

VOICE&VOTE

How can the mini-public's experience support the renewal of the decision-making process of representative institutions?
Presentation of the results of the research

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HUGE GAP

academic vision of
deliberative mini-publics,
which focuses strongly on
the **quality of
deliberation and the
characteristics of the
proces**

views of political actors on
innovative deliberative
processes, whose actual
evaluations and motivations
differ from officially declared
ones

(Fung, 2003; Smith, 2009; Warren, 2009; Curato et al, 2021; Grönlund et al., 2014; Farrell, Suiter & Harris, 2019; Roberts & Escobar, 2015; Jacquet, 2017; Niessen & Reuchamps, 2020; Escobar & Elstub, 2017; Fishkin, 1996, 1997; Dryzek, 2010; Landemore, 2015; Giraudet et al, 2022), Nabatchi & Farrar, 2011; Koskimaa & Rapeli, 2020).

Why is it important to bridge this large gap?

- Because the attitudes, motivations, worries and beliefs of decision-makers **influence the success of deliberative projects** in politics and public policy (especially large-scale)

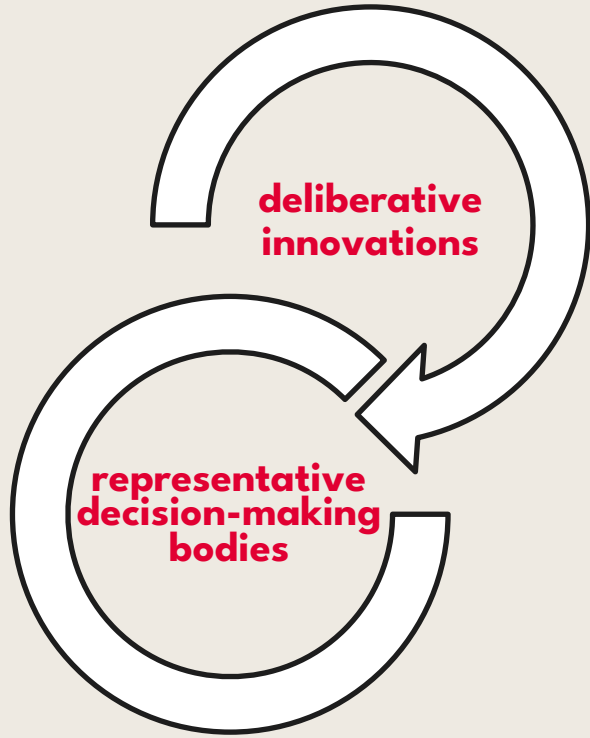
How to bridge this gap?

- Exploring the attitudes, motivations, concerns and beliefs of different types of decision-makers, at various levels of management.

Research aims & design



Research question

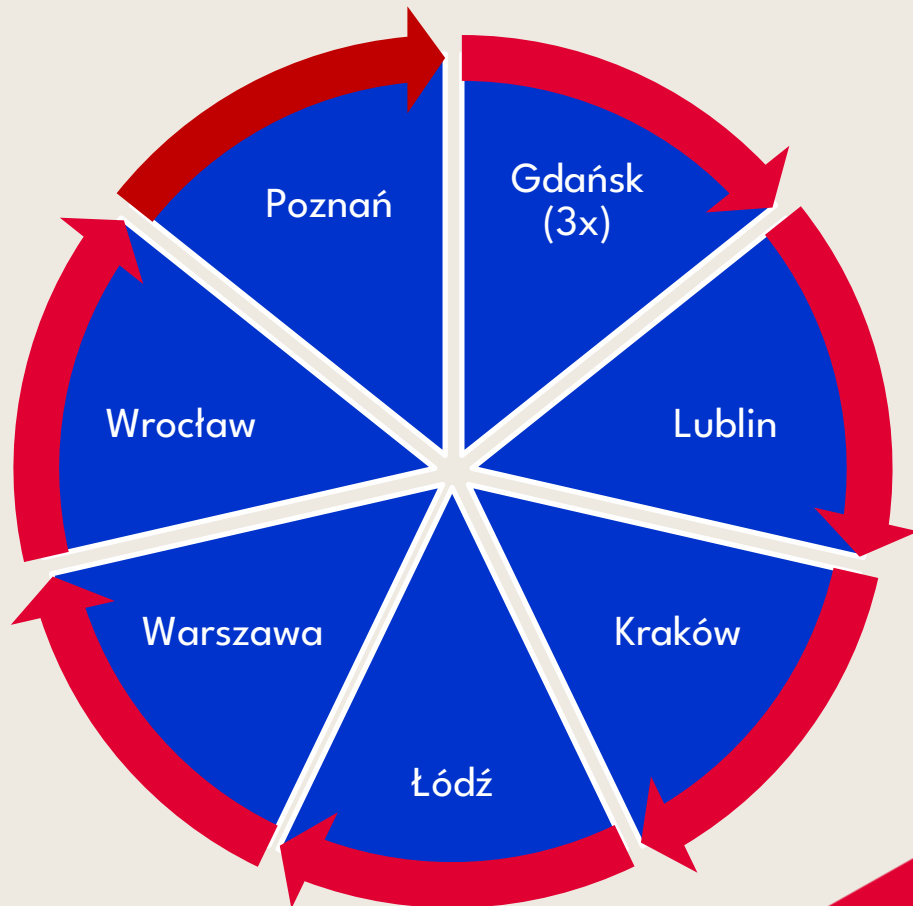


Whether and how the experience of mini-publics can support the renewal of the decision-making process of representative institutions?

➤ Inspirations & elements of deliberative democracy that can be [re]instilled in the activities of collegiate representative bodies.

2016-2021

100% of CA's



22

in-depth
interviews

• • • **DECISION-MAKING
ELITES:**

**presidents
of city councils**

high-level city officials
responsible for
organizing citizens'
assemblies

**citizens' assembly
coordinators from
NGOs**

Key findings



Key Findings

1. THE STATE OF THE LOCAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

It is **dominated by party politics** just like national politics

It is **not based on substantive arguments, but on politics**
(due to political pressure and significant politicization of local activities)

Brawling, quarreling and **power struggles dominate** the council meetings

Councilors **lack substantive knowledge**, have **no motivation** to get involved
(feel like *voting machines*; are linked by a network of dependencies)

Key Findings

2. BENEFITS OF DELIBERATIVE INNOVATION

Respondents highly value and appreciate deliberative innovation

DMP debates are inclusive, open to substantive arguments, and involve a variety of stakeholders and experts

Respondents recognize the value of moderated discussion (facilitators and moderators)

Respondents confirm active participation and high involvement of DMP participants

Respondents confirm that the DMP's decisions are of good quality, fair, reasonable, and bring new and valuable perspectives and solutions

Key Findings

3. POSSIBILITY OF REPLACEMENT (close integration)

To the rest of the respondents, the idea seemed abstract or even of the science fiction kind

Although all respondents consider deliberative mini-publics to be an **important contribution** to local decision-making

only 1 person (NGO) expressed confidence that deliberative institutions **could replace** traditional institutions of representative democracy in the future

Decision makers value deliberative innovation

- but only if they *know their place in the system (as **superstructure**)*

Why can't deliberative innovation be more strongly integrated into the decision-making process?

Arguments of the respondents can be grouped into 4 categories:

systemic

technical

qualitative

instrumental

Systemic arguments:

- fear of damaging the existing political system and its **stability**,
- fear of breaking the accepted **catalog of values associated with the perception of democracy** and self-government (elections vs. lottery, the question of accountability),
- fear of **disrupting the political status quo** in a particular power space.

Technical arguments:

- high **financial costs** and too much **organizational work**,
- fear of insufficient commitment (e.g., time) from citizens,
- fear of the deliberative institution's inability to keep up with the daily demands of city administration.

Qualitative arguments:

- Although the respondents agree that representative democracy has its weaknesses, they stressed that a change would still not solve the problems that are associated with democratic pathologies.
- Some respondents also pointed out that change would not produce qualitative results in the form of better decisions, based on their belief that **residents do not know enough about public affairs**.

Instrumental arguments:

- councilors' expectation that institutions involving anyone other than themselves are only **to support** the decision-making process: residents are supposed to provide casual support for them, and most when **difficult and uncomfortable decisions need to be adopted**.

Key Findings

Decision-makers have **a strong tendency to care about the *status quo* remaining unchanged.**

Any innovations that occur within the baseline are skillfully positioned within the system in a way that provides the greatest instrumental value to the decision-makers of that system.

DEBATE as a distinguishing feature of citizens' assemblies among other types of institutions was pointed out by **only 1** of the interviewers.

All other statements focused on the complex technical aspects of citizens' assemblies or the political aspects of city councils that ensure systemic stability.

Experience of mini-publics can support the renewal of the decision-making process of representative institutions

argumentative debate bringing together citizens, decision-makers, stakeholders and experts - in all possible configurations

the requirement for **justification**,

the inclusion of **external experts** and other **stakeholders**

Is democracy still democracy?



Message to take home

Traditional institutions do not want to reform themselves but only want to **create a corrective "superstructure" that will allow them to remain unchanged...**

... mini-publics can play a significant role in transforming the entire public sphere in a deliberative direction



Message to take home

Deliberative mini-publics can set in motion a process of reforming traditional representative institutions; and become proof to them that a different decision-making process is possible and even possible in **their own city.**

Deliberation cannot be imposed. An essential ingredient in such processes is **goodwill.**

Good practices are of colossal importance, and they are worth recording and promoting, because in this way political practice will begin to take over their patterns and leading elements, processing, modifying and adapting them to other political contexts, as well as to parallel processes taking place in specific communities.



Discussion questions

- **How to design deliberative innovations so that they can effectively fit into a system of representative democracy?**
- **How can mini-publics play a significant role in transforming the entire public sphere in a deliberative direction?**



**Would you like to stay
in touch with me?**

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