Deliberative Democracy: The Case of the Austrian Climate Citizens Assembly

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ABSTRACT

In recent years there has been a lot of scholarly-, and political attention to deliberative mini-publics in the context of climate politics. Many democratic states are facing a crisis of democracy that holds them incapable to impose a climate plan that reduces emissions sufficiently to meet the legally binding treaty of the Paris Agreement. Deliberative democracy is discussed as a promising concept in academic literature in helping to overcome the democratic and climate crises. Deliberative democracy has the quality of linking scientific knowledge with citizens' values and policymaking. In this thesis, I discuss the potential of climate citizens' assemblies focusing on the Austrian "Klimarat", and applying the frameworks of good deliberation by Smith (2009), Fishkin (2018), and the Oxford Deliberative Handbook (Bächtiger et al. 2018). I argue that the Klimarat had significant limitations in representativeness, time, neutrality, and decision-making and propose how these weaknesses can be overcome in future climate citizens assemblies to meet the standards of good deliberation, and thereby contribute to overcoming the democratic and climate crises.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BMK	Austrian Federal Ministry of Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation, and Technology
BOKU	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences
CAUK	UK Climate Assembly
CCA	Austrian Climate Citizens Assembly, Klimarat
CCC	French Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat
DMPs	Deliberative Mini Publics
EU	European Union
INDCs	Intended Nationally Determined Contributions
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-Operation and Development
UWK	University for Continuing Education Krems
SACCA	Scientific Assessment of the Austrian Climate Citizens Assembly

INTRODUCTION

Even though all democratic countries have submitted Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) that led up to the Paris Agreement in 2015 (Höhne et al. 2017, 17), no country has yet imposed a climate plan that has the potential to reduce emissions sufficiently to meet the 1.5-degree target (Climate Action Tracker 2023; Willis, Curato, and Smith 2022, 1). Global governance fails to meet emission reduction targets due to the complexity of democratic systems as well as the complexity of environmental problems (Berg and Lidskog 2018; Willis, Curato, and Smith 2022).

This thesis seeks to address the potential that deliberative democratic citizen innovations, specifically the concept of deliberative democracy, have to help overcome the climate and political crises. Deliberative democracy is a form of democracy in which deliberation by the people is used as a basis for political decision-making. It shows what people would want if they were well-informed and part of authentic deliberation. I argue that deliberative democracy has significant potential to facilitate the better adoption of democratic climate policy outcomes. However, I also point out that climate citizens' assemblies need clear guidelines, a well-designed and neutral deliberative process, a democratic mode of decision-making and a manageable amount of proposals to meet the standards of good deliberation.

In the thesis, I first outline a theoretical overview of the crisis of democracy, need for environmental policymaking, and the challenges it faces. I introduce the concept of deliberative democracy as a framework that can help adapt to political challenges by discussing the deliberative criteria of Smith (2009), Fishkin (2018), and the Oxford Deliberative Handbook (Bächtiger et al. 2018). In the second part, I discuss the Austrian "Klimarat" (CCA) a climate citizens assembly that took place in Austria in 2022. I critically examine the limitations of the CCA, referring to the deliberation criteria introduced earlier and to the Climate Assembly UK

(CAUK) and the French Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (CCC). Lastly, I discuss recommendations for future climate citizens assemblies adding to the proposals of the Scientific Assessment of the Austrian Climate Citizens' Assembly (SACCA).

THE THEORY OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICYMAKING

Environmental Policymaking and the Challenges

A large and growing body of literature has investigated global warming and its effects on human life. Most prominently, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that anthropogenic emissions have already caused 1°C of global warming above pre-industrial levels (IPCC 2018). Several studies have examined the phenomena of global warming over the past decades. The first IPCC report that scientifically assesses global warming scenarios was released in 1990 to support policymakers (Pedersen et al. 2022). The later volumes of IPCC list the impacts of a 1. 5°C global warming, including extreme temperatures, heavy precipitation, droughts in many regions, mean sea level rise, biodiversity loss, increased poverty, negative human health effects, as well as lower economic growth (IPCC 2018). Based on the findings of the IPCC Report, in 2015, at the United Nations Climate Change Conference, 193 states signed the Paris Agreement, a legally binding treaty in which the states declare their commitment to "holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre–industrial levels" (The Paris Agreement | UNFCCC n.d.; United Nations n.d., 2a). The European Union (EU) played a key role in bringing about the Paris Agreement (Oberthür and Groen 2017), however, the EU is still rated with "insufficient efforts" by the Climate Action Tracker (Climate Action Tracker 2023).

Additionally, democracy is facing a crisis that recently gained scholarly attention. The political environment is polarizing, and political leaders are offering simple solutions that do not match the complex problems they intend to solve, and citizens either follow partisan cues or

completely drop out of the political sphere (Dryzek et al. 2019). In representative democracy, competition and winning the next elections are priorities for political actors and very little attention is paid to considered judgment, enhanced deliberation, and understanding different standpoints. However, nationwide or even global emission reductions need complex solutions and united citizen's support. Therefore, the crisis of democracy hinders the solving of the climate crisis. However, deliberative democracy can help adopt because "the contemporary crisis of democracy, which is a crisis of communication, not of individual reasoning" (Dryzek et al. 2019, 2) can arguably be facilitated with deliberation.

The Potential of Deliberative Democracy in the Environmental Context

A significant amount of the current literature on deliberation pays particular attention to deliberative democracy in environmental contexts (Berg and Lidskog 2018; Boswell, Dean, and Smith 2023; Ross et al. 2021; Willis, Curato, and Smith 2022). This might be due to the lack of climate action in line with the emission reduction targets necessary and the potential that is seen in deliberation to make global policy more democratic and more efficient (Berg and Lidskog 2018). Within this body of literature, there is a large amount of research investigating why policymakers worldwide fail to reduce their emissions sufficiently. Environmental problems are often transboundary in space as they go beyond national borders and transboundary in time as their implications go beyond generations (Berg and Lidskog 2018). Democratic decision-making is challenged by the temporal aspects of global warming due to a limited ability to consider future generation's needs, values, or views (Willis, Curato, and Smith 2022). Moreover, the transboundary nature of environmental problems causes redirection of responsibility among nation-states, economic actors, and social groups (Lamb et

al. 2020). Furthermore, environmental problems are scientific estimations that include uncertainties and challenge policymaking due to little interaction between scientific advice and social needs (Berg and Lidskog 2018; Willis, Curato, and Smith 2022). These problems of interaction between society, politics, and science result in non-transformative solutions as well as technological optimism or even climate surrender (Lamb et al. 2020). Lastly, anthropogenic environmental problems are intertwined with global capitalism, meaning that solving environmental problems is closely related to questions of influence and power, considering citizens' well-being and social justice as well as considering the economic effects that these solutions have (Berg and Lidskog 2018; Lamb et al. 2020; Willis, Curato, and Smith 2022).

This thesis is based on the assumption, put forth by recent scholarship, that the approach of deliberative democracy can contribute to overcoming the weaknesses of democratic systems in dealing with environmental problems. Smith (2009) suggests that modern democracies struggle to cope with the multiple crises they face due to the limited political attention that is given to democratic innovations that go beyond elections and familiar modes of political activity. Berg even goes as far as to say that "While deliberation is crucial for democratization at any level when it comes to democratizing global politics, it is perhaps the single most suitable practice, due to the lack of democratic institutions and sovereignty at the international level" (Berg and Lidskog 2018, 4). Deliberative democracy is a democratic innovation that stresses the importance of informed and inclusive deliberation of citizens and aims at including balanced information, diverse perspectives, and reflected positions. It is the approach to give citizens space to participate in the political decision-making process through policy proposals that are not bound to locations, contexts, or formats and in mutual engagement with other forms of democracy (Bächtiger et al. 2018; Smith 2009). The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy describes deliberative democracy as "an ideal in which people come together based on equal status and mutual respect, to discuss political issues they

face and based on those discussions decide on the policies that will affect their lives" (Bächtiger et al. 2018, 2)**.** Through the design of considered and reflected judgment, deliberation activates participants' long-term thinking and helps avoid short–sighted selfish thinking (Willis, Curato, and Smith 2022). Further, in the deliberative process, science only provides one form of knowledge that has to be translated into policy through reason-giving, consistency mutual respect, inclusion, and authentic dialogue (Berg and Lidskog 2018). This results in more power for the better argument, better dialogue, and more understanding between policymakers and citizens (Willis, Curato, and Smith 2022).

Most formats of deliberation in the environmental context are deliberative mini-publics (DMPs). DMPs are an overarching category of deliberation forums that represent a population like a microcosm. One definition for DMPs is "carefully designed forums where a representative subset of the wider population come together to engage in open, inclusive, informed and consequential discussions on one or more issues" (Curato et al. 2021b, 3). DMPs have to be representative of the population, need to include a deliberative learning phase, and need to produce an output (Curato et al. 2021a; Willis, Curato, and Smith 2022). Curato et al. (2008) describe that DMPs participants should not necessarily include politicians or other representative actors that are already active in policymaking. Further, the recruitment should occur through random sampling but be adapted to not systematically exclude any social groups and achieve a significantly large sample number. In the design of the deliberative learning phase of DMPs, the format of online or in-person, the duration, and how decisions are reached play a significant role. Physical deliberation allows more engagement and discussion than online deliberation, as well as a format of several days or months allows more in-depth deliberation than a few hours. However, physical attendance and long-duration formats are costlier and make it harder to recruit participants due to families, jobs, religion or other reasons. The output of DMPs varies from simple opinion-collection reports to questionnaires to policy

recommendations. If policy recommendations are the output, the way the decision is made can vary from consensus to the majority (Curato et al. 2021a).

Deliberative democracy, however, is confronted with challenges as well. Smith addresses different rates of participation, the lack of skill and competence by citizens, limited effects on political decisions, and burdens on citizens and institutions as well as limitations by scale as the most prominent ones. (Smith 2009, 14–20)**.** Mansbridge (1999) addresses the dilemma of unequal participation, an issue that is often correlated with wealth, education, and income. Marginalized groups face structural or environmental barriers as well as a lack of access to education, information, or social biases that exclude them from deliberation (Mansbridge 1999; Nussbaum 2003). However, the representative inclusion of marginalized groups in the numbers of the sample and opinions and experiences is an important feature of success for the deliberative process (Ross et al. 2021).

Modes and Frameworks of Deliberative Democracy

In this section, I present modes of deliberation and frameworks of deliberation to outline the most important characteristics of deliberative democracy. These democratic qualities are important to keep in mind when assessing the Klimarat or other DMPs. Notably, the literature on deliberative democracy is very broad, and different authors have published different qualities for good deliberation that are not necessarily the same among the different authors.

The Oxford Deliberation Handbook gives an overview of modes of deliberation. Deliberation is "mutual communication that involves weighing and reflecting on preferences, values, and interests regarding matters of common concern" (Bächtiger et al. 2018, 2). As they point out, deliberation can be found in state-based organizations but is

not bound to this sphere of politics. According to them, deliberation is not very successful in formal institutions, like legislatures and governments, as representatives primarily aim at electoral victory and less on mutual understanding or considered judgment. They point out that conflict-focused forums or mini-publics open to all who want to attend have the advantage of being inclusive to all and bringing issues and problems in institutionalized contexts. However, due to openness to all they tend to over-represent participants of higher socioeconomic status that dominate the discussion.

Bächtiger et al. (2018) describe several types of DMP's. Table 1 gives an overview of the three types of DMPs that are referred to in this thesis.

Table 1: Types and characteristics of mini-publics (Based on Bächtiger et al. 2018, 301; Buzogány et al. 2022; Cherry et al. 2021; Fishkin 2018; Willis, Curato, and Smith 2022)

	Number of participants	**Time**	**Output**	**Example**
Citizens Jury	12-36	2-5 days	Recommendations in a citizens' report	Leeds Citizens Jury
Citizens Assembly	99-150	Series of weekends	Recommendations	Austrian Climate Citizens Assembly (CCA), UK Climate Assembly (CAUK), French Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (CCC)
Deliberative Poll	200+	Weekend	Post – deliberation survey	Europolis

Bächtiger et al. (2018) describe that the format of randomly selected citizen juries involves about 12-36 assembly members that deliberate face-to-face and come up with a report or policy issue at the end of the process. According to them, this format has the advantage of being small in cost and organization; however, it lacks representativeness in results due to the compromised group of participants. Citizens Assemblies involve at least 99 assembly

members that deliberate for several weekends, resulting in a report or recommendation that should be considered representative. Deliberative polls involve even more assembly members that deliberate for a weekend and provide results in the form of a questionnaire that measures the shift of informed opinions (Bächtiger et al. 2018).

One analytical framework of democratic goods was published by Smith (2009). He introduces inclusiveness, popular control, considered judgment and transparency as democratic goods as well as efficiency and transferability as additional institutional goods. He describes *inclusiveness* as the participation of a socially diverse group in the form of presence and voice; *popular control* as the ability that participants have, to influence the process of decision-making; *considered judgement* as technical knowledge, moral considerations as well as reflection of the perspectives of others; *transparency* as the openness of the process to all affected parties as well as the wide public. The institutional good of *efficiency* addresses the aspects of costs and time and *transferability* is the ability to transfer the process to different contexts and scales.

Another framework for deliberative polls was published by Fishkin (2018). The framework by Fishkin includes eight criteria: three for a good sample and five for good deliberation. According to him, a good sample must be *demographically representative, attitudinally representative*, and have a significant *sample size*. That means the sample must represent the population of the city/region/country according to age, gender, class, ethnicity, or other relevant factors. Further, it means that sample's viewpoints should represent the population's viewpoints. Lastly, the sample size must be large enough to be representative so that changes of opinion can be evaluated for statistical significance. Good conditions for deliberation include *arguments in favor and against* proposals in an evidence-based manner. Fishkin points out that assembly members need to receive balanced briefing materials that include all major arguments, attend plenary sessions by

experts, and be part of small discussion groups where personal positions are shared. Further, deliberation is successful if the assembly members have significant *knowledge gain* through the process. This knowledge gain is measured in questionnaires of multiple-choice format. Moreover, *opinion change* is a criterion for good deliberation. Individual opinions are asked before and after deliberation, and the net opinion change is measured. Additionally, *distortion-free* deliberation is a criterion. Certain groups, like male, educated and privileged persons, tend to be louder or more dominating in discussions. These power inequalities need to be balanced out by good moderation and good sampling to avoid domination or polarization of the group. The last criterion is identifiable *reasons for the conclusions* of the microcosm. This is assessed with the questionnaires and recordings of the group discussions (Fishkin 2018, 69–79)

THE CASE OF THE AUSTRIAN CLIMATE CITIZENS ASSEMBLY

In this section, I discuss the Austrian Klimarat (CCA) which was the first attempt at a nationwide climate citizens assembly in Austria. I aim to bring the CCA into a discussion with the literature on deliberative democracy and highlight the limitations of the CCA to avoid those pitfalls in the future. Specifically, I focus on deliberation criteria that the CCA did not fulfil and on proposals for the inclusion of these qualities.

Many authors and many countries have in common that they think deliberative democracy has the potential to contribute to dealing with the democratic and environmental crises (Berg and Lidskog 2018; Curato et al. 2021a; Dryzek et al. 2019). The Politisize Dataset contains data on DMPs that took place in Europe between 2000 and 2020 (Paulis et al. 2021). It lists 159 DMPs in 2023, of which 51 DMPs were held on environmental issues (Inventory of mini-publics – Politicize n.d.). The high number of DMPs on environmental issues might be linked to the awareness of the need for action after the Paris Agreement in 2015, as well as to the declarations of "climate emergencies" that many cities have called out. Throughout Europe, many cities have declared a "climate emergency" to call for rapid decarbonization of all sectors as well as to call for a reflection of societal injustices generated by the climate crisis (Ross et al. 2021). As discussed in the sections above, there are high hopes for deliberative democracy to solve the environmental and democratic crises. Moreover, many European countries, including Ireland, France, the UK, Scotland, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain, and Austria held national climate citizens' assemblies in the last years (Boswell, Dean, and Smith 2023). Deliberative democracy has the quality to link scientific knowledge with the social need of the population and come up with proposals or opinions that represent what the public would want

if they were well informed. This quality cannot be found in any other democratic form and therefore is seen as having the potential to help overcome the crises of the 21st century.

The Austrian "Klimarat"[1], is one of many climate citizens' assemblies that were held in the last years. The project originated from the petition "Klimavolksbegehren" held in the summer of 2020 that demanded a citizens' assembly on climate[2], and climate protection being anchored in the constitution, alongside other demands. The petition was signed by 380.590 Austrian voters[3] which refers to 6 percent of the Austrian voter population (Praprotnik et al. 2022, 7). According to the Klimavolksbegehren, the expectations of the CCA were a well-done, transparent, visible, and politically effective climate citizens assembly with an output of concrete proposals for measures to achieve climate neutrality in Austria by 2040 (Verein Klimavolksbegehren 2021). The CCA was expected to align with the recommendations of the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA). Graham Smith funded KNOCA and offers guidelines on how to organize climate citizens assemblies according to standards of deliberative democracy (Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies n.d.).

The CCA was commissioned by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation, and Technology and executed by the ARGE Klimarat[4]. It was held from January 2022 to June 2022 and received a lot of public attention. The Scientific Assessment of the Austrian Climate Citizens' Assembly (SACCA) has only been published in the second half of the year 2022 and is very recent literature that has not

[1] The CCA was carried out by the European Climate Foundation (ECF), the Austrian Federal Ministry of Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology (BMK) and scientifically evaluated by the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) and the University for Continuing Education Krems (UWK) following the OECD Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes (2021).

[2] The Klimarat was planned for November 2021 but was postponed to January 2022 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic (Buzogány et al. 2022).

[3] A threshold of 100.000 signatures is necessary for a petition the be discussed in the Austrian Parliament (Praprotnik et al. 2022).

[4] The ARGE Klimarat is a collaboration of (ÖGUT – Österreichische Gesellschaft für Umwelt und Technik, Pulswerk GmbH, PlanSinn GmbH.

received a lot of scholarly attention yet. The SACCA followed a mixed methods design structured in 6 work packages divided among the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) and the University for Continuing Education Krems (UWK). For the design of the deliberative processes, the BMK decided to follow the UK Climate Assembly (CAUK) and the French Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (CCC) as role models. Overall, the CCA had 84 participants that met over 6 months for one weekend (2 days) a month and proposed 93 policy recommendations in their final report that were structured in one general plus five issue areas (energy, consumption and production, food and land, mobility, housing). The evaluation was structured in three dimensions: input (representativeness, selection criteria, personal and economic resources, specific goals and initiation), process (voice and decision rules, discourse quality, debate dynamics, and public authority attitude), and output (effects on policies, on participants and accountability) and followed several guidelines including Galais et al. (2021), OECD (2020, 2021) and Papadopoulos and Warin (2007). In terms of success, the CCA was mentioned in about 500 newspaper articles in Austria and was overall reported as a success story (Buzogány et al. 2022, 51; Dieter 2022). The BMK made an official response to each of the 93 proposals, however, the implementation of the proposals is not legally binding and some of the responses were only dodging the proposals (Buzogány et al. 2022, 46; Dieter 2022). The SACCA discusses limitations in representativeness and cross-cut system-level thinking as the biggest weaknesses of the CCA. However, the CCA also had significant deliberative democratic limitations in neutrality, time, and decision-making that are not adequately discussed in the evaluation report. In the following section, I discuss the biggest deliberative limitations of the CCA: representativeness, time, neutrality, and decision-making, and bring it into context with the literature on deliberative democracy.

Evaluation of the Austrian Climate Citizens Assembly

Representativeness

Generally, "Representativeness", means that the sample represents the population according to standard categories. Fishkin splits representativeness into *demographic representativeness* and *attitudinal representativeness* (Fishkin 2018). According to the SACCA, the CCA was demographically representative of the Austrian population in the categories of gender, region, urbanization, education, and income. However, citizens not born in Austria were underrepresented. Further, the age groups of 16-29 and 45-59 were overrepresented and the age groups 30-44 and 75-84 were underrepresented. The CCA was not attitudinal representative as viewpoints on climate change and politics were not part of the selection criteria. According to surveys, 96% of participants were worried or rather worried about the development of the climate and 94% were very interested or fairly interested in politics. In contrast, in the general Austrian population, only 82% are very interested or fairly interested in politics, and only 76% were worried or rather worried about the development of the climate (Buzogány et al. 2022, 28). Hence people who were in favor of the climate policies already before the learning and deliberation phase were significantly overrepresented. In contrast, the CAUK which served as a role model for the CCA, included ethnicity and attitude towards climate as selection criteria (Cherry et al. 2021). It is unclear and not justified why the CCA decided to not include these categories. Regarding Smiths' (2009) criteria of *inclusiveness in presence & voice* citizens of the age group 85 and older as well as those below the age of 16 were categorically excluded. The categories "disability" or "families migration background" were not included in the selection criteria hence these groups were underrepresented or not represented at all. Further, the CCA was operated under stricter Covid-19 Pandemic rules than the Austrian Parliament had at the same time, which categorically excluded people that were not vaccinated or recovered from Covid-19. The assembly members of the CCA were recruited

by Statistik-Austria, an external organization, that did not publish the methodological report of the selection criteria until they were publicly pressured to do so. Therefore, I argue that *transparency*, one democratic good according to Smith (2009) was not fulfilled in the selection process. Statistic Austria contacted 2003 citizens that were selected according to the criteria and only 145 responded[5]. The *sample size*, a criterion by Fishkin (2018), was planned as 100 participants including 28 on a standby list. However, due to the pandemic, more people than expected cancelled, and due to data protection, they could not replace the mass of cancelled spots which led to a total amount of only 84 participants (Buzogány et al. 2022). According to Bächtiger et al. (2018), the sample size for a citizen's assembly should be at least 99.

Time

The time when participants were present was only 12 days (6 weekends each 2 days). Participants received information material for the first three weekends (4-5 pages and 6-17 minutes videos) as well as 8 lectures on "Impacts of climate change" (30min), "Climate mitigation and adaptation" (17min), "Food and land use" (50min), "Environmental psychology" (38min), "Energy" (20min), "Mobility" (20min), Production and consumption" (20min) and "Housing" (20min) (Buzogány et al. 2022, 36). According to Fishkin (2018), *arguments for and against* a course of action are a quality of good deliberation. Even though the information provided by the experts was broad, the process was built around different disciplines of climate science, ecology, economy, sociology, etc., which made it almost impossible to provide arguments for and against the 93[6] proposed policies in the short amount of time. After the first 3 weekends, the scientific board was available for questions in person

[5] I interpret the low number of responses as linked to the guiding question "How can Austria become climate friendly?" that is vague and not appealing to the part of the population that is not already engaged in climate issues and activism. Another interpretation can be that many people did not want to attend an assembly due to the pandemic.

[6] The CAUK had 50 recommendations and the CCC had 149 (Cherry et al. 2021, 48). Whereas the different citizens assemblies were different in purpose and design, there seems to be a tendency of a high number of proposals in climate citizens assemblies in Europe.

or via telephone. It is reported in the SACCA that there was a lack of time for questions and discussions with experts and the presentations were sometimes hard to follow. I interpret that this was a consequence of the short timeslots for scientific lectures that were covering a wide range of material and that the scientific board was not present at all times during the later weekends. However, not only scientific experts were providing input but also 14 stakeholder groups and representatives from all political parties in parliament got timeslots for talking. Similarly, the SACCA reports a lack of time and engagement of the stakeholders for meaningful discussion and points out that the format of stakeholder discussions challenges the neutrality of the CCA. Moreover, the assembly members were split into ten working groups, on each issue area there were two groups working. The format of fixed working groups was also used in the CAUK and the CCC where it was reported that participants complained about not being part of all fields of recommendations (Cherry et al. 2021). The CAUK justified the fixed working groups by arguing that otherwise, they would not have been able to cover the scope. The CCA and SACCA do not mention a justification for working groups. Even though the working groups in the CCA were selected diversely by the moderators, the proposals are not representative of the entire assembly, as only about 16 people deliberated certain proposals. According to Fishkins' framework (2018), k*nowledge gain* is a deliberative quality. The participatory observation reported a knowledge gain of the participants in that they were justifying their viewpoints better in the later weekends of the CCA. However, as the knowledge gain was only measured by observation, it remains uncertain how much knowledge participants gained.

Neutrality

The process was facilitated by three different independent companies (ÖGUT, Pulswerk, and PlanSinn) collectively called “ARGE-Klimarat” which was supported by moderators, moderation assistants, and other supporters. The CCA was commissioned by the BMK, as it is

a common practice that political institutions commission climate citizens assemblies[7] (Cherry et al. 2021). It is not fully clear from the report to what extent facilitators influenced the process but there are tendencies of facilitators not to remain neutral. According to Buzogány et al. (2022), some facilitators tried to ensure the implementation of the proposals and maintained contact with the parliamentary representatives that were present in the CCA. Further, the CCA used vague and unclear terminology. For example, the guiding question was "How can Austria become climate-friendly?"[8]. Similarly, the goal was formulated as "climate health by 2040". The meanings of the terms "climate friendly" and "climate health" are vague and unclear. During the process, they were interpreted to "climate neutral by 2040", a guiding government strategy of the BMK (Bundesministerium für Klimaschutz, Umwelt, Energie, Mobilität, Innovation und Technologie 2020). It is unclear how much the scientific board has been involved in the preparation of the proposals. A public survey "Klimarat fragt Österreich" collected 5.000 ideas that were integrated into the decision-making process; however, it is not clear how they were integrated. Further, it is reported that the scientific advisory board reviewed the measures proposed by citizens in the night from Saturday to Sunday on the 5th weekend and reported that the proposed measures were insufficient from a scientific point of view to achieve the goal of climate neutrality by 2040. Linking back to the democratic good of *transparency* (Smith 2009), the involvement of facilitators and scientists in the process is not transparently communicated and leaves indices of involvement as well as vague ambitions[9].

[7] The CAUK was commissioned by six committees of the House of Commons. The CCC was commissioned by President Macron. (Cherry et al. 2021)
[8] In contrast the CAUK's framing question was "How should the UK meet its legally binding target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050?"(Cherry et al. 2021, 44).
[9] The German "Bürgerrat Klima" explicitly states that the scientific board was involved in the process of proposal design (Brüggemann 2021). It is possible that the CCA followed the same structure.

Decision-making

The facilitators introduced and collectively agreed on an "Agreement for Cooperation[10]" and an "Impact Manifesto" on the first weekend of the CCA (ARGE Klimarat 2022; Buzogány et al. 2022). The "Impact Manifesto" included the following commitments: "We want to make practical, effective, and socially just proposals to policymakers. We want to generate attention. We want to promote a shift of attitudes in the public. We want to increase the willingness of politicians to implement fast, effective climate protection measures" (Buzogány et al. 2022, 34). Decisions[11] were made by a modified principle of consent, meaning that unless there were at least ten severe and justified objections to a proposal, the proposal was accepted. An objection was only justified if it was either was an argument for the proposal not being in line with the goal of climate neutrality by 2040 or not in line with the "Impact Manifesto" introduced in the first weekend. The format of an "Impact Manifesto" is not common in DMPs and has not been used in the CAUK or the CCC (Cherry et al. 2021). As the CCA was planned with 100 participants, the threshold of ten objections might have been calculated as a 10% of the number of assembly members. However, if that was the case it should have been adapted to 8 objections due to the lower number of participants. There is no justification for the mode of decision-making in the report and it is not mentioned in the SACCA. The design of decision-making does not meet the criteria of *popular control* (Smith 2009), as the assembly members did not have the option to choose a mode of decision-making and the mode that was chosen significantly limited their ability to influence the resulting policy proposals.

Overall, the Klimarat was the first attempt at a nationwide climate citizens assembly bringing Austrian climate politics a step closer to participatory democracy. However, I argue that the CCA had significant limitations foremost in representativeness, time, neutrality, and decision-

[10] Similarly, at the CAUK the assembly members developed conversation guidelines (Elstub et al. 2021).
[11] In contrast the CAUK and the CCC made decisions by voting in secret paper ballots and online tools (Cherry et al. 2021).

making. I would claim that under good standards of deliberation, 84 assembly members could not have come up with 93 concrete recommendations in the fields of energy, consumption and production, agriculture and land use, living, and mobility in the short amount of time. Furthermore, I hold that the neutral scientific evaluation SACCA should have identified the limitations of the CCA in neutrality, time, and decision-making and addressed them more explicitly in the summary of the report.

Table 2: Limitations of the Austrian Climate Citizens Assembly

	Deliberative Criteria	**CCA**
Representativness	Demographically Representative (Fishkin)	Age groups 16-29 and 45-59 were overrepresented; Age groups 30-44 and 75-84 were underrepresented; Citizens with family migration background and citizens with disability were underrepresented
	Attitudinally Representative (Fishkin)	Groups interested in politics and in favor of climate policies and were overrepresented
	Inclusiveness (Smith)	Excluded citizens aged over 85 and under 16; Excluded citizens not vaccinated or recovered from Covid-19
	Transparency (Smith)	Recruiting data was not initially shared
	Size (Fishkin)	The sample size was smaller than planned (84)
Time	Arguments in favor and against (Fishkin)	Experts were presenting on topics, not on proposals
	Knowledge gain (Fishkin)	Measured in observation only; Limited time for learning and deliberation
Neutrality	Transparency (Smith)	The influence of scientists and facilitators in the development of the proposals is not transparently communicated
Decision-making	Popular control (Smith)	The decision-making mode did not allow popular control

Recommendations

In the following section, I discuss proposals for future citizen assemblies or DMPs. As an overarching recommendation, I propose that more attention should be paid to a neutral design

of DMPs. An experienced team should facilitate a DMP and there should be a sufficient planning phase that allows to include guidelines and best practices from the literature available.

In my recommendations, I rely on Galais et al. (2021) design of Input, Process, and Output to allow a reading structure in the order of the SACCA.

Input

First, the framing of a DMP should be neutral and clear. Terms such as "climate health" or "climate friendly" that were used in the CCA should be avoided and replaced by explicit wording like the CCC "reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by the year 2030" or like the CAUK "meeting the legally binding target of net zero greenhouse gas emission by 2050" (Cherry et al. 2021, 46). A neutral and clear framework of a DMP is essential for an attitudinal representative assembly that includes a variety of viewpoints.

Second, the demographic and attitudinal representativeness of the assembly members is essential for DMPs. To ensure demographic representativeness selection criteria should consider disability and migration background. To ensure attitudinal representation in climate citizens' assemblies, attitudes toward climate politics should be considered.

Third, the budget must be considered and adapted according to the process design. The budget for the CCA was 2 Mio. € (Al-Youssef 2022; Bundesministerium für Klimaschutz, Umwelt, Energie, Mobilität, Innovation und Technologie n.d.), whereas the range of climate citizens assembly budgets is big. The UKCA had a budget of around 650.000 € whereas the CCC had a budget of 5.4 Mio. € (Cherry et al. 2021, 46). A higher budget invested in a citizen's assembly that meets the qualities of good deliberation is a better investment than a lower budget invested in a citizen's assembly that does not meet the standards of good deliberation.

Process

First, the influence of facilitation and experts should be kept to a minimum to ensure a representative result. The idea of DMPs is to support ordinary citizens in learning and deliberating about complex problems and creating an output. If the organizers wish to design a DMP differently, they should communicate the influence of facilitation and scientists in the deliberative process.

Second, there should be enough time for assembly members to learn and deliberate on issues. For good deliberation understanding and discussing different viewpoints as well as engagement in pro- and con-arguments of certain proposals is important. Assembly members should not only come up with proposals but have enough time to deliberate on them.

Output

First, the scope of a DMP should be adequate, meaning that participants should have the chance to deeply deliberate on them and in that they are well targeted for policymakers to implement them. The CCA had 93 proposals in their end report, which is too much for deep deliberation of the assembly members and too much to put pressure on politicians to implement certain policies. The amount of 93 proposals allows policymakers to pick policies that benefit them the most rather than implementing what is necessary. In contrast, at the British Columbia Citizens Assembly on electoral reform in 2004, 160 assembly members deliberated for over 11 months on only one topic, namely the electoral system reform (Warren and Pearse 2008). In the context of environmental deliberation, there is a tendency to include as many topics as possible in one deliberation event. This trend can be found in the recent climate citizens' assemblies in Europe. The French climate citizens assembly had 149 draft laws as an output, the UK climate citizens assembly had 51 recommendations, the German climate citizens assembly had 84 recommendations, and the Austrian climate citizens assembly had 93 policy

proposals (Boswell, Dean, and Smith 2023, 187–88; Buzogány et al. 2022). Another example is the Europolis of 2009, a deliberative polling event in the European Union. Twenty-seven countries participated in the deliberative event on the issues of climate change and migration, concluding in a report of opinion changes that shows the percentages of participants supporting the green parties and their standpoint regarding climate change and migration rose significantly (Fishkin 2018, 112–26). Covering many topics in the environmental context has the advantage of addressing many of the areas that need to be addressed. However, a high number of topics and proposals limits the time for deliberation of the assembly members and hence decreases the deliberative quality.

Second, the mode of decision-making should be chosen according to academic literature, and best practices from other DMPs. Decisions should be made in a way that all assembly members can democratically influence the decision. The adaption of consensus that was used at the CCA did not have the quality of giving all assembly members a voice in the decision-making process.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have outlined the potential that deliberative democracy, specifically climate citizen assemblies, has to help overcome the democratic and climate crises. The use of DMPs in the context of climate policies has gained much scholarly and political attention in the last few years and is reported as a promising concept. I have outlined the modes of deliberation as well as deliberative qualities by prominent authors in the discipline of deliberative democracy and applied them to the Austrian Klimarat. The Klimarat was Austria's first national citizen's assembly and was reported as a success story. However, I have outlined significant deficits in representativeness, time, neutrality, and decision-making. For future DMPs, I propose that special attention should be paid to good framing, representativeness, and budget. Throughout the process, there should be enough time for learning and deliberation and the influence of scientists and facilitators should be kept to a minimum. Moreover, the scope of the topics deliberated on should be kept manageable, to allow good deliberation for assembly members and produce a well-targeted message for policymakers. Lastly, the decision-making process should be chosen according to democratic standards. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the limitations of my argument. I mainly apply the deliberative criteria of Fishkin (2018) and Smith (2009), and focus only on the Austrian Climate Citizens Assembly, not assessing other climate citizens assemblies in depth in my research.

A comparative study of deliberative democracy in climate citizens' assemblies might reveal more insights into the deliberative qualities of the recent climate citizens' assemblies. Moreover, as climate citizens assemblies are very different in design than successful cases like the British Columbia Citizens Assembly (Warren and Pearse 2008), an evaluation framework, specifically tailored to climate citizens assemblies would contribute to academia in assessing the quality of such events.

Moreover, what can be learned from the case of the Austrian Climate Citizens Assembly, is that there is a need for easy-to-understand and clear guidelines for facilitators to implement a DMP according to the standards of good deliberation. The literature on deliberative democracy is broad, including different formats and criteria for good deliberation. To improve the designs of DMPs, facilitators should be provided with straightforward guidelines for organizing a good climate citizens' assembly that meets the qualitative standards of deliberative democracy. Therefore, resources like the "Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies" (Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies n.d.) should be extended and promoted to facilitators.

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