions take place in small-groups and in plenary.

The idea of assigning political functions by random selection existed already around the 4th century BC in Athens,¹ and many scholars advocate today to return to such practices – even if they do not all entirely agree with each other on the reasons. For Barber (1984), the random selection ensures a greater democratic equality because every citizen has the same chance to get elected, which in turn mobilizes people that do usually not participate (Fung, 2011). For Bohman (2006), the randomly composed citizen body comes with a higher epistemic diversity and therefore better deliberations. For Fishkin (2009) in turn, the ambition

¹ As Hansen (1993) explains, the magistrates (*kleros*), the council that prepared and executed the decision of the popular assembly (*boulè*) and judges and juries of the popular tribunals (*dikastai*) were all composed random selection.

is to reconstruct a representation of the society in miniature. With a more activist position finally, Van Reybrouck (2014) would add that the sortitioned citizens are more independent and closer to popular reality than are elected elites.

The main critique of Mini-Publics is whether they can actually translate the mentioned advantages into practice and if the rather restricted and sterile format can produce an authentic deliberative debate beyond fragmented issues and individual positions that do not take into consideration the real societal fragmentations. For scholars like Pourtois (2013), the exchange of some citizens, even if it would be rational and equal, cannot entirely fulfil the initial aspiration of deliberative democracy, i.e. the deliberation of the macro-public in a mass-democracy. As Chambers (2009, p. 344) nicely puts it: “abandoning the mass public in favor of mini-publics risks sending deliberative democracy on a path toward participatory elitism where citizens who participate in face-to-face deliberative initiatives (and only a small fraction do) have more democratic legitimacy than the mass electorate.”

Despite these critiques, Mini-Publics have been increasingly used for political purposes since the 2000s. One of the internationally best known examples is the British-Columbia Citizen Assembly that was charged in 2004 by the provincial government to revise the electoral system of the Canadian province. Beyond the micro-political use of Mini-Publics, we can see that – even if their outcome is usually only consultative – the macro-political impact becomes always more tangible. This requires the adoption of what has been called a “systemic approach to deliberative democracy” (Mansbridge, et al., 2012) to examine the interaction between deliberative bodies and the democratic process as such. As Parkinson (2012) stresses, deliberative features do indeed not guarantee *per se* that a process is democratic.

b) Stakeholders and Elites – Competing Legitimacies beyond Public Support

Different scholars have developed objective criteria to assess the legitimacy of Mini-Publics (Fung, 2006; Smith, 2012; Caluwaerts, & Reuchamps, 2015). Their methods vary but they have in common that one crucial point for every process is the support of the macro-public. As Dryzek (2001, p. 654) puts it: “decisions still have to be justified to those who did not participate”. Beyond the support of the macro-public as such, the legitimacy of a Mini-Public does not only depend on its own conception. Instead, it is part of a political sphere where different visions of democratic governance have multiple and potentially competing legitimacies (Rosanvallon, 2011).

A first type of legitimacy that might challenge that of Mini-Publics is that of elected elites. Independently of the fact that some might see them as politically more knowledgeable than ordinary citizens, their democratic legitimacy is based on the electoral mandate by which citizens’ transferred them the political authority to take care about public affairs in their name (Manin, 1995).

A second and more diverse type of legitimacy comes with the conception of public decisions as the “product of a collective and deliberative inquiry that involves all those that it [the decision] concerns” (Blondiaux, 2008, p. 99). I refer here to actors that are particularly concerned by the topic of a Mini-Public and that are usually called ‘stakeholders’. Traditionally, “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of

the organization's objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 46) was considered in the economic sphere as a stakeholder. In politics, a similar conception applies to the process of lobbying when politicians consult associative or economic actors to profit from their expertise and to assess the implications of their decisions given the interests at stake.

The relationship between Mini-Publics and stakeholders or elites has hitherto received little attention in the literature. If Kahane, et al. (2013) have explored under which conditions stakeholders can contribute to public deliberation, Rui and Villechaise-Dupont (2005) have examined with evidence from France the somewhat critical opinions of associations and social movements that saw participatory processes as a political strategy to legitimize public actions by consulting ordinary citizens whose opinions are considered as subjective and therefore non-representative for the society. Jacquet, et al. (2015) have analyzed the opinions of national politicians on citizen participation in Belgium and found three different postures – an “elitist posture” that questions ordinary citizens’ political capacity, a “corporatist posture” that questions citizens’ capacity to represent societal opinion beyond their subjective vision and a rather rare “hybrid posture” that has a more positive opinion on participatory democracy.

If these works are insightful insofar as they illustrate the largely critical opinions of stakeholders and elites on citizen participation in politics, they do not study parallelly how the three potentially competing legitimacies of stakeholders, elites and deliberative democracy are envisioned by each other, nor do they focus more specifically on Mini-Publics. Given that the functioning of representative democracy is deeply questioned today and that an increasing number of Mini-Publics is used as one possible address to this questioning, it is however important to understand what positions associative, economic and political actors develop in parallel on a Mini-Public – which is the ambition of the present paper.

2. SURVEYING AND INTERVIEWING STAKEHOLDERS’ AND ELITES’ OPINIONS ON A MINI-PUBLIC

To examine these actors’ opinions, it is important that the studied Mini-Public is initiated by a public authority and that the macro-political impact that comes with its results is clearly identifiable for the stakeholders and elites. In Belgium, different citizen panels have been used in the last fifteen years at regional and local levels to provide decision makers with policy recommendations.² Given the increasing number of Mini-Publics, the country provides an interesting ground for studying how these are perceived by actors with different democratic legitimacies.

² The first one was organized in 2001 by the *Foundation for Future Generations* on the territorial management in the Province of Walloon Brabant (cf. André-Dumont, 2002). In 2006, the *King Baudouin Foundation* coordinated even a process on neurosciences with citizens coming from nine different European countries (cf. Rauws, & Steyaert, 2013). A recent and well known example is the G1000, a private initiative of several intellectuals and academics to deliberate on the country’s future during the governmental crisis in 2010. Jacquet et al. (2016) show that, even without formal political impact, the G1000 was the starting point for similar initiatives to be installed by public authorities.

a) *The Mini-Public – Citizen Climate Parliament in the Province of Luxembourg*

One of these initiatives is the *Citizen Climate Parliament in the Province of Luxembourg* (CCP), a Mini-Public that was launched in 2015 by the rural Belgian province to get informed, discuss and agree on measures that the provincial authorities should adopt to become energetically neutral by 2050 (i.e. to cover its energy demand by renewable energy supply). Initiated by a member of the provincial executive, Thérèse Mahy, the provincial legislature agreed unanimously on the process whose organization was entrusted to a group of sociologists from the research unit for *Socio-Economics, Environment and Development* (SEED) of the University of Liège.³ Thirty-three participants were recruited through a quasi-random selection from the overall provincial population.⁴ To prepare their work, the SEED organized a one-day workshop with associative, economic and public actors that are involved in energy or climate issues of the province.⁵ The aim was to gather their field experience and to give them the opportunity to underline the issues and viewpoints they wanted the citizen panel to take into account.

The CCP took place on three weekends in September and October 2015. During the first weekend, the objectives of the project were clarified, first general expert hearings took place and the participants discussed the topics they wanted further information on. These topics were addressed during the second weekend by further expert hearings and deepened in sub-group discussions. During the last weekend, sub-groups pursued the topic-specific discussions and formulated final recommendations which were then adapted and validated by the whole group. The final recommendations were presented to the Provincial Council in November 2015. After brief discussions, cabinet member Thérèse Mahy was charged with proposing concrete integrations of the CCP recommendations in the overall provincial policy program, which she did in June 2016 through a response document to the Provincial Council.

Given this context, the CCP is an ideal case to study the opinions of associative, economic and political actors on a Mini-Public. It was indeed (1) a deliberative citizen assembly with random selection that (2) was installed by a public authority (3) and whose recommendations were considered by this authority (4) in a field where issues are at stake for stakeholders (5) of whom many were aware of the process.

b) *Stakeholders and Elites – Associations, Companies and Politicians of the Province*

To identify the stakeholders and elites whose opinion will be studied, the precise object of the CCP has to be outlined. Climate change and energy neutrality are indeed both very extensive.

³ On November 28th, 2014, the Provincial Council signed the charter of the European Network for Energetically Neutral Territories “100% RES COMMUNITIES”. The aim was amongst others to mobilize the communes of the province to join the *Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy*, an initiative of the European Commission to support local and regional collectivities in Europe in their efforts of reducing CO₂ emissions and fighting climate change. The CCP was one part of the provincial program, *PEP’S Lux*, which coordinated the process. More specifically, the aim of the CCP was to consult the population originally and to create a larger public dynamic.

⁴ The SEED hired a private survey company, *Sonecom*, to draw a random sample of 2.500 citizens from an approximate population register of the province and to send them an invitation letter. 75 people responded positively to the invitation. 45 of these 75 have been selected based on their age, gender, domicile and profession to create a diversified citizen panel. 33 of these 45 took finally part in the whole CCP process.

⁵ 23 associations, two companies and three members of communal administrations participated.

During its work and in its final recommendations, the CCP has however focused more specifically on four topics: local production and consumption, mobility, habitat, and commitments of communes and the province.

Regarding associative and economic stakeholders, those actors who work in the province on at least one of the four mentioned topics or in the renewable energy domain (as transversal dimension) are taken into account for the study. Actors whose activities pursue a financial profit are classified as economic, the others as associative. Adapting and complementing the list that had already been composed by the SEED for its workshop, I identified 30 associative and 50 economic actors as fitting the criteria. In addition, one person in each association or company had to be identified as representative for the actor’s opinion. In this study, the person with the highest responsibility was addressed (e.g. the director, manager, or president), except if one person in the organization had been explicitly charged to follow the CCP.

Regarding political actors, the recommendations of the CCP touch upon competences that are exercised by communal, provincial and regional public authorities. Therefore, I took into account all mayors (44), provincial councilors (37) and regional (5) parliamentarians who were elected in the Province of Luxemburg. Since some politicians cumulated different mandates, the total number of selected political actors was 78.⁶

c) Analysis – Combining Explorative Surveys with Semi-structured Interviews

In total, the opinion of 158 associative, economic and political actors on the CCP had to be examined. More precisely, the study aimed to understand the actors’ vision of the CCP, their assessment and how they justified both. Their reflections had to be examined with regard to the conception, the process, the results and the context of the CCP, but also with regard to Mini-Publics in general. To collect all this information, I combined explorative surveys with semi-structured interviews.

First, I sent electronic questionnaires to the 158 actors – asking for their knowledge and opinion on the CCP, for their knowledge and opinion on participatory democracy more generally, for justifications of their stated opinions, and for different socio-demographic characteristics. The survey was conducted once before the CCP started once after its recommendations had been published. That allowed me to test for potential evolutions. The latter were however marginal. 70 actors (44.30%) responded to the first survey, 81 (51.27%) to the second (*cf.* appendix 1).

Based on the responses of these two explorative surveys, I selected a diversified sample of 28 stakeholders and elites for semi-structured interviews to investigate more deeply the actors’ opinions on the CCP. The interviewee selection took into account actors’ knowledge as well as their opinion of the CCP and of participatory democracy in general, but especially the arguments they used to justify their opinions. I considered also the size of associations and companies, as well as the party affiliation and mandate level of political actors. Based on

⁶ All federal parliamentarians that are elected in the province are also mayors.

the point of saturation in their answers, I finally conducted interviews with eight associations, eight companies and twelve politicians (*cf.* appendix 2).⁷

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and have been analyzed through a thematic discourse analysis in three steps. In a first reading, listed all upcoming arguments for and against the CCP and Mini-Publics in general in two tables (*cf.* appendices 3 and 4). In the qualitative data analysis software *NVivo*, I translated these tables then into so called ‘nodes’. In a second reading, I coded all relevant text passages in their respective argument-node. This classification made it possible for me to trace the connection between various types of arguments, so that four different rather coherent discourses or positions have been identified. These were then again transformed into nodes. In a third reading, I coded all relevant text passages in their respective discourse-node to get again a better understanding of the connection between discourses and actors.

3. THE POSITIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS AND ELITES ON THE CCP

The results of the thematic discourse analysis suggest that the arguments developed by the interviewed associative, economic and political actors can be attributed to four positions. As will be shown later, these positions are not mutually exclusive since some actors mobilized elements of different positions in their discourse. The way arguments were used nevertheless led to the identification of four clearly distinct normative postures. To better illustrate the differences between positions, I will compare them systematically to Arnstein’s (1969) famous ladder of citizen participation.⁸

a) Elitist position

Stakeholders with an elitist position have a strong vision of representative democracy.⁹ According to them, the elected politicians of the province should make political decisions because they are more enlightened and because they have the legitimacy to do so by virtue of their electoral mandate. In turn, the ordinary citizens selected for the CCP are seen as not having the necessary capacities to participate formally to political decisions. If an elected provincial official can get inspired by their opinions, he should finally decide based on his own convictions since it is not always suitable to do what citizens want.

“Every x years, (...) the citizen has the opportunity to carry out an act: he votes. (...) Once these people have been elected to ‘lead’ a commune, a province, a region or a country, they do their job. And starting now to create commissions just as popular consultations and all these things, ... I am not really in favor. Because I think that there is a tool [the vote], that is perhaps the least in democracy, but that helps at least that we agree. And if the people regularly say that always the same are elected, ... I think that it is also always the same electors who choose the same people. So they shouldn’t complain.”

- Mayor and Provincial Councilor (cdH – Christian-Democrat) -

⁷ If the diversification process went fairly well, one selection bias has to be noted. Among the contacted actors, women agreed significantly less to be interviewed, so only three out of the 28 interviewees were female.

⁸ He proposed to rank citizen participation according to a ladder with eight rungs: manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, citizen control.

⁹ I took the label “elitist” from Jacquet et al. (2015).

“The average man and woman are not capable to read this sort of files. This is not a critique but the guy who is a good bricklayer, who perfectly builds his walls, his houses, etc. that’s not what you need to read administrative files and vice-versa.”

- Unit director in a large association for rural development -

They argue further that, rather than always reinventing new forms of democratic procedure, one should appropriately explain the functioning of representative democracy to citizens so that the latter can act accordingly. Their actions should however not be institutionalized as in the CCP, but they should rather associate spontaneously as free citizens that inform their representatives about their interests. At every election, citizens reallocate their votes to those they judge best to represent them. In a somewhat associative variant of this position, the elected politician is seen as more competent because he surrounds himself with experts in his cabinet. Confronting his own views with those of the experts, it is still his own convictions that he should base his decisions on.

“One should explain what a democratic state is instead of losing one’s time with useless intellectual masturbation. And once it has been explained to people that they have the right to ask questions to those they voted for, and held them accountable, democracy will function correctly again. (...) And people will come together around a cup of coffee or a glass of beer and discuss with each other. And they say, we will go to the communal councilors for whom we voted and we will ask them why they took this decision, why they didn’t take another one, why they are not envisioning a forward looking project for our commune. That’s what people should do.”

- Provincial Councilor (MR – Liberal) -

In the light of these arguments, stakeholders and elites with an elitist position saw the CCP’s formality of consultation as going too far. They were rather sceptical about the political capacity of its participants and the recommendations were envisioned as one source of inspiration for popular opinion amongst others – but without any morally binding character. When comparing it to Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation, the elitist position would most probably be situated on the levels of therapy, information and eventually consultation for those most inclined to get inspired by the CCP’s points.

b) Expert position

Stakeholders and elites with an expert position contended that popular consultation is important but that this consultation should above all care about opinions of those who are concerned and have a particular expertise in the respective policy field. Politicians should hence take their decisions based on what these local experts from the province say, rather than based on what ordinary citizens in the CCP think, since the latter are less well informed and have only a subjective opinion.

“I think that the citizen has to have its place and has to be able to orient the field. But at a certain point, its sphere of influence has to be limited... delimited sorry. Because a citizen remains above all... (...) I mean they do not have the professional competence to judge the pertinence of what they suggest. I’ll give an example. In the framework of European subsidies, of bottom-up approaches, we invite citizens to sessions of several days sometimes where we ask them... where

we explain them what the issues of our territory are. (...) And with them, we try afterwards to delimit the projects that should be developed for the territory. And at one point, everything goes in all directions and you have to... we have to bias because the citizen stays... how to say? He thinks with regard to his personal situation and not with regard to the collective situation. (...) Thus, I am in favor of citizen action's but it has nevertheless to be strongly framed."

- Head of a medium-size association in the environmental sector -

According to expert oriented stakeholders, citizen participation like in the CCP should in this sense be accompanied and even guided by actors who know better the issues and stake and a more capable to represent society's general interest. In a somewhat entrepreneurial variant of this position, companies and universities are also seen as expertise holders.

"That's as if you said that we speak about issues of migration and we do not call the Red Cross nor Fedasil¹⁰. (...) I am happy to see a Citizen Parliament being launched because I think that's a way to give the voice to the citizen and hence also to associations. The associations have finally few accesses to politics too. Politics listen to what they want. (...) So at this point, I think that associations should really have access to it because they are part of the citizen experts one should count on. (...) I do not defend particularly the associative sector but I wanna say: associative is citizen, and I am happy to see that the citizen can get its hand back on public affairs."

- President of a small association in the energy sector -

Stakeholders with an expert position were hence quite critical about the CCP not formally involving associative or entrepreneurial experts from the field concerned. They supported the citizen approach as such, but wanted the work of the CCP to be prepared, guided or finished-off by themselves. On Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, that vision would correspond to the levels of information, consultation and eventually partnership, if one sees experts as citizens too.

c) (Re)connection position

The articulation of the arguments in what has been identified as the (re)connection position is less homogenous than in the two previous positions. Basically, (re)connection stakeholders and elites envision citizen participation as bridging citizens and elites. They question somewhat elites' capacities but see them as legitimate elected decision makers. Two variants were identified: connection and reconnection.

Stakeholders and elites in the reconnection variant observe an increasing distance between citizens and elites that they want to reduce by giving the citizen the possibility to have his say about public issues. Through this consultation like in the CCP, they want to illustrate the complexity of public decisions to citizens. According to them, this complexity requires the politicians to take the decisions because they know better the arcana of power and take decisions on a less emotional basis.

"We all understand, in all parties, that our system has reached a limit. And I am not at all in favor of abolishing our representative democracy. (...) Beyond that a process has to be found that invites people to participate at the exercise of power, also at the responsibility of power. (...)"

¹⁰ It is the Belgian national agency for the reception of asylum seekers.

Asking for people’s opinion and taking it into account, but asking people’s opinion in the framework of a preparation because it shouldn’t be a populist opinion either. (...) I think that consulting, associating people closely is a good thing to stick closer to people’s reality but also so that people understand that the decision making process is not easy.”

- Parliamentarian (PS – Socialist) -

“I think that it is a good thing in citizen assemblies that there is the... average citizen sometimes puts the finger on things that decision makers don’t like to hear. That’s one thing but on the other hand, observations are not enough (...). I don’t say that we are better than the others but these are people that, in theory, don’t know all the arcana of power.”

- Mayor (PS – Socialist) -

“We ask the political manager who is elected for doing that to, even if he has to listen to what people want, to reflect if that is the good thing to do. (...) That means that people’s behavior is sometimes unforeseeable and there has to be some safeties because you can have craze people everywhere.”

- Mayor and Parliamentarian (MR – Liberal) -

Stakeholders and elites in the connection variant want citizens to be included in the decision making process because they are the ones who are concerned. The decision maker is seen as an executor of public opinion who does not necessarily have higher capacities than ordinary citizens but who should finally decide because he is legitimized by virtue of his election.

“People have the impression that politics are disconnected of their reality. At the same time, people vote for politicians, hence they choose them. But when choosing the politicians, they don’t choose based on a program they usually don’t read. They choose the one who speaks well. I have the chance not to speak so badly so that things went well for me, but that doesn’t mean that I am competent.”

- Mayor (Ecolo – Green) -

“Politicians who are near to the people, generally, they listen to what people want and try to put it into practice. Me, in my commune or in the province, I do not do what I want to do; or yes I do it but I am there to represent the population. Thus basically, I try as much as I can to do what people want me to do. That might seem schizophrenic or bizarre but that’s why we are there, one should not forget about it.”

- Mayor and Provincial Councilor (cdH – Christian-Democrat)

Stakeholders and elites with a (re)connection position had probably the most positive opinion of the CCP. From the reconnection perspective, the citizen panel was seen as an ideal way of reconnecting citizens and elites. From the connection perspective, it was envisioned as a tool to conform elite decisions to citizens’ opinions. While the former would correspond to the levels of information, consultation and eventually placation on Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation, the latter would be situated on the levels of placation and partnership.

d) Reinvention position

Stakeholders and elites with a reinvention position envision democracy as being ill and want to renovate it. They see representative (electoral) democracy as one step in the democratic evolution and want to go ahead by testing new democratic procedures.

"I think that is high time because we are in a democratic system that is worn out and unfortunately (...) I don't know if politicians imagine... the catastrophe that is preparing at this level. (...) It is not a trivial question to know how we will take our decisions in the best possible structures. No, that's a question of survive. (...) Hence it is really high, high time to reinvent something else."

- Leader of a small association in the environment sector -

"I am sorry but what elected parliamentarians work out in terms of quality, that's a mess. Thus I am sorry but don't tell me that randomly selected citizens would work less well than elected. That hasn't even been demonstrated. It could even be an interesting counterweight to elected officials who are certainly elected and then, sit three times a year in a circle... I am curious about it and I would like to... so much I think our institutions work badly, I would appreciate some fresh wind."

- Director of the environmental service of a large company -

One should note that reinvention stakeholders and elites do not see the politicians of the province as more capable than the ordinary citizens of the CCP and vice-versa. They have no explicit preference for one democratic innovation. They rather want to try different of these innovations to discover strong points, weak points and complementarities.

"Moving citizens can be done in plenty different ways. The [Citizen] Parliament is one amongst others. (...) And I have a positive opinion on it because it is without any doubt one of the best ways to restore people's interest in public affairs in the noble sens. (...) Participation remains in my opinion the best, or the less worst, I don't know how to say it, to disentangle the problems since the citizens aspires also to be consulted. We are no longer in front of sheep-like citizens that are going to listen stupidly to what others impose on their neighborhood, on their commune. Everybody wants to have his say today and that is positive. Thus corresponding [institutional] modalities have to be found."

- Head of a large association of the environment sector -

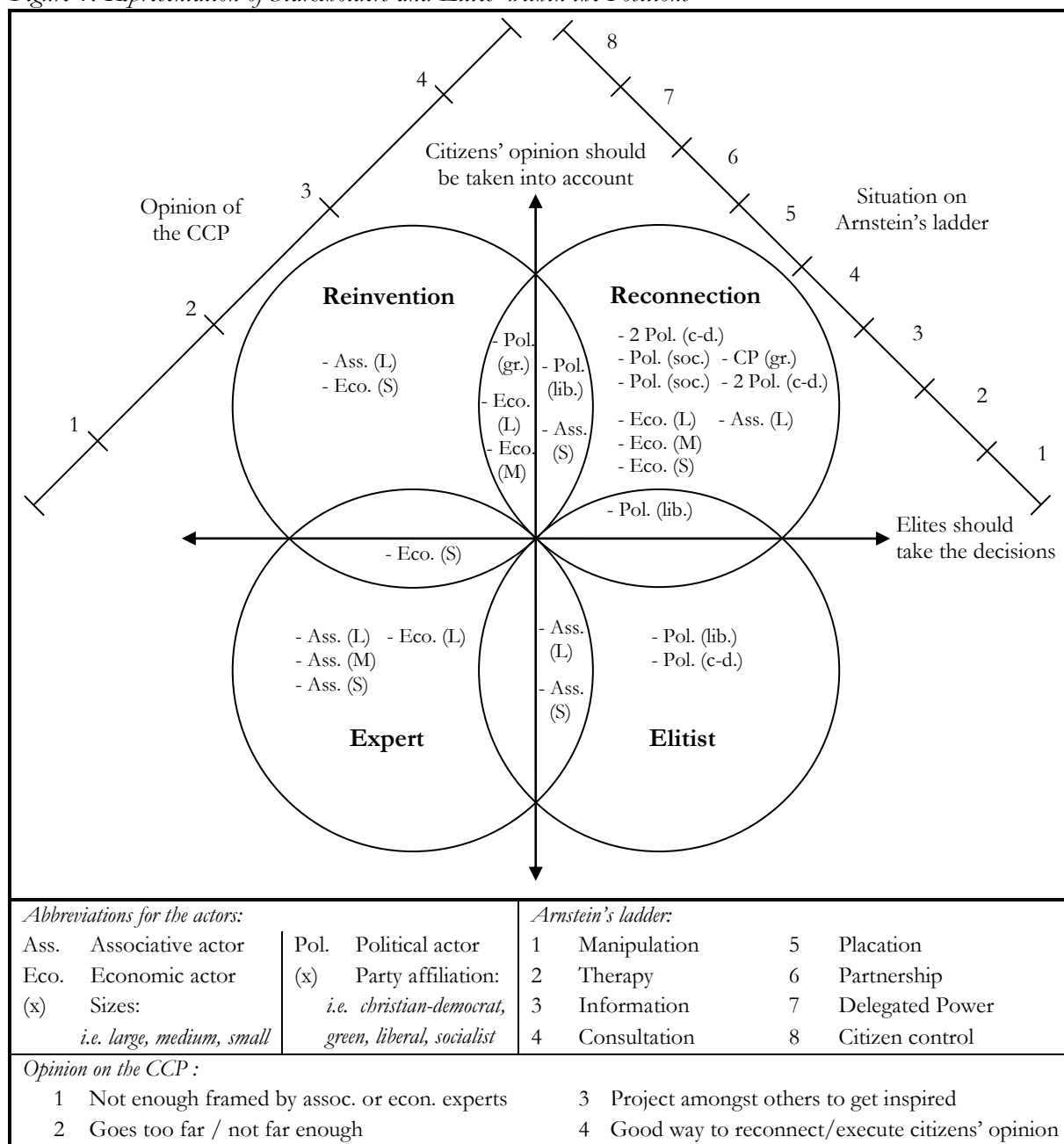
Stakeholders and elites with a reinvention position had a rather positive opinion of the CCP but were critical because they wanted its results to have a stronger effect. More generally, it was seen as one possible democratic innovation amongst others. On Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, the position covers the levels of consultation until delegated power and citizen control.

4. MINI-PUBLICS, STAKEHOLDERS AND ELITES

When developing the arguments that form these four positions, the stakeholders and elites drew particularly on two dimensions – first the desirability of taking into account citizens' opinion, secondly the desirability of elites taking political decisions. Through a distinct normative view of democracy and participation, every position has been developed with a specific vision of the CCP and Mini-Publics more generally. Figure 1 tries to account for this by visualizing the four positions vis-à-vis these two dimensions and according to stakeholders and elites' opinion on the CCP and Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation. The 28 interviewed actors are thereby situated within their respective position.

This visualization shows that different stakeholders and elites mobilized discourses of one or more positions. If a position is formed by a quite homogenous set of arguments, figure 1 illustrates that they are not mutually exclusive in the sense that stakeholders and elites can mobilize at the same time discourses that correspond to different positions.

Figure 1: Representation of Stakeholders and Elites’ within the Positions



When looking at the positions from the perspective of the initially described problem of potentially competing legitimacies, one can see that the legitimacies of the CCP, of its stakeholders and of the provincial elites are seen as conflictual in the elitist, expert and reinvention position, while they are seen as rather complementary in the reconnection position. While one could assume that the elitist position is developed especially by elected officials and the expert position by stakeholders, this is true for the latter but not for the former. Indeed, there have also been associative actors with an elitist position (and some expert elements in their discourse). More interestingly, the reinvention position was especially developed by companies, in addition to an association and a politician. In the reconnection position finally, the picture is quite diverse with associative, economic and political actors. A look at the individual characteristics of the actors shows that size did not play a predominant

role in the development of associative and economic opinions. Party affiliation for the political actors does however to some extent. While liberal and christian-democratic politicians did not exclusively take an elitist position, no socialist or green politician touched upon it.

When comparing these findings with those of previous studies, one can see that the elitist position was already identified by Jacquet et al. (2015) among Belgian parliamentarians. In addition, what they described as corporatist posture for politicians who saw corporatist organizations as more representative for the needs of civil-society has some similarities with the present expert position. That is also the case for the most critical (associative) actors interviewed by Rui and Villechaise-Dupont (2005). What has been identified as (re)connection position in this study could have some similarities with the hybrid posture in Jacquet's et al. (2015) and with less critical associations approached by Rui and Villechaise-Dupont (2005), but it is much more developed in this case. That is especially true for the reinvention position.

CONCLUSION

One reason for this broader picture is the systematic approach of the present research that studied the opinion of associative, economic and political actors in parallel on a Mini-Public whose democratic legitimacy was seen as potentially competing their own. Thereby, it is interesting to see that these competing legitimacies of the CCP as Mini-Public, of its stakeholders and of the provincial elites were to some extent developed by the actors in competing terms. However they also developed a position supporting the legitimacy of Mini-Publics (reinvention) and one that complements all of them to some extent (reconnection).

Now, does this better understanding of associative, economic and political opinions on the CCP resolve the problem of competing democratic legitimacies in today's complex governance? It does not, but it illustrates that the positions of these actors with competing legitimacies are not mutually exclusive and that deliberative Mini-Publics can make use of this complementarity to enhance their own legitimacy.

Beyond the macro-political public support, Mini-Publics can indeed try to combine their work with those of both stakeholders and elites. Three possibilities exist for that. First, before a Mini-Public, i.e. when preparing its work. Second, during a Mini-Public, i.e. when debating sensitive issues. Third, after a Mini-Public, i.e. when implementing the results.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Response rates to the explorative surveys

Actors	Total	Before CCP	%	After CCP	%	Before and After	%
Associative	30	14	46,67	17	56,67	10	33,33
Economic	50	20	40,00	26	52,00	19	38,00
Political	78	36	46,15	38	48,72	24	30,77
Total	158	70	44,30	81	51,27	53	33,54

Appendix 2: Profiles of the 28 actors selected for the semi-structured interviews

Associative Actors		Economic Actors	
Sector of Activity	Size*	Sector of Activity	Size*
Energy	Small	Eco-construction	Small
Energy	Small	Eco-construction	Small
Energy	Small	Eco-construction	Small
Nature	Small	Local construction	Medium
Nature	Medium	Energy	Medium
Nature	Medium	Other**	Large
Rural Development	Large	Other**	Large
Worker Association	Large	Other**	Large
Political Actors			
Mandate	Party		
Provincial Councilor	Christian-Democrat (cdH)		
Provincial Councilor	Christian-Democrat (cdH)		
Provincial Councilor	Green (Ecolo)		
Provincial Councilor	Liberal (MR)		
Provincial Councilor	Liberal (MR)		
Provincial Councilor and Mayor	Christian-Democrat (cdH)		
Provincial Councilor and Mayor	Christian-Democrat (cdH)		
Provincial Councilor and Mayor	Christian-Democrat (cdH)		
Mayor	Green (Ecolo)		
Mayor	Socialist (PS)		
Parliamentarian et Mayor	Liberal (MR)		
Parliamentarian	Socialist (PS)		

* Small = less than 10 employees, Medium = 10 or more employees, Large = more than 100 employees.

**Not specified to prevent identification.

Appendix 3: Arguments that stakeholders and elites made for or against Mini-Publics in general

	In favor of Mini-Publics	Against Mini-Publics
<i>Representativity</i>	Random selection leads to a panel that is more representative of the popular opinion	Voting is more representative for opinion of the population.
	Random selection leads to a more diversified panel of persons.	Random selection is not representative because there is no feedback-loop to the population.
	Random selection mobilizes people that do usually not participate.	Random selection with voluntary participation does not prevent that the same people come back to power.
<i>Responsibility</i>		Randomly selected people do not have to justify themselves. Elected people have to decide because they are truly responsible for a taken decision.
		Letting randomly selected people decide is a discharge of responsibility by elected people.
<i>Capacity</i>	Randomly selected people live nearer to the issues at stake.	Randomly selected people have only few expertise in a specific domain.
	Randomly selected people do not have fewer capacities than elected.	Randomly selected people have only a limited capacity to understand complex issues.
	Elected people only think at their own interests.	Randomly selected people cannot overcome their subjectivity.
	Elected people are trapped by the participacy.	Randomly selected people do not know the arcana of power.
	Randomly selected people are more sincere.	Randomly selected people do not have a global vision of politics (budget, laws, etc.)
		Random selection does not guarantee that citizens are motivated and of good will.
	A Mini-Public can specialize more in one issue.	Elites are better surrounded by experts in their cabinet.
	Randomly selected people think more on a longer term.	Randomly selected people take their decisions on a too emotional basis.
	An election does not guarantee to select qualified people.	Random selection risks selecting fools or those who produce fool solutions.
	Elected people can be influenced too easily by pressure groups.	Randomly selected people can be influenced more easily than elected.
	Elected people do only think at their reelection.	Elected people have to take strong decisions.
<i>Legitimacy</i>	Random selection gives the voice back to the citizen.	Elected people are more legitimate because they have been chosen.
	The basis has to be the opinion of those who are concerned – citizens or stakeholders.	
<i>Others</i>	It will restore a positive attitude towards politics.	Otherwise, elected people are no longer useful.
	It will make decisions more easily acceptable for the entire population.	Randomly selected citizen assemblies lack continuity.
	It has an educative value.	
	It is a way to counter extremisms.	
	It can help elites to overcome the NIMBY-problem.	

Appendix 4: Arguments that stakeholders and elites made for or against the CCP

	In favor of the PCC	Against PCC
<i>Results</i>	They are nice advancements.	Many things exist already.
	The propositions were realistic.	Many things are not feasibly (especially financially)
	Many projects can be imagined based on the recommendations	There are some principles but no concrete projects.
	The results were moderated.	The results were the least one could expect.
	Consultation facilitates public support for the decisions that will be taken.	The recommendations do only repeat the priorities that have been advanced prior to the CCP by the expert panel.
		Experts should have better prepared the works so that more concrete results would have been possible.
<i>Process</i>	The scientific committee has provided a good methodological framing.	Stronger personalities were favored in presenting their point of view.
	It is positive that experts have been heard for further information.	A better and larger choice of experts would have led to more nuanced recommendations.
	The dynamic of the group was perceivable.	There should have been a better communication with the population and in general.
<i>Principles of conception</i>	It allows politics to implicate the citizen and to create a larger social uptake.	Participation should work through citizens that group on freely.
	The diversified panel with different opinions prevents a potential politicization.	70/2.500 is a low participation turnout.
	It is interesting to get the opinion of ordinary people.	Instead of a randomly selected assembly, persons of the field who know better should be asked.
	It created a societal dynamic.	Randomly selected citizens are too subjective.
	The random selection mobilized people that would not have come otherwise.	The size of the project (30 people) is too limited to change something.
	Participants had to be motivated to participate what should have led to good results.	They should have got a fixed budget to elaborate x projects.
	The random selection is more equal because it gives everybody the same chance to be selected.	Rather than selecting randomly, there should have been a voluntarily participation.
	It is more spontaneous than in a traditional assembly.	The randomly selected people had finally no responsibility.
	Open the reflection beyond the ecological milieu is positive.	
<i>Topic and Provincial Framework</i>	It allows awakening the Provincial councilors that are not conscious enough in the field.	Climate is a too complex topic for ordinary people.
		Speaking broadly about climate is too general, few concrete results can be obtained.
		Such a topic is neither beginning nor end, it has to be tackled more transversely.
		The province has no competences in climate affairs, they should have worked on another topic.
		At a provincial level, many things are trivial, it does above all distributing money.
		It is a topic where the decisions are self-evident, there is no need for a particular project.
		The project is only there to legitimate actions that would have been necessary anyway.
		The project is just a media window for the christian-democrats and Thérèse Mahy.