EuComMeet
DEVELOPING ONLINE DELIBERATIVE SPACES

D8.6 - Proposal for new protocols on policy outcome

WP8 - Effective contribution to the policy outcome

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List of abbreviations and definitions

Abbreviation	Definition
CSIC	Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas / Spanish National Research Council
DoA	Description of Action
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
GA	Grant Agreement
H2020	Horizon 2020
MPs, MSs, MRPs	Members of parliament, Members of senate, Members of regional parliaments
UW	University of Warsaw
WP	Work Package

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Executive summary

The EUComMeet project, funded by the European Union, aims to thoroughly investigate the conditions that contribute to the effectiveness of deliberation and representation as responses to the challenges faced by liberal representative democracies. By systematically embedding deliberative practices and institutions within the multilevel system of governance and representation of the EU, the project seeks to explore their potential in reducing polarization, fostering a stronger European identity, promoting inclusiveness, and bridging the gap between policymakers and citizens. Within this comprehensive framework, WP8 focuses on understanding and facilitating the valuable contributions of policypro posals resulting from the deliberative processes of EUComMeet. This is accomplished by engaging with two key actors in the process: citizens and policymakers.

The goal of this last deliverable is to produce a short practically oriented report of how the contents of this WP on impact and the results of the project could inform the organisation of deliberative events, considering the existing attitudes of citizens and elites on this topic. With this goal in mind, we organize the text in two main sections. In the first one, we summarize the most important learnings, findings and ideas produced through the development of this EUComMeet WP. In the second one, we make a few practical recommendations derived from these findings on how to organize deliberative events.

1. Summary of WP8's findings

The EUComMeet project, funded by the European Union, has a primary objective of examining the circumstances in which deliberation and representation can effectively address the challenges faced by liberal representative democracies in five countries (France, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Poland). Through experimental approaches, the project aims to systematically incorporate deliberative practices and institutions within the multilevel system of governance and representation of the EU. Additionally, it explores the potential of deliberation and participation in reducing polarization, strengthening European identity, promoting inclusiveness, and narrowing the gap between policymakers and citizens.

Within this comprehensive framework, WP8 focuses on understanding and facilitating the effective contribution of policy proposals generated through the deliberative processes of EUComMeet. To achieve this, WP8 primarily investigates the motivations and factors influencing policymakers' acceptance or rejection of deliberative inputs. By examining policymakers' general and specific motivations and identifying the factors that drive their decision-making, WP8 aims to enhance our understanding of the policy impact resulting from these proposals. Furthermore, WP8 seeks to explore how policy changes influenced by these proposals affect citizens' attitudes and behaviors towards participatory processes. By shedding light on both policymakers' and citizens' roles, WP8 contributes to a deeper comprehension of the conditions under which deliberative participatory spaces can effectively contribute to the policy-making process.

This document aims to propose the consideration of certain elements in the organization of deliberative events bearing in mind the results of our WP8 on impact. The main findings lie at the interplay of the two main characteristics of the work done. On one hand, from a substantive point of view, our main questions and goals dealt with policy impact[1], aiming to understand and facilitate an effective contribution of policy proposals resulting from the EUComMeet deliberative processes. To do so, our research has focused on the two main actors: policy makers and citizens. On the other hand, our main methodological strategy has been an elite survey, developed first as a pilot in Spain and then in the remaining five countries (see D8.3 and D8.4 for further analysis of these results). This means that, in practice, our major focus has been to understand the general and specific motivations of policymakers regarding these processes and which factors influence them to change.

Table 1 presents a summary of the main ideas that have been developed in the previous deliverables, as well as on some academic papers and conference presentations developed during this period.

The first set of ideas concerns the general characteristics of elite preferences regarding democratic processes, the role citizens should play in them and the characteristics that deliberative events should have to incorporate citizen voices.

- Elected representatives'[2] trust in the decision-making capacity of ordinary citizens is limited. This is a clear result of the elite survey that underpins on many other ideas and preferences discussed here. Whether or not this perception is accurate, it is a fact that must be considered when thinking about the role of any deliberative event and its decision-making capacity. In spite of this idea, most elected politicians reject one of the potential solutions: incorporating only the voices of the most educated citizens. However, despite this limited trust mentioned, this is not their preferred solution.

[1] A recent EC report (2023) highlights an important problem regarding the limited policy impact of these events.
[2] Elected representatives and political elites are used here as synonims. We follow the same logic for minipublics and deliberative events.

- Deliberative events may be organized for quite different reasons. The elected representatives interviewed stressed especially cultural and civic goals, such as reducing citizen dissatisfaction and/or increasing citizen empowerment (even if the exact meaning of this expression can be quite ambiguous).

Main topic	Finding
Elite preferences	Trust in the competence of citizens is low and crucial. Still, politicians do not want to listen only to educated citizens.
	Cultural goals (reducing dissatisfaction, increasing citizen empowerment) are central objectives among the reasons to organize deliberative events.
	Being or not binding is not necessarily the most important characteristic to support minipublics. Who participates is crucial: elites want to be there and want also organized civil society on board (especially at the EU level).
	There is a tension between deliberative preferences (favouring deliberation and consensus) and participatory preferences (favouring binding decisions, and the exclusive voice of the people).
Elite/citizen diversity	Left-leaning, pro-participation and those elected representatives whose participation goal is social justice are more favourable to binding processes.
	National and German elites are more reluctant to participation in general and to binding processes in particular). Territorial level matters sometimes, with natonal elites being sometimes more reluctant to participation.
	There is a relevant gap in preferences with citizens: part of it, due to different levels of trust in citizens' abilities and satisfaction with how democracy works.

Table 1. Main findings of the WP8 (impact)

There are different minipublics characteristics that increase their support among politicians and their willingness to organize one. Who participates is especially central: representatives want to be sure that all relevant voices are heard (a diverse and representative presence of citizens, but also stakeholders, especially when an organized public opinion may be more difficult to articulate, as at the EU level). The presence of politicians themselves as participants is also a valued characteristic. Non-binding minipublics are also preferred, but this characteristic is less influential than the preference for who is going to be heard.

- For elected representatives, organizing participation may entail making difficult choices and facing trade-offs. Our results show that these tensions exist among those goals more oriented towards deliberation (better debate, favouring consensus) and those emphasising on participatory goals (e.g., more participants, a more binding character). These trade-offs and different choices also appear among the preferences of political elites, with some political representatives more inclined towards one side and others towards the other.

The second set of findings relates less to general tendencies among elites and more to the differences and explanatory factors of the diversity among them, or even between the ideas of citizens and representatives. Four especially clear ideas in this direction are:

- Two factors are especially important in understanding the preferences of political elites regarding participation. The first one is their general inclination towards a fully representative model with very limited role for citizen input, or a more participatory model where citizens and elites have both a relevant decision-making role. The second factor is the traditional left versus right ideology. Several preferences are particularly shaped by these two values. For example, left-leaning and pro- participation representatives have slightly different goals in mind when organizing participation, with social justice becoming one of the relevant objectives. Also, both groups tend to favour a more binding character of citizen participation.

- Other variables that play a distinctive role are nationality and territorial level (whether political representatives work at the local, regional, or national level). However, while the previous two make a difference for many preferences, the particularities of nationality and territorial level are less general and more case-specific. For instance, for some democratic preferences German elites are more reluctant than those in other countries to give an enlarged role to citizens (e.g., to give participation a binding character). Something similar happens with the territorial level, where we expected more consistent differences. Only for some characteristics, and when all differences are accounted for, we find some more reluctance towards participation from national elites, compared to local ones.

- Finally, a significant preference gap exists between citizens and elites. Citizens are more willing to see an enlarged role for themselves in policy-making. This preference also exists among some representatives, but it is much softer than among citizens. Part of this difference is accounted by two important variables: their degree of satisfaction with how democracy works and their degree of trust on citizens' capabilities in decision-making. If their perceptions on these two issues were more similar, citizen and elite preferences for how much participation would be quite less further away

2. Some practical recommendations on how to build deliberative events

To organize this set of proposals, we follow the traditional distinction that distinguish deliberative events according to input-process-outputs (Agger and Lögfren, 2008; Gastil et al, 2017; Galais et al, 2018). Thus, we first highlight the design characteristics of the deliberative event, including who is going to participate (input). Second, we incorporate ideas regarding the process of information and deliberation among participants (process). Finally, we set characteristics of the outputs and its incorporation into policy-making (outputs).

These recommendations are inspired by the previous set of findings and build on the existing experience regarding the organization of minipublics. However, it is important to recognize that while the previous ideas (section 1) are clearly established on research findings, these recommendations have a more speculative character: they are reasonable considering the existing knowledge, but we cannot prove they would always necessarily work in any setting. Also, these suggestions are exclusively inspired in the findings related to outputs and should be carefully balanced with the ideas coming out from the other areas analysed in EuComMeet (inclusion, reflexivity, identity and polarization).

Table 2 makes a summary of these recommendations aggregated in the three arenas mentioned (input/process/output). We suggest a list of four ideas regarding the inputs of a deliberative event:

- Politicians are reluctant towards the decision-making capacity of minipublics. This lack of trust has to be addressed if making the policy recommendations more impactful is a relevant goal. In fact, it seems that they are more interested in cultural and civic impacts, not in policy ones. As such, one clear concern of politicians is that their (allegedly more knowledgeable) voices can he heard during the process. Increasing their voice may limit the popular control role (Smith, 2009) of the process, but trade-offs exist in the design of deliberative events and ensuring sufficient voice of elected representatives may be the only or the clearest way to increase their trust in the proposals made. This increase in their voice may be translated into two different places. First, their capacity to overview, control or influence the design of the process through some kind of Political board, where different political actors are present[3]. The existence of this type of boards is not so uncommon and while it has some problems, it also contributes to guaranteeing a political support that goes beyond the party in government. The second possibility is that **representatives are members themselves of the Minipublic**. The Irish experience shows this may not be ideal from the deliberative point of view, but it contributes to facilitate its policy impact (Farrell and Suiter, 2019).
- Politicians are not only concerned about their presence, but about the presence of all relevant voices. A very careful attention to the recruitment process to guarantee that participants present no important socio-demographic or political bias, using among others powerful incentives for the most excluded populations. Also, guarantee the appropriate presence of all relevant stakeholders, at the very least as informants (or as members of the political board if necessary), are two possible efforts in this direction.
- Finally, any deliberative event has a specific mandate. These can range from being very broad to very specific and each option has also advantages and disadvantages[4]. From the point of view of policy impact, a too broad mandate (or one where the topics to be covered have not sufficient time to be adequately addressed, informed, and discussed) may become an additional obstacle.

Area	Recommendation
	Voice to politicians concerns in overseeing and planning
	Consider pros and cons of incorporating politicians as participants

[3] See https://www.knoca.eu/events/knoca-workshop-governance-structures-and-practices-of-climate-assemblies for some examples and alternatives.
[4] See Shaw et al (2021) for different kinds or mandates and their impacts in the case of Climate Assemblies.

Input	Define a realistic policy objective
	Guarantee that all relevant voices are present (stakeholders and participants)
Process	Sufficiently rich, plural and policy relevant information (including information about existing policies and competencies)
	Adjust information and deliberation to the mandate
	Find equilibria in deliberation if politicians are present
Output	Make clear expectations since the design stage about the policy impact of recommendations and their route to policy (government answer; parliamentary debate, technical evaluation, referenda…)
	Establish a transparent follow-up system open to all citizens that allows a clear tracking of the policy recommendations. Provide explicit answers to each of them.

Table 2. Summary of recommendations

Regarding the development process of minipublics several things should also be considered. This organization of these events has been up to now very strongly dominated by democratic and deliberative concerns, aiming to make debates enriched with qualities such as being bottom-up, open, plural and having epistemic quality. However, concerns about making the results more useful and realistic regarding its potential policy impact have been much more absent from their design. Some examples in this direction could be the following:

- Probably the most important one relates to the type, richness and amount of information provided. Much technical information may be less interesting for some participants, but limited information becomes a real problem if policy impact is a goal. Information provided needs to be sufficiently rich, plural and include the actual policies developed, its reasons and trade-offs, as well as some consideration of potential alternatives.
- The amount and type of information provided must be adjusted to the deliberative event mandate. If the mandate is strongly policy oriented, the information provided should be too. Making participants create their own proposals is democratically appealing, but cognitively very demanding and requires sufficient time and information. Provide policy alternatives through experts and/or stakeholders is another alternative. This is relevant also for deliberation, which can take more open and value based character in some cases or to include more policy details depending on the mandate.
- Finally, the traditional rules of avoiding domination in the debates by any participant must be especially enforced if a situation of strong information imbalance exists. This would be especially the case if there were elected representatives acting as participants.

The third set of concerns regards the outputs of the deliberative event. At the very least, two general considerations have to be made.

- First, there is not a unique possible solution to which kind of policy impact policy recommendations or ideas coming out of deliberative events should have. From having no clear mandate at all, to being considered politically binding, to going to technical or political review by the executive and/or legislative, to go to ratification through a popular referendum, many solutions have been tested. There is no sufficient evidence to say that any of these solutions works better and can be used in any single situation. The only general clear recommendation that can be made is that expectations have to be very clear since minute one and that clear rules and messages for all participants should exist regarding this future policy impact. The existence of confusing expectations is one of the factors more likely to create the kind of political frustration (Fernandez-Martínez et al, 2020) that representatives want to fight through their existence.
- Second, if a list of policy recommendations exists, there should be a system to make a continuous tracking of what is the situation of these recommendations and their process to policy and implementation. This should include some symbolic points where an explicit answer from political authorities will exist, providing explanations of how and why these recommendations will be followed up, modified or abandoned at all (Fernández-Martínez et al, 2023) and be opened and available to participants, stakeholders and the general population.

3. Conclusions

Organising deliberative events entails making several design choices, with no easy solution and without any design being clearly superior to others. The message of this final deliverable can be summed up into two main ideas:

First, democratic concerns have prevailed in these design choices. These concerns are important, but they should be carefully balanced with having in mind the goal of making the results policy relevant. The types of frames, information or proposals produced should have this goal in mind.

Second, these design choices do not operate in a vacuum and should consider the preferences of the two main actors involved: citizens and elected representatives. Each of them has their demands, preferences and prejudices and these have to be at least kept in mind if the process and its results want to achieve a sufficient degree of legitimacy among both actors.

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