

From Process to Outcomes: An exploratory study of the Irish Climate Assembly (ICA)

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

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Vienna, 10 March 2025

*Daragh Hamilton*_____

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the Irish Climate Assembly (ICA), a trailblazing deliberative process tasked with examining how Ireland could lead on climate action. The rare case study offers critical insights into the potential of (Climate) Citizens' Assemblies {(C)CAs} to bridge the prevailing gap between climate science and policy action in “laggard” countries.

Through the triangulation of multiple qualitative methods (interviews, observation, and documental analysis), the study firstly evaluates the ICA's “input legitimacy” – its representativeness, procedural rules, information stage and process-outcomes. It subsequently explores its “output legitimacy” – namely, the consideration and uptake of recommendations by the Parliamentary Committee on Climate Action (PCCA) and broader structural changes on policymaking.

This research focus on “input-output” interlinkages is unique within the empirical literature and reveals tension between deliberative ideals and the realities of policymaking in line with the “green dilemma”. Specifically, the findings reveal that many ICA recommendations were aligned with pre-existing policy preferences; that PCCA actors were aware of ICA design-issues which influenced their response to controversial proposals; and how key policy actors seek to instrumentalise (C)CAs for their own strategic objectives, despite the rhetoric of citizen empowerment.

In analysing legitimacy claims and illuminating the perceptions of key actors, this research proffers unique insights to enhance the design and institutionalisation of (C)CAs. Herein, it also contests the often-uncritical narrative surrounding the ICA and (Irish) CAs more generally. Nonetheless, it illustrates the potential of (C)CAs to serve as a catalyst for (climate) policymaking, while emphasising the need for transparent and independent evaluations of deliberative processes.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BCCA – British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly

CA – Citizens Assemblies

CAP – Climate Action Plan (referencing the Irish Government’s 2019 and 2021 plans)

CA – Citizens’ Assembly

CAUK– Climate Assembly UK

CCA - Climate Citizen’s Assembly – used to refer generically to “Climate Assemblies”

CCAC – (the Irish) Climate Change Advisory Council

CT - Carbon Taxation

CTAE – Carbon Taxation on Agricultural Emissions

DD – Deliberative Democracy

DMPs – Deliberative Mini-Publics

EAG – Expert Advisory Group(s)

ESRI – The Economic and Social Research Institute

EVs – Electric Vehicles

ICA – the Irish Climate Assembly (2017)

ICC – The Irish “Constitutional Convention” (2012)

PfG – Programme for Government

PCCA – The Parliamentary Committee on Climate Action - officially called the “Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action (32nd Dáil)

PM – Prime Minister (referred to as “Taoiseach” in the Irish language)

SES – Socio-economic status

SIM - Sequential Impact Matrix

WTC – “We the Citizens” (2011 pilot deliberative process held in Ireland)

1 INTRODUCTION

Democracy as it stands seems ill-equipped to cope with the “wicked problem par excellence” of climate change (Wohlgezogen et al. 2020, 1048) and its cascading policy consequences (Willis et al. 2022; Smith 2021). Put starkly, Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 213) propound that “the scarcity and environmental instability linked to climate change inevitably threatens the viability of liberal democracy itself by undermining the very conditions upon which it is based”. However, despite repeated clarion calls from scientists declaring an impending environmental catastrophe over the past half century (Knops and Vrydagh 2023) and a concurrent augmented awareness of climate breakdown, a notable “knowledge-action gap” remains between the climate science and policy action (Knutti 2019). This “disconnect” (Niemeyer 2013) between the demands posed by climate change (and environmental issues more generally) and the response of traditional representative democracies, in part, arguably stems from the inherent complexity of the scientific subject matter (Abbasi 2006; Shaw et al. 2021) combined with perverse incentives for policymakers – for instance, the immense uncertainty, the high costs¹ – associated with change and the clout of vested-interests within emitting sectors (Dryzek and Pickering 2018, 5) – all of which has thus far prohibited substantial climate action. Consequently, as Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 212-3) note, “far from being just another ‘crisis’ that needs to be solved, climate change is a direct threat to democracy”. Herein, it has become increasingly apparent that addressing such wicked problems as climate change will require “different forms of inquiry, communication, problem solving, and decision making than we often see in politics or public policy research” (Carcasson 2013, 39).

1.1 *DEFINING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY*

In response to these problems, deliberative democracy has been put forward by its proponents as “the best chance of finding effective and legitimate climate policies” (Lenzi 2019, 313). Moreover, Devaney et al. (2020, 1) propound that “(a)mid pressure for climate action worldwide, processes of deliberative democracy are being called upon to address public policy complexities, include citizens in decision-making, restore faith in public institutions and enhance governance processes”. More generally, Nielsen and Sørensen (2023) note how “(c)urrent proponents argue that CAs hold the potential for overcoming the current rise in political polarisation and the surge in authoritarian values (Warren 2013; Dryzek et al. 2019; Daly 2020)”. Not surprisingly, Vrydagh (2023, 1-2) notes how citizen assemblies (hereon CAs) – which are

¹ economic, social and political

understood as “a generic term for all participatory institutions which brings together an inclusive group of lay citizens who deliberate together on a public issue so as to exert a public influence” – have thus “become a popular institutional solution to address a series of symptoms of the democratic crisis” as part of what the OECD (2020) has described as “the deliberative wave”. Nevertheless, Vrydagh conversely cautions how such positive “assumptions” regarding the apparent promise of deliberative mechanisms (e.g. CAs) are being increasingly “challenged internally and in other social science fields”. However, before assessing the merits of “deliberative democracy” (hereon DD), it firstly must be defined within the context of this research. With respect to competing definitions (for example, see Elster, 1998; Fearon 1998; Fishkin 2011), this thesis utilises the following description from Gutmann and Thompson's (2004, 7) for the purpose of this prospectus:

“a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives), justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present on all citizens but open to challenge in the future” (Gutmann and Thompson 2004, 7).

The reasoning and justification for this particular definition is that, unlike others, the above arguably implies that deliberative processes are not isolated and idiosyncratic events but instead a “form of government” which seeks “binding” conclusions which are legitimate to “all citizens but open to challenge in the future”. Put simply, to aim for such conclusions suggests the need for a (closer) integration between deliberative processes and the formal political system. Consequently, a greater understanding of the interlinkages between DD (or, specifically, for the purpose of this research, CAs) and the traditional political system is arguably vital to assessing whether the “knowledge-action gap” between climate science and climate policy (Knutti 2019) can be overcome through this new form of public participation. Likewise, exploring the binding links (if any) between micro deliberative events and more embedded political processes is also necessary to illuminate how and to what extent the inclusion of “citizens in decision making” through DD (Devaney et al. 2020, 1) is actually achieved. Moreover, it can allow us to assess whether these decisions are indeed legitimate and “open to challenge” to all citizens and/or “their representatives”. Finally, with reference to a “form of government”, this DD definition arguably speaks to the “systematic turn” within deliberative scholarship (for example, see Lacelle-Webster and Warren 2023; Owen and Smith 2015; Mansbridge et al. 2012; Dryzek 2012) and the need to move beyond an empirical focus on discrete and disconnected deliberative experiments to a more integrated approach. Specifically, through this lens, it enables one to explore whether the noble ideals of DD – for instance, “*to justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible*” – can indeed be transmitted

and embedded more broadly within an increasingly partisan, polarised and populist political system. The importance of this integrated approach to DD is also shared by esteemed scholars within the field, with Rummens (2016, 131), for instance, noting how Habermas "has argued from the start that the deliberative ideal should be realised within the context of the traditional parliamentary system", with this argument illuminating "the importance of a systemic approach to deliberative democracy". Similarly, with reference to deliberative processes, Goodin and Drysek (2006, 220-1) note that "when it comes to the macro-political impact of micro-political innovations...generally they can have real political impact *only* by working on and through the broader public sphere, ordinary institutions of representative democracy, and administrative policy making (emphasis added)". Nevertheless, the same authors also propound that such deliberative events "rarely determine public policy", with Nielsen and Sørensen (2023, 129) bluntly noting that "critical assessments of the actual impact of CAs document that they are no panacea" (see e. g., Goodin and Drysek 2006; Edelenbos, van Meerkerk and Koppenjan 2017; Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2016). Hence, further theoretical and empirical scrutiny regarding the application of DD and CAs is clearly required.

1.2 MEANS VERSUS ENDS?

Indeed, despite the "rave reviews from both their participants and their academic observers" (Pilon 2009, 2) with respect to past deliberative initiatives and the bold claims from proponents (e.g. Devaney et al. 2020; Lenzi 2019; Chwalisz, 2020), there is still little concrete empirical evidence, particularly at the national level, to suggest that such processes actually lead to better or different (environmental) policy outcomes (e.g. Goodin and Drysek 2006; Elstub, 2009; Roberts et al. 2020). Over a decade ago, Bäckstrand et al. (2010, 18) concluded that "the environmental effectiveness of participatory innovations is assumed rather than validated". More recent assessments from Vrydagh (2023, 1; also see Geissel 2023; Courant 2021) also suggest that the "empirical examples of CA show its shortcomings in generating largescale political changes and addressing other societal issues such as...climate change". Hence, as Jacquet and van der Does (2021, 470) posit, this "raises a fundamental question: What kind of consequences can minipublics² have on the policy-making process?". Herein, according to Geissel (2023, 60) ", (a)cademia has neglected the connections between CAs and decision-making for too long".

From a theoretical viewpoint, Bäckstrand et al. (2010, 6; also see Wong 2016) note that "green political theory (is) increasingly dominated by questions of how to secure democratic

² "minipublics" will be used interchangeably with the term CAs for the purpose of this research

legitimacy and policy effectiveness” due to the “classic dilemma of democracy versus effectiveness, procedure versus outcome”. Specifically, according to Wong (2016, 136), “(t)he dilemma posits that there is no logical or unconditional relationship between democratic decisions and environmental sustainability”, with Goodin (1992, 168) aptly surmising that “to advocate democracy is to advocate procedures, to advocate environmentalism is to advocate substantive outcome: what guarantee can we have that the former procedures will yield the latter sorts of outcomes?”. However, Wong (2016, 152) contests that through the relaxation of certain theoretical conditions it is indeed possible to reframe this “‘means-ends’ problem in such a way that we can come up with possible solutions that are more than simply a hard choice between democratic agency and environmental values”. Nevertheless, Lövbrand and Khan (2010, 49) state that given the apparent weak link between “green deliberative theory” and the “practical reality in which environmental politics is played out”, there is a need for “a serious engagement with the practice of environmental governance...to determine the feasibility and desirability of the normative ideal itself”. This is especially the case given the “mushrooming implementation of CAs” in recent years (Geissel 2023, 59). Similarly at the empirical level, Bäckstrand et al. (2010, 218) argue that the legitimacy of CAs “cannot rely on procedural values such as participation and accountability alone”, but instead policy effectiveness must “play an equally central role...(in) assessing this new mode of governance”. Moreover, the need for critical research to shed light on these scholarly questions has arguably grown given the increased sense of urgency regarding climate change in recent years and the strong, yet often uncontested, claims of deliberative proponents³ (Carolan 2015; Courant 2021; Pilon 2009), especially considering that “despite ever growing scholarly attention paid to minipublics, the nature of their consequences on the policy-making process remains unclear” (Jacquet and van der Does 2021, 469).

1.3 *THE IRISH CLIMATE ASSEMBLY (ICA)*

Herein, the Irish case is of particular interest, not least given the country’s combined status as a “climate laggard” (e.g. CANE 2020) and deliberative democracy “trailblazer” (Farrell et al. 2019). Regarding the former laggard status, despite an augmented public sensitivity and awareness of climate change within Ireland in recent years prior to the Irish Climate Assembly (SFI 2015⁴; Sweeney 2020), the “knowledge-action gap” between science and policy action

³ For example, the European Commission have referenced the use of citizens assembly in the context of the EU Green New Deal

⁴ [SFI-Science-in-Ireland-Barometer.pdf](#)

(Knutti 2019) has largely remained. Consequently, before the ICA, Ireland has consistently ranked as one of the worst-performing countries in the EU, with the "Climate Change Performance Index" (2017, 5⁵) – the same year as the ICA – noting the country's "unchangingly poor policy ranking and growing emission levels". Similarly, the 2018 *Off Target* report by the "Climate Action Network Europe" (CANE 2018, 4) placed Ireland as "the second-worst performing EU member state in tackling climate change, both in terms of national action and support for greater ambition", while specifically referencing the influence of vested interest within high-emitting sectors and "their stiff opposition to climate action nationally and in the EU". However, despite this damning appraisal of Ireland's (lack of) climate action, the CANE (2018, 13) also positively highlighted the ICA deliberations on "*How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change*". Notably, the report stated that "this model of citizen-directed hearings with experts should also be promoted at international, regional and local levels". Moreover, the report cited how the ICA "made strong recommendations to the Irish Parliament...to greatly enhance climate ambition" and propounded that "the Irish Government need to implement the Citizens' Assembly proposals". As regards to Ireland's "deliberative trailblazer" status, the country has indeed become something of a "vanguard in relation to this innovative form of citizen engagement" (ICA 2018c, 98) after successive deliberative experiments⁶, with Courant (2021,4) importantly noting that "(t)he main difference between most minipublics worldwide, including other CAs, and the Irish cases is that the latter stand out in terms of policy output". Moreover, from a specific "Climate Citizen's Assembly (hereon **CCA**)" perspective, it is important to note that the ICA was the first national-level climate assembly in the world (Cherry et al. 2021), while Langkjær and Smith (2023, 5) add the important caveat that it is "(o)nly the Irish assembly process (which) has a clear role for parliament", thus adding to the importance and influence of this case.

Specifically, this "role for parliament" refers to the "Joint Oireachtas ⁷ (i.e. Parliamentary) Committee on Climate Action⁸ - which for comparative simplicity, will be here on be referred to as the "Parliamentary Committee on Climate Action" (**PCCA**) in this thesis⁹ – which was subsequently established "to consider the report and recommendations of the

⁵ [The Climate Change Performance Index - Results 2017 \(ccpi.org\)](https://climatepi.org/)

⁶ Starting with the We the Citizens (WTC 2011) pilot initiative, followed by the 2012–2014 Irish Constitutional Convention (www.constitution.ie) and the 2016–2018 Irish Citizens' Assembly and the most recent Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality 2020-2021.

⁷ [Role of the Oireachtas – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

⁸ [Committee on Climate Action – 33rd Dáil, 26th Seanad – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

⁹ The decision to describe the Oireachtas committee using the English language term "Parliamentary" committee has been made for ease of access for other international academics and practitioners given the prominence of the Irish case.

Citizens' Assembly (i.e., ICA)" and thus provided a rare¹⁰ direct link between the deliberative process and the traditional parliamentary system. Moreover, after months of deliberations and hearings from contributors, the PCCA produced its own cross-party report¹¹ outlining a consensus for climate action in Ireland. Importantly, as shall be later illuminated in detail, despite the report's name, it failed to achieve an overall cross-party political "consensus", with a leading opposition party¹² (along with other smaller parties¹³) ultimately opposing it – citing carbon taxes as their main objection¹⁴ – and subsequently issuing their own respective "minority reports". Nevertheless, the PCCA and its published report considered the output of the ICA and "in particular, how their recommendations might inform the further implementation of Ireland's National Mitigation Plan (NMP) and the development of the draft National Climate and Energy Plan (NECP) while taking the National Development Plan (NDP) into consideration". In addition, it has been subsequently claimed that a seminal piece of legislation which commits Ireland to net-zero emissions by 2050 — *the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021*¹⁵ — "has been informed by, and strongly reflects the recommendations as set out in the Report of the Citizens' Assembly (i.e., ICA) and the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Climate Action Report 2019 (i.e., PCCA)¹⁶". Hence, the ICA provides a rare opportunity idea to assess whether CAs and specifically CCAs do indeed have an impact on national-level climate policy.

However, additionally, the PCCA arguably has important research significance beyond its mere consideration of the ICA recommendations (set out in **Appendix A**). As previously alluded to, "deliberative minipublics are indeed presented by normative scholars as an ingredient for the profound transformation of the functioning of democracy" and "are commonly expected to foster public deliberation and participation in the entire political system" (Jacquet and van der Does 2021, 479; also see Devaney et al. 2020; Chwalisz, 2020). Consequently, Jacquet and van der Does (2021, 478) argue that "(f)uture empirical research should therefore analyse if and under what conditions minipublics transform the formal rules and informal

¹⁰ For example, in contrast to other "advisory" (climate) citizens' assemblies such as the UK Climate Assembly which required no formal response from the UK parliament.

¹¹ Climate Change: A Cross-Party Consensus for Action" (2018):

https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_climate_action/reports/2019/2019-03-28_report-climate-change-a-cross-party-consensus-for-action_en.pdf

¹² Sinn Féin

¹³ Solidarity-People Before Profit

¹⁴ Elaine Loughlin: Sinn Féin is all about change — except when it comes to climate ([irishexaminer.com](https://www.irishexaminer.com))

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/984d2-climate-action-and-low-carbon-development-amendment-bill-2020/>

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/22e97-government-approves-landmark-climate-bill-putting-ireland-on-the-path-to-net-zero-emissions-by-2050/>

practices of the policy-making process" within a given (policy) domain. Moreover, they warn that "to neglect this dimension would mean running the risk to disconnect the study of minipublics from the functioning of political systems". Hence, a closer examination of the PCCA – which called on over 40 witnesses (ranging from academics, civil servants, civil society, media, and international experts) to inform its own climate deliberations and ultimately agreed on a rare (partial¹⁴) cross-party consensus for climate action – can provide opportunities to assess the "systemisation of deliberation" (Farrell et al. 2018) or the so called "structural changes" to (climate) policy practices within the Irish political system. Indeed, there has arguably already been (perceptibly) an institutionalisation of CAs within the Irish environmental policy domain with the subsequent establishment of the world's first national-level CA on Biodiversity (2022), something which will be referred to throughout this present study to strengthen the feedback loop of inputs-outputs and interlinkages between (discrete) cases. In short, as Jacquet and van der Does (2021, 478) argue, addressing such structural consequences "is essential if one wants to grasp minipublics' contributions to contemporary governance".

1.4 RESEARCH AIMS

Given the prominence of the "Irish model" (Courant 2021), the world-leading first of the ICA and subsequent clarion call for further **(C)CA's**¹⁷ (Devaney et al. 2020; CANE 2018), It is important from an environmental perspective to ascertain if the ICA has indeed helped to overcome the "knowledge-action gap" (Knutti 2019) and kick-start climate action in a laggard country such as Ireland. Indeed, Averchenkova and Mara Ghilan (2023, 6) cross-country research project on the "*Attitudes of Climate Policy Actors towards Climate Assemblies*" revealed that most interviewees – specifically politicians, policy makers, (climate) advisors and deliberative organisers – "have reported learning about CAs as an instrument through the media, most often citing the example of the {ICA} as their first encounter with CAs". Moreover, from a democratic viewpoint, the Irish case may also provide invaluable insights into whether such CAs can "restore faith in public institutions and enhance governance processes" (Devaney et al. 2020, 1), as claimed by proponents of deliberative democracy more general (Dryzek et al. 2019; Daly 2020). Hence, the stated aim of this doctoral research will be to illuminate the interlinkages between the ICA and the PCCA to ascertain whether and to what extent the ICA induced "effective and legitimate climate policy" (Lenzi 2019, 313). More broadly, it will seek to qualitatively assess the degree of systematic influence of the ICA on the Irish parliamentary process with the given (climate and environmental policy) domain, something which Jacquet

¹⁷ Note that the abbreviation (C)CA is used to denote CCAs as a subset of CAs.

and van der Does (2021, 474) note is “more indirect and long-term”. With these aims, this doctoral thesis will follow in the footsteps of Bäckstrand et al. (2010, 19) by critically scrutinising “the theoretical promise of new modes of environmental governance by linking it to policy practice” at the national level. In short, it is hoped that this doctoral research will further our collective understanding of whether these new forms of deliberative governance and (C)CAs really are “win-win mechanisms that can strengthen both input and output legitimacy” (Bäckstrand et al. 2010, 218).

Consequently, to achieve this aim, both the input and output legitimacy of the ICA will need to be assessed. Regarding deliberative inputs, Kronsell and Bäckstrand (2010, 39) propound that “(t)he participatory quality of the decision-making process is a central element of input legitimacy” and specifically whether “policies and norms (have been) developed in a transparent, fair, inclusive, and accountable manner”. For instance, it is important to understand how the agenda-setting processes or the selection of speakers may have framed the ICA’s recommendations and if these conclusions were “*open to challenge*” or revision by the PCCA (Gutmann and Thompson 2004, 7). As for “output legitimacy”, Kronsell and Bäckstrand (2010, 39) purport that this “is associated with a consequential logic”, and therefore, the objective of this thesis is to specifically focus on the (environmental) policy consequences of the ICA (i.e. not concrete policy implementation). Herein, Demski and Capstick (2022, 2) importantly note that “there are limits to any attempt to disentangle the threads of cause and effect from the many other influences on climate action...(and) this is particularly the case for the detection of longer-term and wider-ranging impacts, as compared to more immediate and discrete outcomes”. Thus, the focus of this research involves the latter more immediate and discrete policy outcomes. Hence, in line with the stated research problem, this research will utilise Jacquet and van der Does’s (2021, 471) three primary policy-making consequences: *policy congruence*; *policy consideration*; and *the degree of structural change within the policy domain* (also see Table 5). Herein, policy consideration pertains to whether and how such recommendations are considered within the broader public sphere and within “empowered institutions”; congruence refers to how effectively a deliberative process such as the ICA had their recommendations subsequently translated into discernible policies, while the latter structural changes relate to “a change in policy practices”, what could be described as the degree of systemisation within the broader (policy) domain. Moreover, Vrydagh and Caluwaerts (2023) “Sequential Impact Matrix” (SIM) will also be applied to distinguish between the type of *influence* and the extent of the ICA’s policy *influence* (i.e. via its specific recommendations). Herein, this researcher intends to “process trace” (Pickering 2022) from the ICA deliberative process to (any) discernible policy outcomes

within the PCCA¹⁸ in order to obtain “clearer picture about whether minipublics matter for policy-making” (Jacquet and van der Does 2021, 480).

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION AND OBJECTIVES

The research question posed for this present research is:

How can the ICA’s input legitimacy (i.e., deliberative process), output legitimacy (i.e., policy consequences) and their interlinkages be appraised in consideration of the normative ideal of deliberative democracy?”

Consequently, the objectives of the present research relating to inputs, outputs and their interlinkages – in addition to the overall aims of this thesis – are outlined below:

Input Legitimacy Objectives:

- Evaluate the ICA design (i.e., input legitimacy) and subsequent process in accordance with leading theoretical and empirical insights.
- Develop a suitable theoretical framework specific to the particularities of a CCA – with regard to other relevant evaluation frameworks – to guide the analysis of the ICA's input legitimacy.
- Explore the perceptions of ICA participants and other key actors (e.g., Secretariat, expert contributors, and advisors) regarding the process and its outputs.

Output Legitimacy Objectives:

- Assess the uptake and influence of ICA recommendations on the within the Irish policy domain (specifically the PCCA, but more broadly national policy & political decisions where possible).
- Explore the consideration of ICA recommendations by PCCA actors (i.e., elected representatives, advisors and stakeholders).
- Analyse any discernible “structural changes” (i.e., change in policy practices) within the given environmental policy domain.

Interlinkage Objectives:

- Contextualise the Irish deliberative model. Identify and (briefly) compare the ICA with other Irish CAs (e.g. the 2022 Irish CA on Biodiversity) to assess potential feedback loops or path dependencies between CAs.
- Explore how the ICA design (i.e., input legitimacy) affected relevant PCCA actor's (i.e., elected representatives, advisors, stakeholders) perceptions and responses to ICA recommendations (i.e., output legitimacy).
- Illuminate relevant actors (elected representatives; advisors; stakeholders; expert; and organisers) perceptions and motivations regarding the utility of (C)CA processes.

¹⁸ and, to a lesser extent, associated outcomes within the parliamentary system and policy domain.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

Despite DD cementing its place as “the darling of political theory” (Garside 2013, 140) after “a strong deliberative turn” (Löfbrand and Khan 2010, 47) in recent decades, “the jury is still out” with regards to both the deliberative ideal and the specific ICA case (Devaney et al. 2020, 21). Regarding the former, this thesis will seek to address but ultimately attempt to move beyond the first- and second-generation approaches to CAs or minipublics¹⁹ towards a third-generation approach, as outlined by Curato et al. (2020²⁰, 7). Specifically, the aforementioned authors – drawing on the work of Lafont – note how the “third generation breaks with the ‘minipublic approach’ of its predecessors and invites a conversation on whether minipublics per se are necessary for a well-functioning democratic system”. In short, they should not automatically be assumed as positive or benign contributors to democracy (Elstub and Khoban 2023), as many (often well-meaning) proponents have implied to date (as noted by Carolan {2015}, Courant {2021} and others. Regarding the specific topic of climate change and the ICA case, Ireland is also of particular interest given its comparative poor climate ranking (prior to the ICA), and thus serves as an ideal case to explore whether other (small countries or states which are) “climate laggards” can kick-start ambitious climate action through the utilisation of such deliberative processes. Moreover, the ICA was undoubtedly a break-through international case, with Averchenkova and Ghilan (2023, 6) study across 15 EU states noting that the Irish case was “the most often cited” example among climate policy actors regarding their first encounter with the (C)CA concept. However, Devaney et al. (2020,1) propound that “(t)he true test of whether (the ICA) has successfully contributed to strengthening Ireland’s response to climate change will be seen in the uptake and implementation of the...recommendations in policy”. As for its broader democratic relevance beyond the Irish case, Jacquet and van der Does (2021, 482) state that “research focusing on how minipublics may be linked to policy-making will be informative for the increasingly popular systemic approach in political theory that seeks to formulate how microsites of deliberation can and should be coupled to the wider political system”. Moreover, this thesis will potentially “aid those that seek to promote citizen involvement through inclusive and deliberative consultations to understand what effects such exercises can have on real-life policy-making” (Ibid).

¹⁹ According to Curato et al. (2020, 3) “**first generation** of minipublics is focused on achieving high quality deliberation by eliminating communicative distortions in the public sphere” while “proponents of the first generation of minipublics aspire for these forums to be incorporated in mainstream policy making, though how to standardise the design and implementation of these forums on a large scale remains an open question”. Moreover, “**second generation** thinking still upholds the idea that minipublics quasi-automatically strengthen democracy, and the main focus is thus on amending potential deficits of equality, emancipation, or consequentiality” (Curato et al. 2020, 4).

Critical research is therefore evidently required to appraise the effectiveness of (C)CAs considering the lofty normative ideal of DD. Herein, this research will help to illuminate the influential but thus far under-researched roles and perceptions of elected representatives (Niessen 2023), organisers (Bottin and Mazeaud 2023) and experts (Roberts et al. 2020) throughout the deliberative cycle: “*From Process to Outcomes*”. Moreover, regarding evaluations, Carolan (2015; also see Courant 2021) states that “much of academic commentary” of such Irish deliberative processes “comes from those who initially advocated or were involved in its operations”. Consequently, such evaluations may not always reflect the true reality of (C)CAs or their perceived output “success” (Courant 2021). More generally, the OECD (2021, 12) has noted that “only seven per cent (of deliberative processes) have had an independent evaluation”. In contrast, this research(er) will take an “external point of view” which differs from the vast majority of commentary on Irish deliberative cases which come from “authors directly involved in the organisation and promotion of several of the Irish CAs” (Courant 2021, 2-3). Hence, this will arguably allow for a truly independent and critical appraisal of the ICA with respect to the deliberative ideal. However, the intention herein is not to dismantle or dismiss the ideal, as Drysek (2007, 250) wisely states that “(d)eliberative democracy is not a hypothesis that can be falsified, but...a project, to which theorists, researchers, citizens, and activists alike can contribute”. On the contrary, the research stance is one of a “critical friend” who intends to constructively appraise the merits of the ICA (and CAs within the Irish case study more generally) based on the best theoretical knowledge and empirical evidence in order to improve the input and output legitimacy of future assemblies not only in Ireland but also abroad. Indeed, Rountree and Curato (2023, 75) have propounded that “inviting scrutiny to the process and outcomes of mini-publics build their legitimacy through deliberative accountability”. Hence, this proposed doctoral research will serve as an important contribution to “the future of deliberative democracy...(which) depends on whether its proponents can create and maintain practices and institutions that enable deliberation to work well” (Gutmann and Thompson 2009, 59).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CLIMATE CHANGE – THE PERFECT PROBLEM

Modern societies have arguably become ever more reliant on specialist knowledge to solve the so-called “wicked problems” of our age. Herein, Wohlgezogen et al. (2020, 1048)¹ note how “climate change has been referred to as a ‘wicked problem par excellence’ because it constitutes a series of linked problems that cannot be solved (or even diagnosed) in isolation” (also see Termeer et al. 2013, 282). As Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 212) note, “far from being just another “crisis” that needs to be solved, climate change is part of a fundamental ecological and socio-political mutation (Charbonnier 2020; Chakrabarty 2014; 2018) which requires thinking about the place of humans in relation to nonhumans, and thinking of the relation between our economic development and the earth (Dryzek and Pickering 2018, 5) to ensure that humanity can operate within planetary boundaries (Jackson 2009; Rockström et al. 2009)”. Nevertheless, despite the advances within climate science, the incessant warnings from the scientific community (e.g. the IPCC) and the concurrent increase in public awareness during the last three decades (e.g. SFI 2015), concerted climate action at the (inter-)national-policy level has not kept pace (Hornsey and Fielding 2020; Abbasi 2006; Knutti 2019). For instance, Willis et al. (2021, 2) propound that “although all major democracies are signed up to the Paris Agreement, none yet has a national climate plan compatible with this goal”. Hence, it raises the question of why the so-called “knowledge-action gap” (Knutti 2019; Whitmarsh et al. 2011) between climate science and climate policy remains apparent.

Firstly, according to Abbasi (2006, 17), “the problem of climate change is almost perfectly designed to test the limits of any modern society's capacity for response” due to the “uniquely daunting confluence of forces” which pertain to both inherent epistemological structure of scientific knowledge and the range of psychological and socio-political factors which impede action. From the scientific perspective, the given nature of the complex content lends itself to difficulties in translating climate science into climate policy (Whitmarsh et al. 2011; Knutti 2019). This initial difficulty is compounded through the communication and framing of specialist scientific content – most of which has been (historically) intended for other experts in the field – in a manner which is often inaccessible to non-scientific decision-makers and the public alike (Hornsey and Fielding 2020; Abbasi 2006). For instance, Abbasi (2006, 108) notes that scientists and their papers “emphasise puzzles, uncertainties, caveats and details that the public cannot absorb” rather than focusing on “core points”. Moreover, Hornsey and Fielding (2020, 12-13) note how under the traditional “deficit model” of climate communication, the

rejection of climate science is perceived to be due to either insufficient exposure to evidence or difficulty comprehending it; hence, the reflex response is to continuously reiterate the scientific findings as widely as possible in the hope that more of the same will lead to different outcomes. However, the authors note that three decades in, "persisting with a single-frame pitch risks becoming stale" (Hornsey and Fielding 2020, 19). This is further complicated by the remote nature of the problem focus (i.e., climate change), which, if left unanchored, is often unrelatable to laypeople (Whitmarsh et al. 2011). Finally, the undoubted time lag between cause and effect pertaining to climate predictions merely lends itself to further abstraction and uncertainty (Abbasi 2006). In short, Shaw et al. (2021, 5) aptly surmise how "certain elements of the communication of climate change, from the complexity of its physical dimensions, feedback loops, and interactions of different systems, to distant time horizons and scientific uncertainty, can make climate change difficult for lay audiences to relate to". Not surprisingly then, repeated surveys have pointed to this apparent disconnect between scientists, policymakers, and lay people. For instance, while the Science in Ireland Barometer (SFI 2015²¹) found that although 64% of Irish citizens predict that science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) will have a positive impact on the fight against climate change, between 69% and 71% of citizens surveyed stated that STEM is too specialised for them to understand, that there is too much uncertainty to know what to believe, and importantly, that scientists should listen more to what ordinary people think (SFI 2015). Likewise, another recent survey illuminated that while 88% of Irish adults believe in climate change, nearly half (49%) of those surveyed found information on climate action confusing and unclear (SFI 2019)³, with these findings echoing the findings of similar surveys conducted in other countries (e.g., Funk 2017).

Secondly, the inherent structure of "scientific knowledge" is further compounded by "a myriad of factors {that} have been attributed to the governance of unsustainability in contemporary democratic systems" (Knops and Vrydagh 2023). In short, reaching international obligations on CO₂ emissions arguably requires a circuit break from the current "institutional path dependency" (Mahoney 2000). More specifically, it requires immense structural change and unprecedented political decisions to be made (arguably more impactful, long-lasting, and far-reaching than the response to Covid-19, for example), which would seek to alter ingrained systems and behaviours at both the micro and macro level. Moreover, as noted in the Irish case (CANE 2018), many of the highest emitting sectors which require significant restructuring (e.g., agriculture, energy, transport) contain well-funded and politically influential vested interests that

²¹ The most recent Barometer data before the ICA

are highly resistant to change (Lamb et al. 2020; Dunlap and McCright 2015). Furthermore, Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 216; also see Smith, 2021) note how "the grounding of liberal democracy in capitalist and neoliberal ideologies" has also contributed to this path dependency approach of "locking-in politics in a short-term bias". For example, Wagner and Auranitia (2018, 888) analysis of Ireland's Climate Law of 2015 offered "empirical results to support Flynn's (2003) description of the Irish environmental policy domain: domestic NGOs are weak, powerful economic actors and government departments dominate the policy process, decisions are largely determined by the Cabinet, and economic issues are prioritised over ecological concerns". These barriers to change are further amplified within the political system by the fact that while the high (economic, social, and political) costs of change would be immediate, political credit could not be easily claimed as (m)any benefits would arguably be distant and disparate over both time and place. In addition, even if decision-makers agree with the need to change, there is seemingly no "silver bullet" solution nor any clear consensus regarding climate mitigation and adaption strategies (Avi-Yonah and Uhlmann 2009; Abbasi 2006). Such factors, although not an exhaustive list, obviously obfuscate the motivation of decision-makers, who may be "hard-wired" with other incentives and preoccupied with the concerns of a myopic, reactionary, and competitive political system (MacKenzie 2021; Smith 2021). As Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 220) propound, "it seems that even in contexts where scientific expertise is widely shared, recognised, and inputted into the democratic system in the form of reports and recommendations, political institutions tend to ignore or downplay the implications of these scientific recommendations". In sum, given this "democratic myopia" mindset which "prioritises short-term over long-term decision-making" (Lacelle-Webster and Warren 2023, 104), there are seemingly always other immediate matters at hand as the political system lurches from crisis to crisis, in the (apparent) age of the "polycrisis" (WEF Global Risks Report 2023); thus, climate change rarely persists on the political or public agenda²² despite the continued calls of concern from scientists and activists alike.

Not surprisingly, then, academics, civil society and climate movements have been propagating the merits of DD to overcome these stated and persistent challenges (Devaney et al. 2020). For example, Lacelle-Webster and Warren (2023, 104) propound that "CAs can contribute by increasing collective decision-making capacities and providing citizen-based leadership against political deadlock, thus giving legislatures cover for taking on difficult issues,

²² For example, climate change regularly ranks between 3-7% in the Irish Times/Ipsos B&A poll monthly "Key Themes" snapshot survey from July 2023 to June 2024: [Housing overtakes immigration as the top issue getting voters' attention – The Irish Times](#)

even against well-organised interest groups and veto players". Moreover, Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 217) note that given CA participants "are not subject to electoral pressure, they can be expected to favour long-term perspectives, and adopt more difficult – unpopular – decisions". Additionally, the authors posit that deliberative forums provide lay citizens with the time and space to comprehend the (long-term) complexities of climate science and policy (Smith 2021). Furthermore, Kulha et al. (2021, 36) suggest that the deliberative practice in itself (i.e. the mutual and reasoned consideration of evidence and experiences) can also mitigate against the myopic approach prevalent within many representative democracies. In contrast, they posit that it may instead induce a shift towards a more inclusive and environmentally conscious approach to policymaking. Nevertheless, despite this potential for a longer-term approach response to climate change through citizen engagement, Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 217) warn that given (C)CA proposals are merely advisory, representative institutions (with their aforementioned flaws and biases) which receive "citizens" proposals ultimately retain the "locus of power". Thus, the authors conclude that "it remains to be seen whether future-oriented policy proposals will actually materialise" from CCAs. Hence, there is a clear need for research to explore how (C)CA outputs are integrated within traditional democratic systems.

2.2 *THE DELIBERATIVE TURN*

Democratic theory has taken "a strong deliberative turn" (Löfbrand and Khan 2010, 47) in recent decades, with DD thus cementing its place as "the darling of political theory" (Garside 2013, 140). Herein, Vrydagh (2023, 5) propounds that "the theory of deliberative democracy is essential to understand the more recent creation, development, and functions of CAs". The concept of "deliberative democracy" itself has already been defined for the purpose of this research (see **Section 1.2**); nonetheless, Bächtiger et al.'s (2018, 2) definition of deliberation as "mutual communication that involves weighing and reflecting on preferences, values and interests regarding matters of common concern" is informative for understanding the emergence of the normative ideal. According to Vrydagh (2023, 5), "this communicative action lies at the roots of the broader theoretical paradigm of deliberative democracy". Regarding the origins of this "turn", Floridia (2018) illuminates five distinct stages between 1980 and 1993, which saw the contemporary formation of the theoretical field. However, despite this recent and somewhat contested evolution of the democratic theory (Ibid), deliberative scholars and practitioners alike have continued to draw upon a diverse range of philosophical sources, "from Aristotle, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, John Dewey and American Pragmatism" (Chambers 2018) to the more recent works of John Rawls and Jürgen

Habermas who arguably fused the various philosophical foundations of the deliberative theory in the early nineties (Florida 2018; Cohen 1987; Manin 1988). More recently, Vrydagh (2023, 5) notes how deliberative theory has also been shaped by a dialogue between other diverse disciplines, from social theory (Elster 1986) and political science (Dryzek 1994; Fishkin 1991; Mansbridge 1983) to theoretical scholarship on constitutions and law (Bessette 1980; Sunstein 1985).

Overall, the driving force behind this deliberative shift arguably stemmed from “a renewed concern with the authenticity of democracy: the degree to which democratic control is substantive rather than symbolic and engaged by competent citizens” (Dryzek 2000, 1). From this viewpoint, the value of democracy lay “less in the counting of votes or the aggregating of preferences than in the ability of reasonable citizens to explain themselves to each other and to engage in mutually responsive discussion about the key political, economic, and moral concerns that exercise them” (Stears 2007, 95). Moreover, Abelson et al. (2003, 239) note that the “emphasis on participation methods is also a response to the prevailing view that methods used in the past”, primarily this aggregation of preferences through voting (Stears 2007), “are no longer appropriate for current decision-making processes or for a more educated, sophisticated and less deferential public”. For instance, Dalton (2007) notes how the generational shift from “duty-based” to “engaged citizenship” has generated a greater demand for political participation. In short, Chambers (2003, 308) has described the shift from a “vote-centric” to a “talk-centric” perspective of democratic engagement. Consequently, there has been increasing calls from within academia, civil society, and social movements to enhance the “two-way interaction between decision makers and the public as well as deliberation among participants” (Abelson et al. 2003, 240). This movement towards innovative models of public participation has been particularly pronounced within the environmental field, with growing demands for more “interactive governance” (Forsberg, 2020), in addition to specific calls for (C)CAs from within academia, civil society (e.g., KNOCA) and grassroots environmental movements (e.g., Extinction Rebellion²³). This “deliberative wave” (OECD 2021) has more recently even extended to multi-lateral institutions, for example, the EU’s REAL_DEAL project²⁴ which aims at “promoting citizen participation in the European Green Deal”. This clamour for DD and (C)CAs is undoubtedly helped by what French (in Carolan 2015, 735) describes as a “celebratory, at times euphoric, tone” in evaluations of prior deliberative experiments. Nonetheless, Carolan (2015, 735) propounds that “(t)his instinct towards the celebration of

²³ [Citizens' Assembly - Extinction Rebellion UK](#)

²⁴ [REAL DEAL: Promoting Citizen Participation In The European Green Deal - European Movement](#)

ordinary citizens should not, however, obviate the necessity for rigorous analysis of not only the strengths of such fora but also of their potential weaknesses". Likewise, Smith (2009) warns that it is often too easy to get swept along with the rhetoric of change without asking the hard questions of institutional design, something which perhaps may be in part obstructed by the low level of independent evaluations (OECD 2021) and the "involved positions" (Courant 2021, 3) of academics within given (C)CA processes, some of whom may serve multiple roles as deliberative proponents, expert contributors and/or advisors²⁵.

However, despite the positive evaluations and expectations of DD as noted by Devaney (et al. 2020, 1) and others, there appears to be little empirical evidence to suggest that such deliberative experiments can induce the changes required to reach the individual nationally determined contributions (NDCs) as set out in the Paris Agreement (Buranyi 2020). Specifically, scholars note the importance of the link between the "input (procedural) and output (problem-solving capacity) dimension" (Konsell and Bäckstrand's 2010, 38; Goodin 1992; Courant 2021), or to put it more succinctly, the (seemingly weak) link between citizens deliberations and decision-making (Bouyé 2020). As Carolan (2015, 735) posits, "involving the people (or, more accurately, some people) in the process provides no guarantee that those people will - or indeed should - be listened to". Hence, in light of the "deliberative turn" – from the initial normative debates of the ideal to the concrete empirical focus on discrete cases to the recent systematic turn which attempts to illuminate the deliberative characteristics of given polities (Owen and Smith 2015, 213-14) – scholars such as Niemeyer and Jennstäl (2018) have argued "it is crucial to take stock of theory, evidence, and the grand claims made by both deliberative scholars and practitioners" in order to effectively evaluate "what deliberation is (process), what it does (outcomes), how these two inter-relate, and how deliberation is achieved (design)". Specifically, with regard to the systematic turn in deliberative literature, Nielsen and Sørensen (2023, 130) note how it has expanded "the scope of how {CA} formats are evaluated: from the direct and measurable effects of individual experiments to the broader functional effects that putting different...formats in the toolbox of decision-makers and institutions has on the democratic systems". This is of particular importance to the future of DD given the "institutional and political objections raised by elite commentators against...citizens' assembly proposals...(which) reflect the challenge of realising inclusive, deliberative governance in highly

²⁵ Additionally, they may subsequently receive funding to conduct evaluations of a deliberative process while also submitting their own academic publications on the same topic thereafter. Finally, academics may also play a key role as "information" gatekeepers who may frame or frustrate other "external" research, for example, by holding a monopoly over certain primary data or through mediating access to research participants (e.g., assembly members).

politicised contexts” (Boswell et al. 2013, 164). Herein, Nielsen and Sørensen (2023, 131) importantly add that the systematic perspective enables researchers to “broaden their questions from the (in)ability of citizens to affect the decisions of political leaders and system; they may also evaluate what the CA does (or fails to do) to help elected political leaders lead (Sørensen 2020)”, something which this present thesis will explore. Moreover, the authors note how this systemic approach “opens the door to a productive form of evaluation that is less concerned with proving or disproving the immediate effects of {CA} innovations (Curato et al. 2017) and more concerned with how and under what conditions new {CA} formats can best provide the functional enhancements to the democratic system that they promise (Mansbridge et al. 2012)”.

2.3 *DELIBERATION WITHIN THE IRISH CONTEXT*



Figure 1: Timeline of Deliberative Processes in Ireland Leading to the ICA

Herein, the uniqueness of the Irish case or perhaps "Irish model" is of interest, as Courant (2021, 17) suggests that the country "shows a progressive, yet incomplete, institutionalisation of deliberative mini-publics in the ordinary political life". Similarly, Farrell et al. (2019, 113) find "a degree of 'systemisation' of deliberation" in Ireland. Indeed, in recent years, Ireland has been at the heart of the "deliberative turn" in both theory and practice due to successive and (perceivably) successful deliberative experiments (Courant 2021; Holohan 2014; Renwick, 2015, 2017; Suteu, 2015; Flinders et al., 2016; Van Reybrouck, 2016). It has been claimed that these deliberative experiments “reinvigorated the political landscape after the political disasters that the global financial crisis unleashed on Ireland” (Dryzek et al. 2019, 1145), but prominent scholars have also cited the use of CAs in Ireland as a catalyst for improving political representation (Courant 2021) and shaping climate policy more broadly (Torney, forthcoming). Moreover, the Irish case, more generally, is particularly unique in terms of discernible policy outputs (Courant 2021). Consequently, the country has been described as "the most innovative democracy in Europe" (Van Reybrouck) with regards to CAs; however, some

scholars have questioned the very basis of this perceived “success” (Carolan 2015) and others whether a replicable ‘Irish model’ actually exists (Courant 2021, 2). Hence, to determine its true merit, Courant (2021,2) posits that “(a)n empirical analysis of the Irish case is necessary to understand what made this deliberative process possible in the first place, in terms of international, structural, contextual, and local factors”. Herein, the perceived starting point of Ireland’s successive waves of deliberative fora arguably stems from the 2008 financial crash and the profound economic, political, and social crisis which followed (O’Leary 2019). In response to the “seething anger” (Byrne 2010) emanating from the economic crisis and subsequent erosion of democratic sovereignty imposed by the Troika as part of the MoU²⁶, a small group of Irish academics espoused the virtues of deliberation to restore democratic legitimacy (Byrne 2011; O’Leary, 2019). However, Courant (2021, 5; also see Farrell, 2010a) also notes the importance of Professor Kenneth Benoit’s contributions to the Oireachtas (i.e., parliamentary) Joint Committee on the Constitution held in late 2009, wherein he specifically referenced the idea of CAs. Consequently, political parties, such as the Labour Party and Fine Gael, “started incorporating his suggestion in their promises...the month following Benoit’s presentation”. Both these events seemingly served as the catalyst for manifesto pledges to ensure “citizen-led constitutional reform” in the subsequent 2011 Irish general election.

However, if the crisis created the “window of opportunity” (Kingdon 1995) for democratic reform and the space for deliberative innovations to slide through in Ireland, it is important to note the prior influence of diffusion from international and domestic deliberative experiments alike. For example, with regards to the former, one of the key proponents of deliberative democracy within the Irish context, prominent academic Prof. David Farrell, was previously invited to the Canadian and Dutch CAs (as an expert contributor on electoral systems) wherein he had a first-hand insight into early deliberative experiments (Courant 2021). More generally, Courant (2021, 3) posits that rather than being unique, the Irish deliberative cases were just the “latest chapter of a long trend involving deliberative mini-publics and a product of international transfers”. Nonetheless, contemporary scholars have largely overlooked the possible influence of (albeit sporadic) systemisation relating to prior domestic deliberative initiatives. For example, in their Democracy Commission (2005) report²⁷, the Irish think tank TASC “called for deliberative and participatory approaches to governance”, with specific reference to “deliberative panels”. Furthermore, Teague and Donaghey (2009, 66) argue that the Irish model of social partnership, which ran from 1987 to 2008, was “guided by the

²⁶ memorandum of understanding

²⁷ [TASC Publications | TASC - Think-tank for Action on Social Change](#)

principles of deliberative democracy”. Specifically, Teague (2006, 421) propounds that the Irish social partnership model, which included a broad range of stakeholders, was “considered distinctive as it (was) based on the principles of deliberative democracy more than adversarial bargaining”. Nonetheless, Teague and Donaghey (2009, 51) note that such innovations should not be “over-estimated” as despite social partnership leading to “new public policy experiments...these have not led to the principles of deliberative democracy being embedded in the country to any significant extent”. However, perhaps this pronouncement was somewhat premature given the past decade of successive deliberative experiments. Interestingly, institutional support in both the case of social partnership and the national-level CAs was provided for by civil servants within the Department of Taoiseach (i.e., the Irish Prime Ministerial Office). In short, this could suggest a degree of relevant institutional learning and prior systemisation within the domestic Irish context.

Regardless of the process of deliberative pollination, the We the Citizens (WTC 2011) citizens (sponsored by Atlantic Philanthropies) represented the first clear deliberative “pilot project” and seemingly proved that this new form of democracy, despite its flaws, could conceivably work within the Irish context. For instance, O'Malley et al. (2019, 31) argue that the WTC, although a pilot and having no legislative standing, “had direct policy implications in public debates over constitutional reform: the 2012–2014 Irish Constitutional Convention (www.constitution.ie) and the 2016–2018 Irish Citizens' Assembly (www.citizensassembly.ie) followed closely the design of the 2011 experiment, both in terms of how they operated as deliberative mini-publics and in the key personnel involved”. Moreover, the authors note how these successive Irish fora also “fed into international debates over how to involve citizens in processes of constitutional design in other countries”. Importantly, Courant (2021, 6) notes that the subsequent WTC (2011) report was “used in lobbying various politicians, civil servants, and civil society representatives” and consequently the political scientists and “key personnel involved” (O' Malley et al. 2019) who led the WTC were subsequently placed on the Academic and Legal Research Group for the Irish Convention on the Constitution (hereon **ICC**). As O'Malley et al. (2019) attest, the WTC model therein became a template for the subsequent ICC (2012-2014) established in December 2012 to propose amendments to the Bunreacht na hÉireann (i.e., the Irish Constitution) and the following Irish CA series from 2016-2018, which notably included the ICA. Herein, Courant (2021, 6) argues that the Irish case follows a discernible international pattern wherein “institutional support is often the product of organised democratic activists with high social and symbolic capital often among...political scientists who push the proposal, which is sometimes later accepted by a newly elected government”. Hence,

despite the narrative of a democratic revolution (stemming in part from prominent deliberative proponents²⁸) it seems from the very outset, the Irish deliberative experiments were elite-driven processes with "political scientists" at their fore²⁹.

Regarding the foundation of the ICA, the perceived success of the prior ICC – despite its sporadic agenda and selective outputs with only two of 18 recommendations leading to a promised constitutional referendum (Carolan 2015; Courant 2021] – led to a commitment within the 2016 Programme for Government (hereon **PfG**) for "the establishment of a {CA}, within six months and without participation by politicians, with a mandate to look at a limited number of key issues over an extended time period" (CA 2016). Subsequently, in July 2016, a resolution was moved in the Irish Parliament to form the Irish CA series (2016-2018), which mandated the consideration of five topics, including climate change. As for the origins of this climate topic amongst this eclectic mix, Farrell et al. (2019, 114) allude to the "intense international pressure" that the then-Irish Government was under "to take more radical action on climate change: the country is seen as a laggard in the steps taken to meet inter-national targets". However, it must be noted that the Government (consisting of a coalition between Fine Gael and the Independent Alliance) did not include the topic of climate change within their establishing legislation; instead, a Green Party amendment on "*How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change*"³⁰ was subsequently accepted during the parliamentary debate on enacting the Irish CA series. This is important for contextualising the organisation and design of the ICA (as part of the broader CA series 2016 – 2018), as Torney (2021, 387) propounds that "climate change was added to the agenda of an assembly focused primarily on the topic of abortion, almost as an after-thought". Hence, although a comparison between the specific ICA and the CA on abortion is beyond the remit of this research, it is important to be cognizant of the fact that ICA organisational, design and process issues *may* have been (to a greater or lesser extent) influenced by this overarching emphasis on the abortion topic. For example, with regards to "output legitimacy" – a key focus of the chosen research aim, question and objectives – Torney (2021, 385) notes how "(d)espite not being required, in the case of the climate change topic a similar model to that required for follow-up on the abortion topic was adopted, and a

²⁸ For example, see: [#IUACHangeMakers Citizens Assembly, University College Dublin - YouTube](#)

²⁹ Perhaps one illustrative example of "academic-centric" CA processes relates to the interesting choice of setting for deliberative forums, with Farrell (in Courant 2021, 5) noting "(w)e were booking conference rooms in hotels" in advance of the WTC. This choice of four-star hotel conference rooms, perhaps familiar spaces for travelling academics, was arguably an interesting choice considering the goal to "set the agenda in a bottom-up dynamic way to foster input legitimacy, in other words, to listen to what 'ordinary people' wished for the future of Ireland". Indeed, this trend of locating CAs in conference rooms continued with the ICC and the ICA, and one wonders if such venues created the necessary institutional comfort for 'ordinary people'.

³⁰ [Citizens' Assembly: Motion – Dáil Éireann \(32nd Dáil\) – Wednesday, 13 Jul 2016 – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

special parliamentary committee was established to consider the recommendations”.

Overall, the Irish CA (2016 – 2018) series, including the specific ICA case, consisted of the Chairperson, the Honorable Mary Laffoy, a five-person Expert Advisory Group (EAG) and 99 citizen members' (plus replacements) who were chosen with the aim of providing a representative cross-sample of Irish people. Specifically, the citizens were broadly representative of Irish society, as reflected in the census, in terms of age, gender, social class, and regional spread. Prior to the commencement of the climate topic, the ICA also invited members of the public, representative groups and citizen organisations to make public submissions, with a total of 1,185 received (Farrell et al. 2019). The stated question was then considered over two weekends in late 2017, with 21 speakers addressing the assembly. Based on these inputs and subsequent deliberations from the CA membership, a ballot paper consisting of 13 recommendations was voted upon, and all items were approved by a majority (see **Appendix A**). A detailed report outlining the process and recommendations was subsequently sent to Parliament in April 2018 to be considered by the PCCA³¹. Scholars such as Courant (2021, 10) have since noted that the ICA recommendations and subsequent PCCA cross-party report (in response to the ICA's recommendations) had "some influence on the 2019 Climate Action Plan and 2020 Climate Action Bill" (Courant 2021, 10). However, despite this perceived success in terms of output legitimacy, Devaney et al. (2020, 21) propound that "the jury is still out in the Irish case", while Courant (2021, 2) - in echoing Carolan's (2015) general criticism - notes that "supporters of the 'Irish model' claim it is a "success" often without good knowledge of the cases and while remaining vague as to the criteria for assessing the said 'success.'". Notably, many of these same supporters include "a core group of a few researchers" that have both advocated for, contributed to, and subsequently promoted deliberative processes in Ireland and abroad, with Courant (2021, 2-3) noting that "their own role as actors is not analysed". Thus, this raises questions over the perceived policy consequence of the Irish model; hence, the following sections will shed light on the question of input and output legitimacy (and their interlinkages) and provide a guiding theoretical framework to assess the true merits of the ICA – from process to outcomes.

2.4 THE QUESTION OF LEGITIMACY

Scholars such as Stasiak et al. (2021, 2) note that an "ever growing" number of (C)CAs "have emerged in an attempt to address deficits of legitimacy within government and representative institutions by including ordinary citizens in the decision-making process (Smith,

³¹ Joint Oireachtas (i.e. Parliamentary) Committee on Climate Action

2009; Setälä, 2014; Setälä and Smith 2018)”. Likewise, Lenzi (2019, 313) propounds that (C)CAs “offer the best chance of finding effective and legitimate climate policies”. Herein, the Stasiak et al. (2021, 4) distinguish between two main types of legitimacy regarding CCAs. Firstly, normative legitimacy “asks whether the authority of a {CCA} is justified” and therein “appeals to democratic principles and ideals (Smith 2009)”. Secondly, the authors note that “empirical accounts of legitimacy often rest on judgements about whether a given process is considered fair and of high quality (Jacobs and Kaufmann 2019; Mansbridge, 2019)”. Importantly, the aforementioned authors note that both normative and empirical accounts are “closely related”, as “what people acknowledge as legitimate corresponds with their view about what is normatively justified (Bodansky, 2008). Herein, Mansbridge (2019, 119) notably argues that “the more embedded these institutions are in the state, the greater must be their normative and perceived legitimacy”. This latter point is key considering the uniqueness of the Irish case and its distinct connection to the traditional representative democratic system (i.e., parliament).

Nevertheless, Stasiak et al. (2021, 4) also note that “legitimacy is a highly contested concept in political science”. For example, representativeness is key to both “normative” (Mansbridge, 2019) and “empirical” (e.g., Jacobs, Kaufmann, 2019) accounts of legitimacy; yet there have been long-running and unresolved scholarly debates therein. For example, in *‘Legitimacy and economy in deliberative democracy’*, Dryzek (2001, 651)⁶ purports “that outcomes” – particularly important in the Irish context and specific ICA case – “are legitimate to the extent they receive reflective assent through participation in authentic deliberation by *all* those subject to the decision in question” (emphasis added). However, Parkinson (2003, 180-191) contends that in “complex societies, deliberative participation by all those affected by collective decision-making is extremely implausible” and continues to highlight “the gaps in deliberative theory’s account of legitimacy”, points which will be further reflected upon in the forthcoming “Representation” section (**See Section 2.7.1**). Nonetheless, Parkinson (2003, 191) importantly notes that representational legitimacy “depends in part on seeing deliberative forums as being embedded in a wider deliberative system in which legitimacy is created in the openness of the linkages between moments, rather than relying on ideal legitimacy of each moment taken separately”. Herein, Parkinson described the early stages of deliberative embeddedness – a point still relevant twenty years later (e.g., Youngs 2022) – and hopes that “future work on the nature of the deliberative system will...provide deliberative democrats with firmer footing”. This is something which this present research on the input and output legitimacy – in addition to their interlinkages – of the ICA will aim to achieve. Overall, Stasiak et al. (2021, 2) state that “a perception of a CA as legitimate among the general public and political actors is key for it

achieving its main political objectives and for having resonance in the wider society”; consequently, the authors propound that there is a need to “ensure that evaluation and research focus systematically on the perceived legitimacy of climate assemblies and not just their internal practices”, something which will be discussed in the following section.

2.5 EVOLUTION OF (C)CA EVALUATION FRAMEWORKS

In recent years, a proliferation of frameworks has been developed to evaluate participatory innovations (Geissel and Gherghina, 2016, 77; OECD, 2021). However, it is important to note that the roots of a participatory framework, with a particular emphasis on assessing inputs and outputs, are more than a half-century old; specifically, Suiter and Reuchamps (2016, 6) propound that it was Easton’s (1965) seminal work on “*A Systems Analysis of Political Life*” which first “demonstrated the importance of understanding any political system in terms of its inputs and of its outputs as well as in terms of their interactions.” Nonetheless, since Sewell and Philips (1979) called for a ‘concise research agenda’, little progress had been made until the so-called deliberative turn (Geissel and Gherghina 2016, 76; Rowe and Frewer 2004). In the intervening years, Renn et al. (1995), Chess and Purcell (1999) and Rowe et al.’s (2004) were among the initial scholars who developed the “first generation of frameworks”. In subsequent years, various academics have attempted to further elaborate on these frameworks by focusing on “a variety of criteria” (Geissel and Gherghina 2016, 76; also see Abelson et al. 2003). Yet despite these recent developments, the majority of these (early) CA evaluation frameworks have failed to adequately consider the issue of output legitimacy beyond a mere isolated deliberative event, specifically, the potential policy consequences within the “maxi-public” sphere. However, there have been more recent attempts to both examine and address the issue of output legitimacy within the literature (Geissel and Gherghina 2016; Suiter and Reuchamps 2016; Jacquet and an der Does 2021), particularly with regard to the systematic turn within deliberative scholarship (Parkinson and Mansbridge 2013).

Similarly, within the field of green democracy, Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2023, 241) state that the “demands for concrete evaluation standards and tools have risen” with regards to Climate Citizens’ Assemblies (i.e., CCAs)³² in recent years. This is not surprising given that CCAs “have been mushrooming throughout Western democracies” (Knops and Vrydagh 2021, 211-12). Although Ireland has been the frontrunner with the ICA – held in 2017 – being the first national-level climate assembly in the world, CCA’s have been more recently “implemented

³² Herein, CCA shall be used to refer to Climate Citizens’ Assemblies. CCA’s are often referred to simply as “Climate Assemblies”, however, the thesis shall use CCA in order to differentiate between Citizens’ Assemblies (herein CA).

in many countries³³ (Lindell 2023, 258) in part due to the “increasing salience of climate change as a political issue and the accelerating pace of climate change overall” (Knops and Vrydagh 2021, 211-12). Herein, the authors note how deliberative scholars have portrayed CCAs “as a concrete institutional path to overcome the chronic failures and shortcomings of representative democracy on climate and environmental issues (Niemeyer 2013); the “impotence” of representative democracy (Courant 2020), democratic myopia (MacKenzie 2021; MacKenzie and Caluwaerts 2021) and systemic unsustainability (Blühdorn 2013; Felicetti 2021)”. However, importantly they note that thus far, the literature has not shown significant empirical evidence regarding the (policy) success of CCAs. Consequently, Carrick (2022, 2) propounds that “(r)igorous evaluation of {CCAs} is necessary if we are to develop a better understanding of good practice”.

Herein, Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2023, 241) propound that proper evaluation is crucial to the (ongoing) legitimacy of CCAs as “(a)fter all, the more power is given to CAs, the more we expect them to live up to certain quality standard”. However, Carrick (2022, 2) laments that despite this need, “(a)pproaches to evaluations of climate assemblies are currently inconsistent”, with the first wave of CCAs often limited to self-reported (members’) satisfaction surveys and process-related criteria, while also often lacking independent and/or rigorous academic analysis (e.g. OECD 2021). Therein, Carrick notes that the “*OECD’s Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes*”, which builds on its “*Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes* (OECD, 2020)” ...represent a comprehensive and authoritative attempt to provide minimum standards for evaluating deliberative processes in general”. In short, the guidelines are “based on a three-step evaluation cycle, broadly representing pre-process design work, events during a deliberative process, and post process outcomes” (Ibid), as summarised in **Table 1**. This three-step process closely mirrors and builds upon the work of Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2023, 241) who proffer a “comprehensive account of central evaluation criteria for CAs, in the input, throughput, and output phases”. According to the authors, “input” refers to representativeness, the openness of the agenda, and “to what extent the participants have access to information and the quality of this information”. Secondly, “throughput” includes consideration of the “quality of participation” (e.g., participatory equality), the quality of decision-making (i.e., better and/or different decisions), and the contextual independence of the process” (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2023, 245). Regarding the latter “contextual independence”, Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2023, 247) importantly note that “a legitimate

³³ For example, in France, Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Finland, Spain, Poland, Luxembourg

deliberative process should...be able to handle these outside influences and should avoid the participants from being forced in a particular course of action”. Finally, the output phase contains three criteria: public endorsement, political uptake, and policy implementation.

Table 1: OECD (2021) Evaluation Criteria for Deliberative Processes

Process design integrity	Deliberative experience	Pathways to impact
•Clear and suitable purpose	•Neutrality and inclusivity of facilitation	•Influential recommendations
•Clear and unbiased framing	•Accessible, neutral, and transparent use of online tools	•Response and follow-up
•Suitable design	•Breadth, diversity, clarity and relevance of the evidence and stakeholders	•Member aftercare
•Procedural design involvement	•Quality of judgement	
•Transparency and governance	•Perceived knowledge gains by members	
•Representativeness and inclusiveness	•Accessibility and equality of opportunity to speak	
	•Respect and mutual comprehension	
	•Free decision-making and response	
	•Respect for members' privacy	

Herein, the OECD guidelines offer a somewhat useful framework to comparatively assess the ICA. For example, Carrick (2022, 6) briefly reviews the Devaney et al. (2020) evaluation of the ICA, which was "funded by the Irish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) commissioned academics from Dublin City University to draw lessons from the Citizens' Assembly's work on climate policy for deepening public engagement on the climate crisis". Herein, Carrick states that although the authors "evaluated some elements of the process integrity, deliberative experience, and pathways to impact...only *one* element of process design integrity recommended by OECD was evaluated (representativeness and inclusiveness)" as represented in *Table 2*. Moreover, she notes that the "evaluation of deliberative experience and pathways to impacts relied solely on participants' views"; something which may have provided a skewed positive bias (i.e., self-selection bias).

Table 2: Elements of the ICA Evaluation by Devaney et al. (2020) – Source: Carrick (2022, 6)

Process design integrity	Deliberative experience	Pathways to impact
The recruitment process and the representativeness of assembly members CA	Assembly members' satisfaction with the content and volume of evidence and the presenters	Assembly member views on the uptake of recommendations, including the relevance and impact of the recommendations on politicians and the public
	Assembly members' satisfaction and views on learning (change in knowledge and attitude) and experience of process	Assembly member views on media coverage
	Content of public submissions and expert evidence	

Additionally, Carrick (2022) also notes that the ICA has additionally “been assessed in academic articles”, including by one prominent academic who was also a member of the official EPA evaluation team (i.e., Devaney et al. 2020) and a member of the ICA Expert Advisory Group (ICA 2018a, 8). This points to another significant issue; namely the perceived “independence in evaluation” (Demski and Capstick 2022, 12), something previously noted with respect to the “involved positions” (Courant 2021, 3; also see Carolan 2015) of academic commentators. Specifically, Demski and Capstick (2022, 12) argue that “(b)ecause of the subtleties involved in detecting and attributing impact to {CCAs}, it is advisable that those carrying out an evaluation have no real or perceived conflict of interest”. Moreover, they state that “(i)deally, any evaluation process should be fully independent from those organisations and individuals commissioning, designing, carrying out, or affected by the outcomes of a climate assembly”. Herein, the OECD (2021, 10) guidelines also state that a “(m)aximum degree of independence of evaluation should be ensured...(and) the selection of the evaluators and the evaluation process itself should be clear and transparent”. In short, it seems apparent that the current evaluations of the ICA have fallen short of this ideal, and like Carolan (2015, 735) assessment of the prior ICC, “a rigorous analysis of not only the strengths of such fora, but also of their potential weaknesses” has arguably not yet been attained. This lack of contextual³⁴) not only has the potential to undermine the ongoing, transparency, outcomes and overall legitimacy of deliberative (past, present, and future) processes, but could also lead to notable

³⁴ independence (i.e. from outside influence, such as academics, experts, lobbyists and government agendas etc.

unintended consequences. For instance, Demski and Capstick (2022, 12) note the danger of "raised expectations to be unfulfilled" – a point with importance beyond the domestic arena given that the Irish model has been held up as a "game changer" for other peer countries and climate laggards. Moreover, the authors warn of "a reaction against the nature of the process" if (perceived) flaws or biases are (unconsciously or consciously) suppressed or ignored by evaluators. Nevertheless, Demski and Capstick (2022, 12) propound that "evaluators who are separate from other aspects of a {CCA} are in a better position to assert their findings, than are those who are intimately invested in the success of process"; hence, this current research will make an important contribution to the academic literature by independently unpacking the often-uncritical narrative (Courant 2021) around the world's first national climate assembly.

Notwithstanding the utility of Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2015; 2016) framework and the OECD (2021) evaluation criteria in providing a comparative overview of (C)CAs thus far, it is the present authors opinion that these approaches are not entirely suitable for an in-depth evaluation of the specific ICA case. As Carrick (2022, 15) has noted, "(c)limate assemblies are somewhat distinct from citizens' assemblies on other topic", in part due the complexity of the topic and notably power-dynamics between "expert" and "citizens" therein. For example, Carrick (2022, 1) notes how "(e)valuations of {CCAs} have included 'climate specific' elements not captured by the OECD guidance, including...how climate change science and solutions are framed". However, the OECD (2021) criteria make little, if any, explicit mention of the role of political sponsors (i.e., elected representatives) and/or experts in issue framing and indeed speaker selection (of other experts); consequently, rigidly following the listed OECD evaluation criteria would not allow for an in-depth critical analysis of the ICA. Similarly, while a "response and follow-up" criteria under "pathways to impact" are welcomed within the OECD guidelines – especially given "most evaluations omit" this crucial assessment of real-world CA impact (Carrick 2022, 1) – it is ultimately restrictive and arguably flawed. Specifically, the criteria guidelines state that "the government or equivalent commissioning body responded to members of the deliberative process and/or to the general public" and continues in parentheses that "ideally, such a body would accept the recommendations or provide a public justification for why not" (OECD 2021, 21). However, such an analysis would fail to illuminate the deeper "*whys*" (i.e., policy consideration – see Jacquet and van der Does 2021) regarding the selection or rejection and indeed *influence* (Vrydagh and Caluwaerts (2023) of certain recommendations; for example, whether recommendations were "cherry-picked" given their congruence with existing institutional imperatives or rejected for similar reasons (Bussu et al. 2022; Font et al. 2018). This critique also holds true for Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2023) proposed assessment of outputs

(i.e., political uptake and policy implementation). For example, Demski and Capstick (2022, 12) note with reference to the Climate Assembly UK (**heron CAUK**) evaluation that “even where a (parliamentary) commissioning body may appear to have responded to an assembly’s recommendations, it may already have been inclined in this direction”. Moreover, they posit that “(i)ndeed, policy options may be offered for assembly appraisal on the basis that these are plausible proposals for implementation”. Hence, if we are to deepen our understanding of the interlinkages between deliberative process and subsequent outcomes – a core objective of this given thesis – then arguably a more in-depth, fluid, and authentic (beyond mere officialdom rationales) research paradigm is required. Moreover, in line with a systematic approach, attention must also be paid to the broader “structural changes” a CCA may induce within a given policy domain, something which the two aforementioned frameworks fail to address. Hence, developing a new guiding framework – while remaining open to criteria within existing frameworks – is arguably justifiable for this chosen case study.

2.6 TOWARDS A GUIDING THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following section explores theoretical considerations pertaining to input and output legitimacy – and their interlinkages (*see Table 6*).

2.6.1 *Input Legitimacy*

According to Kronsell and Bäckstrand (2010, 39), “(t)he participatory quality of the decision-making process is a central element of input legitimacy”. Habermas’s (1984) concepts of “ideal speech” and “communicative competences” serve as a useful conceptual foundation for understanding such participatory processes. From this, Renn et al. (1995) have derived two primary meta-principles – *fairness and competence* – by which the quality of participation may be judged (Abelson et al. 2003). Specifically, the former principle of *fairness* relates to the extent of equal opportunities to meaningfully participate in “agenda setting, establishing procedural rules, selecting the information and expertise to inform the process and assess the validity of claims”. While the latter *competence* principle – which mirrors Habermas’s ideal of communicative competencies – suggests that a (C)CA should “ensure that appropriate knowledge and understanding of the issue is achieved through access to information and the interpretation of the information” (Abelson et al. 2003, 244). Taken together, Abelson et al. identify “four key components of any evaluation of a deliberative process: (1) **representation**; (2) *the structure of the process or procedures (i.e., procedural rules)*; (3) **the information used in the process**; and (4) **the outcomes and decisions arising from the process (emphasis added)**” which have been adapted and included in the theoretical framework for this research. This closely mirrors Stasiak et al. (2021,1) who suggest that the legitimacy of CCAs come from four factors: “(1).

representativeness, impartiality, and inclusivity within the deliberative process **(2)**. a governance structure that reflects thematic competence, procedural fairness, and efficiency **(3)**. an output that has the potential to respond to the needs of those who are or should be served by the respective policies under review **(4)**. a positive perception of the process among participating citizens, as well as the wider public (e.g., with respect to its fairness and quality)".

Firstly, with regards to "*representation*" – long established within the literature as a core component of legitimacy – Stasiak et al. (2021,1) cite that "random selection of members (if necessary, combined with an application of diversity criteria by demographics, economic and social backgrounds as practiced by all CAs) and a diversity of attitudes towards climate change is crucial for a CCAs (perceived) legitimacy". **Secondly**, in addition to "*procedural fairness*", the authors cite the importance of "transparent procedures for selection of topics" which may include framing and agenda-setting, in addition to overall governance and organisation. **Thirdly**, regarding "information", the aforementioned competence principle would seem of particular importance for deliberations on climate change⁷. For instance, Abelson et al. (2003) cite the need for "appropriate procedures" with regard to the selection of knowledge (and thus knowledge "gatekeepers") within a given deliberative process. Similarly, Stasiak et al. (2021, 1) call for "transparent procedures for selection of topics and expertise...(and) "ensuring legitimacy of expert inputs". Indeed, which experts are selected and thus legitimised (or not), by whom and on what basis is arguably critical to the inter-linkages between inputs and outputs (with the former informing the latter). For instance, Abelson et al. (2003, 244) are critical of evaluations which have occurred within a narrow theoretical framework which assumes that adequate representation, procedural fairness and considered judgements alone will produce legitimate outcomes while ignoring or neutralising "the role of power...(in) producing a particular set of outcomes". For example, van Beek et al. (2024, 12) propound that "it becomes problematic...if policy recommendations are presented as citizens own identified ideas whereas in reality, these reflected experts' proposals". Thus, for a topic such as climate change – which arguably requires a greater degree of expert knowledge and participant comprehension (in contrast to moral issues, which are subjectively more relatable to a lay public) – it is evidently important to explicitly acknowledge the dynamics of information as power and how this may (in)directly affect outputs. Hence, the inclusion of a specific "*information stage*" within the process-stage framework is arguably crucial for accurately evaluating the ICA. **Fourthly**, as aforementioned (**in Section 2.5**), prior frameworks – including Renn et al.'s (1995) – have failed to adequately consider the prospect of "*outcomes*". Overall, within the broader empirical literature pertaining to deliberation, more weight has invariably been given to the discussion of process

as opposed to outcomes, perhaps due to the difficulty in deriving the later⁸ (Abelson et al. 2003). However, from a green theory perspective, arguably, outcomes should be paramount within the context of discussions on the environment (Goodin 1992) and, indeed, CCAs. In drawing on the work Beierle (1999), Abelson et al.'s (2003, 2003, 245) framework attempts to address this deficiency by explicitly considering “*outcomes/decisions*” in their “*(p)inciples for the design and evaluation of public participation processes*”; however, the proposed “outcome” criteria, while individually important and influential in their own right, seemingly fails to collectively account for the “consequential logic” of output legitimacy beyond an isolated deliberative initiative (Kronsell and Bäckstrand 2010, 39; also see Reuchamps and Suiter, 2016). Hence, given the focus on “process-outcomes” within-existing frameworks (OECD 2021) and limited evaluation methods thus far, one might expect “the link between legitimacy and environmental effectiveness” to still remain “weak” (Bäckstrand et al. 2010, 17). This problem will be addressed in the following “output legitimacy” section.

Moreover, Kronsell and Bäckstrand (2010, 39) propound that the overall legitimacy of such processes of environmental governance ultimately rests on combining effectiveness “with fair, accountable, inclusive, and *transparent* procedures (emphasis added)” Arguably, the three former criteria are procedural components that are adequately captured within Renn et al. (1995) and Abelson et al.'s (2003) respective frameworks. However, both fail to explicitly account for *transparency* which is the first principle noted by the ICA (i.e., “*Openness: The Citizens’ Assembly will operate with transparency*”¹⁰) and is arguably critical to its overall legitimacy. In contrast, the aforementioned OECD (2021) evaluation guideline specifically references the importance of “transparency and process integrity”. Similarly, Smith (2009, 12; also see Smith 2019) cites *transparency* as part of his four democratic goods for participation¹¹ (although notably, he too also neglects to adequately consider output legitimacy, i.e., policy consequences). Specifically, Smith (2019, 7) notes that “(p)articipatory institutions need to be transparent to participants, so that they fully understand the conditions under which they are participating and the powers they are able to exercise”. Moreover, he notes that these “activities should also be transparent to the rest of the community and higher levels of governance so they can be held to account for decisions (Chambers 2004)”. In addition, it could be argued herein that transparency is a two-way street; in short, not only must participatory “activities” be transparent for “higher levels of governance” as Smith (2019) and Chambers (2004) rightly propose, but moreover, that the policy consequences derived from deliberative processes and decision-making processes within the broader political system must also be transparent to deliberative participants and the broader public. Nevertheless, despite the noted importance of transparency in previous research (e.g.,

Hoppe 2011; Bherer et al. 2016) and the apparent need for transparency regarding a (C)CAs procedural rules, expert involvement, and policy-outcomes (Stasiak et al 2021), Carrick (2022, 1) propounds that “(m)ost evaluations omit...governance and transparency...(and) the involvement of stakeholders in process design” despite it being “recommended by the OECD”. Importantly, Galais et al. (2021, 807)¹² analysis of the input-process-output model of public participation also “provides evidence that input factors have a direct impact on the output factor transparency”, which highlights the significance of transparency when assessing the interlinkages between inputs and outputs. In short, they state that “dominance by the administration suppresses transparency...(but) well-structured designs lessen this dominance” (Galais et al. 2021, 822).

Furthermore, on a more practical level, transparency is also important to aid empirical research which seeks to “process trace” the policy recommendations of a given (C)CA. For example, Jacquet and van der Does, (2021, 480-1) cite “the challenge of identifying the influence of a {CA} when a decision taken by a public authority seems congruent with the recommendations made by the respective minipublic”. Moreover, the authors conclude that “(i)t forces the researcher to stipulate the series of expected activities and their ‘observable manifestations’ that link the minipublic to the specific consequences being studied (Beach & Pedersen, 2019)”, something they posit is required in order to “move past narrative accounts of how policy-making effects come about and move toward the specification and empirical verification of detailed mechanisms”. However, this thesis argues that the burden of observable proof should not be left solely to the empirical researcher(s); on the contrary, the normative ideal must include a broad and deep conception of transparency which practitioners, academic proponents, and sponsors of deliberative projects (particularly regional, national, or multi-national sponsors) must aspire to so that the “manifestations” and “mechanisms” cited by Jacquet and van der Does (2021) are indeed both transparent and observable. For example, Stasiak et al. (2021, 12) note how “access to information, strategies for ensuring accurate information are available and easily accessible, and strategies for minimising and responding to misrepresentations are vital”. As Parkinson (2003, 189) propounds, “researchers and bureaucrats are legitimately the agents of the people, not vice versa.” In short, the proposed theoretical framework will apply the principle of “transparency” both before, during and after the ICA, and this will be holistically addressed throughout the subsequent analysis and discussion sections. Moreover, transparency is also important for establishing the degree of **contextual independence**, which is absent from the abovementioned frameworks but is commonly used as a characteristic of “throughput legitimacy” within the input-output-throughout legitimacy

framework (Courant 2021; Reuchamps and Suiter, 2016). Specifically, the concept recognises that (C)CAs do not occur in a political vacuum and may be subject to significant pressures from outside interests such as Government agendas, external lobbying, or international obligations (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2015), with Stasiak et al. (2021, 12), for example, noting how the “broader political context was highlighted in {their} interviews as another important factor for perceptions of legitimacy and public attention devoted to the climate assemblies”. Indeed, within the Irish context, this present research may help illuminate the (perceptive) influence of political sponsors & organisers, experts & academics and broader sectoral & public interests.

In conclusion, with regards to the assessment of “input legitimacy”, the below guiding framework pertaining to “process-related” factors will be utilised. Herein, the stated core categories will be covered within the “Input Legitimacy” section of the analysis (**Analysis Part 1**) while the noted criteria (elaborated upon holistically within the following literature review (**Section 2.7**)) will guide the analysis. However, the researcher will remain open to new insights and emerging patterns in line with an interpretative research paradigm.

Table 3: Process-related (i.e., input legitimacy) evaluation categories & guiding

Representation	Procedural rules	Information	Outcome/ Decisions
<i>Legitimacy and fairness of selection process</i>	<i>Credibility and legitimacy of process.</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Legitimacy and accountability of:</i>
	What point in the decision-making process is input being sought (e.g., framing/scope)? Who is listening?	Accessibility Readability Digestibility Emphasis on challenging experts, Information	Decision-making (within CCA) Communication (external) Responses from receiving body?
Is there a representative sample? Geographic Demographic	Degree of citizen control/input into agenda setting, establishing rules, selecting experts, information	<i>Selection and presentation</i> Who chooses the information? Who chooses the experts?	More informed citizenry? Achievement of consensus over the decision? (i.e., broad-based understanding and acceptance of final decision)
<i>Political Community</i>	<i>Deliberation</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>	
Participant selection vs Self-selection	Amount of time Facilitation	Adequacy of time provided to consider, discuss, and challenge the information?	Better and/or different decisions?
Inclusiveness (broad) vs Exclusiveness (narrow)	Mutual respect (or polarisation?)		

Transparency & Contextual Independence



2.6.2 *Output Legitimacy*

With regards to the recent “wave” of (C)CAs, Youngs (2022, 3) propounds that the challenge now is “not so much about getting the basic case for sortition-based participation onto the agenda or silencing doubters by showing that successful assemblies can be held...(r)ather, it is to demonstrate that these initiatives are capable of reshaping democratic politics in a more far-reaching fashion—or, at least, it is about posing the question of whether this wider impact is a feasible and desirable goal.” Herein, Green et al. (2019, 1) note that citizens’ deliberations should play a more direct role in government decision-making. Similarly, Rummens (2016, 131; also see Goodin and Dryzek 2006) states that leading scholars such as Habermas “have argued from the start that the deliberative ideal should be realised within the context of the traditional parliamentary system” with this argument illuminating “the importance of a systemic approach to deliberative democracy” (also see Goodin 2005; Parkinson 2006; Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012; Owen and Smith 2015). According to Hendriks and Lees-Marshment (2019, 599; also see Parkinson 2012, 164), “(r)egardless of whether public deliberation is viewed as a forum, a societal-wide process or a complex system, the democratic burden of deliberative democracy rests on there being an effective communicative process between decision-makers and potentially affected publics”. Consequently, since the systematic turn, scholars have “shifted their focus away from the internal dynamics of deliberation on to its integration in the political system” (Bussu et al. 2022, 135; also see Chwalisz 2020; Fagotto and Fung 2014; Green, Kingzette, and Neblo 2019; Papadopoulos 2012; Suiter and Reidy 2019; Suiter et al. 2020). Moreover, within the environmental space, there is arguably an even greater need to effectively evaluate the role of CCAs when it comes to climate action and governance, especially given the supposed “dilemma of green democracy” (Wong 2016) and associated democratic means versus environmental ends conundrum (Goodin 1992). Yet to date, Geissel (2023, 60) propounds that “CAs do not necessarily guarantee that citizens’ refined preferences feed into political decision-making”, with little, if any “guarantee” of consequential outcomes (Elstub, 2009; Roberts et al. 2020; Courant 2021). For instance, Hendriks and Lees-Marshment’s (2019, 600) propound that “(r)esearch on participatory forums finds that in many cases, decision-makers fail to take up and directly act upon citizens’ recommendations”. Moreover, Vrydagh (2023, 9) notes how there has been “little or no impact of many CAs in practice”, with Lafont (2023, 48) concurring that “(w)ith few exceptions, the political impact of CAs has been rather modest” to date.

Hence, Bäckstrand et al.’s (2010, 18) decade-old critique that “the environmental effectiveness of participatory innovations is assumed rather than validated” appears as accurate as ever. However, as previously discussed, the Irish CA series (2016 -2018) is a unique empirical case

due to its (perceivable) output legitimacy (Courant 2021); nevertheless, this optimism regarding the potential of such (C)CAs and purported success of the ICA must be critically unpacked. For instance, Geissel (2023, 60) raises questions such as: “(H)ow can we ensure that recommendations made by CAs do not disappear unnoticed in pigeonholes? How can we guarantee that CAs are not misused?”. Indeed, she rightly propounds that “(a)cademia has neglected the connections between CAs and decision-making for too long”. Thus, with regard to the “output legitimacy” of such deliberative processes as the ICA, there is a need to illuminate if there has been any “consequential logic” (Kronsell and Bäckstrand 2010, 39). Herein, when discussing the “outcomes” of a given (C)CA, such as the ICA case, it is also important to define the terms meaning and empirical boundaries – something which Kronsell and Bäckstrand (2010, 42; also see Gulbrandsen, 2005; Victor et al., 1998; Weiss et al., 2000; Young, 1999) relate to “environmental effectiveness”. According to the authors, “(t)he predominant approach in political science and environmental politics is to conceptualise effectiveness in terms of policy, institutional or compliance effectiveness”. However, although Schlyter et al. (in Kronsell and Bäckstrand 2010, 42) argue that “the overall legitimacy of environmental policies” is ultimately determined by the extent of environmental protection, the link between policy and environmental effectiveness (i.e. policy “compliance” and actual biosphere outcomes) is clearly beyond the remit for this research given the difficulty of disentangling cause and effect (Capstick et al. 2015)³⁵.

Herein, given the context of this research question, aims, and objectives, Demski and Capstick’s (2022) “*Impact evaluation framework for climate assemblies*” is also informative and must be illuminated. Specifically, the framework distinguishes between “*policy, social and systemic*” areas of impact while also providing a lens to explore the type of impact, namely *instrumental, conceptual, and capacity-building* impacts (see Table 4). Importantly, the proposed “**policy impact**” (i.e. consequences) focus of this present research is deemed justifiable according to Demski and Capstick (2022, 2), with the authors propounding that “(t)he evaluation of a climate assembly may choose to emphasise or exclude certain types of impact”. Moreover, the authors state “it is likely that particular attention will be directed towards assessing whether the original aims and objectives of a deliberative process have been met – typically, in terms of an intention to influence policymaking”. Herein, Demski and Capstick (2022, 6) further distinguish between *instrumental, conceptual, and capacity building* (policy) impacts. The former – instrumental – “may involve policy change to what should be done (e.g., ban petrol cars by 2035) or how something is done (e.g.,

³⁵ For example, Ireland’s emissions dramatically fell in 2020 primarily due to the effect of COVID-19 lockdowns rather than any significant policy change) and the-inevitable long time horizon (e.g., Ireland’s Climate Bill sets a goal of net-zero emissions by the year 2050 – a timeframe beyond the limits of this research).

considering vulnerable groups in climate policymaking)". Moreover, "*conceptual*" impact may refer to changes to policymakers understanding of diverse public perspectives on climate policy. While "*capacity-building*" may consider specific recommendations and policy areas. Additionally, while reference will be made to Demski and Capstick's (2022) conception of **social impacts** (e.g., opinion poll evidence of a broader public shift in policy attitudes subsequent to ICA), this is not within the core research emphasis. However, instrumental social impacts "also capture effects on assembly members...who might alter their behaviour in response to the climate assembly" (Demski and Capstick 2022, 6), something which will be explored within the confines of deliberative process-outcomes. Finally, "**systemic**" effects (e.g., evidence of subsequent institutionalisation of CAs within environmental domain {instrumental}; political actors' attitudes to deliberative process {conceptual}; evidence of capacity-building and improvement amongst organisers) will also be illuminated during in-depth interviews with PCCA policy actors and ICA organisers.

Table 4: Potential Policy Impacts of CCAs (Source: Demski and Capstick 2022, 5)

<div>↓</div> <div>Type of impact</div>	→ Instrumental impacts:	Conceptual impacts:	Capacity-building impacts:
	<i>Changes to how things work and what happens: policies, behaviour, practice</i>	<i>Changes to how people think: knowledge, understanding, attitudes</i>	<i>Changes to what people do: skills development, ability, confidence</i>
Policy: Effects on public policy and political decision-making Key actors: policymakers, politicians, parliamentarians, civil servants, advisory bodies	Changes to climate policy and legislation, and resulting climate action	Changes to policymakers knowledge and understanding of diverse public perspectives on climate policy issues	Capacity-building focused on specific climate recommendations and policy areas
	Changes to political debate/positions on climate change and climate action	Changes to policymakers understanding of and attitudes towards climate change and climate action	Capacity-building to improve understanding of and integrating public perspectives into climate policy
		Clarification of roles and responsibilities for climate action	Changes to (or new) political coalitions, networks, or cross-party collaborations

In sum, for the purpose of this research, **output legitimacy** will be determined regarding the "policy effectiveness" (Bäckstrand et al. 2010, 218), "policy impact" (Demski and Capstick (2022, 2) or what Jacquet and van der Does's (2021, 471) refer to as "policy-making consequences". Given the research question, aims and objectives, an improved version (i.e., see the inclusion of

"Influence" - Vrydagh and Caluwaerts 2023) of Jacquet and van der Does's (2021) conceptualisation of "policy-making consequences" appears most appropriate as categories to guide the analysis of the ICA's output legitimacy. Specifically, the latter authors "identify three main ways to conceptualise policy-making consequences: *congruence with decisions, consideration, and structural change*", which – along with Vrydagh and Caluwaerts's (2023) concept of *influence* – will be adapted to guide the analysis of the ICA's policy consequences and subsequent output legitimacy. Firstly, ***congruence*** refers to how effectively a deliberative process such as the ICA had its recommendations subsequently translated into discernible policies. However, Jacquet and van der Does, (2021, 480-1) cite "the challenge of identifying the *influence* of CAs when a decision taken by a public authority seems congruent with the recommendations made by the respective minipublic (emphasis added)". Herein, Vrydagh and Caluwaerts (2023, 119) concept of ***influence*** acknowledges this empirical limitation and thus "builds on previous congruency studies, by studying how CAs affect policies, all the while including policy makers' pre-existing preferences" to determine its genuine effect. Secondly, ***consideration*** pertains to how such recommendations are considered within "empowered institutions". Finally, the latter ***structural changes*** are the least studied and relate to "a change in policy practices" (which may include the future utilisation of CAs), which could be described as the degree of systemisation within a particular domain. Hence, by incorporating Jacquet and van der Does's (2021, 475) policy consequences and Vrydagh and Caluwaerts (2023, 119) conception of "influence" into the proposed guiding framework (*see Table 5 and Table 6*), it is intended to move beyond a purely process-related (i.e., input) evaluation and thus strengthen our understanding of output legitimacy and various interlinkages.

Table 5: Output Legitimacy Framework

Conceptualisation of Policy Consequences	Underlying Questions
<i>Congruence with Decisions</i>	To what extent did the ICA recommendations translate into policies?
<i>Influence of Recommendations</i>	To what extent and in what ways, if any, were ICA recommendations influential?
<i>Consideration in the policy-making process</i>	How did actors consider the ICA and its recommendations within empowered institutions?
<i>Structural changes</i>	Is there evidence that the ICA changed policy practices in the environmental policy domain, and if so, in what way(s)? How did the input legitimacy of the ICA influence these consequences, and how may the output legitimacy of the PCCA affect future assemblies (i.e., feedback loops)?

2.6.3 *Inputs, Outputs, and their Interlinkages*

In sum, the proposed framework (*see Table 6*), which will be applied to the ICA builds upon and comprehensively assimilates prior evaluation categories and guiding criteria cited by other prominent scholars (Renn et al. 1995; Abelson et al. 2003; Bekkers and Edwards, 2007; Papadopoulos and Warin, 2007; Smith's 2009; Kronsell, A., and Bäckstrand, E. 2010; 2019; Caluwaerts and Reuchamps, 2015; Reuchamps and Suiter, 2016; Jacquet and van der Does 2021; OECD 2021; Stasiak et al 2021; Carrick 2022; Demski and Capstick). However, importantly, Galais et al. (2021, 822) ask, "*(w)hat about the relationship between these factors? Is it simple path dependency from input to process to output as assumed in much of the literature?*". In short, the authors propound that their "results suggest otherwise". Specifically, they state that "input has both direct and indirect effects {on outputs} and posit that "aspects of design, deliberation and the exercise of power by public authorities can have a significant impact on the outcomes of participatory democracy". Herein, they suggest that "(g)ood design ensures good process that in turn leads to positive output". However, while Galais et al.'s (2021) given framework accounts for both *policy consideration* and *congruence* within the "weight of the results" category, it arguably also fails to acknowledge the potential for structural *changes* (and is thus an inadequate research framework for the given case). Indeed, Rummens (2016, 130) recognises this weakness when stating that "it is very important to keep in mind that this (i.e., Galais et al.) framework only provides a local and partial measure of deliberative legitimacy, precisely because it focuses only on the {CA} as such rather than on the democratic system as a whole". Moreover, Rummens states that empirical research "requires a shift" towards a more macro-analysis in line with the "systemic approach to deliberative democracy".

Hence, in returning to the Habermasian ideals that underpin the conceptual foundations of this stated research framework, Rummens (2016, 131-142) thus cites the need for a more "comprehensive approach" wherein deliberative processes "are connected to and integrated with more traditional representative processes", a view also shared by Goodin and Drysek (2006, 220-1). From an empirical standpoint, this approach would also allow researchers "to investigate how the use of mini-publics and/or deliberative networks could further strengthen this 'traditional parliamentary' system and help to deal with some of the challenges it currently faces' (Rummens 2016, 131). However, Rummens warns "that a convincing theoretical framework for such an assessment has not yet been developed", and thus, systematic empirical assessment remains "highly challenging". Nevertheless, Ireland arguably provides a near-perfect empirical testing ground for such a framework as "it seems clear that the Irish process provides an interesting attempt to combine the best elements of both worlds: the specific epistemic

quality of mini-public deliberation and the large-scale (epistemic and motivational) legitimacy of traditional parliamentary politics". In sum, the following framework attempts to fill the aforementioned theoretical gaps by both strengthening the links between input and output legitimacy and accounting for deliberative systematisation within the policy domain (i.e., structural changes). In addition, it also seeks to illuminate the concepts of transparency and contextual independence throughout the process (from inputs to outputs). However, given the stated “challenge” of developing such a framework and the exploratory nature of this proposed empirical research, it is important to emphasise that the intention is not rigid adherence to a pre-defined and prescribed set of evaluation *criteria*. On the contrary, categories will be holistically applied to guide the data collection and analytical processes, while always remaining flexible and open to new information, patterns, and emerging insights.

Table 6 Guiding Theoretical Framework and Categories

Types of Legitimacy	Categories
Input Legitimacy <i>(Note guiding criteria: Table 3)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Representation</i> • <i>Procedural Rules</i> • <i>Information</i> • <i>Outcomes/Decisions</i>
Output Legitimacy <i>(Note Table 5)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Consideration</i> • <i>Influence</i> • <i>Congruence</i> • <i>Structural Changes</i>
Cross-cutting or "interlinking" Legitimacy (i.e., considered within context of other categories and criteria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Transparency</i> • <i>Contextual independence</i>

2.7 INPUT LEGITIMACY

Thus far, the literature has largely focused on input legitimacy – which may also be referred to as “design”, internal dynamics, or deliberative quality – of given (C)CAs. Herein, Lindell (2023, 257) propounds that “a plethora of research suggests that the internal quality of the CA (or any

citizen deliberation) is crucial for the legitimacy of decision-making but also for how participants are included and affected.” Moreover, in line with the potential of (C)CAs, the author states that if the design is done well, “CAs can be a tool to bring informed views of the public into policymaking, help break political deadlock on policy issues, understand the priorities of citizens, increase the legitimacy of social action, reduce the impact of lobbyists and special interests, and to increase citizen participation”. The following sections will therefore review the relevant literature to assess what needs to be “done well” according to four aforementioned categories of “input legitimacy” i. *representation*; ii. *procedural rules*; iii. *Information and* iv. *(process-related) outcomes* (also see Table 3).

2.7.1 Representation

The question of “who participates” is core to the (perceived) legitimacy of (C)CAs (Stasiak et al. 2021; Harris 2019). As Dryzek (2009, 1382) aptly surmises, “without inclusiveness, there may be deliberation but not deliberative democracy”. Likewise, Lindell (2023, 261) propounds that a CAs “legitimacy depends on who participates, how they have been selected, and how representative the group is of the wider society”. Herein, academics such as Vrydagh (2023, 7; also see Vandamme 2023) have argued that CAs could “help to artificially repair the unequal distribution of power and voices in representative democracy”. Similarly, Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 219) suggest that “the recent experiences of CCAs and the literature on deliberative democracy tell us that they make a valuable contribution in tackling these conflictual dimensions; both in allowing conflicts to express themselves in a “deliberative” way (i.e., without leading to antagonism and affective polarisation (Calvert and Warren 2014: 208–209; Fishkin and Luskin 2005), but also in offering a new channel of representation for underrepresented groups”. However, in contrast, scholars such as Smith (2009, 15) have illuminated that “the widely held concern among democratic theorists is that extending opportunities for citizen participation in the political process will simply reinforce and amplify the existing differentials of power and influence within society”. Similarly, Chambers (2009) stresses the danger of “participatory elitism” if the mass public are abandoned in favour of the views of a mini-public, with Parkinson (2006) and Lafont (2015; 2023) similarly highlighting how CAs may not be legitimately representative of or to the wider public. Hence, to assess these competing claims with respect to the ICA, it is therefore essential that “(a)ll evaluation frameworks include some criteria about how representation issues might be assessed and emphasise the extent to which different types of representation can be achieved (Abelson et al. 2003, 244)”. Nonetheless, MacKenzie (2023, 22) importantly adds the caveat that “CAs should not be judged according to the standards and expectations used to judge elected representative” as they have differing incentive

structures, which is “precisely the point”. In short, (climate) *citizens'* assemblies must accrue their own representative³⁶ legitimacy.

Firstly, with regards to “who” participates, the legitimacy of (C)CAs is arguably dependent on whether the “small scale deliberation (the micro) can be meaningfully related to the public spaces of mass democracy (the macro)” (Olsen and Trenz 2016, 663). Yet herein, Manin (1987, 352) posits that “(a)s political decisions are characteristically imposed on all, it seems reasonable to seek, as an essential condition for legitimacy, the deliberation of all or, more precisely, the right of all to participate in deliberation”. Conversely, Walzer (1999, 68) contends that “(d)eliberation is not an activity for the demos ...as 100 million of them, or even 1 million or 100,000, can't plausibly 'reason together'”. Consequently, it is clear that “the ideal of having all those impacted by a political decision deliberate together is empirically impossible” (Jennstå 2016, 2; also see Goodin 2000). Indeed, Dryzek (2001, 652) illuminates this inherent irony when stating that “viability depends crucially on the vast majority always choosing not to exercise the rights and capacities that are so fundamental to the theory”. Hence, given the inevitable reality of participatory exclusion, Stasiak et al. (2021, 4) propounds that “the selection process needs to be sensitive to the variety of opinions, ideas and backgrounds present in the broader public”.

With reference to this theoretical (i.e. the right for all to participate) and real-world (i.e. the feasible number of citizens' who could reasonably participate) trade-off, Stasiak et al. (2021, 5) note that although “(p)revious assessments have found that the legitimacy of a decision-making process is enhanced by including more citizens (Pogrebinschi & Ryan, 2018; Jacobs, 2019)....other scholars have warned that deviation from random selection can introduce systematic biases since adding participants in different ways defies the principle of giving each citizen an equal chance to be selected (Bryson et al., 2013; Benighaus & Renn, 2016; Bächtiger & Parkinson, 2019)”. Herein, the authors note how “measures to ensure input legitimacy of CAs often rely on achieving representativeness through the randomised selection of lay citizens (OECD, 2020)”, with the ultimate goal of achieving “descriptive similarities between the body and the citizenry” (Warren (2008, 56). But this is no exact science, with Abelson et al. (2003 242) citing how critics force “the architects of the deliberative exercise to carefully consider whom to involve”. On the contrary, Parkinson (2003, 190) propound that “legitimacy depends, however, not on technocrats making

³⁶ Although the term “sortition” is often used to describe the selection process of a given CA (for example, see Gąsiorowska 2023), for the purpose of this research, *representativeness* (i.e., how the assembly members compare to the broader society in terms of demographic profile, see Abelson et al. 2003) – which can be seen as the “goal” of a given CA – is preferred as the former (i.e. sortition) pertains more to the specific random selection method used with CAs. In short, the concept of representation enables a deeper critique of the legitimacy of assembly processes beyond the application of a specific selection methodology (e.g., for example, the critique of whether CAs can ever be fully representative of society?).

that call, but on the people, themselves deciding what is relevant and what is not”. Moreover, he purports that “representation is context-specific” and consequently “what is legitimate in one context will be illegitimate in another”. Herein, he proffers that “deliberative democracy must be open in the sense that those who are potentially *affected* have both the opportunity to judge relevance...and the opportunity to affect the inclusion/exclusion rules” (emphasis added). Similarly, Dryzek (2001, 652) argues that “decisions still have to be justified to those who did not participate” if the “legitimisation problem” is to be overcome – something which relates to the interlinkages between input and output legitimacy.

Nevertheless, the very “right” to participate has itself been challenged by some theorists who question the very “capacities of ordinary people” (e.g., Schumpeter, 1962). However, Elstub and Khoban (2023, 121) completely reject this longstanding critique “with respect to its limited normative vision of what democracy entails and the conclusions it draws from the empirical evidence about public participation”. Specifically, they cite evidence from deliberative and participatory practices which “clearly demonstrate the capacity of the public to make meaningful contributions to policy debate and formation”. Nonetheless, this apparent elitist assumption may hold particular resonance regarding the complex topic of climate change (also **see Section 2.7.3**). For instance, Stasiak et al. (2021, 3) note how “concerns are often raised as...to what extent {citizen members’} are suited or qualified to make policy recommendations or influence decisions”. Indeed, Parkinson (2003, 187) posits that “it may be one’s self-assessment, rather than that of elite theorists, that one’s point of view may be better advanced by a communicatively competent representative than by doing it oneself”. However, overall, this arguably depends on how issues are framed (**see Section 2.7.2**); specifically, lay citizens’ may have limited knowledge of scientific and technical complexities, but nevertheless may equally play an important role in prioritising moral arguments and pluralistic values, particularly when it comes to climate mitigation. Herein, Shaw et al. (2021, 2) state that CAs should seek “to provide space to recognise and explore values as much as technical questions”. This aligns with Parkinson’s (2003, 186-7) “institutionalist view that it is not that ordinary people cannot deliberate, but that existing liberal democratic structures do not allow them the chance to develop those deliberative capacities, a point that goes back to J. S. Mill (Pateman, 1970; Peters, 1999).” Consequently, for (C)CAs to address these notable concerns, Stasiak et al. (2021, 1-3) propounds that they “need to combine the elements of epistemic competency and democratic inclusiveness in order to enhance the legitimacy of policy-making”.

Nonetheless, the authors note how (C)CAs may often “fall short in giving the most vulnerable parts of the population an adequate voice in policymaking”, with Fishkin (2009, 80), for example citing that “when participation is voluntary”, as is nearly always the case, “the better off

and the more educated tend to participate more” – something commonly referred to as “self-selection bias” within the participation literature. For example, within the early *British Columbia Citizens Assembly* (hereon **BCCA**) on Electoral Reform held back in 2004 – a seminal early deliberative case which (at least partly) informed the early Irish experience according to the literature (e.g., Courant 2021) – MacKenzie (2023, 26; also see Warren and Pearse 2008) noted how “joiners” (i.e., people who were already active in other political or voluntary organisations) were over-represented. Similarly, Muradova’s (2020, 16) early empirical evidence from the specific ICA case study noted that “people who agree to attend deliberative forums may be better perspective-takers and reflective thinkers than non-attenders”; therein, they arguably may be more pre-disposed to consensual deliberation than the general populace. Overall, Elstub and Khoban (2023, 120) remark that “since there is no compulsion to participate, a degree of self-selection is unavoidable, and risks exacerbating inequalities in political influence between resourceful and marginalised groups”. Nevertheless, not all deliberative scholars perceive such self-selection bias as problematic. For example, MacKenzie (2023, 27) argues that self-selection bias could be “advantageous”, stating that it “does not undermine the principle of equality at work in random processes” and that those who opt in may be “more committed, eager, and willing”, citing the over-representation of “joiners” within the aforementioned BCCA case as “positive”. However, surely attracting those citizens who are disenfranchised, disengaged or disillusioned with traditional politics should arguably be paramount if deliberative processes are genuinely attempting to address the “series of serious challenges” (Vrydagh 2023, 1) faced by traditional representative democracy (see Section 1) – for example, low trust, increasing polarisation and associated civic unrest, in addition to concurrent wicked problems such as climate change – which “makes it increasingly difficult to adopt policies that receive public support beyond partisan line”.

Nevertheless, Jennstå (2016, 1) notes that “there is a legitimate concern that not all citizens can, will, or want to participate in deliberation, which raises the question of “(h)ow to achieve representativeness when citizens do not want to participate”. Regarding the former point, even if all citizens are capable in theory of deliberation, they may not have the capacity in practice. For example, Warren's (2008, 58) empirical evidence from the BCCA illustrated “an under-representation of those who are less organised, less educated, and have fewer resources”, suggesting that even those who physically “can” participate still “will not” if design conditions are not favourable. Similarly, Parvin (2021, 280)⁴ propounds that there is “(t)oo much faith in the ability of low socio-economic status (SES) citizens living in deprived areas to change their circumstances through active participation in political and civic life”. Herein, he argues that the time and resource commitment of active participation “shouldn’t be underestimated”, and pessimistically states that

“even if it would be possible to come up with democratic innovations capable of easing time pressures, low SES citizens would still have limited or no access to the range of networks and resources associated with participation and the development of democratic capacity”. Hence, (C)CAs may conform with Lijphart’s (1997, 1) conception of “systematic class bias”, wherein “the inequality of representation and influence are not randomly distributed but systematically biased in favour of more privileged citizens – those with higher incomes, greater wealth, and better education – and against less advantaged citizens”. Moreover, regarding the latter point by Jennstå (2016) on whether participants even “want” to participate, Parkinson (2003, 187) notes how representative democracy “may be efficient from the nonparticipant’s own point of view: some people may not want to deliberate on a given issue or feel strongly enough about it to gain the required competencies, but still have an interest in the outcome” (something which builds on Dryzek’s {2001} earlier observation that CAs must be legitimate to those who do not participate). Indeed, a closer examination of both the low acceptance rates, relatively high number of dropouts and significant “self-selection bias” from prior deliberative experiments (e.g., MacKenzie 2023; Farrell et al. 2019) suggests that many citizens, even if instinctively political in their daily lives, may have little desire to engage in a formal, extensive, and possibly prolonged period of “voluntary” deliberative service. For example, Jennstå (2016, 19) notes empirical evidence which suggests that “(t)here appears to be sensitivity to time commitment for otherwise motivated individuals...that has implications for the design of such events in attracting these individuals”.

However, Parkinson (2003, 184) argues that there may be a number of other reasons why people may choose not to participate in CAs which don’t neatly align with deliberative theory. Specifically, he notes the argument that “the pursuit of reasoned consensus and the ‘civilising’ norms of deliberative democracy submerge the genuine injustices suffered by ‘other voices’”. Importantly, he posits that “what is often required to make those voices heard is deliberately unreasonable acts and speech: protests, resistance, emotional speechmaking and rhetoric designed to shock the dominant consensus into perceiving what it has been blind to”. Herein, Moore (2016, 21; also see Mansbridge et al. 2012) notes that if deliberation became the only game in town, then this “raises important systemic danger which is that {CAs}...could diminish or even displace the more informal processes of social movement contestation and protest” (Moore 2016, 21; also see Mansbridge et al. 2012). Moreover, a related point is to what extent critical, dissenting, or even controversial (minority) voices to (forms of) climate action are considered, deliberated upon, and incorporated into the “broad-based understanding and acceptance of final decision” (Abelson et al. 2003). Parkinson (2003, 184), building upon the work of Rawls (1996), makes the important point that if deliberative democracy rules “pre-formed preferences, interests and goals’... out of

court, it may seem to people that deliberative democracy is procedurally unfair, and thus illegitimate” – thus weakening the desire among some to participate. On the other hand, organisers must also consciously consider "how to mitigate strong vested interests which may try to use the deliberative process to sway the discussion or, ultimately, the outcome of the exercise" (Abelson et al. 2003, 248). This may be particularly evident in the case of climate change and related environmental issues; wherein organic or organised “self-selection” could occur among those with strongly held views on climate change. Herein, Stasiak et al. (2021, 10) note how "the UK and Scotland assemblies explicitly considered the perceived legitimacy of the membership of the assembly when they added attitudes towards climate change as an additional criterion". Importantly, they purport that "this was to avoid criticisms that the assemblies were populated only by those concerned about climate change". Similarly, Carrick (2022, 15) illuminates that the *Climate Assembly UK* (hereon **CAUK**) "included evaluation of political perspectives as part of its analysis of process design" as evidence suggests that perspectives towards climate action are also shaped by prospective CCA participants pre-existing political views (Fagan and Huang 2019; Colvin and Jotzo 2021). Herein, although Lindell (2023, 259) notes that “moderation” is normally perceived as the “desirable outcome” of a CA, she also states that scholars would insist "that if polarisation (or moderation) occurs, it should do so in normatively defensible ways and not be the product of undesirable group dynamics or on other non-deliberative pathways". Hence overall, deliberative organisers should arguably guard against "a politically engaged citizenry whose views are not representative of the broader public" (Gerber et al. 2011, 704), as Lindell (2021, 4; also see Thompson 2008) propounds that “a deliberative discussion where citizens hold diverse viewpoints will have different outcomes than a discussion between like-minded individuals”.

Nevertheless, despite the danger of self-exclusion by certain (often marginalised, low SES and/or disenfranchised) groups, deliberative theorists often argue that assembly members will adequately acknowledge and account for their fellow citizens who are unable or unwilling to participate (e.g., Goodin’s 2000). For instance, Lindell (2011, 4) posits that "participants shouldn't be seen as representatives of their own social group but be able to reflect and consider their own preferences in the light of new information and arguments put forward by other participants". Indeed, MacKenzie (2023, 22) highlights “four types of representation that CAs can provide: 1) descriptive; 2) discursive; 3) surrogate; and 4) gyroscopic”. In contrast to Dryzek (2001, 652) view that “decisions still have to be justified to those who did not participate”, MacKenzie also argues that "these forms of representation, as realised within CAs, do not provide, or require direct links of accountability between the representatives and the represented”. However, Parkinson (2003, 185) conversely propounds that “it is problematic if some groups of people are more ‘spoken for’

than ‘speakers’, as has regularly proved the case for women, ethnic minorities, and other excluded groups”. For instance, the prior BCCA case provides an empirical example of these countervailing theoretical viewpoints. Specifically, James’s (2008, 111-118) analysis of the BCCA concluded that a “failure to screen for ethnicity may have undermined the quality of deliberation” while on the contrary, Gibson (2002, 13) argued that this perceived “failure” was justified by the belief that Canadian Democracy was “resolutely color-blind”. Overall, Parkinson (2003, 187) importantly notes that “*persons affected*” cannot be determined with any great certainty, and that “persons are not the unified individuals of classical liberal theory but are multi-faceted, with multiple roles and fluid, socially constructed, contextualised identities”. Hence, Parkinson posits that “deliberative representation demands that representatives act in a dual role” when stating that: “{citizen members} must be free to be persuaded by better arguments, thus acting as trustees; but they must also communicate with their principals as delegates, meeting the condition of accountability as well as authorisation”. Therein, he adds that: “any contradiction is resolved, when one sees deliberative moments as embedded in a larger ‘deliberative system’” (see **Section 2.8**). The later point (i.e. “deliberative system”) is important within the context of the current research focus re. input and output legitimacy and their various interlinkages, as Parkinson (2003, 193) again reiterates that “representation’s legitimacy depends in part on seeing deliberative forums as being embedded in a wider deliberative system in which legitimacy is created in the openness of the linkages between moments, rather than relying on ideal legitimacy of each moment taken separately”. Likewise, in his chapter on “Representation and Citizens’ Assemblies”, MacKenzie (2023, 24) argues “that CAs may be considered legitimate when they are situated in, or integrated with, other institutions that are authorised and accountable to the publics they serve”. Hence, the situation of the ICA within the broader Irish representative system (i.e. PCCA) is something this present research will seek to explore.

Nonetheless, aside from normative debates on the role of representation, practical issues regarding input representation remain, namely, “whether different relevant groups should be represented equally or proportionately” (Parkinson 2003, 189). Specifically, Elstub and Khoban (2023, 120) have noted that “another problem with random sampling to CAs is that small minorities risk not being represented”. This is an important point for “context-specific” climate assemblies, as communities most affected by mitigation measures (e.g. rural communities) may be underrepresented within standard demographic sampling, and thus there may be an unintended “echo-chamber” (Boswell et al. 2023) amongst the majority (e.g. urban dwellers). This is particularly worrying when we consider the claim of deliberative advocates that (C)CAs can counteract existing echo chambers “by making people talk to others who don't share their opinions” (Benedictus

2019)". For example, Setälä et al.'s (2010) evaluation of an Australian citizens' jury on nuclear power highlighted representative concerns pertaining to affected aboriginal communities. Herein, Parkinson argues that "so long as group representatives are present in proportion to their numerical strength, identities and views which command the allegiance of the many will always dominate those of the few, regardless of the reasonableness of those views". Hence, some scholars, such as Brown (2006) and Steel et al. (2020) have argued that oversampling of minority groups may be justified if it addresses social inequalities. However, conversely, others such as Landemore (2013) have noted practical problems with this approach, while Gül (2019; also see Mackenzie 2023) highlights the problematic paradox of how this method re-introduces human bias (via organisers decisions) into an apparently randomised selection process (which shall be discussed in further detail below). Moreover, James's (2008, 122) aforementioned empirical evidence from the BCCA suggests that even where such minority groups are provided enhanced representation (e.g. via quotas), in the absence of a "critical mass or threshold...isolated individuals are less likely to express a minority position that contradicts the dominant perspective".

Thus, mere visibility does not equate to the expression of a representative voice, with both presence and voice being required to achieve true "inclusiveness" (Smith 2009, 12) and create real "psychological safety" (Edmondson 1999). This is also arguably essential for ensuring "the inequalities of life do not contaminate the deliberative process" (Fishkin 2009, 129), with Shapiro (1999, 36) stating how ultimately "politics is about interests and power" as opposed to mere consensual deliberation. Similarly, Mouffe (1999) contends that the overt focus on rationality by (traditional) deliberative scholars often overlooks the connection between legitimacy and power. Herein, given these "existing social inequities and resources, knowledge and power disparities among different social classes and groups", Eckersley (1995, 212) posits "if (green) institutional design should not start from the premise of power disparities rather than from a regulative ideal that is unlikely ever to obtain in practice?". Notwithstanding these theoretical critiques, good internal deliberative design is nonetheless essential to (somewhat) dampen external inequalities. Herein, rather than starting from an idealistic assumption regarding the desire of citizens to deliberate (e.g. Smith 2012), CCA organisers must critically ask, "what do we know about citizens' actual willingness to participate in deliberation?" (Jennstå 2016, 2). Thus far, the empirical evidence is mixed, with some studies indicating an unwillingness among the public to participate in CAs (Mutz 2006), while other cases find higher levels of uptake (e.g. Neblo et al. 2010). These case studies must be viewed within the context of the aforementioned theoretical discussions (re. citizens' propensity to participate). Nonetheless, Bächtiger et al. (2018, 36; also see Siu 2017) optimistically state that "empirical research shows that in most deliberatively well-designed

situations these criticisms {i.e. socio-economic disadvantage} do not withstand scrutiny”. For example, Vrydagh (2023, 7) notes how “CAs can rely on stratified random sampling and targeted mobilisation strategies to make sure that all groups are represented”. With regard to the former (i.e., stratified random sampling), this usually involves a two-stage process (Curato et al. 2021, 41–46; OECD 2020), with organisers firstly sending invitations to randomly be selected and secondly proceeding to select participants from those who accept using stratified random sampling technique (Vrydagh 2023, 7-8).

Nonetheless, there are arguably two inherent problems relating to the role and choices of organisers therein (Gül 2019). Firstly, self-selection bias is arguably "baked-in" to the process, even amongst those marginalised groups (e.g. low SES; women; minorities); hence, it may be questionable how representative these individual participants (with multiple identities) actually are of their disenfranchised groups who may feel distant, detached and at times degraded by the prevailing political establishment (e.g. someone may be from a "minority" background but of high socio-economic status and thus fail to adequately represent the general feelings of their given "stratified" group). Hence, at the very minimum, efforts should be made to reduce self-selection bias to ensure representative legitimacy. Specifically, empirical evidence from Street et al. (2014, 5) suggests that “stratified sampling with a broad range of criteria; recruitment through market research company or by telephone, letter or door-knocking; and a substantial honorarium” can all help to reduce self-selection biases and the under-representation of traditionally disenfranchised groups. However, the authors add an important caveat that failure to account for *all* of these stated measures – in favour of just a select few – has been empirically shown to lead to a less representative sample. The second inherent problem regarding the role of organisers in selection is that stratified random sampling implies that “CA designers use various socio-demographic, geographic, and political criteria (Vrydagh 2023, 8; Curato et al. 2021: 39–41; Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008)”. However, as Mackenzie (2023,25) propounds, “(o)ne of the problems...is that stratification brings human judgement and biases back into the selection process, thus potentially undermining the legitimising force of using random selection in the first place”. Herein, Bottin and Mazeaud (2023, 338) note that "public servants are still under-analysed in studies on participatory processes, and are almost invisible in studies on CAs, even though they play a key role in their organisation". Indeed, Gül (2019, 32) has illuminated that "the decisions made by organisers' do not only ensure the smooth process of organising {CAs} but also affect their character”. Moreover, building upon Saward’s (2006, 2010) idea of representation as a “claim-making framework”, Gül (2019, 41) aptly surmises that:

“Organisers are shaping descriptive representation as they see fit. Hence, we should not exaggerate the value of

descriptive representation of demographics. Equally, we should not miss its function for representative claims made in the context of minipublics while keeping the problems with it in mind”.

Overall, the author notes how "the underlying assumption of descriptive representation is that a representative body is the one that most resembles the represented ", something which can be possibly used by deliberative organisers and sponsors to bolster the perceived (output) legitimacy of a given (C)CA process. For example, with regard to the given ICA case, Gül (2019, 35) cites how “the participants are argued to be ‘a representative sample of ordinary members of Irish society’ (ICA 2017, 39)”. Therefore, it is clear that even seemingly "mundane organisational tasks affect our evaluation of {CAs} as democratic citizen engagements" (Gül 2019, 39). The deliberative case of *We the Citizens* (hereon **WTC**) – the first citizens’ assembly experiment in Ireland – is illustrative of these design features and organisational choices. For example, just 16% of those contacted positively responded to an invitation to partake in the deliberative exercise. Moreover, "lower class" citizens' were underrepresented when compared to "upper-middle class" participants (WTC 2011,25), while similarly "members started with a higher level of interest than the control groups" (WTC 2011, 14). Furthermore, the WTC suffered from an over-representation of older participants, while at the same time, younger cohorts were significantly under-represented (with their representation equating to less than half of the general populace in percentage terms). Thus, as aforementioned, it could be argued those with fewer resources (e.g. time, income, efficacy) were less willing and/or able to partake – something which may have been exacerbated by the lack of financial remuneration. Herein, Farrell et al. (2019, 118) note with reference to the specific ICA case that there were higher levels of turnover and lower levels of turnout than in the prior Canadian and Dutch assemblies (e.g. see Fournier et al., 2011). In line with Street et al. (2014), these shortcomings could have been exacerbated by the organisational decision³⁷ not to provide financial remuneration for participation which may have impinged on the representation of both the young and low-income groups, as one could reasonably assume that they would be less financially secure. Conversely, older and wealthier individuals – who were notably over-represented – arguably had more “free” time and general resources to induce commitment to the WTC process. Indeed, the WTC report itself concluded that "an important factor in the Irish case was the decision not to provide members with an honorarium in recognition of the time and effort they put into the process, a point noted by the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly in its final report". Moreover, regarding the organisational issue of random selection, the prior experience of the *Irish Constitutional Convention* (heron **ICC**) – the first State-sponsored deliberative mini-public in Ireland held between 2012 to 2014 – is perhaps even more concerning. Specifically, “a number of the so-called ordinary

³⁷ Perhaps understandably due to resource constraints

citizens of the Convention were in fact known to each other”, including a married couple who actually approached the recruiting company to seek selection (Carolan 2015, 742). More worryingly, “their relationship was not notified to other members of the Convention and...both sought to be selected for membership of the Convention's internal organising committee”. As Carolan (2015, 742) propounds, the fact that “the polling company was willing to entertain this suggestion and in fact to recruit {them} raises obvious issues concerning the randomness of the sample selected”. Overall, he suggests it casts doubt “on the diversity of attitudes present within the {ICC}”, while importantly noting that “(w)hile a sample may be statistically representative, that does not necessarily mean that the members are subjectively representative of the attitudes that exist within the community at large”.

Finally, in addition to overcoming such fundamental selection flaws as witnessed within the ICC case, Stasiak et al. (2021, 5-6) call for additional design features to include underrepresented voices within (C)CAs. Specifically, they call for “focus groups or round tables with selected individuals or groups that are not well represented or unlikely to be reached by a random selection process”. Moreover, the authors state that “inviting public submissions or undertaking open Q&A sessions” may help to better include the broader public's views. For example, Devaney et al.'s (2020, 12) official ICA evaluation states that the public submission “process provided *already engaged* “mid-publics” with a platform to voice their concerns, propose solutions and feel part of the policy process” (emphasis added). However, it is also debatable how representative such “engaged” groups are of latent public opinion³⁸. Moreover, the authors also note that “questions remain over how the submissions were used by the mini-public partaking in the {ICA}”, for example, their possible influence on framing and/or agenda-setting, which will be discussed in the following section. Overall, this illustrates the importance of transparency in assuring (representational and overall) legitimacy throughout a {C}CA process.

2.7.2 Procedural Rules

The concept of “procedural rules” herein closely relates to the idea of “throughput” or “process” legitimacy as illuminated by other scholars (e.g., Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2023) and within the aforementioned evaluation frameworks (see **Section 2.6**). Specifically, Stasiak et al. (2021, 4-5; also see Harris 2019) note how this relates “to the very processes of participation, its rules of decision-making and contextual independence”. Overall, these procedural rules may pertain to the processes of deliberation, framing and agenda-setting, which will be discussed in detail throughout the following section, with Stasiak et al. (2021, 4-5) also citing the importance of

³⁸ For example, note the disconnect between the prevailing NGO stakeholders' position and the public vote in relation to Women and Care referendums in 2024 – both of which emerged from the 2020-2021 CA on Gender Equality

“transparency, openness, and inclusiveness” therein. Overall, with regard to the input legitimacy of the given ICA case, Abelson et al. (2003, 244) state that “the extent to which the procedural aspects of a consultation process are legitimate, reasonable, responsive and fair are fundamental aspects of the evaluation process”.

Regarding "the very processes of participation" (Stasiak et al. 2021, 4), the act of deliberation itself – which builds upon the concept of "voice" (2009) introduced in the previous representation section (i.e. **see Section 2.7.1**) – is arguably the “defining feature of deliberative democracy” (Dryzek 2000, 31). Herein, traditional deliberative scholars tend to emphasise the idea of “justification rationality theory” (Muradova 2020) in line with the Habermasian school of communication, wherein "no force except that of the better argument is exercise" (Habermas 1975, 108). For example, Bächtiger et al. (2010, 33) define deliberation as “a systematic process wherein actors tell the truth, justify their positions extensively and are willing to yield to the better argument”. Herein, Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 219) cite empirical evidence which shows "CAs can shift the preferences of their participants (Andersen and Hansen 2007; Fishkin 2011)...by balancing the biases of individual reasoning (Mercier and Landemore 2012; Setälä and Smith 2018). Moreover, deliberation may help create a sense of shared identity (Hartz-Karp et al. 2010) and communal values (Knobloch and Gastil 2015). For example, empirical evidence from the Irish deliberative model suggests that this “talk-centric” process can generate empathy “towards people whose lives are very different from their own” (Suiter et al. 2020, 264). Furthermore, Vrydagh (2023, 5) notes that “for deliberative democrats, a law is legitimate to the extent that it is the result of democratic deliberation, which implies that all citizens and points of view affected by that law can participate in the deliberation and receive an equal consideration and are freely compared (Floridia 2017: 108; Habermas 2015; Manin 1987)”. Hence the author above – building on the work of other scholars – concludes that deliberation has numerous benefits such as “improving the epistemic credentials of decisions: through the exchange of arguments, participants can broaden their perspectives, understand the rationale of others, and identify potential flaws or particular interests (Bächtiger and Parkinson 2019: 2; Manin 1987: 351–355).

However, some scholars have questioned the claimed positive effect of deliberation between citizens themselves. Herein, such academics “accentuate the role of knowledge acquisition” (Barabas in Muradova 2020, 2) – something which will be discussed in detail within the following “Information” section (**see Section 2.7.3**) – and therefore suggest that the "quality of deliberation" has little real effect on citizens' attitudes (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2014). Indeed, arguably, the effects of information acquisition may be particularly acute for a “wicked problem” like climate change, which may rely more on specialist knowledge. For example,

concerning an Australian citizens' jury on an environmental issue, Goodin and Niemeyer (2003, 627-628) found that participants altered their opinions "more in response to the 'information' phase of proceedings, involving a large degree of deliberation within', than during the formal 'discussion' phase" – in short, their evidence suggested the former to “be far more important”. Nevertheless, O'Malley et al.'s (2019, 332) existing empirical evidence from the specific ICA case suggests that it is often “difficult to distinguish between deliberation and information”. Similarly, Muradova et al. (2020, 1332) note that “when questioned on the relative importance of the information and deliberation” phases for their decision-making, most interviewees {i.e. citizen members} credited “a mixture of both”. Moreover, Muradova (2020, 627) importantly notes that the “information theory...posits that individuals gain issue-related information and knowledge either from experts or each other (or both) in deliberation, which leads them to reconsider their policy choices (*emphasis added*)”. Herein, Muradova et al. (2020, 1332) suggest that “deliberation reinforces the understanding that participants gain through passively receiving information by allowing them to actively reflect, ask questions and apply newly acquired knowledge in the context of a discussion”. Hence, the authors – drawing on the work of Brown (2014) – “do not discount the importance of deliberation, but rather stress that both components together determine outcomes”. Consequently, a deeper discussion of the deliberation stage is thus required within the context of CCAs and the specific ICA. Perhaps the most apt definition of this deliberation process – taking into account Parkinson (2003) condition that deliberative representative must play a “dual role” as both trustees and delegates – comes from Chambers (2003, 309), who describes it as: “*a debate and discussion aimed at producing reasonable, well-informed opinions in which participants are willing to revise preferences in light of discussion, new information, and claims made by fellow participants*”. Moreover, given the context of the stated research question and goals, the author significantly adds that: “*although consensus need not to be the ultimate aim of deliberation, and participants are expected to pursue their interests, an overarching interest in the legitimacy of outcomes (understood as justification to all affected) ideally characterises deliberation*”. Herein, the difficulty of defining “all affected” has been illuminated within the previous section (see **Section 2.7.1**); yet importantly, Parkinson (2003) purports that this should be at the discretion of citizens’ – not sponsors, bureaucrats or technocrats – to decide (a point which shall be shortly discussed further relating to “citizens’ control”). Moreover, such decisions undoubtedly have implications for a deliberative process's subsequent framing and agenda-setting setting. For example, should members within a given CCA be concerned with the impact of climate change within their borders or take a more global view encompassing the effect on the world's poorest is one such moral quandary (Stasiak et al. 2021)?

Despite the diversity of scholarly debate surrounding the concept of "deliberation", Lindell (2011) elucidates three core conceptual ideals within the literature: inclusion, reflection and rationality. Firstly, **the prior "Representation" section** has partly covered the concept of inclusion under the guise of "presence" (Smith 2009). However, even accounting for design innovations to induce inclusion³⁹, Curato et. al (2019, 68) aptly note that "getting a seat at the table is vastly different from having a voice at the table". However, García-Espín (2023, 3) empirical evidence *does* suggest that "increasing presence also result{s} in greater voice". Nonetheless, "voice" (Smith 2009) is also essential for achieving *meaningful* inclusion. Specifically, García-Espín (2023, 3) states that "voice has more to do with people's direct involvement in deliberations, negotiations, and decision-making and the measures that lead to participants' views being taken into account". Notably, she also argues that this goes beyond the ability to express opinions, stating that "real inclusion implies that people's views are taken into account even when they are not expressed in dominant discursive codes". Herein, such "internal exclusion" (Young 2000) may diminish significantly by "the presence of a professional facilitator", thus strengthening overall process-legitimacy (Stasiak et al. 2021,5). For instance, Willis et al. (2021, 4) note that "facilitation ensures free and fair communication between participants in the development of recommendations" within CCAs. Specifically, Trénel (2009, 253) state that it may also "structure group communication in a way that empowers disadvantaged participants". Importantly, the author distinguishes between "basic facilitation" that "keeps participants focused on the agenda and ensures rules of civility" and "advanced facilitators...professionally recruited for each discussion group, in order to balance participation, create a respectful climate, and stimulate, clarify, and summarize discussions". However notably, Willis et al. (2021, 4) cite that "different {climate} assemblies had different approaches to coordination and facilitation that played into their degree of politicization". Likewise, Trénel (2009, 255) laments that this is "particularly troubling, as the basic facilitation approach seems to be the most common". With regard to the specific ICA case, initial empirical evidence from Muradova (2020, 8), suggests that facilitation "provided the members with a safe environment in which to air...differences".

Nevertheless, Curato et al. (2021, 62-63) remark how facilitation is no easy task, as it necessitates identifying the nuanced and implicit pathways through which inequalities may manifest and contaminate deliberative communication. For instance, although Trénel (2009, 255) argues that "advanced facilitation" fosters a more inclusive environment – particularly for women, but also to a lesser extent for "non-whites, low income and low educated groups" – its overall impact is subject

³⁹ For example, quotas for "affected groups", public submissions, focus groups or lay contributors to account for those who may be under-represented)

to empirical debate. Specifically, Willis et al. (2021, 8) state that “even with trained facilitation, questions remain about the extent to which {CCAs} are able to overcome established differentials in participation”. Herein, the authors cite “emerging evidence from different {CAs} suggests that women's arguments are less likely to be taken up (Beauvais, 2021)”. Yet, in contrast, Harris et al.’s (2021) recent evidence from the ICC found that although men spoke more often than women in the plenary sessions, women tended to participate more than men during roundtable discussions (although previously discussed selection flaws should be noted herein). Furthermore, Willis et al. (2021, 8) also highlight evidence that even with facilitation, “those with lower income contribute less often and may have less capacity to engage in deliberations” (Gerber et al., 2018; Han et al., 2015; Setälä et al. 2010)”. Overall, the authors posit that “these differentials have particular resonance if we expect {CCAs} to consider challenges of climate justice”, citing concerns from Kahane (2018) as to “whether {CCAs} are the right institutional model to deal effectively with the degree of change to economic and social systems”. In sum, Willis et al. (2021, 8) conclude that “these are empirical questions that require more application and analysis of DMPs²”, something this present research intends to address within the context of the ICA.

Secondly, Lindell’s (2011) concept of “**reflection**” encompasses the need to allow assembly members time to consider their viewpoints and various competing counterarguments. Herein, the findings of Willis et al. (2021, 7) analysis of deliberative democracy and the climate crisis – and exploration of specific case studies in Ireland, the UK and France – “point to the ability of citizens to make sophisticated judgments, not just about the merits of particular technologies or approaches, but about the politics and power relations that lie behind them”. Nevertheless, Bryant and Stone, (2020, 21) state the somewhat obvious fact that the “gathering of citizens to navigate their way around this super wicked problem {of climate change} and the complex landscape of actors involved will take a significant amount of time”. However, problematically, Willis et al. (2021, 7) note how “some {CAs} have been rightly criticized for asking participants to cover too much ground with limited time”. For example, Duvic-Paoli (2022, 242³) cites how the Irish CA series “met for 12 weekends between October 2016 and April 2018 in a hotel in Dublin, with limited time to discuss five topics of considerable importance and scope”, including climate change (i.e. the ICA). Herein, Street et al. (2014, 5) systematic review of citizens' juries in health policy decision-making – another complex policy area relying heavily on technical expertise and guidance – is informative. The authors found that “in shorter juries, some participants complained of insufficient time to explore the issues but... still delivered outcomes”. Conversely, they cite how longer deliberative processes gave citizens the “opportunity to engage with different forms of evidence”. Notably, they also found evidence that “(l)onger juries did permit participants greater

control over the ensuing report", something which also has relevance for the "degree of citizens' control" (Abelson et al. 2003).

Furthermore, the third concept expounded by Lindell (2011, 4) pertains to *rationality*, with the traditional scholarly thought on deliberation having “a strong focus on rational argumentation”. As previously discussed, even with inclusion and the presence of trained facilitators, certain marginalised groups may not have an adequate voice within climate assemblies (Willis et al. 2021), something which might potentially call into question the inherent legitimacy of CCAs to deal with wicked problems requiring seismic structural change (Kahane 2018). Unfortunately, “the style and standards of deliberative reasoning” often amplifies such criticisms. According to Lövbrand and Khan (2010, 49 -57), this may “further disadvantage already disadvantaged citizens”. Specifically, the authors (also see Lupia and Norton 2017) suggest that such discourses “privileges the beliefs, experiences and speaking styles of Western, white, well-educated men at the expense of the marginalized 'other'”. For example, Hooghe (1999, 292) propounds that “even in perfect circumstances, a university professor will always have better chances of convincing others than a manual worker has” (1999, 292). Similarly, Bächtiger et al. (2010, 39; 2018) posit that “many disadvantaged people do not engage in idealized forms of deliberation” – referred to by the authors as “**Type 1 Deliberation**” – which they argue “suits only a privileged few”. Moreover, they suggest that this focus “on rational, dispassionate discussions creates a stifling uniformity and constrains deliberation” in the name of consensus, with Parkinson (2003, 184; also see Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Youngs 2020; Moore 2016) stating that “reasoned consensus and the ‘civilising’ norms of deliberative democracy submerge the genuine injustices suffered by ‘other voices’”. Furthermore, Fraser (1990, 72) warns against a reductionist focus on “a single, all-encompassing ‘we’, thereby ruling claims of self-interest and group interest out of order” as she argues that “the less powerful may not find ways to discover that the prevailing sense of ‘we’ does not adequately include them”. Additionally, Elstub and Khoban (2023, 116) note how the “deliberative idea of rational argumentation has also been criticised by so-called ‘difference democrats’... (who) argue that there are good reasons to believe that marginalized groups’ arguments and modes of expression will be perceived as unreasonable in deliberation, especially if they threaten the position of advantaged groups (e.g., Williams 2000; Young 1996)”. Herein, Vrydagh (2023, 6) notes that (C)CAs should also enable “a wide range of expression styles, so that everyone feels it is legitimate to participate (Curato et al. 2021), thereby broadening the scope of deliberation beyond the Habermasian ideal of rational discourse (Bächtiger et al. 2010; Young 2000)”. Similarly, Dryzek (2001, 48) calls for “a more tolerant position (which) would allow argument, rhetoric, humour, emotion, testimony or storytelling, and gossip”, characteristic of

“Type 2 Deliberation” (Bachtiger et. al. 2010). Specifically, he argues that “(t)aking difference seriously means attending to different identities and the different kinds of communication that accompany them, refusing to erase them in the name of a unitary public reason”. According to Bachtiger et. al. (2018, 38), “empirical studies show that almost all participants can tell stories and share experiences to make their points... {while} these studies also suggest that stories can help to include disadvantaged perspectives (e.g. Polletta and Gardner 2018)”. More pointedly, Youngs (2002, 58) calls for an “agonistic model” of authentic deliberation, suggesting that space should be made for combative, critical and sometimes controversial conversations within (C)CAs.

Nevertheless, Muradova (2020, 647- 650) states that “despite this attention to perspective-taking and affective empathy, scholars have rarely theorized about *why*, *how* and *under what conditions* deliberation can induce the process of perspective-taking among citizens and, similarly, *whether* and *under what conditions* perspective-taking is beneficial for citizens’ reasoning processes during deliberations.”. Herein, the author found that the Irish CA series (including the ICA) offered participants a “safe environment” and subsequently “invited the free expression of stories and arguments and it contributed to creating bonds of trust and mutual understanding among citizens even when they disagreed with each other”. However, importantly she notes that “stories and testimonies” alone do not represent the full picture unless accompanied by “factual information and argumentation”. This empirical evidence conforms with Smith’s (2009; 24) theoretical assumption that “considered judgment does not simply require citizens to learn more “facts” about the issue under consideration...it also requires them to appreciate the views of other citizens with quite different social perspectives and experiences”. Hence, it is important to note that Type 1 and Type 2 style deliberation need not be mutually exclusive: on the contrary, Bachtiger et. al. (2018, 36-37) state that “second generation approaches to deliberative democracy have...helped to broaden the idea of what counts as communicative rationality and are more fully inclusive of diverse people and their histories, identities, biases, and imperfections”. Moreover, with regard to other empirical evidence from the Irish context, the WTC report (WTC 2011, 23) cited “statistically significant” changes in opinions among assembly members “after they had deliberated on economic issues”. Notably, it suggests these were “not random or the result of chance”, but on the contrary “distinctly different from those of the various control groups”. Similarly, O’Malley (et al. 2019, 330) found “significant differences” between the deliberation and information (control) groups in addition to “significant differences in the opinion change under deliberation” at the WTC. Nonetheless, the WTC also highlighted how under-represented groups may ultimately have their interests suppressed despite the rhetoric of inclusiveness. Specifically, the report noted that “when specific questions related to concrete proposals were made, for example, the introduction of gender

quotas to increase the number of women in the Dáil⁴, responses became more guarded” (WTC 2011, 30), suggesting an unwillingness to engage in an “agonistic model” (Youngs 2022) of deliberation with regards to thorny topics.

Moving on from the above discussion on deliberation (both inclusion and voice), the questions of who sets the rules, remit and agenda are other important components of procedural rules and together relate to the degree of citizen control within a given assembly (Abelson et al. 2023). Indeed, Thorman and Capstick (2022, 1; also see Elstub et al. 2021) note that “the influence of a climate assembly cannot be separated from the internal logic and scope of the process itself... {which} can encompass the topic areas used to consider climate action, the extent to which processes are ‘bottom-up’ (driven by citizens’ concerns) or ‘top-down’ (the agenda determined in advance by experts)”. Although the literature has predominantly focused on “agenda-setting” processes (e.g., Smith 2009) as an indication of citizens control thus far, more recent scholarly attention has been paid to the importance of framing (e.g. Shaw et al. 2021; Blue and Dale 2016). For instance, the OECD (2021, 18) calls for “non-leading, unbiased, clear” framing as part of their *“Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes”*. However, as Shaw et al. (2021, 1) purport, “there is no neutral way of framing climate change”, as inevitably, the “choice of information and how it is presented always represents a particular viewpoint”. Herein, in their article *“Framing and power in public deliberation with climate change: Critical reflections on the role of deliberative practitioner”*, Blue and Dale (2016, 1) illuminate the power dynamics behind such (organisational) choices and propound that “it is a well-known principle among practitioners and researchers alike that whoever controls the frame of an issue in a deliberative setting also shapes the outcomes in important ways”. Akin to Gül’s (2019) aforementioned critique regarding organisational choices around representation – and with reference to the chosen research question and specifically the assessment of “interlinkages” between inputs and outputs (see Section 1.6) – Blue and Dale similarly suggest that “decisions over framing, some of which are more conscious and deliberate than others, influence the process of opinion formation among participants as well as the outcomes of deliberation”. Similarly, Shaw et al. (2021, 1) explain how the issue of climate “can be framed in many ways” – from a purely scientific and technical problem to a public health and even moral issue⁴⁰, not to mention concerted environmental or economic concerns (Badullovich et al. 2020). Hence, as Parsons (1995, 88)⁵ elucidates, “problems involve perceptions, and perceptions involve

⁴⁰ For example, Gus Speth, a former Senior Advisor to President Jimmy Carter, famously remarked, “I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystems collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy...and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation and we, (Lawyers) and scientists, don't know how to do that.” [Gus Speth - Earth Charter](#)

constructions”, which consequently makes “a definition of a problem part of the problem”. Indeed, there are “so many potential problems and so many potential ways of responding to them” (Baumgartner and Jones, 2005b, 19) – all the more so for such “wicked problems” as climate change. Thus, Baumgartner and Jones (2005b, 14)⁶ contend that “the aspects of the policy that is emphasized in the debate often determines the outcome”, with Kingdon⁷ (2011, 198) more bluntly arguing that “the recognition and definition of problems affects outcomes significantly”.

Hence, as Shaw et al. (2021, 4) state, the specific framing of climate change ultimately means “highlighting or downplaying different aspects of the issue”. Notably, such choices are rarely if ever decided within a neutral vacuum; on the contrary, Elstub et al. (2021, 4) propound that the process by which issues are selected for discussion is structured by the ‘value choices and the political power of the players’ involved’ (Dietz 2008, 35)...(and) typically reflects the priorities of the commissioning body”. Likewise, Lacelle-Webster and Warren (2023, 100) concur that such crucial decisions are “usually elite driven”. Herein, Smith (2001, 84) has argued this is the “mobilisation of bias is at its highest”, with Shaw et al. (2021, 4) purporting that “these choices have implications for how people engage with the topics, and ultimately the choices they make”. Indeed, regarding the interlinkages between input and output legitimacy, Elstub et al. (2021, 3-4; Goodin 2005) illuminate an inevitable “path dependency here, as the scope of a citizens’ assembly will determine many of the design features and the interest of policymakers and the public in the process and its outcomes”. However, the authors note that despite the fundamental importance of framing and issue selection with (C)CAs, “much of the research on the agenda of mini-publics has been {solely} theoretical”. Indeed, Blue and Dale (2016, 16) likewise note that “in practice, the complexity and consequences of choices about framing are often left unexamined”. Hence, further empirical research on the (systematic) effects of framing is required. Consequently, framing – in addition to agenda-setting processes – should be seen as a key component of an evaluation of popular control, namely “the degree to which participants are able to influence different aspects of the decision-making process” (Smith, 2009, 12). Herein, Abelson et al. (2003, 244) ask the pertinent question of “(w)hat point in the decision-making process is public input being sought?”. According to Youngs (2022, 10), “at present, {CAs}... rarely emerge from other sources of political legitimacy”, with the wider public often utterly unaware of these processes. Instead, he argues that they are “*pushed* by a narrow circle of officials, experts, and participative practitioners, but rarely subject to wide-ranging democratic debate” (emphasis added). Likewise, Boswell et al. (2023, 85-89) note that “(w)hat is less problematized is that CAs are mostly rooted in what we call “big-D Design” thinking in democratic governance – an abstract and technocratic exercise in developing and implementing institutional interventions to democratize the policy process”. Herein, the authors note the concern

that top-down forums may crowd out or marginalise more organic civic activism and, therefore, merely "function as a tool by which governing elites seek to tame difficult issues, shutting out or quietening the “noise” from the public sphere (also see Lee 2015; Fuji-Johnson 2015; see Courant 2021)”. Hence, they argue that such (C)CAs may offer nothing but “the veneer of democratic inclusion within a context of continuing elite domination” (Boswell et al. 2023, 89). More worryingly, from a transparency and contextual independence point of view, Boswell et al. (2023, 88) warn that CAs often “provide little scope for the sort of scrutiny or accountability typical to established democratic institutions”.

Even discounting the possibility of concreted elite manipulation of (C)CA processes, such tensions may also arise amongst democrats and environmental activists, especially considering the “dilemma of green democracy” (Wong 2016, 136). Goodin (1992, 168) perhaps best encapsulates this dilemma when expounding that: “*To advocate democracy is to advocate procedures, to advocate environmentalism is to advocate substantive outcomes: what guarantee can we have that the former procedures will yield the latter sorts of outcomes?*”. Indeed, Wong (2016, 151) propounds that despite the claims from proponents that “green values are more likely to emerge in a deliberative context”, in reality, “it cannot guarantee that green collective decisions will eventually be generated from the decision procedure”. Moreover, the empirical evidence that CCAs even produce different – let alone substantially "better" green outcomes remain weak to date (e.g., Vrydagh 2023, 1). Consequently, environmental advocates pursuing climate action via democratic means face, from their perspective, an inherent risk, as Saward (1993, 93) bluntly notes that such "greens have a little comeback if a majority does not want green outcomes". Hence, Lövbrand and Khan (2010, 51) note that “political scholars are often faced with the pressing question concerning whether deliberative practices can legitimately be *steered* towards environmentally sustainable ends" (emphasis added). Herein, such "ends" may be influenced by framing and subsequent agenda-setting processes. Nevertheless, such "steering" may be the beginning of a slippery theoretical and practical slope, with prominent green theorists like Goodin believing that "democracy may be sacrificed to pro-environmental outcomes"; thus, other scholars such as Saward point out the obvious “risk of green democracy degenerating into some kind of authoritarian procedure” (Wong 2016, 138-139). This inherent temptation to steer a CCA may have profound implications when we consider the input and output legitimacy of the ICA, and their various interlinkages. For instance, Shaw et al. (2021, 5) posit that "given that public audiences outside of the CA will judge the outcomes on the basis of their values and worldviews, if those elements of the understanding and deliberation have not been built into the process, subsequent communications (a key aspect of CA remits) will not be informed by knowledge of how values have shaped the responses".

Importantly, they suggest that consequently, "public acceptance of the recommendations may be low, and hence undermine the ability for climate action to be taken on the basis of the recommendations".

Moreover, Shaw et al. (2021, 3-5) note how "perceptions of fairness are an important part of ensuring public acceptance of policies, with policies perceived as unfair unlikely to win broad public support" (Sovacool et al., 2017; Moberg et al., 2018). Herein, empirical evidence shows that "a number of {CCAs} have made efforts to specify normative descriptions for how objectives should be achieved, embedding themes such as fairness, justice and balancing multiple interests" (Ibid). For example, the Scottish CCA called for climate action to be achieved in "*an effective and fair way*", the French iteration stressed the "*spirit of social justice*", while the German edition called for change which is "*good for us, good for our environment and good for our country*" (Ibid). Nevertheless, there is a dearth of empirical research on the impact of framing, something compounded by the failure of most CCA evaluations to consider the issue (Blue and Dale 2016) actively. Nonetheless, there is some evidence from the official evaluation of the ICA case which suggested that the "wide framing of the question... {was} somewhat unhelpful" (Devaney et al. 2021, 15). Moreover, Devaney et al. (2021, 15-20) highlighted the desire among ICA participants and focus group respondents to move away from one-dimensional "cost-orientated framings" and "instead, try to focus on human and non-human impacts of inaction". This initial empirical insight from the ICA aligns with Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 219) concern regarding the "dominance of a techno-managerial framing of climate change which summarizes the situation in numerical objectives, and technological problems, without addressing the political implications...(and) the unequal effects across society". This narrow eco-technocratic approach (Wong 2016), the authors conclude, "ends up glossing over the fundamental conflicts and inequalities that revolve around climate change, and which can't be addressed through technological policy solutions only". In sum, Shaw et al. (2021, 2-5) warns that "values are as important (if not more important) than technical knowledge in making judgements about climate change" and that "if the framing of the issues carries an ideological imprint then that may cause {proposals} to be rejected on those grounds, rather than because of any substantive concerns about the policy itself".

In contrast to framing, scholars have developed extensive theoretical and empirical literature on agenda-setting within deliberative processes. Indeed, Bussu and Dannica Fleuß (2023, 143) note how the literature on CAs "has historically focused on top-down (i.e., state-led) deliberative initiatives (e.g., Bächtiger and Parkinson 2019" and that "these processes have a long history which predates the deliberative turn in the field (Floridia 2017)". Similarly, from the outset of the deliberative turn, authors such as Fraser (1990, 71) have pushed for a "bottom-up"

conception of participation when arguing that citizens “themselves can decide what is and what is not of common concern to them”, a point also echoed by Parkinson (2003) pertaining to the issue of “affected communities” and the contours of representative inclusivity. Moreover, Fraser (1990, 72) states there should be no constraints on “what sorts of topics, interests, and views are admissible in deliberation”. This lack of constraint, she argues, would potentially empower (C)CAs “to contribute to the more critical and emancipatory aspirations of deliberative democracy as a normative theory” (Elstub et al. 2021, 4; also see Böker and Elstub 2015). Indeed, Bussu and Fleuß (2023, 144 -150) propound that the very “idea of “bottom-up legitimacy” remains at the heart of the participatory and deliberative project, whereby legislation and the “rules of the democratic game” must ultimately be rooted in affected citizens’ perspectives, needs and preferences (Fleuß 2021)”. Herein, the authors explain that “within a bottom-up approach, the concern might be more explicitly on disruptive change to political, social, and economic structures that would ensure meaningful opportunities for citizens to participate”.

Nonetheless, Bussu and Fleuß (2023, 142-150) also note how “deliberative democrats frequently “fetishize” bottom-up processes”, particularly the claims of enhanced citizen empowerment, mobilisation and engagement (Cornwall 2004; Perry and May 2010; Wagenaar and Wood 2018). However, such assumptions have been scrutinised in recent years. For example, Bussu and Fleuß illuminate the risk that selected participants may become disconnected and co-opted in their role as “expert citizens”. Moreover, Richardson et al. (2019) note how civil society-led initiatives are often susceptible to being influenced by sectional interests and may be disconnected from the needs of affected citizens if they lack openness, transparency, and inclusivity. Furthermore, they suggest that a State-led approach may be perceivably better placed to (neutrally) mediate between conflicting interest claims. Indeed, concerning citizens' control over agenda-setting, Fraser (1990) herself notes another potential problem of such an idealistic viewpoint when stating that “there is no guarantee that all {citizens’} will agree”. For example, the experience of the fluid bottom-up Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement – which “employed the idea of deliberation to achieve a participatory, consensus-based democracy” (Jae Min 2014, 73) – is informative. In short, Robert's (2012, 758) review of *“Why the Occupy Movement Failed”* notably cites the struggle of “agreeing on the ‘things that need to be done’” as one of the two major difficulties of the movement. Moreover, as numerous scholars have elucidated, a lay public – no matter how representative – may lack the requisite knowledge to set their agenda solely, particularly one as complex as climate change. Furthermore, with respect to the stated research question and goals regarding the interlinkages between inputs and outputs, Elstub et al. (2021, 4) suggest that such an approach may also reduce the potential of CAs “to impact on policy if it is on a topic that

is not of interest to policy-makers”, while proposals are also more likely to contain “radical reform proposals” (Niessen 2003, 334) which may not be feasible, practical or implementable. Herein, the WTC pilot project served as an empirical example of a bottom-up deliberative process within Ireland, as it did not source its agenda from the given Government's electoral programme nor any anointed set of academic experts, but rather from (an albeit biased sample of the) people of Ireland (Elstub et al 2021). This “citizen-led” (WTC 2011) process arguably safeguarded against the potential for citizen “capture” or “co-option” and helped ensure that (despite noted representational biases – see **Section 2.7.1**) “the initiative was truly citizen-led” (WTC 2011, 9). Moreover, design features – such as the forgoing a “top-table or keynote speaker” (WTC 2011, 10) perceivably underlined the principle of “*primus inter pares*” (WTC 2011, 10). Nevertheless, deriving the agenda from a series of regional “roadshows” which were “free and open to everyone” risked the danger of events and the subsequent agenda being “taken over or heavily influenced by some organized political or lobby group” (WTC 2011, 9-10); hence, such bottom-up agenda processes clearly need some constraints. Moreover, given its independence from the representative system, the WTC had little tangible policy impact apart from demonstrating the capacity for deliberation in Ireland (a noteworthy feat).

In contrast, (C)CAs may “be tightly scripted, top-down engagements” (Boswell et al. 2023, 93). For instance, Bussu and Fleuß (2023, 143-44) note how such assemblies are “organized around a clearly defined problem, with a... pre-determined {process-design}, and with expert evidence, structure, and voting options agreed in advance by the commissioning or organizing body”. Consequently, participants of (C)CAs are often forced to deliberate upon “predefined policy options, with limited opportunities to reframe the issue and expand the scope of the evidence around it”, with so-called “citizens” recommendation inevitably “shaped by the way the process is designed”. Not surprisingly, such (C)CAs “are more closely linked to the political agenda of the day and pursue less “disruptive” goals”. Moreover, the authors state the rationale is generally “functionalistic”; specifically, they suggest “the agenda is shaped from above based on the technocratic needs of the public agency that “invite” citizen participation (Cornwall 2004)”. Nonetheless, the authors suggest that this top-down model may be helpful to “generate new information to strengthen effective governance”. Conversely, such (C)CAs could perhaps operate in a more manipulative way “to increase popular support for specific policy outcomes, in order to pre-empt social opposition (Papadopoulos 2012)”. Overall, Lacelle-Webster and Warren (2023, 100) state that political elites define and shape agenda issues, and CAs are thus only convened “when other institutions have the political will and capacity to do so”. However, like in the case of bottom-up assemblies, the empirical reality does not neatly fit the theoretical picture. Specifically,

Bussu and Fleuß (2023, 142) note that one would expect state-sponsored (i.e. Government; public agencies) CAs to “guarantee greater influence on decision-making institutions, as well as stronger legitimacy”; however, they cite empirical evidence which shows that thus far, “only a small number could be said to have led directly to policy or constitutional change” (something which will be further illuminated upon in Section 2.8). One possible reason may be “that mini-publics with pre-determined agendas ‘will tell us little of value about the popular will’ (Richardson 2010) as policymakers will remain uninformed about the issues that matter to the public most” (Elstub et al. 2021, 4) – hence, implementation of perceivable “illegitimate” recommendations may be politically problematic.

Similarly, Felicetti (2023, 382; also see Gastil and Knobloch 2019) warn that such top-down approaches, which “are disconnected from the wider democratic system, in the context of communities that did not ask for public deliberation in the first place”, are likely to induce substantial “misunderstandings and opposition”. Hence, one can reasonably conclude that the oversight of agenda-setting processes and procedural rules must be fully transparent, as Smith (2009) asserts that the “very integrity” of (C)CAs rests on the broader public’s perceptions of fairness when it comes to these stated internal dynamics. In short, these are integral to the input and subsequent output legitimacy of any (C)CA process, as Fournier et al. (2011, 91) propound that “if the assembly members were to fall under the sway of some external actors - the chair or staff of the assembly, interest groups, or some other powerful political actor - they no longer can be said to represent the public”. Herein, regarding the prior Irish Constitutional Convention (ICC), Carolan (2015, 743) notes an evident lack of transparency surrounding such procedural rules. Specifically, the author – in deviating from the prevailing (uncritical) positive commentary surrounding the ICC – states how “(n)o guidance was issued...about the principles or procedures applied to agenda-setting...at any given time”, something which he describes as “normatively troubling...especially in light of the evidence from previous mini-publics about the potentially decisive influence of expert input”. At best, Carolan suggests this could be due to a lack of awareness on behalf of organisers, somewhat surprising given the degree of expertise surrounding the deliberative experiment; or at worst, this could account for “deliberate concealing of these dynamics” (Ibid). Either way, Carolan (2015, 743-746) posits that such a lack of information “cannot but impugn the legitimacy” of a given process, as he propounds that “(o)stentatiously involving ordinary citizens in this process, particularly where the political elite retain control over its agenda and over the ultimate outcome of the process, might cynically be seen as providing only an impression of consultation or commitment to reform”. In sum, he concludes that citizens

involvement alone is “not enough to assure them of influence or autonomy” (Ibid) – with “them” also seemingly referring to the broader citizenry.

Overall, Bussu and Fleuß (2023, 150) illuminate how the two “ideal types” of agenda-setting processes may be used “to achieve different goals in different contexts”. Specifically, bottom-up approaches may be more appropriate “to foster new discourses in the broader society about political alternatives”. Conversely, a top-down approach could “aim to have a concrete impact on policies or constitutional decisions”. Nonetheless, the authors also point to recent empirical evidence of new “new hybrid approaches”, such as the French “*Le Grand Débat*”⁴¹. Specifically, the French example aimed at directly involving the public in agenda-setting processes to address pressing societal issues such as growing distrust, polarisation, and climate change. Herein, Bussu and Fleuß (2023, 150) note how this hybrid approach has the potential to act “as a promising synthesis between these two normative positions, as it reclaims the deliberative toolbox to foster epistemic value but also more radical participation that challenges the socio-economic and political status quo”. Similarly, Rountree and Curato (2023, 78) note that including a “public consultation phase” has ensured that “that participants in CAs do not only hear from experts but also from lay citizens or the wider public”. Furthermore, the authors argue that “this can create incentives for the public to participate in debate because that input can feed directly into assembly deliberations”, whether through attending public hearings or providing written submissions. Overall, Rountree and Curato posit that (C) CA's can “use public input to create a feedback mechanism between the public and assembly members”, thus enhancing the input-output legitimacy of a given process. However, they warn that there is a need for caution “about concluding public consultations influence a CA in practice”, as organisers, experts and even members may “play lip service” to its importance while simultaneously “cherry-pick {ing} elements of the consultations to reinforce their own decisions”. For example, the early cited WTC experience highlighted how interest groups may capture such processes, and thus, full transparency is required to maintain contextual independence. Hence, more empirical evidence is needed regarding the effect of public consultation on the ICA.

Additionally, expert advisory groups (EAGs), which one empirical analysis found in two-thirds of CAs (Street et al. 2014, 7), may alleviate the potential for both uninformed and/or (politically) irrelevant recommendations through (actively) assisting in shaping agendas (e.g. topic and speaker selection). Moreover, they may also help ensure that topics are appropriately refined, as prior research suggests a broad agenda may lead to poor-quality deliberations (Elstub et al.,

⁴¹ Launched by President Macron in 2019: [France's Macron Launches 'Grand Debate' Following Protests \(voanews.com\)](https://www.voanews.com/france/macron-launches-grand-debate-following-protests)

2021). However, although the benefits of such an approach may seem obvious – particularly when we consider the generally high trust in (scientific) experts across society (Edelman Barometer 2021) – a largely “expert-led process” may reduce the scope of (C)CAs to purely instrumental aims, as “the agenda and proposals under consideration are pre-prepared” (Thorman and Capstick 2022, 10). Herein, Bryant and Stone (2020, 19) warn that such an approach risks “denying citizens the opportunity to present their own solutions to issues”. Similarly, Blue (2015, 152) argues that “rather than opening up public issues to diverse meanings, mini-publics can inadvertently close down public debate where only expert issue framings are considered valid, reasonable, and credible”. Herein, she argues that the framing and subsequent agenda-setting of a climate assembly as “an inherently expert-based issue” may limit or even undermine the “admirable objective to include lay publics in climate policy”. More worryingly, Thorman and Capstick (2022, 10) note how therein, expert-derived recommendations may be “misconstrued” as “citizens” recommendations – something which may form part of deliberative sponsors and organisers’ claim-making process (e.g. see Gül 2019; Saward 2010) – with the CAUK cited as one such example. Finally, an expert-driven process may further exacerbate procedural biases through speaker selection, as Thorman and Capstick (2022, 10) note that “choosing the speakers within a mini-public can function as a form of agenda-setting, as each individual speaker brings their own perspective and expertise” – something which will be further explored in the following “*Information*” section.

2.7.3 Information Stage

There is a broad consensus within the literature on (C)CAs that participating citizens should “receive information so as to inform their deliberation, stimulate the production of informed judgement and considered reflection, and to compensate for some internal inequalities among participants” (Vrydagh 2023; also see Curato et al. 2021: 71–72; Drury et al. 2021). Moreover, Ibsen (2023, 2) propounds that “the evidence provision stage is of paramount importance in the formation of attitudes of participants and their collective recommendation writing in climate assemblies”. Herein, the author notes that “this importance raises a number of epistemic, normative, and practical questions that must be taken into account in knowledge curation in citizens assemblies”. For instance, akin to the aforementioned discussions on framing and agenda-setting, information “always represents a particular viewpoint, and so care needs to be taken to understand the implications of various choices” (Shaw et al. 2021, 4). Consequently, regarding the stated research question and associated objectives regarding input-output legitimacy and their interlinkages, Stasiak et al. (2021, 11) propound that the “(i)ndependence and diversity of expertise is essential to an assembly’s epistemic legitimacy”. Moreover, the authors state that “further empirical research is required into the different approaches taken by (C)CAs and how this links to

the perceptions of legitimacy and resonance among political actors and broader publics” – something this present research aim to achieve in the context of the ICA. Hence, the “(d)ecisions regarding what and how information is selected, presented and interpreted are crucial elements of any consultation process and are therefore important evaluation principles to consider” (Abelson et al. 2003, 244).

However, despite the importance of information, particularly for technical topics such as climate change, it is “often overlooked in scholarship on deliberative democracy” (Muradova et al. 2020, 23). For instance, Roberts et al. (2020, 4) note it is “surprising that...the role of witnesses and evidence has been largely neglected, particularly with respect to empirical research”. This is perhaps even more extraordinary – and counterintuitive - when we consider that “the inclusion of expertise and evidence in public debates is considered essential...(g)iven the increasingly technical and complex nature of many policy issues (Roberts et al. 2020, 5; Ophuls, 1977; Goodin 2008). Thus, there remains a continued “uncertainty around the type of evidence best suited to informing deliberation, the desirable qualities of any expert information-providers and the best means of presenting information” within the empirical literature (Ibid). Hence, Stasiak et al. (2021, 15) state that there is a need for further research on “best practices for ensuring legitimacy of *expert* and knowledge input based on past experiences with deliberative processes on climate change policies” (emphasis added). At this stage, it is important to define the term “expert” (and related terminology) for the purpose of this given thesis; specifically, similar to Ibsen’s (2023, 4) recent work on *Knowledge Curation in Climate Assemblies*, “the terms expert and expertise are used in a broad sense to cover not only traditional forms of technical or scientific expertise but also policy experts or citizens with lived experience of a particular social context”. Moreover, other terms will be used to refer generally to denote participating experts (e.g. contributors; speakers), while more specific terminology will be employed to describe different types of speakers (for example, “scientific” or “technocratic” for technical experts, and “lay” and “practitioners” for other contributors).

Furthermore, following on from the discussion on procedural rules, framing and agenda setting, Cherry et. al (2021, 20) cite that “there remains a risk...that the kinds of information selected for inclusion may be more closely aligned with the needs of the policy actors rather than the participants”. For example, regarding the specific ICA case study, Thorman and Capstick (2022, 8) note how “in the climate component of the {ICA}, too, many proposals were actively being considered or largely uncontroversial in policy circles, including increased investment in electric vehicles and active travel, and a socially just transition”. Indeed, in line with Wong’s (2016) concept of “eco-filtering”, Demski and Capstick (2022, 12) purport that “policy options may be offered for assembly appraisal on the basis that these are plausible proposals for implementation”. Therein,

the authors state it is "is problematic to view climate deliberation primarily as an exercise to provide public legitimacy for policies that are already on the political agenda". Nonetheless, they also concede that "the garnering of citizens' informed support can prove valuable for advancing climate action – and as such for enabling impact and legacy" – something which hints at the possible competing motivations of political/policy sponsors, organisers and expert contributors (something fully discussed in **Section 5.3**).

Herein, Wong's (2016) theoretical discussion on how certain "minimal requirements for green democracy" – namely, the robustness to pluralism, consensus preservation, and green outcomes – may be relaxed to overcome the aforementioned "dilemma of green democracy" is informative. Firstly, Wong (2016, 141) illuminates an "eco-filtering approach (which) rejects any inputs that fail to meet certain conditions, such as being sufficiently green-minded, from inclusion in the democratic process". Similarly, Smith and Wales (2000, 58) warn that "there is a danger that even before citizens are directly involved, issues, information and witnesses might be mobilized out of the process". For example, the initial framing remit of the CCA may exclude any debate of whether climate action is, in fact, a moral imperative over competing value and policy concerns (e.g., inequality, poverty, economic growth). On the contrary, it automatically assumes that "green opinions should in principle be prioritised". However, as Wong (2016, 142) posits, "it is possible for the decision procedure so formulated to degenerate into a virtually undemocratic procedure" if a majority non-green public preference is excluded in favour of a "minority choice...which is a seemingly undemocratic outcome". Closely related to the concept of eco-filtering is the "eco-technocratic approach" outlined by Wong (2016, 146), wherein "(a) green collective decision is available if, and only if, these exclusive technocrats submit green opinions (or judgements) as inputs to the decision procedure". As aforementioned, such "inputs" may be particularly crucial within the context of the ICA, given that environmental decisions require "a greater need for knowledge and technical expertise"... (thus) the average citizen will not be able to make a constructive contribution to decision making". Furthermore, in such circumstances "scientific and professional expertise, and expert advisory commissions" will essentially rule, with (C)CAs possibly reduced to a mere rubber-stamping mechanism. Moreover, importantly, Wong (2016, 146) notes that "even if in principle it can produce green collective decisions....eco-technocracy faces significant challenges regarding its insensitivity to pluralistic environmental values and opinions". For instance, he cites that such eco-technocratic approaches tend to favour a narrow economic "efficiency" paradigm of "cost-benefit analysis" and thus consequently risk overlooking "the importance of other values and principles in assessing decision alternatives".

Therein, Thorman and Capstick (2022, 8) likewise note how “there may also be concerns about the limits placed upon the recommendations and outcomes where the process is commissioned by those in power, or where it is rigidly expert-led with a priority on the instrumental application of findings”. Specifically, the authors note that “(t)his is because recommendations are only able to emerge from discussion around topics that are pre-approved, guided by experts, and placed on the agenda a priori” – similar to Wong’s (2016) description of an eco-filtering and an eco-technocratic approach. For example, regarding the chosen ICA case, Courant (2020, 320) has criticised the somewhat “superficial” content of citizens proposals. Herein, Norgaard (in Knops and Vrydagh 2023, 222) “findings also show that “information”, expertise, and knowledge on their own are not sufficient to produce policies that significantly depart from existing trajectories and unchanged daily lives”. Indeed, Cherry et. al (2021, 20) warn that such conditions may not produce “an accurate representation of what concerns participants most about climate change and climate policies”. For instance, in contrast to assumption that “mini-publics are considered to be an effective mechanism to promote a conducive lay-expert relationship for ‘bringing public judgment to bear on expertise’ (Moore in Roberts et al. 2020), Shaw et al’s (2021, 7; also see Badullovich et al. 2020) conversely argue that “much of the literature on climate change framing also comes from unidirectional communications, where information is transferred from the source to the recipient”. Likewise, Ibsen (2023, 2) states that “speakers in climate assemblies often predominantly come from a natural-scientific background, and rarely present in an interactive format that facilitates discussion and engagement with participants”. This, the author warns, “increases the danger of blind deference to authoritative expert opinion” (Ibid), in line with Wong’s conception of “eco-technocracy”. In contrast, Shaw et al. (2021, 7) purport that “citizens’ assemblies, as well as wider society, {should} involve two-way, or multi-dimensional forms of communication from a multitude of actors” and that moreover, CAs “can be a starting point to open up dialogue and generate constructive discussion”. For example, rather than the current unidirectional expert-to-citizen pattern of informational exchange, Christiano (in Roberts et al, 2020, 5) notes how citizens could “determine the aims of policy but that experts should determine the means and consequences of achieving these aims”, something which may be conducive with a “bottom-up” process. Overall, it can be argued that “by starting from a point of deliberation rather than persuasion, the different ways in which climate change is framed and the meanings associated with them can be scrutinised” (Shaw et al.’s 2021, 7; also see Romsdahl, 2020) as opposed to the more narrow “eco-technocratic” approach that neglects pluralistic values and arguably citizen-input. However, this somewhat idealistic notion regarding the potential capacity of individuals – not one homogenous group – to

first grasp and subsequently discursively engage with leading (climate) experts has run into difficulties within the scholarly discourse.

Firstly, regarding the capacity of participants, Schumpeterian (1942, 260-261), among other scholars, has questioned the very potential of the average citizen to comprehend complex information, rationally engage in a “long or complicated” argument or to see beyond their own narrow self-interest. Similarly, Converse (1964) suggests the broader citizens' views on public issues are “non-attitudes” and, therefore, constantly fluctuating due to limited knowledge; consequently, it has been argued that public opinion can be induced via elite manipulation (Zaller 1992). Furthermore, other famous social experiments – such as the Milgram and Asch conformity experiments – have shown the (extreme) dangers of obedience to authority and group conformity, respectively, something which may emerge with CCAs (Ibsen 2023). More recently, Brennan (2016, 60) has described deliberative scholars’ naïve faith in the public’s capacity for reason as “fantasy”. However, these arguments have been somewhat rebuffed by other scholars drawing on more recent empirical evidence (e.g., Elstub and Khoban 2023, 121). Likewise, Lindell’s (2011, 10) meta-study of twelve empirical cases concluded that “citizens can deliberate effectively on challenging and complex issues”. Additionally, the research identified knowledge gains among citizens after the CA “information stage” in 13 out of 19 empirical cases and found no negative findings in the remaining six. Similarly, with reference to the Irish context, the WTC (2011) report noted that citizens augmented their understanding and knowledge of economic affairs as a result of exposure to expert contributions and briefing documents. However, these cases notably refer to general deliberative topics, not climate change. Herein, Bäckstrand (2003, 34-5) notes that “(e)ven an educated citizenry would have problems grasping the complexities of the highly specialized knowledge of environmental science” (Bäckstrand 2003, 34-5).

Secondly, Roberts et al. (2020, 5) purport that “(d)emocrats have given insufficient attention to the issue of expertise...and its associated inequalities in knowledge”. This they argue, comes despite the fact that it “provides a fundamental challenge to democratic and deliberative equality and the idea that all should ‘have an equal opportunity to contribute to deliberation on matters that affect them’ (Moore 2016)”. Indeed, such “internal inequalities” between participants – in terms of class, education-levels and other characteristics – “may be masked by institutionalized ‘comfort’ among participants, apparently taking part equally” (Abelson et al. 2003, 246). Moreover, although design measures – such as the aforementioned use of advanced facilitation – may somewhat lessen deliberative inequities regarding knowledge, others may inadvertently amplify them. For instance, although Elstub and Khoban (2023, 121) acknowledge that “knowledge acquisition is indeed an important aspect of CAs”, they warn that “an over-emphasis on the

educative function...may risk overshadowing their empowering and emancipatory capacity (cf. Böker and Elstub 2015)”, specifically by undermining those participants “who are considered to have relatively little knowledge and skills”. Furthermore, with regard to expert papers provided to assembly members in advance of sessions, scholars such as Huitma (2007, 303) have noted that “not everybody will read the material...(and) this procedure is seen to increase the differences in the participants level of knowledge”. Similarly, disadvantaged participants may struggle to digest the sheer quantity of information provided (due to limited capacity or resources), further putting them at a disadvantage (Lenaghan, 1999).

Thirdly, regarding the potential power of participants to open up complex issues to scrutiny, empirical evidence "suggests a continuing expert-deficit model of lay knowledge, with suspicion (among experts) that the public misunderstands environmental issues". Herein, Bäckstrand (2003, 31) cautioned two decades ago that “the traditional mode of top-down scientific expert knowledge is still retained...while dressed in the language of transparency, dialogue and participation” (Bäckstrand 2003, 31). Similarly, Petts and Brook (2006, 1048) warned that if “a deficit ideal remains amongst individual experts this could be a significant inhibitor of a participative cultural shift in environmental decision making”. Some two decades later, it appears little has changed. Specifically, Ibsen (2023, 2) notes that although “(r)ecent literature emphasises the importance of experts acting as “honest brokers”, who can engage with participants in interactive dialogue and joint deliberation and offer an overview of different actionable policy options...(i)n reality, however, experts often subscribe to an outmoded knowledge-deficit model of science communication, which compromises their ability to serve as honest brokers.” Indeed, recent empirical evidence from a Scottish CA on windfarms also suggests this may still be the case. Specifically, Roberts et al. (2020, 17) found that experts “did not see the participants as equals who they can learn from, and doubted that the jurors could critically scrutinise and evaluate evidence” (Roberts et al 2020, 17). This suggests that experts perceive deliberative forums less as mutually transformative processes meant to broaden possible alternatives, and more as narrow tools to secure access to decision-making while simultaneously legitimising and ensuring acceptance of their proposed solutions. Indeed, Petts and Brooks (2006, 1045) argue that experts do not conceive that “lay knowledge might provide a similar role in terms framing of problems, knowledge input to assessment, and presentation of arguments to aid evaluation” and furthermore suggest that “this extended role for lay knowledge appears to be personally challenging and uncomfortable for experts”. Moreover, it has also been noted within the literature that “few evaluations have assessed what sponsors have learned from the process, implying that the information flow and learning is unidirectional rather than a two-way information exchange as

idealized by the principles of the deliberative forum” (Abelson et al. 2003 246). Nevertheless, the present study will try to fill this empirical gap by illuminating the learning of experts and political sponsors.

Another consequence of the prevailing 'deficit model' is the propensity to attribute the sometimes-unfavorable public responses to the (climate) science as stemming from mere” irrationality, fear, ignorance, and lack of knowledge” (Bäckstrand 2003, 30-38). In contrast, Shaw et al. (2021, 5) cite how “certain elements of the communication of climate change...can make {it} difficult for lay audiences to relate to” (**see Section 2.1**). Consequently, scholars such as Bäckstrand have long called for “improved science communication, scientific literacy, and public understanding of science”. Herein, there is a significant potential to improve the quality of scientific communication and speaker contributions within CCAs to tailor them to citizen’s needs, with Muradova et al. (2020, 8) stating that “simply increasing the supply of information will not...have the desired effect”. Likewise, Ibsen (2023, 2) propounds that “(t)here is an under-utilised potential for climate assemblies to make use of narrative formats, story-telling, and visualisation to increase understanding and facilitate engagement from participants of diverse educational and cultural backgrounds and learning styles”. For instance, Whitmarsh et al. (2010, 56-59) explore the need to “shift away from seeing scientific literacy as defined by knowledge of abstract scientific ‘facts’, towards investigating the contextual meanings of science applied in everyday life”. In doing so, the authors note the importance of “processes of objectification (translating the abstract into the concrete and tangible) and anchoring (categorising according to pre-existing cognitive frameworks thus rendering familiar)” stemming from social representation theory. Herein, Muradova et al.’s (2020, 8; Kahan et al. 2012) empirical evidence from the specific ICA case suggests that “‘individuals’ opinions on climate change are a means of expressing their identity and social values, rather than a consequence of scientific literacy”.

Moreover, Brown (2014, 64) states that “there is something ironic about deliberative forums that aim to challenge the political dominance of experts but then provide experts with a privileged spot in the programme and reduce lay-expert communication to a staged question-and-answer format”. Likewise, Ibsen (2023, 2) notes that speakers in CCAs “rarely present in an interactive format that facilitates discussion and engagement with participants”. Herein, Roberts et al. (2020, 27) suggest designing the format to “encourage rapport between the witnesses and the participants to be rapidly developed” while additionally noting “that effective lay-expert interaction needs to be facilitated”. The early WTC (2011) is interesting in this regard. Specifically, the bottom-up pilot assembly – in contrast to the subsequent officially state-sponsored ICC – had “no top table” so citizens’ and speakers were seen as equal. Moreover, Estlub et al. (2021, 4) also positively

cite the utilisation of a “steering group’ of members” within the chosen ICA case “who were charged with providing feedback and guidance on meeting plans”. In short, this may be another way of breaking down the boundary between experts and citizens. Furthermore, Shaw et al. (2021, 1) note how “people learn in different ways...(and) presentation styles in {CCAs} tend to rely on standard presentation techniques such as powerpoint that privilege particular participants”. Furthermore, Cherry et al. (2021, 16) cite research which illustrates “how different visualisations (e.g., using images of climate impacts, protest or scientific processes) lead to different types of reactions from people”. Overall, Roberts et al. (2020, 6) propound that “the influence of experts on public deliberation ultimately depends on their power to persuade the public”. Arguably, this “accentuates the responsibility of organisers to brief them and facilitate their input” (Ibsen 2023, 2). For example, Roberts et al. (2020, 6) suggest that speakers could be “offered training with professional communicator, to improve their confidence and skills, and to distil and enhance the ‘message’ or story of the witness and means of managing questions”. Herein, Shaw et al. (2021, 5) add that a “solutions-focused orientation of {CCAs} is an effective way of bringing everyday people into deliberations on complex issues like climate”. For instance, regarding the specific ICA case, Muradova et al. (2020, 22) found that “(p)olicy uptake by citizens may (at least partially) depend on the way in which experts present this evidence”. Specifically, they found that “effective communication, conceptualised as communication conveyed in accessible language in a narrative format, reflecting daily lives and values of lay citizens and delivered in an authentic and convincing way, does affect deliberative outcomes”. Moreover, the authors purport that such effective communicators “saw a greater proportion of their policy proposals taken up by the Assembly in the recommendations”. Nonetheless, the authors analysis arguably neglects to consider the quality of these expert proposals, any potential biases and whether a countervailing viewpoint was proffered in the case of experts acting as “issue advocates” (van Beek et al. 2024) – something this present research aims to address.

Herein, climate assemblies (CCAs) face an unenviable dilemma, which Abelson et al (2003, 242) aptly describe as “the ‘double-edge’ built into the deliberative paradigm”. On the one hand, Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 221) note how “experts fulfil an important role in CCAs because they provide the knowledge and information that is necessary for citizens to engage in sound deliberation”. Indeed, the authors cite prior empirical studies which have illustrated “the positive epistemic effects of expert hearing on deliberation and opinion change (Goodin and Niemeyer 2003; Thompson et al. 2021)”. Moreover, if well designed, (C)CAs can offer leading experts “a new stage where they can present their research and help to democratize and disseminate it across society” (Ibid; also see Dryzek and Pickering 2018, 130 –136; Verret-Hamelin and Vandamme

2022). Thus, CCAs offer huge potential to overcome the existing “knowledge-action gap” (Knutti 2019) between climate science and policy (see **Section 2.1**). However, on the other hand, Cherry et al. (2021, 23) note that “whilst presentation of the science of climate change is essential to contextualising climate deliberations, it needs to be recognised that there is no scientific representation of the climate crisis that exists in a political vacuum, outside of wider social and cultural contexts”. Indeed, the reality is that “deliberation does not necessarily change the ground rules for debate and may ignore the way power enters speech itself” (Bäckstrand 2003, 35). Consequently, Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 221) state that expert influence “on CCAs’ participants is also subject to questions and criticisms, because, if poorly designed, expert hearings can end up disempowering citizens and lead to the manipulation of CCAs and their results (Böker and Elstub 2015; Courant 2020, 325–327; Drury et al. 2021, 41)”. Nevertheless, many deliberative proponents and practitioners too often ignore these inherent power dynamics, with Abelson et al. (2003) alluding to “naïve assumptions” regarding the “unavoidable power balance between those who possess what seems to be the desired information, who control its dissemination and the forum within which it is debated (the sponsor of the deliberative process), and those who do not (the participants)”. In sum, Ibsen (2023, 2) aptly surmises that “(f)rom a deliberative-democratic point of view, expert input must be subject to potential counter expertise and public scrutiny”.

Hence, despite the risk of expert bias, manipulation or indeed, capture of (C)CAs, practical design features may limit the propensity for power imbalances within deliberative forums. For example, Knops and Julien Vrydagh (2023, 221) note that “scholars have advocated a series of measures to overcome the most adverse impacts of expert participation, such as preparing participants to engage with experts or allowing participants and experts to cooperate throughout the CA process (Drury et al. 2021; Roberts et al. 2020)”. Moreover, greater transparency regarding the selection and specific role of experts (both EAGs and contributors) may help guard against bias and the replication of inequalities (Roberts et al. 2020). For instance, Ibsen (2023, 2) states that “in the context of a climate assembly, this ideally requires recruitment of a broad spectrum of experts within the bounds of reasonable disagreement, and that participants are given the opportunity to influence the selection of evidence and speaker”. Herein, Stasiak et al. (2021, 13) proffer that “(m)ost assemblies provided transparent information on the selection of...experts”. However, this is questionable when it comes to the Irish deliberative experience thus far, with Carolan (2015, 747) for example citing the “the limitations” of the prior ICC experience, which he argues “underline the necessity for greater transparency around question of process, most notably: the identification, recruitment and selection of independent experts; the procedures used to identify and select speakers for and against the various propositions considered”. Importantly, he notes

how “(n)one of these issues were considered in a public or accessible manner, substantially undermining the plausibility of the Convention’s claim to democratic legitimacy” – something which will need to be judged in the case of the subsequent ICA.

Moreover, Roberts et al. (2020, 4) note there is “very little research on the process of involving experts and their motivation for involvement”. This is despite the fact that “expert views might have a strong impact on how individuals perceive the issue, what kinds of beliefs they have and, consequently, on their attitudes and views” (Lindell 2023, 263). Consequently, as Estlub et al. (2021, 4) state, there is a clear “potential for expert witnesses’ *own* opinions to influence the outcome of an assembly” (emphasis added), something which may undermine both the input and output legitimacy of (C)CAs given their growing influence. Specifically, the authors (also see Böker and Elstub 2015) aptly propound that “if the witnesses and evidence are not incorporated in an appropriate manner, {CAs} can be highly susceptible to manipulation”. Consequently, Lindell (2023, 263) propounds that “experts need to be chosen wisely to ensure a plurality of expert views and to make sure all views are valued (Leino et al. 2021)”. Herein, Elstub and Khoban (2023, 117) suggest that “to mitigate this danger, balanced advisory boards usually select relevant experts and advocates to speak to the assembly members and guide them on, and review, the specific information to provide, and the manner in which they provide it (Elstub 2014)”. Nonetheless, the authors admit that this “may not be sufficient to prevent manipulation”, with Roberts et al. (2020, 7) also citing the obvious problem wherein experts (i.e. Expert Advisory Board members) picking experts (i.e. speakers) simply “recreates existing power relationships” (Roberts et al. 2020: 7). Moreover, the same criticism with regard to the selection speakers may also hold for EAGs, especially if there is little transparency regarding the recruitment of experts therein. Nevertheless, Estlub et al. (2021, 4) empirical evidence notes that “expert selection is usually a task performed by the organisers or their stewarding board”. Indeed, Ibsen (2023, 3) agrees that “in reality, time and budget constraints often mean that evidence and speakers are chosen by organisers and only subsequently vetted by a scientific board”.

However, Estlub et al. (2021, 4; also see Lang 2008) cite the potential herein for citizen members to have more informal control over agenda-setting processes through speaker selection. Similarly, Roberts et al. (2020, 7-15) also posit that greater citizenry autonomy over speaker selection can mitigate against potential (advertent or inadvertent) manipulation from background experts (e.g. oversight committees). Nevertheless, they state that “real-world’ time and resource restrictions often limit the capacity to support this model of witness recruitment”. Indeed, Ibsen (2023, 2) finds that “citizens are often only given the chance to influence knowledge curation later in the process, if at all”. Nonetheless, little academic scrutiny has been given to the diversity and

representativeness of speakers (Street et al. 2014; Roberts et al. 2020), while a recent systematic review of various deliberative forums by Elstub et al. (2018) found little variation in speaker selection thus far. This lack of diversity – which herein not only refers to demographic characteristics but (more) importantly, epistemological diversity – and the accompanying lack of scrutiny regarding the selection and role of experts is, therefore, deeply problematic. However, Abelson et al. (2003, 246) propound that "(e)ven with significant lay involvement in and control over the selection of experts and information, the vast majority of the public will defer to the "experts" when it comes to these decisions because they may not have the expertise required to critically appraise the information presented". For example, Cherry et al. (2021, 20) illuminated the potential for "acquiescence bias" – "whereby people are naturally inclined to agree with options presented to them" – within the CAUK case. Specifically, they suggest that the extremely high agreement with expert proposals "also raises the question of the extent to which assembly members might be inclined to support whichever options they had presented to them". Hence, Abelson et al. (2003, 246) aptly conclude that there is a "heavy burden" on assembly members who are expected to act as "judge, lawyer and jury".

Nevertheless, the empirical evidence indicates that "lay witnesses can also be helpful in improving the public's understanding of complex principles" (Abelson et al. 2003, 246), with the important caveat that they should be "utilised on an equal footing with professionals, with equivalent time and equal opportunities for questioning" (Dunkerley and Glasner 1998, 188). Herein, Stasiak et al. (2021, 15) "recommend including the voices of affected persons and controversial viewpoints in addition to scientific expertise". For example, Muradova et al.'s (2020, 1332) findings from the ICA suggest that lay speakers were "well positioned to tap into the everyday concerns and values of citizen deliberators" and consequently cite the need for a range of both expert and non-expert contributors at such fora. Nonetheless, Bäckstrand (2003) importantly highlights that lay evidence is not "necessarily truer, better or greener" and should, therefore, not be placed on a pedestal without challenge (either). Moreover, there is a danger that competing and conflicting presentations by experts and lay speakers alike – particularly those considered "controversial viewpoints" (Stasiak et al. 2021, 15) – may lead to considerable confusion for citizen members. For instance, Lindell (2023, 263) laments that "even if organizers usually invite experts with various expertise and point of views, citizens may use expert information highly selectively to confirm their pre-existing views". In contrast, Roberts et al. (2020, 28) suggest the inclusion of a "neutral witnesses" may help citizens in this regard. Similarly, rather than pushing a particular agenda or policy ideas, Thompson et al. (2021) argue that the primary role of experts is to foster

learning and internal reflection which can serve as a catalyst for participants to consider various values and new perspectives.

Overall, Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 221) conclude that “despite the apparent benefits of including climate-experts in CCAs, scholars also point out the ambiguous role of expertise in this context”. Specifically, they note how the heavy reliance on expert contributors within CCAs leads to doubts and questions “about the type of output that is expected from CCAs: should they formulate broad policy principles and values to be translated by policymakers (Christiano 2012) or should they come up with detailed and informed ready to-use climate policies?”. The authors conclude that “the empirical evidence on recent CCA experiences points in different directions”. Regardless of the choice, clearly transparency and contextual independence – both cross-cutting concepts – are particularly crucial when it comes to the selection of expert advisors, (lay) speakers and subsequent (academic) evaluations. Regarding the latter, academic experts also often play an important and often under-discussed role in evaluating (C)CAs, a process which is essential to their perceived (external) legitimacy. Indeed, such (positive) evaluations may serve as part of the “claim-making” (Saward 2010) process by sponsors, organisers and experts to encourage further institutionalisation of (C)CAs within a given polity. However, there is a need to be wary of any potential conflict of interests. For example, Carolan (2015, 746- 748) cites “the way in which the {ICC} ‘agenda items or narrative . . . sometimes reflected the interests of the academics’ highlights similar risks with the influence of an assembly’s experts”. Moreover, he notes that “cynics might also point out that these bodies are likely to provide academics with their best opportunities to positively influence public policy”. Consequently, Demski and Capstick (2022, 12) argue that “(i)deally, any evaluation process should be fully independent from those organisations and individuals commissioning, designing, carrying out, or affected by the outcomes of a climate assembly”. However, the OECD’s (2021, 12) finds that “only seven per cent {of CAs} have had an independent evaluation”. Hence, there is a clear need for transparent and contextually independent assessment ICA outcomes – something which shall be further illuminated in the following section.

2.7.4 (Process-Related) Outcomes

Following on from the importance of transparency with regard to academic or expert involvement in CCA evaluations, the OECD (2021, 12) also note how “timely evaluation strengthens the trust of policy makers, the public, and stakeholders in any recommendations developed by a deliberative body”. Moreover, the report adds that “their confidence in the legitimacy of the process is crucial”. Herein, it is clear that “the effectiveness of any public participation or consultation process should be judged by some measure of the outcomes achieved”

(Abelson et al. 2003, 247). This may include individual-level effects (including their expectations and follow-up care), whether better or different decisions have been reached and how the process is externally perceived (e.g. politicians, media and public) – all of which shall be discussed in the following sections.

Regarding individual-level effects, Stasiak et al. (2021, 8) note that “(m)ost studies have focused on the internal dynamics of {CCAs} and their effect on participating individuals (c.f. Kirby et al. 2021; Setälä et al., 2010). For example, the authors suggest “that being involved in a {CCA} improves a person’s ability to participate in other political processes and augments overall trust that citizens can meaningfully engage in debating and solve complex issues (Farrell et al., 2019; Roberts and Escobar, 2015)”. Similarly, Jo and Nabatchi’s (2021, 138)¹ meta-study assesses personal impacts of public participation – including deliberative processes – within the healthcare setting, another “wicked problem” area requiring specialist knowledge. Herein, their comprehensive review illuminates that “most individual-level effects pertain to perceptual and attitudinal changes, and many fall into one of four categories: (1) increased awareness about the issue being addressed (Delli Carpini, Cook, and Jacobs 2004; Rowe and Frewer 2000), (2) greater perceived competence (Barabas 2004; Tolbert, et al. 2003), (3) enhanced self-efficacy and empowerment (Gastil 2000; Morrell 2005), and (4) improved trust in public service professionals (Bloomfield et al. 2001; Bryson et al. 2013)”.

Overall, Jo and Nabatchi (2021, 145-7) find that “direct public participation generates positive individual-level outcomes, including issue awareness, competence, empowerment, and trust, albeit to varying degrees depending on the process”. Importantly, the authors emphasise that deliberative processes (i.e. CAs) had a “stronger effect on all four outcomes” compared to other participatory methods (i.e., focus groups; public meetings). For example, they found that “individuals who participated in a citizen jury (which involves high-intensity interactions)...experienced significant and positive increases in their awareness about the issue being addressed, their sense of competence and empowerment, and their level of trust in service professionals”. Similarly, Lindell (2023, 260) also cites evidence of “a long-lasting impact on participants’ interest in politics, political engagement, and policy attitudes (Fishkin 2018; Luskin, Fishkin and Jowell 2002; Smith 2021; Smith and Wales 2000)”. However, herein lies a potentially ironic danger of (C)CA membership “co-option”; specifically, citizens members “may lose their lay perspective and their views may become more closely aligned with those of the ‘professionals’” (Abelson et al. 2003, 246-7; also see Mullen 2000) during a (prolonged) CA process. Moreover, this may (inadvertently) exacerbate pre-existing inequalities between participants and non-participants (i.e., as evidenced through voluntary participation, self-selection and socio-economic biases as

discussed in **Section 2.7a**). One potential remedy to guard against such potential co-option is the continuous rotation of citizen members, for example, after completing specific topics. Nonetheless, there is a delicate balance to be struck to ensure continuity and consistency of a (C)CA membership in order to enhance the quality of learning, deliberation and recommendations, while simultaneously guarding against what Abelson et al. (2003) describe as “institutionalized “comfort” which may mask both internal and external inequalities between citizens”. Regarding the potential for co-option and the need for contextual independence, the OECD (2021, 21) also stress the need for “free decision making” to ensure that the “final recommendations represent what the members actually think” and are “free of interference beyond set roles and processes (i.e. intrusions by experts, steering group members)”. This again highlights the need for absolute transparency throughout a (C)CA process (including in the pre-assembly stage).

Herein, Abelson et al. (2003) similarly cite the need for “better or different decisions” given the time, expense and opportunity cost associated with CAs (e.g. funding could be alternatively used for broader climate awareness strategies or direct mitigation measures). For instance, with regard to the prospect of “better decisions”, Gershtenson et al. (2010, 95-6) posit that “participating in deliberations about political outcomes leads people to discard inaccurate perceptions of the facts and rigidly held political views and may yield a greater sense of the overall legitimacy or acceptability of the ultimate outcomes, even if one personally disagrees with them”. Similarly, different decisions could come from the “plurality of views” (Wong 2016) proffered not only from citizens and traditionally under-represented groups (who may commonly be excluded from decision-making processes), but also expert and lay speakers who are offered a rare platform to provide unique perspectives which may influence public policy. Hence, the data collection and subsequent analysis will seek to uncover whether such (positive) individual-level outcomes, (potential) co-option and contextual independence were apparent within the ICA, in addition to whether decisions were “better or different” decisions were evident, something which will also be elucidated by analysing the congruence and influence of recommendations in **Section 5.1**.

However, Stasiak et al. (2021, 8) propound that “a sole focus on participants of the assemblies is insufficient, not least because most {CCAs} only include a relatively small number of citizens leaving the effect on the majority of non-participating citizens unexplored (Jacobs and Kaufmann, 2019), even more so if CAs ‘remain essentially black boxes’ for the outside audience (Rummens 2016, 138)”. Nevertheless, despite the apparent need to assess the broader legitimacy and impact of (C)CAs, the OECD (2021, 12) note that “the most common practice of evaluating representative deliberative process (67%) has been self-reporting by members of a deliberative”.

This points to a major gap within the empirical literature regarding the current evaluation of deliberative processes, including CCAs. Thus, there is a clear need to assess output legitimacy – and how it interlinks with (future) input legitimacy (i.e., feedback loops, path dependencies and institutionalisation) – beyond individual-level member effects. Specifically, Vrydagh (2023, 8-9) propounds that “citizen participation should result in some effects on decision-making (Rowe and Frewer 2000; Smith 2009: 22–23); otherwise, it dissolves into tokenism and leads to the frustration of its participants (Fernández-Martínez et al. 2020; Pateman 2012)”. The author adds that thus far, deliberative theory “has mainly focused on contributions to policymaking, mainly regarding how CA recommendations help policymakers’ adopt more informed and responsive decisions”, something which will be the focus of the following **“Output Legitimacy” (2.8)** literature review section.

Nonetheless, participants’ views on the potential outputs of CCAs (i.e. recommendations) are firstly important to assess, as Abelson et al. (2003, 248) note that “the public may not be that willing to participate in time-consuming, face-to-face processes, especially if they cannot be assured that their involvement will make a difference”. Indeed, Lenaghan, (1999, 54) found that “(m)any positive remarks {from members regarding CAs} were often qualified to the effect that their final judgement would depend upon whether or not the authorities listened and took note of their recommendations”. However, herein, Abelson et al. (2003, 248) questions “(h)ow to ensure accountability to the participants for the outcome of the deliberation when the deliberative process is only one input into the decision-making process or if the final decision is several years into the future or may not be taken at all”. Similarly, regarding the Irish CA series (2016-2018) more generally, Farrell et al. (2019, 119) propound that “(o)ne concern regularly raised in the interviews {with participants} was over the degree of follow through by the government”. Moreover, Devaney et al.’s (2020, 144) evaluation of the specific ICA case states that “more needs to be done to communicate to the members of a {CCA} regarding the uptake and implementation of their recommendations”. Importantly, they note that “this did not happen in the case of the {ICA} and its secretariat had disbanded before these recommendations were utilized”. Herein, the authors conclude that “(c)lear and proactive output communication protocols are also necessary to build trust and buy-in amongst politicians and the wider public dependent on the decisions of the representative few”.

Regarding the potential benefits for the broader public of (C)CAs, Fournier et al. (2011, 142) illustrated a (still) relevant empirical critique when noting: *“If one attaches great importance to the necessity of education and preparation before deliberation and decision-making for the former, why disregard that logic for the latter?”*. Indeed, Mansbridge (2019, 118) notes how “robust legitimacy derives not only

from appropriate delegation but from the design and the *public presentation* of the mini-publics themselves” (emphasis added). More pointedly, Rountree and Curato (2023, 75) propound that regardless of the perceived popularity and “rave reviews” of CAs amongst participants, practitioners, and academic advisors, ultimately “their legitimacy is not predetermined but constituted by demonstrating that the reasons circulating in the public sphere have been seriously considered in their deliberations”. They also state that legitimacy is derived from “justifying the outcomes of deliberation to people who did not take part in the mini-public”. Importantly, Curato and Böker (2016) argue this may also help address the often critical portrayal of CAs as “participatory elitism” (Chambers 2009). Indeed, Stasiak et al. (2021, 7) propound that “the perception that the broader public, political actors, and the media has of CAs, influences the chance of CAs becoming established as a legitimate part of the participatory policymaking ecosystem”.

Herein, Rountree and Curato (2023, 80) state that a hostile reception to CAs “may arise from genuine scepticism of the legitimacy of CAs... (n)evertheless, there is the danger that politicians or lobbying groups, distrustful that an assembly will serve their interests or dissatisfied with the assembly’s recommendations, will attempt to de-legitimize the process (Setälä 2017; Dryzek 2015)”. For example, the authors cite the proposed 2010 Australian Climate Assembly as an example whereby a backlash by politicians, the media and the public can derail the legitimacy of a deliberative process. Specifically, the electoral promise made by Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard was perceived by some “as a delaying tactic on climate change, while others speculated that assembly members would be manipulated towards specific policy recommendations”. Ultimately, an expert panel was chosen to replace the CCA (see Boswell, Niemeyer and Hendriks 2013; Carson 2013) – which returns to the earlier question of whether citizens are even capable or best placed to deliberate upon such complex topics. Overall, the aforementioned critiques of the proposed Australian CCA were seemingly justifiable as illuminated throughout the current literature review (e.g. danger of manipulation); nevertheless, Rountree and Curato (2023, 80) add the important caveat that “it will not always be clear whether genuine concern or strategic interest leads groups to criticize assembly processes”. Hence, it is important to evaluate the perceptions and motivations of responding bodies, elected representatives, and their advisors (which will be discussed in the analysis **in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 respectively**).

The perception of political actors within the political sphere – particularly regarding the congruence, consideration and potential structural changes emanating from the ICA- will also be discussed in detail in the following section (i.e. **Section 2.8**). With regard to the broader public arena, Lindell (2023, 272) notes how “CAs might stimulate public discussions not only because non-participants gain knowledge about a policy issue, but also because they increase visibility

among the citizenry". Nonetheless, Lindell notes criticism from Lafont (2019) and others that the "outcomes of CAs are nothing but democratic shortcuts that require non-participants to blindly defer to the decision of deliberating strangers (Lafont 2019)". However, in reality, citizens' recommendations have always been advisory, with Abelson et al. (2003) propounding that the "stakes are often too high" to ensure "binding decisions" given the aforementioned potential for process design flaws and biases. Herein, the French Citizens' Convention on Climate⁴² also highlights the pitfalls of politicians promising "binding implementation" of proposals which they subsequently cannot or will not keep. Additionally, referring back to the primary definition of deliberative democracy in this present research, Gutmann and Thompson (2004, 7) note that decisions should be "*open to challenge in the future*". Similarly, Rountree and Curato (2023, 73) argue that "rather than consider CAs as authoritative forums...CAs should be viewed as conduits of public deliberation that are influenced by public discourse and have the potential to reshape public sphere deliberations". Indeed, they contend that "the praises and criticisms against CAs can be bridged by emphasizing the connection between deliberations taking place in these assemblies to deliberations taking place in the public sphere", noting that CAs are being shaped by and have subsequent capacity to reshape broader public conversations.

Moreover, this link between the "mini" and "maxi" public is arguably crucial to the (perceived) legitimacy of CAs given the broadly held claim – particularly amongst sponsors and prominent – that (C)CAs indeed speak for the "ordinary citizens". Consequently, Rountree and Curato (2023, 74) propound that "(t)he outcomes of {CAs}, as well as the reasons that support these outcomes, should be communicated to those who were not part of the forum as another input to on-going public deliberations", something Boswell et al. (2016) refer to as the "transmission role" of CAs. Similarly, Abelson et al. (2003, 247) note the desire for "greater accountability for their participation" amongst CA members when stating that: "at a minimum, they want the resulting decision communicated to the public with some demonstration of how the public's input was used or considered in the decision-making process". Herein, Rountree and Curato (2023, 74) add the important caveat that external communication "is not to say that outcomes of mini-publics are necessarily more superior than the discourses already articulated in the public sphere", but part of a broader "deliberation-making process". In sum, the internal design (i.e. input legitimacy) of a CA may, therefore, impact its subsequent external (i.e. output) legitimacy. Hence, the extent of this "transmission role" within the ICA must be assessed.

⁴² [French Citizens' Convention on the Climate \(La Convention Citoyenne pour Le Climat\) - National Assembly \(knoca.eu\)](https://www.knoca.eu/en/french-citizens-convention-on-the-climate-la-convention-citoyenne-pour-le-climat)

For example, Felicetti et al. (2016, 440-441) argue that the crude voting metric, which often concludes a (C)CA can inaccurately portray a perception of 'consensus.', particularly when combined with organiser and political sponsors claim-making regarding the decisions of "ordinary people" and "citizens" more generally (Gül 2019). Specifically, the author's Italian case study illuminated how voting on recommendations "constrained deliberation by imposing an oppositional and aggregative logic...(wherein) the focus in conveying the outcome was supposed to involve the justificatory arguments". Moreover, the authors highlight an ironic paradox wherein rather than a "meta-consensus" being achieved, on the contrary, "the dominance of the improvised vote fueled a partisan clash among local political actors". This once again highlights how the internal design (i.e. input legitimacy) of the ICA may have subsequently influenced its output legitimacy (i.e. via shaping the responses of political actors in the PCCA) – something which will be explored within the context of this given research. However, Felicetti et al. (2016, 440-441) make an important contribution to the literature when noting how a more impartial communication of the given CA's nuanced proposals, for example, "via the mailing of the report to citizens", could have contributed to a more genuine deliberation-making process (Niemeyer 2014). Similarly, Rountree and Curato (2023, 75-78) note how "CA reports could be condensed to a page or two and disseminated to every residence" in order to enhance the aforementioned "transmission role". This method of influence, in contrast to the "blind deference" (Lafont 2020) approach often promoted by sponsors and organisers, could instead see the assembly and its subsequent report as a tool to "provide the public with the raw materials for public debate, including a solid information base, key values at stake, an array of policy options, and the benefits and drawbacks of each approach" (Rountree and Curato 2023, 75; Gastil and Black 2007).

Indeed, Vrydagh (2023, 10) also outlines how "a collective judgement is...compiled in an official public report, which is circulated among the broader public and policymakers...(and) that report is the main channel through which CAs pursue public influence, although media coverage and the involvement of elected representatives can also allow a CA to exert public influence". However, despite its importance, Rountree and Curato (2023, 75) highlight that although "some CAs processes have distributed copies of their findings to residents", they surprisingly note that "there is not currently research on the reception or use of these recommendation reports". This, again, perhaps points to the internal focus of CA evaluations thus far, with limited research focus given to their broader external impact. Nonetheless, Rountree and Curato (2023, 78; also see Gastil and Knobloch 2020) conclude that initial research on the Oregon Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR) showed increased "awareness of the process and (that) the CIR findings are relatively high and may influence informal channels of political conversation". Nevertheless, the overall empirical evidence

linking CAs to the broader public is troubling herein. For example, regarding one of the first and most prominent (regional) deliberative bodies, the BCCA, Warren (2008, 63) notes how "by the time of the referendum {on the assembly's recommendation}, only slightly more than half of the BC electorate was aware of the CA and its work". Moreover, the referendum result did not reach the "super-majority" threshold due to low-voter turnout, suggesting that the topic did not move the broader public despite the "unique" CA process. Furthermore, Dryzek (2001, 654) notes this disconnect has also been repeated within other contexts, as despite the "publicizing" of deliberative findings within an Australian CA case, "the majority of those voting in the referendum chose the opposite of the deliberators' recommendation".

Herein, regarding the specific Irish context, the empirical evidence is mixed. For instance, electoral exit poll data (RTE/B&A Poll 2018¹) found that 66% of those surveyed were "aware of the Citizen Assembly series (2016 – 2018)", which included the ICA. There was also a high degree of awareness that citizens were "randomly selected" (70%) and "experts were invited" (76%). However, some caveats are worth noting therein. Firstly, this "electoral exit poll" surveyed only those registered to vote and who actually voted; thus, we can expect a skew towards higher educated, socioeconomic classes and age groups in line with historical voting patterns (Lijphart 1997). Additionally, awareness of the CA was lowest amongst the youngest age cohort (only 48% among U-24s), C2DE social class (i.e., non-professionals and working-class categories) and rural respondents, all groups which are arguably already (relatively) disenfranchised and whose support is crucial for effective policy implantation of climate-related measures. Moreover, regarding the specific ICA session itself, Devaney et al's (2020, 14) official evaluation uncovered limited domestic awareness of the climate assembly. Furthermore, the authors report that "when questioned on the perceived impact of the {ICA} recommendations on climate change, {focus group} participants were not aware of {Parliamentary Committee on Climate Action - PCCA}, which was established to take them forward in the policy process". The above findings concur with Carolan and Glennon (2024, 193) who note that while "much of the research {on Irish CAs} has been based on either surveys of members of the mini-public themselves, or an analysis of opinion polling data whether before or after the process...there are limitations with each". Nevertheless, the views of interviewees and relevant opinion poll data shall be used to illuminate further the potential link (or disconnect) between "mini" and "maxi" public within the ICA context.

Finally, although a complete media content analysis is beyond the remit of this research, it is nonetheless important to contextualise the media coverage of the ICA and how this compared with actors (both members, stakeholders, and political actors) own perceptions of this coverage. Firstly, Rountree and Curato (2023, 80) note how "most of the public will not be familiar with a

CA or how it operates, so the “news” in a CA is simultaneously the findings of the assembly and the process itself”. They suggest this may lead to “public deliberation about deliberation” or what Rinke et al. (2013) refer to as “mediated meta-deliberation”. Regarding existing empirical research, most studies have shown limited media uptake and poor public awareness of CAs policy recommendations (Rinke et al. 2013; LeDuc 2011). Nevertheless, McNamara’s (2019) study on the Irish CA regarding the seminal abortion topic provides a rare positive exception of media coverage and public consciousness; however, this may owe more to the high-profile, well-publicised and deeply controversial issue at stake, rather than the internal deliberative design (e.g. communications strategy) of the CA itself. Moreover, the topic itself was highly conflictual and hugely polarizing, both “core elements that attract media attention” (Rountree and Curato 2023, 76;) but which CAs often inherently lack (Fournier et al. 2011). Indeed, Parkinson (2006) cautions that media coverage will often selectively highlight segments of CAs which are deemed most captivating for their audience. Herein, McGovern and Thorne’s (2021) “study on the impact of climate reporting in the Irish media ‘before’, ‘during’ and ‘after’ the {ICA}” is informative. Specifically, the authors find that “(o)verall, neutrally toned articles increased while both positively and negatively toned articles decreased from ‘before’ to ‘after’ the {ICA}”. Importantly, they suggest that “the themes in narratives presented by the publications were indeed influenced by the {ICA}”. However, the authors conclude that “only two publications increased their climate reporting, grounded in the highest levels of evidence”. Notably, their content analysis also finished in May 2018 – before the finalisation of the PCCA's report, which caused a degree of political controversy (specifically over carbon taxation, which will be explored in **analysis Section 5.2**). In short, McGovern and Thorne's study may not have fully captured the link between the extended ICA process (i.e., inputs and outputs, with the latter including the PCCA follow-up) and generally public opinion, as Carty et al. (2008 158-159) note the importance of “prominent political actors” engagement in shaping the broader public’s response to CA outcomes, while Smith (2009, 104) likewise state’s that citizens often “take their political cues from elite actors and media discussions”. Hence, the potential responses of receiving bodies and elite actors will now be explored with the following output legitimacy section.

2.8 *OUTPUT LEGITIMACY*

The literature review's prior "Input legitimacy" section (**see Section 2.7**) elucidated upon the main categories and holistic criteria for evaluating a CCA process such as the ICA. However, in line with the stated research question, aims and objectives, Stasiak et al. (2021, 6) importantly posit that “enhancing legitimacy of climate change policy making would thus require focusing not only on internal and process features of {CCAs} themselves, but also...on the practices and

intentions of the institutions whose legitimacy is directly affected by the deliberative processes – e.g. the governmental institutions that are commissioning the assembly, the political institutions that are expected to act on the CA’s recommendations, etc”. Indeed, some scholars have even argued that (C)CAs may *only* be “considered legitimate when they are situated in, or integrated with, other institutions that are authorized and accountable to the publics they serve” (MacKenzie 2023, 24). Nevertheless, Minsart and Jacquet (2023, 283-4) propound that the “(f)ocus has been on internal dynamics for too long, thus ‘leaving aside the question of their wider external effects (Elstubb, et al. 2016)’”. Indeed, the authors note that while (C)CAs have “become particularly common in recent years, the question of their broader impact on the policymaking process seems unclear”. For instance, despite a recent empirical shift from internal design to broader external effects as part of the systematic turn (e.g. Mansbridge et al. 2012; Jacquet and van der Does 2021a; Setälä and Smith 2018), Vrydagh (2023, 9) notes that there has been “little or no impact of many CAs in practice”, with Devaney et al. (2020, 21) for example stating that “the jury is still out in the Irish case”. However, herein lies the question of what we define as “impact”, with Minsart and Jacquet (2023, 284) noting the ambiguity of the term and thus “the difficulty in defining its limits”. This ambiguity and perceived lack of outcomes to date is deeply problematic for deliberative scholars given that the potential of (C)CAs to influence (climate) policy has been cited as a “central objective for the advocates of such mechanisms (Minsart and Jacquet 2023, 283; also see Fishkin 2018)”. For example, proponents of deliberative democracy propound that CCAs “offer the best chance of finding effective and legitimate climate policies” (Lenzi 2019, 313). However, Niessen's (2023, 333) comprehensive review of the existing empirical research concludes that “despite the steady increase of (CAs) around the world, they are still received with a certain caution by many elected officials”. Similarly, Minsart and Jacquet (2023, 284) propound that this perceived “lack of impact of those assemblies is one of the main arguments put forward by citizens drawn by lot who refuse to participate (Jacquet 2017, 14)”. This once again highlights the crucial link between input and output (and future input) legitimacy (as implied in the research question), as the authors note: “the risk is then, by multiplying CAs with little impact on the policymaking process, to only reinforce an already existing crisis of confidence of citizens towards the political system (Blondiaux 2007)”.

Hence, Gutmann and Thompson (2004, 59) state that “the future of deliberative democracy...depends on whether its proponents can create and maintain practices and institutions that enable deliberation to work well”. Moreover, Vandamme (2023, 35-36) notes that as (C)CAs become “more and more empowered...the very democratic legitimacy of {(C)CAs} is at stake, as it is often considered that an unaccountable political power is undemocratic”. However, the author

suggests that this apparent "lack of direct popular accountability is a less salient problem when CAs are embedded in a broader democratic system (see Parkinson and Mansbridge 2012) where key decision-makers are accountable, and when the output of CAs is submitted for approval either to elected representatives or to the general population through a referendum". Overall, Vrydagh (2023, 9) states "we should not lose sight of two facts" regarding the discussion on impact. Firstly, he argues that most CAs are "implemented as a consultative institution for policymaking (OECD 2020; Paulis et al. 2021)" while rarely targeting broader public debate. Secondly, he suggests that "these kinds of public influences should ultimately result in some impact on public decisions and policies as well". This aligns with Kronsell and Bäckstrand (2010, 39) aforementioned idea⁴³ that "output legitimacy" must be "associated with some consequential logic"; precisely, discrete (environmental) policy consequences. The following section will discuss policy consequences or impacts with reference to empowered actors and institutions within the Irish case (namely the PCCA, relevant national policies and government legislation). More specifically, Jacquet and van der Does (2021) have conceptualised (after a systematic literature review of all research CA impact-related research published before 2019) three main pathways regarding their potential impact on the policymaking process: **congruence, consideration and structural changes**. These will be discussed in the following section and shall be subsequently used to structure and guide "*Analysis Part 2*". Additionally, Vrydagh and Caluwaerts (2023, 119) concept of **influence** will also be explained and operationalised given "the challenge of identifying the *influence* of CAs when a decision taken by a public authority seems congruent with the recommendations made by the respective minipublic" (Jacquet and van der Does 2021, 480-1). In sum, the concepts of i) **congruence**, ii) **influence** iii) **consideration** and iv) **structural changes** will be further explored below.

2.8.1 *Congruence*

Regarding the congruence of citizens' proposals with subsequent policy consequences, Font et al. (2018, 616; also see Nabatchi and Amsler 2014, 81) note the "significant lacuna in our understanding of the impact of participation on public decision making". Furthermore, they propound that if proposals are ultimately disregarded (or perhaps under-utilised) and there is no observable impact on the policies and indeed practices of public administration (the latter which will be discussed re. structural changes), the very validity of CAs may be called into question. Consequently, Font et al. (2018, 615) examine "one of the key aspects of participatory processes that has been the subject of rare systematic analysis and comparison is the fate of their outputs:

⁴³ Previously outlined in Section (1.5) and Section (2.5) respectively.

their policy proposals". Specifically, their analysis attempts to illuminate the specific factors which determine the *fate of citizens' proposals* in the hands of public authorities. However, the authors make an important contribution relating to the congruence of proposals (or recommendations), which they note "cannot be simply dichotomous" (i.e. rejected or accepted). Thus, they distinguish between three fates of proposals: fully implemented, partially implemented or modified, or rejected. Likewise, Vrydagh and Caluwaerts (2023, 124), in building upon Font et al.'s framework, proffer three complimentary concepts that shall be operationalised to analyse the ICA case: **uptake, partial uptake or rejection**. The former is self-explanatory; however, when the uptake is only "partial", then "decision-makers only consider a fragment of the proposal but do not integrate it in its entirety" (Ibid). Finally, the authors note that "when there is no uptake, decision-makers were not influenced by the (C)CA, because there is no visible trace of the proposal in the subsequent public policy".

Herein, Font et al. (2019, 634) make an important point regarding the interlinkages between input and output legitimacy with respect to the partial uptake or rejection of recommendations. Specifically, the authors purport that "there may be sound reasons for why a public authority decides not to implement or to alter proposals". However, they significantly add that "from a democratic perspective...providing public explanations for these decisions becomes crucial". Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the intended difference between Font et al.'s (2019, 617) actualisation of these concepts and their intended utilisation within this research. Specifically, the authors note that "(i)t is not enough that the local authority agreed to act...we are interested in whether the proposal was implemented". As previously discussed, it is beyond the remit of this research to follow implementation (which may, in some cases, play out over decades); in contrast, implementation at the local level, which Font et al. examined, is arguably more discernible. However, Jacquet and van der Does (2021, 475) also add that recommendations may be "abstract values" or "an aggregated vote for different options", and thus identifying a clear (set of) recommendations is not always possible. Moreover, the authors note how correlation does not imply causation, and "that observing congruence between recommendations and subsequent decisions does not imply that the minipublic was the determining factor in the adoption of the respective decisions...(nor) tell us what the exact role of the minipublic is in the policymaking process". Hence, an exploration of consideration and influence is required to determine the impact on policymaking (rather than policy implementation, which is beyond the confines of this research).

2.8.2 Influence

In addition to assessing the congruence of ICA recommendations, their influence must also be examined. As it stands, Vrydagh and Caluwaerts (2023, 118) propound that (C)CAs are

expected to have some discernible influence on policymaking and to also “provide some kind of feedback” – an important point for assessing the interlinkages between input and output legitimacy. However, the authors critique that one of the main shortcomings of existing empirical research (i.e. process tracing CCA proposals to ascertain congruence) “is that it constructs the relation of influence between a {(C)CA} and the subsequent public policy as if decision-makers do not have pre-existing policy preferences”. Put simply, scholars too often provide a simplified descriptive narrative of congruence without exploring the counterfactual (i.e. what would happen if the CCA didn’t take place?). Herein, they state that a given evaluation “may attribute the {(C)CA} with an impact on a specific public policy, whereas decision-makers already wanted to adopt that public policy before the {(C)CA}”. For example, Duvic-Paoli (2022, 249) states that the ICA, “by identifying the people’s concern for climate change and their appetite for more governmental action in this area, strengthened political mobilization and spurred the drafting of a comprehensive Climate Bill”. Indeed, Government communication around the given climate bill – the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 – repeatedly referenced the influence of the ICA recommendations and the subsequent PCCA report⁴⁴. However, arguably, other domestic (e.g., the rise of the Green Party; enhanced climate awareness) and international factors (e.g. binding EU & Paris Agreement obligations;) could have participated in such change independent of any CCA process.

Consequently, Vrydagh and Caluwaerts (2023, 119) posit that assessing a (C)CA’s impact on policy “ideally requires establishing a causal relation between a {(C)CA} and a legislative output”. However, the authors note how the “analytical complexity” therein is “a very delicate exercise because minipublics are but one source of influence in policymaking, besides, e.g. pressure groups and international organisations”. Overall, Minsart and Jacquet (2023, 290) argue that it highlights “the importance of integrating the initial preferences and positions of policymakers into the reflection process in order to avoid prematurely concluding that there are links of influence when the implementation of a recommendation in public policy can be explained elsewhere than by the holding of the CA in question”. Herein, Vrydagh and Caluwaerts put forward their Sequential Impact Matrix (SIM) Framework as an attempt to rectify this gap. In short, “the SIM builds on previous congruency studies” by not only exploring the “uptake” of policies, but also “including policy makers’ pre-existing preferences” in order to determine its actual (discernible) influence. Herein, the degrees of influence are further categorised by the authors. Firstly, **“continuous influence”** refers to when a (C)CA recommendation is adopted which already

⁴⁴ [gov - Government approves landmark Climate Bill putting Ireland on the path to net-zero emissions by 2050 \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/government-approves-landmark-climate-bill-putting-ireland-on-the-path-to-net-zero-emissions-by-2050/)

existed before the deliberative process. Secondly, if the (C)CA further developed a pre-existing proposal, this is described as an **“enriching influence”**. Thirdly, if decision-makers (e.g PCCA; Government) prior preferences completely changed as a result of a deliberative process like the ICA, this is noted as a **“shifting influence”**. Fourthly, if a completely new idea or issue is put forward by a (C)CA, this is considered an **“innovative influence”**. Finally, **“no influence”** is apparent where there is lack of congruent policy between the citizens recommendations and the receiving body. Overall, although not a perfect scientific metric, the SIM framework nonetheless empowers qualitative empirical researchers to better determine the perceivable influence of a given (C)CA, for example, by examining prior national policy documents and political commitments within the given (environmental) domain.

2.8.3 Consideration

With regard to the "consideration" of a given assembly's proposal, Minsart and Jacquet (2023, 290) propound that even when “a recommendation does not seem to lead to a policy change, this does not mean that the assembly was not listened to, heard, or did not influence the decisions in some way”. The authors continue that “perhaps the recommendation was discussed, but was found to be in conflict with other alternative proposals, or was deemed not feasible or even desirable”. They conclude by stating that “since the policymaking process is particularly complex and fragmented, the study of the impact of a CA can only be done through a more complex vision of the future of the recommendations, on the one hand, and of the assembly on the other”. In short, to gain a deeper understanding of the interlinkages between a CCA and traditional representative institutions, one must assess not only “what” happened, but also “why” it happened. Herein, Jacquet and van der Does’s (2021, 476) conception of consideration illuminates a complex policymaking process which "cannot be depicted as a single decision taken by a monolithic actor" in isolation; on the contrary, they note "how multiple types of actors compete and collaborate to produce policies inside and outside state institutions (Teisman, 2000)”. Therefore, unpacking the (perhaps overly simplified) narrative of the ICA’s “success” and exploring the various (competing and collaborating) influences which the PCCA considered will be an important contribution of this given research.

Herein, Font et al. (2018, 616) make an important contribution to the field with their extensive multilevel analysis of a diverse set of 571 policy recommendations emanating from participatory processes. Specifically, their study “provides evidence that authorities make a non-random selection of proposals...selecting those that are easier to develop or are closer to their own preferences”. Elstub and Khoban (2023, 118) put this more bluntly when stating that “authorities select recommendations they already planned to implement and ignore the others that they do not

support”, a view also shared by Vrydagh’s (2022) empirical evidence. Put simply, such critics suggest that authorities engage in “cherry-picking” proposals (Smith 2009, 93), “selective listening” (Sintomer et al. 2008) or “retro-fitting” recommendations (Elstub and Khoban 2023, 118), something which may be exacerbated by the influence of stakeholders with a vested interest in criticising (C)CA recommendations (Dryzek 2010, 27). For instance, Curato et al. (2021, 22), who have extensive experience evaluating CAs remark: “What use are intelligent recommendations from CAs if these recommendations are silenced by politicians?”. Indeed, Elstub and Khoban (2023, 118) note that “even in Ireland, which has some of the most celebrated CAs producing recommendations on abortion and marriage equality which were adopted into legislation via referendums and parliament, most of the other recommendations have not been picked up (Harris 2019)”. Overall, Font et al. (2018, 629) posit that this “may undermine significantly the democratic value of public participation”, particularly when CAs only are utilised as “tokenistic consultative exercise convened to legitimize predetermined policy outcomes” (Curato et al. 2021, 107). Herein, the growth of (C)CAs may be deeply problematic if they simply “become useful legitimating devices for an already decided policy” (Pateman 2012, 9). Regarding empirical findings, Andrews et al (2022, 117) evidence from the Scottish CCA notes that “it could indeed be argued that some {a third of} recommendations are fairly well covered by existing or planned policy”, while a third of proposals would not be taken forward. Conversely, other studies suggest that the institutionalisation of CAs – for example, via linking them with parliaments as in the case with the ICA – has resulted in an increasing uptake of recommendations (Paulis et al. 2020; OECD 2020). Nonetheless, the methodological approach utilized by these studies, particularly the lack of triangulation (for example, the absence of interviews with relevant parliamentary and policy actors), has been criticized by some (e.g. Vrydagh 2022). Herein, Font et al.’s (2018, 615) findings provide important evidence of “both contextual and proposal-related variables”, which may impact the degree of cherry-picking. Specifically, they state the importance of “the design of participatory processes” along with “proposal-level, economic and political factors: a proposal’s cost, the extent to which it challenges existing policy and the degree of support it has within the municipality all strongly affect the chance” of adaption³. This concurs with the findings of other scholars who state that despite institutionalisation, recommendations are often ignored or diluted in favour of “competing institutional imperatives” (Bussu et al. 2022, 136; also see Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker 2001; Newman et al. 2004), disregarded when they are too costly or challenging (Bussu 2019; Dean, Boswell, and Smith 2020) or “cherry-picked” to align with pre-existing political agendas (Bussu et al. 2022, 136; Courant 2021; Bua 2017).

Importantly, with regard to the interactions between the ICA inputs and its subsequent consideration by the PCCA, Font et al. (2018, 630) note how democratic theorists such as Fung (2006) and Smith (2009) have "made a strong case that design matters in judging the democratic character and effectiveness of participatory processes" and their own "data bears this out". However, it is firstly important to note that they find no evidence of the difference between the number of proposals or other authorities' involvement and the subsequent adoption rate. On the first point, although a complete case comparison between the ICA and the most recent CA on Biodiversity (2022) is beyond the scope of this research, there is a fruitful opportunity for research on how the 13 ICA recommendations compared to the proposed 100+ recommendations of the biodiversity assembly. The second point regarding "other authorities" also bears relevance to the ICA case. Specifically, Font et al (2018) refer specifically to the involvement of "particularly those (authorities) from a higher level". Although they found no link between local and regional authorities (i.e. the latter's involvement in a local process), there is arguably greater potential for the (indirect) involvement of EU "authorities" (e.g. compliance with rules, directives, climate obligations etc.) to influence the congruence of national-level recommendations. Nevertheless, Font et al. (2018, 630) do find evidence that the (perceived) "quality of participation" influenced the subsequent rate of proposal adoption by (local) authorities and therefore suggest a tentative finding that the "deliberative capacity of a process... *may* be related to implementation (emphasis added)". This is a key point in line with the stated research aims and objectives (regarding the interlinkages between input and output legitimacy). Specifically, Minsart and Jacquet (2023, 290) note that "(b)eyond the question of "whether" a CA has had some impacts on the policymaking process, there is also a lack of understanding of the explanatory factors of such potential impacts". Nonetheless, Font et al. (2018, 630) state that several factors "have already been put forward as likely determinants of the impacts of CA" which importantly include "design" (Smith 2009) and related variables⁴⁵. However, the authors note how this finding "contrasts with earlier suggestions that posit a trade-off between deliberation and political impact (Goodin and Dryzek 2000; Smith et al. 2015)", suggesting the need for future research on the actual existence of this trade-off and its causal mechanisms. Hence, this present research will make an important contribution to the

⁴⁵ The authors Minsart and Jacquet (2023, 290) also reference other factors such as the following: "the institutional anchorage and the degree of rupture of the CA with existing power relations (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2016), the content of the recommendations and their degree of congruence with existing policies (Font et al. 2018; Michels and Binnema 2019), the link of the assembly with civil society (Pogrebinschi and Ryan 2018) as well as the participatory tradition in which the CA is part of (Nabatchi and Leighninger 2015)". However, arguably issues such as anchorage, degree of rupture, link with civil society are included within the evaluation of the "design" of the ICA (e.g. assessing linkages with parliament, agenda setting/framing processes, expert & speaker selection in addition to public consultation). Moreover, participatory tradition is referred to within the case study element, while congruence has already been discussed.

field by shedding light on how political actors (and their advisors') perceptions of the ICA's design may have influenced their consideration of the given recommendations.

Apart from process “design” (Smith 2009) factors, Font et al. (2018, 631; also see Michels and Binnema 2019; Minsart and Jacquet 2023) findings tend to support the “co-option thesis” when it comes to consideration. Specifically, they indicate that local authorities are more likely to adopt proposals supported internally by both authorities and civil servants, are cost-effective, secure additional funding from other sources, and, importantly, do not conflict with current administration practices. Thus, they argue, “the public tends to get its way if its recommendations correspond to the preferences or the existing practices of the administration – and do not put pressure on the budget (either through low cost or additional finance)”; however, arguably a discussion of “costs” should not only relate to the purely financial element but the degree of political and social costs should also be acknowledged. For example, Welp (2023, 403; also see Niessen 2023) notes how “CAs are far from being unanimously supported by decision-makers, and there are intuitive explanations: decision-makers need to give away a part of their power when initiating a CA and then need to deal in some ways with the recommendations produced, whether implementing them or explaining why they should not be implemented”. Nonetheless, the author propounds that CAs also provide politicians an avenue to increase the legitimacy of (their) policies as they have been endorsed by a (perceived) representative sample of citizens (note “claim-making” critiques in **Section 2.7a**). This could be viewed either as a positive result of the deliberative process, which is high-quality (i.e., better/different outcomes) or perhaps negatively if the process is simply used narrowly to generate legitimacy (via suspect representation, elite-level framing and limited citizenry input into agenda-setting & expert-selection process). Indeed, returning to Font et al’s (2018) findings, one could argue that if there is similar evidence which suggests that PCCA actors “clearly listen selectively to inexpensive demands that...are politically unchallenging...(and) reinforce their preferences and existing ways of working” within the ICA case, this too would be “far from compelling from a democratic perspective” (Font et al. 2018, 631). It could also undermine the substantive “influence” of the ICA despite the narrative of success regarding recommendations uptake. For example, Font et al’s analysis found that “(m)any of the successful proposals would likely have been implemented even if the participatory demand had not existed (Hoppe 2011)” and therefore “the dynamics of cherry-picking proposals are clear” – something which should be closely explored in the Irish case and has been given limited (if any) empirical attention to date. Moreover, it also raises the question of whether the apparent “positive” results re. the acceptance of participatory proposals would hold true “for a different set of on more controversial issues (Carmines and Stimson 1980)”. Indeed, consideration of national policy, as in

the ICA case, is undoubtedly more complex and potentially more “controversial” than Font et al.’s local-level analysis – so it is indeed more important to illuminate if “challenging proposals would result in more limited compliance” at the national level. On this note, Niessen (2023, 326) importantly questions the following: “*In light of this ambiguity, one may wonder how elected officials perceive CAs, i.e. when they support and when they oppose them?*”². Herein, the author purports that this is an issue of significance not only from the theoretical perspective but also of great empirical and practical importance to the future significance of CAs. In short, Niessen (2023, 326) aptly propounds that since it is political actors “who eventually decide on the reform of existing political institutions, their attitude towards CAs and its determinants provide us with further insights into the likelihood and direction of democratic reform processes”; hence, the present study will make an important contribution to the field in this regard.

Herein, it is also important to carefully unpack the narrative of “success”, and the assumed positive contribution of the ICA and subsequent PCCA to critically examine the extent, if any, of “cherry-picking” within the Irish case. For instance, Font et al (2018, 629) note that their results (in terms of the fate of proposals) may be “biased...in a positive direction” due to the important role of receiving agencies and their actors as “informants” (i.e., data subjects). In a sense, involved actors – whether politicians, civil servants, or academics/experts – with skin in the game may seek (at least publicly or on the record) to oversell the inherent value of (C)CAs and citizens’ recommendations. For example, in relation to political actors, Hendriks and Lees-Marshment’s (2019, 608-609) extensive qualitative research of 51 political leaders found a “notable discrepancy between the forms of public input that leaders *identify as ideal* (e.g. structured group-based participatory forums) and the *forms they find valuable* in political practice (e.g. informal interactions with individual citizens).” Importantly, the authors suggest “that this apparent ‘participatory dissonance’ represents a pragmatic response by leaders to deliberative...failings”, with the twin challenges of limited representativeness and potential biases noted. Overall, Niessen (2023, 325) states that despite the “increasing use, {CAs} are far from being unanimously supported by elected officials”. This also conforms with Font et al. (2018) finding that the quality of design may have direct implications for the uptake of recommendations, something this research will examine further within the Irish context. Nonetheless, concerning the potential (publicly stated) “positive bias” of politicians towards deliberative processes and citizens’ recommendations, Hendriks and Lees-Marshment (2019, 600-608) note how political leaders, in practice, seem to adopt a dual approach towards public engagement. Specifically, the authors illuminate how they utilize informal, impromptu interactions with the public/stakeholders as a means of obtaining information while also drawing upon formal participatory processes, such as (C)CAs, to establish official legitimacy

and, in some cases, foster a sense of public ownership. In short, their findings challenge the “simplified picture” often painted by “deliberative thinkers” wherein “elected officials passively and willingly receive public input”; on the contrary, with reference to policy “*considerations*”, it appears elected representatives have their own preferences, particularly when “it comes to the forms of public input they find most useful in their decision-making”. Notably, the aforementioned authors illuminate how political leaders “especially value opportunities to get beyond experts and their advisors, so they can connect and talk to ‘real’ people”. Herein, Hendriks and Lees-Marshment (2019) empirical evidence suggests they seek to “check the facts ‘on the ground’ and hear the evidence from the source, rather than the experts”. This latter point regarding experts may also have important implications for the PCCA’s *consideration* of recommendations if the ICA was designed (and/or perceived) to be excessively expert-led (see **Section 2.7.3**).

Putting aside the degree of (conscious or subconscious) influence by “experts” in the ICA’s recommendations and assuming the process was predominantly citizen-led, Lafont (2014, 2; also see Moore 2016) raises a more fundamental question of whether it is indeed wise for politicians and institutions to “blindly defer to the deliberations of a few selected citizens”, especially if concerns regarding representational (e.g. self-selection and attitudinal) biases are evident (Hendriks and Lees-Marshment’s 2019, 599; also see Parkinson 2012, 164). Specifically, she argues that “if the mini-publics’ recommendations are supposed to directly feed into a decision-making process bypassing deliberation in the broad public sphere”, this would not only be “incompatible with the criterion of legitimacy endorsed by deliberative democrats”, but also “diminish rather than increase the legitimacy of the deliberative system as a whole” – points which will be further illuminated during the discussion on “structural changes”. For instance, Pateman (2012, 10) has stated how CAs are not embedded well within “the regular political cycle in the life of a community” and thus, they may risk crowding out broader civil society action (Bussu et al. 2022, 135; also see Youngs 2022; Courant 2022; Martin, Carter, and Dent 2018; Johnson 2015; Dean, Boswell, and Smith 2020). Consequently, Moore (2016, 22) posits that “that {CAs} might in practice be captured by elite interests...(while) the deeper concern, then, is not just that minipublics might in practice be captured by elite interests, but that they are essentially elitist, that the better they work, the more they undermine democracy”. Hence, given the potential for such circumstance, it seems representational democracy could also potentially serve as a crucial institutional “safety-valve” to guard against the limitations and excesses of (C)CAs. Specifically, it could possibly help mitigate against some of the “bias and limited representativeness” through providing (more) diverse informational sources (Hendriks and Lees-Marshment 2019, 608-609) and arguably other “pluralistic environmental values and opinions” (Wong 2016) which may have been excluded from

a given (C)CA. This would arguably not undermine the legitimacy of a given deliberative process, as empirical evidence suggests that even citizen members of previous CCAs recognise these inherent limitations and biases, with emerging research from Ireland suggesting that “those ‘ordinary citizens’ (i.e. ICA members) feel they have legitimacy to express recommendations but not to take the final decision” (Courant 2022, 168). This, in turn, raises the question of how PCCA members perceived the quality of the ICA and how they subsequently balanced the (perhaps competing and/or contradictory) concerns of recommendations with that of their constituents (and indeed relevant political, institutional, and other constraints). Herein, Moore (2016, 21) propounds that it “remains to be explored how the different ways of concluding deliberation open up or foreclose opportunities for those outside the room to exercise judgment in taking up (or rejecting) the results of those deliberations” – something which will be explored within the context of the ICA case. Finally, it also remains to be seen if such “considerations” also crossed traditional party-lines and if there was evidence of a more collegial and deliberative atmosphere within the PCCA in comparison to other parliamentary committees. This pertains to the possible structural changes in practices within a given policy domain, which will be explored in the following section.

2.8.4 Structural changes

In line with the “systematic turn” (Setälä and Smith 2018), Jacquet and van der Does’s (2021, 477) “third type of consequence refers to the structural change of the policymaking”. Herein, the authors expound that “(s)tructure is meant to refer to an enduring set of practices and rules” – whether formal or informal – “that characterize a particular policy domain (March and Olsen, 1995)”. Importantly, the authors (also see Gourgues, 2010) note how this challenging empirical approach “underlines that the fate of recommendations is not the only element to take into account when assessing the consequences” of a given (C)CAs. Indeed, Jacquet and van der Does remark that “even if the content of policies does not evolve in the short term, mini-publics can trigger deeper transformations in a particular policy domain”. Conversely, they state that “even when both citizens and policy-makers consider a {(C)CAs} recommendations and these recommendations translate into concrete policy decisions, a minipublic might still have little impact on the functioning of the policymaking process itself”. Hence, the authors conclude that “it seems insufficient to focus on the first two dimensions (congruence and consideration)”. Likewise, Minsart and Jacquet (2023, 289) lament that “the broader structural impact of CAs seems to be largely overlooked here, underexplored” within the literature. Consequently, they warn that “there is thus a risk – by considering only the short-term impacts (congruence and consideration) – of missing the broader debate about the capacity of these CAs to transform the current governance system towards more citizen participation and deliberation”. For example, the OECD (2021, 26) cite that “*seeing a*

{ongoing} role for public deliberation in the policymaking process” as one important factor in assessing the broader impact and long-term effects of these mechanisms. Hence, this present study will make an important contribution to the field by assessing (within the stated limits of the research) the perceivable structural changes within the given environmental policy domain related to the ICA case. With regard to the interlinkages between input and output legitimacy, Youngs (2022, 3) cites the emergence of the “systems approach...which explores how the interaction between different democratic practices and institutions affects the deliberative quality of the polity as a whole”. Within this approach, Jacquet and van der Does (2021, 479) state the need to “assess to what extent minipublics indeed lead to changes in political rules and habits”. For instance, an example of changing habits within the Irish case may be whether “elected officials” sought “to influence each other’s beliefs and behaviour through deliberation”. Indeed, it is worth exploring whether the PCCA process encouraged elected representatives and their advisors to “justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible” in line with the deliberative ideal (Gutmann and Thompson, 2004, 76) or if they instead engaged in general “cheap talk” characterised by polemic speeches and media soundbites (Green et al. 2019, 15) which make little substantive impact on voting behaviour beyond established party lines and policy priorities.

Additionally, Youngs (2022, 3-4) importantly notes the move within deliberative scholarship “to focus not just on the abstract quality of deliberation” as described above, but also on getting selection-based forums to dovetail with other democratic arenas and practices beyond deliberation. Yet, he admits that “determining what this actually means is no easy task”. For their part, Jacquet and van der Does (2021, 479) cite the need to assess impact in terms of “the involvement of ordinary citizens” beyond mere isolated CCAs – something which will be teased out in relation to the following discussion regarding the degree of institutional embeddedness of such processes. Herein, Youngs (2022) identifies two different levels of embedding deliberative processes within the mainstream polity. The first, “*institutionalisation*”, has been the primary scholarly focus thus far and involves ensuring such deliberative forums “take place on a more systematic basis and with formal processes to feed their conclusions into institutional decision-making processes”. The second relates to “*embeddedness*”, a concept which has been given “surprisingly little attention in the academic literature” regarding what it “actually means and the dynamics by which it is achieved” (Bussu et al. 2022, 134). Although Young (2022, 4) suggests it relates to the need to “to embed participative dynamics, behaviours, and attitudes into mainstream politics”, he too acknowledges that the scholarly debate is “less advanced, subject to more divergent views, and still in need of more basic conceptual ordering”. For example, Courant’s (2022, 163-

164) conceptualisation of “institutionalization” as a “necessary condition *firstly* for reducing arbitrary use of democratic innovations by politicians, and *secondly* for making deliberative values a ‘normal’ part of citizens’ ordinary political life (emphasis)” would appear to capture the idea of both (thin) institutionalisation and (thick) embeddedness, with Youngs (2022) and Bussu et al.’s (2022) noting how these concepts are often used as interchangeable. However, it is important to tease out the difference between the two in order to assess the move from a thin conception of institutionalisation towards institutionally a more “thickly” embedded deliberative model in countries like Ireland. According to Youngs (2022, 4), institutionalization of participative exercises occurs in “one or both of two ways”. **Firstly**, that they are granted a formal space within the decision-making process, with Youngs citing “(g)ood-practice examples includ(ing) the {ICC⁴⁶} and several of the climate assemblies run in the last two or three years”. Indeed, he notes that “(m)ost new assemblies now come with some degree of formal connection to state bureaucracies or parliamentary committees” which subsequently consider (in some shape or form) their results. However, he sounds some cautionary notes when stating that “there are many more places where such arrangements do not exist than those where they are being tried out”. More importantly, his “sobering” conclusion is that “current templates of institutionalization do not guarantee that the recommendations of sortition initiatives are actually taken on board, just that there is follow-up discussion or that participation takes place on a topic that is already on the institutional agenda” as has been previously discussed (see **Section 2.8.3**). However, Lafont (2023, 52) posits that “(a) larger issue lurks behind the questions about whether and when it is legitimate to confer binding decision-making authority upon CAs: namely, what are the various political uses and functions that these institutions can fulfil?”, noting that “proposals vary alongside several dimensions, perspectives, and aims”.

Herein, Lafont (2023, 52) differentiates between “top-down” or “bottom-up” approaches imposed by elite sponsors (similar to the discussion on agenda-setting within **Section 2.7b**), with “the ultimate goal of each of these approaches is fundamentally different”. In short, she argues that the first approach empowers (relatively few) participants to deliberate and decide for the broader citizen. In contrast, the latter empowers the citizenry to initiate debate, shape policy and have a say in political decisions. This analysis dovetails with the conceptual framework proposed by Niessen (2023, 326), which aims to understand elite attitudes towards CAs. Specifically, the author outlines four distinct stances: firstly, a negative view opposes CAs influencing decisions, favouring elected representatives’ exclusive discretion (Umbers, 2021). Secondly, a positive view considers CAs complementary to existing institutions, primarily in a consultative capacity (Rummens 2016). This

⁴⁶ Irish Constitutional Convention (ICC)

most closely resembles Lafont's "top-down" approach. Thirdly, elite actors may positively advocate for CAs to share decision-making power, either through bicameralism or mixed membership (Gastil and Wright, 2019; Suiter, Farrell, and Clodagh, 2016). Lastly, some actors may support CAs replacing traditional institutions, aiming for a new political system based on sortition and deliberation (Bouricius, 2018). The latter two points more closely resemble Lafont's "bottom-up" approach. Herein, Lafont (2023, 53) remarks that "(s)o far, most actual CAs have followed the top-down approach in so far as they have been organized by policymakers or administrators with the aim of delivering some "input" that was of interest to the sponsors (Setälä 2017: 851)". Herein, Elstub and Khoban (2023, 118) cite a notable critique of (C)CAs "that they are benign and easily co-opted by public authorities who organize them for symbolic reasons, to provide a veil of legitimacy to elitist policymaking and to make it look as though they are enabling the public to have a say when the decisions have already been made (Dryzek and Goodin 2006; Böker and Elstub 2015; Curato et al. 2021)". Likewise, Courant (2022, 163) makes this point even more starkly when claiming that currently, "(t)heir creation and impact, or lack thereof, are (thus) determined by their sponsor". In short, such critics strongly question the legitimacy of (C)CAs directly feeding into decision-making processes. Indeed, the empirical evidence thus far would seem to support such a viewpoint. Specifically, Niessen (2023) has noted a very high level of support of up to 70% for a consultative model among elected officials, with political approval for a more empowered and independent CA model (e.g. with "co-decision making power") scoring much lower. Consequently, it suggests that CAs are perceived by political actors (at best) "as a tool for consultation and information", wherein they concurrently wish to persevere the power and prerogative of traditional electoral representative democracy (Ibid).

Moreover, Niessen (2023, 327) illuminates other "strategic" considerations of elected representatives (ERs) towards the utilization of (C)CAs. For example, the authors note that leveraging CAs to bolster public approval can motivate officials towards a supportive stance—either in a consultative or co-decisive capacity (Boix, 1999). Similarly, Lacelle-Webster Warren (2023, 104) propounds that "in proposing ambitious solutions to the climate crisis, {CCAs} can provide political cover and legitimacy for legislative actions". Similarly, Niessen (2023) notes that the potential allure of gaining popularity and securing votes plays a pivotal role in politicians' perception, particularly if they perceive the proposals they support as likely outcomes. Consequently, this may encourage them to assert control over the process via input "design" (e.g. framing, agenda-setting, choice of experts, etc.). However, this may be a double-edged sword from a strategic perspective. Specifically, Esaiasson et al. (2019) note that unfavourable outputs may temper elected representatives' enthusiasm (at least towards particularly "costly"

recommendations); hence, elite sponsors could be strongly expected to support retaining the right to reject recommendations. In short, this raises significant questions regarding the legitimacy being used to justify such CCAs by their sponsors (and proponents), the various implications of the forms of institutionalization they propose in each case and additionally, how it affects the uptake of specific recommendations (e.g., public referendum versus parliamentary committee). On this point, Courant (2022, 169) identifies two crucial elements regarding the political power or roles of mini-publics “within the policy cycle: (1) *Who sets the agenda and frame the deliberation topics?* (2) *Who ratifies, approves or rejects the {CAs} proposals?*”. He subsequently suggests that “currently, ‘representative democracy’, or...‘representational electocracy’, allows the elected to control agenda setting and ratification, with an organization handled by their chosen staff and hearings to their discretion”. However, Courant perhaps gives “elected representatives” too much credit and neglects that the possibility that non-elected officials (i.e., civil servants) and external advisors (e.g. academic experts) could also capture the design process and thus shape *a priori* legitimacy of such assemblies. Either way, this can be considered as a “tamed consultation model” wherein the (conscious or subconscious perhaps) “goal is to ‘reconcile’ the ‘ordinary citizens’ with decision makers” (Ibid). However, in reality, this may widen the chasm between the *actual* citizenry or affected communities/constituencies and the policy consequences constructed by institutional elites. Specifically, Courant (2022, 171) highlights “three...conflictual frontlines” wherein “tamed” CAs are “used to construct a ‘counterfactual enlightened public’ aiming at delegitimizing, on the one hand i) the ‘radicality’ of mobilized activists” (e.g. French elites response to Yellow Vest Movement via the Great National Debate); ii) “on the other hand, the ‘stupidity’ of an ‘ill-informed’ or ‘populist’ maxi-public (e.g. the calls for a CA after Brexit by elite actors on the “Remain” side); iii) or, more rarely, the ‘apathy’ of a disinterested abstentionist electorate (e.g. the elite claims of how deliberative democracy is restoring democratic virtues, see OECD 2021 for example). Similarly, Boswell et al. (2023, 89) cite the “growing critique that the refined and routinized practices of professional forum-making can function as a tool by which governing elites seek to tame difficult issues, shutting out or quietening the “noise” from the public sphere (see Lee 2015; Fuji-Johnson 2015)”. Moreover, the authors note that such (C)CAs may “crowd out or marginalize organic, bottom-up participation in civil society (see e. g. Mansbridge et al. 2012)”. Hence, if such critiques hold in the Irish case, it would be a “stretch to classify their impact as a major revolution in politics” (Young 2022, 6), as many have claimed⁴⁷.

Consequently, Courant (2022, 163; 167; also see Harris 2019) notes that “despite an increase in numbers and scope, {CAs} remain under-institutionalized, being convened ad hoc,

⁴⁷ For example, see: [Kick ‘em all out! Citizens’ Assemblies and the next democratic revolution | New Internationalist](#)

changing formats, topic, mandate, with uncertain features and output”. Moreover, the author adds that very few examples of CAs as “permanent institutions” exist. For example, despite a spate of deliberative processes in Ireland over the past decade, the author states how these irritations have significantly varied at times (in terms of both inputs and outputs) and have not yet become “actual institutions” (Courant 2021). Importantly, Courant (2022, 166; also see Gastil and Wright 2019; Buchstein 2010) notes how such “instability leaves the door open to arbitrary and opportunistic use of these democratic innovations”, as previously discussed⁴⁸. Herein, Landemore (2017, 52) posits that “the relation of deliberative democracy to representative democracy has always been undertheorized”. Specifically, it raises the question of whether “inter-connected” deliberative processes could (or perhaps have already) become contaminated with the “fundamental design flaws” of representative democracy, which Landemore (2017, 54-57) argues go far beyond the “external factors...such as globalization and technological change or what some see as the crisis of capitalism in the West”. More pertinently, she propounds that “representative democracy as we know it has turned out to be an exclusionary paradigm, not a truly democratic one” which she asserts “has potentially worrying implications for deliberative democracy” if true (as Courant [2022] touches upon). Similarly, Youngs (2022, 9) propounds that (C)CAs in their current form rest on the somewhat naïve and questionable assumption “that elites are already committed to deepening democratic participation and that the ger apparent ‘participatory dissonance’ mane political issue is about how to run more officially sponsored assemblies and amplify their impact”. Likewise, Courant (2022, 163) warns that deliberative CAs “are not a simple consensual tool to ‘deepen democracy’, (but) they are a potential component of opposing institutional systems”. Moreover, Boswell et al. (2023, 88) remark that (C)CAs “provide little scope for the sort of scrutiny or accountability typical to established democratic institutions” – thus, making them potential more open to abuse due to the lack of transparency and contextual independence. Overall, Landemore (2017, 57) aptly illustrates the inherent contradiction of scholars who propose strengthening the links between formal deliberative processes and what Rummens (2016) refers to as the “traditional parliamentary systems” when stating that: “(d)eliberative democrats cannot at the same time claim that proper deliberation is only possible, and indeed desirable, in representative bodies and that their theory of legitimacy is unaffected by the crisis of representative democracy”. However, according to the author, one “way out⁷” of this deliberative-representative democracy paradox is “to reclaim the concept of representation and build into it new, more democratic meaning”. This also chimes with Youngs (2022) and Bussu et al’s (2022) idea of “embeddedness” and Courant’s

⁴⁸ The recent and much derided Irish Consultative Forum on Defence and Security is one example of this ad hoc approach with changing formats to suit political sponsor's agenda: [State's defence and neutrality to be examined in public forum \(breakingnews.ie\)](http://breakingnews.ie)

(2022) general conception of “institutionalisation”. Specifically, Youngs (2022, 3) propounds that “embedding participation politically should not be simply about how {CA} recommendations journey through other parts of the democratic system, but about fitting participative methods into a holistic notion of democratic renewal”. Moreover, Bussu et al. (2022, 136) postulate that “(i)nstitutionalization thus has an ambivalent relationship to embeddedness”. The latter authors note that it is not “institutionalisation *per se*” that matters, but rather how it induces or impedes the embedding of such deliberative practices. They state that if done correctly, institutionalization could help reinvigorate democratic institutions, but on the contrary, they also have the potential to “sap participatory energy, generating, fatigue and frustration”, ultimately eroding citizens’ commitment to such deliberative practices (Santos and Avritzer 2005).

For instance, Bussu et al. (2022, 136) first cite how embedding is hindered in cases where civil society (actors) are intentionally bypassed by design in “‘an attempt to tame radical energy’ (Blaug 2002, 107; also see Courant 2022)”. Herein, Youngs (2022, 12) propounds that the failure of (some) CCAs to build links to social movements has arguably “reinforced a technocratic-managerial and depoliticized approach to climate policies—actually undermining the possibility of systemic transformation”, something which chimes with Wong’s (2016) conception of eco-technocracy. Moreover, this arguably serves as a missed opportunity as civil society actors — and “not just the so-called usual suspects” but also those who are “more sceptical of the issues being discussed” — have the potential to challenge the ideas put forth by citizens and indeed assigned experts within such assemblies. Indeed, Youngs (2022, 10) argues that CA contributors (i.e. such as experts) “should be subject to much tougher scrutiny and not simply assumed to be benign” (also see **Section 2.7.3**). For example, he notes that CCAs are predominantly pushed “by a narrow circle of officials, experts, and participative practitioners” and thus “rarely emerge from other sources of political legitimacy” nor are “rarely subject to wide-ranging democratic debate”. Likewise, Bottin and Mazeaud (2023, 337-8; also see Gül 2019) note that although “various studies show that civil servants are key actors in the organization of participatory processes, in their institutionalization and in their follow-up...they remain under-analyzed”. Nevertheless, Eckerd and Heidelberg (2020) note how public organizers of participatory processes may view citizens as a “partner”, “student”, “informational source” or as a “hurdle”. Herein, Bottin and Mazeaud cite empirical survey data which suggests that from the public servants’ perspective, “the value of citizen participation is less democratic than instrumental,”⁴⁹, which influences the type of processes

⁴⁹ For an example of this instrumental approach, Stasiak et al. (2021, 14) observation – writing a brief for KNOCA from the perspective of guiding fellow practitioners and institutional actors on “*how can the legitimacy and resonance of climate assemblies in wider society be ensured?*” - is illustrative. Specifically, the authors note that: “(b)efore a CA can start, its place within the democratic system is to be created. To this end, organizers of most previous CAs had collaborated

public agents carry out (Eckerd and Heidelberg 2020; Värttö 2021)". Consequently, the authors (2023, 342) state that organisers' "perceptions of participation and their role exert a strong influence" over a CA "design process" prior to a participatory event. Overall, Boswell et al. (2023, 85-86) propound that "(w)hat is less problematized is that CAs are mostly rooted in what we call "big-D Design" thinking in democratic governance – an abstract and technocratic exercise in developing and implementing institutional interventions to democratize the policy process". Thus, rather than simply viewing certain design features as oversights, Lacelle-Webster and Warren (2023, 98⁵⁰) state that (C)CAs could "also have limitations built into their design" with regard to representation, agenda-setting, expert selection (as outlined in **Section 2.7**). Hence, there is increasingly a broader acceptance amongst the aforementioned scholars "that attention must be paid not only to the visible face (frontstage) such as the animation but also to all the less visible moments (backstage) of the deliberative processes (Bottin and Mazeaud 2023, 342; also see Forester 1999; Escobar 2019)", something which this present study will also illuminate.

Given the above, it is perhaps unsurprising that "most of the public are not aware of these assemblies even where they are held successfully" (Youngs 2022, 10; also see Devaney et al. 2021). This points to an obvious paradox wherein "citizens" assemblies are often elite or insider constructions (including by "insider" civil society actors), something which arguably undermines the potential for broader output legitimacy. Herein, Boswell et al. (2023, 89) note that "the particular concern is that forums might end up offering little more than the veneer of democratic inclusion within a context of continuing elite domination (Fuji-Johnson 2015)". Moreover, the lack of awareness and thus (pre-) input by the broader public into determining which issues merit mini-public deliberation (i.e. topic, framing, agenda-setting) subsequently means that the importance of the topic and the timing of the event are notably left to the discretion of those in positions of power (i.e. top-down). Consequently, these "elite" or "insider" actors may *only* convene such assemblies on a given topic when they "are convinced the outcome will correspond to their preferences" or (instead) grant them a very limited advisory 'power' (Fournier et al. 2011, 146; Courant 2022). However, the deeper reasons behind this apparent disconnect between "maxi" and "mini" publics (e.g. inherent inequalities which call into question the feasibility of CCAs to address climate change, as noted by Willis et al. 2020) do not seem to be addressed by deliberative proponents and practitioners. On the contrary, these are often seen as problems to be solved through downstream measures such as "professional public relation strategies...(and) a

closely with governmental and administrative bodies, who in the ideal case, acted as commissioners of the CA. Based on observed good practice, we recommend the use of cross-sector collaboration before the initiation of a CA to ensure political relevance and visibility for the process."

⁵⁰ A problem-based approach to citizens' assemblies

communication strategy, which allows for active public engagement into the CA process itself” (Stasiak et al. 2021, 14). Similarly, Young (2022, 6-7) cites how “critics feel sortition initiatives treat politics as an exercise in problem-solving guided toward objectively good, supposedly win-win outcomes”, with proponents and guiding organisations such as the OECD (2021) stressing that “there must be no major political disagreements on the issues and no politics involved in judging how well the participative forums function”⁵¹. Additionally, Youngs (2022, 7-11) notes how deliberative proponents often reduce mainstream politics to the role of passively adopting (C)CAs decisions rather than addressing “fundamental a priori questions of whether populations want citizen assemblies, on what terms, on what issues, and in what kind of relation to political actors”. Thus, he propounds that “combating democratic erosion arguably requires *more* political contestation and debate and a wider, not narrower, spectrum of policy options”. This would also be a tonic against the “tamed consultation model” described by Courant (2022), which aims to delegitimise dissent while painting a veneer of democratic vitality despite the reality of disenfranchisement.

In sum, it seems apparent that institutionalisation may be directed towards either virtuous or vicious cycles of embedded or disembedded institutions, respectively. Hence, as Jacquet and van der Does (2021, 479) propound, there is a need for “future empirical research” to establish “if and under what conditions minipublics transform the formal rules and informal practices of the policymaking process”. Moreover, “uncertain questions” (Courant 2022) relating to how deliberative processes are institutionally embedded within political systems *by political sponsors* must also be illuminated, a stated objective of this research. Failure to adequately explore such questions would “make normative discussions regarding the appropriate role of {CAs} incomplete...as they would forgo the potential long-term, and perhaps unintended, consequences {CAs} may have on policymaking” (Jacquet and van der Does, 2021, 479). In short, Boswell et al. (2023 89) argue that CA proponents and practitioners “seldom bear in mind” the inherent complexity surrounding “the messy and incomplete integration of the recent spate of climate assemblies”, something which this present research aims to illuminate within the context of the Irish case.

⁵¹ [Closing the Gap Between Citizen Participation and Mainstream Politics - Carnegie Europe \(carnegieendowment.org\)](https://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/research Briefs/closing-the-gap-between-citizen-participation-and-mainstream-politics)

3 METHODOLOGY

The following chapter sets out the methodological and data analysis approaches undertaken in this research. A full overview of the various methodological approaches utilized to assess research objectives pertaining to the ICA's input legitimacy, output legitimacy and their interlinkages can be found in **Appendix B**.

3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The present researcher employed a constructivist research paradigm to address the chosen research question, aims and objectives. Moreover, an interpretivist approach was adopted, based on a qualitative case study analysis of the ICA and the subsequent PCCA. This paradigm generally seeks to understand “the world of human experience” (Cohen and Manion, 1994, 36), indicating that “reality is socially constructed” (Mertens, 2005, 12). Herein, interpretivist researchers, despite entering the social arena with prior insights, recognize the inadequacy of fixed research designs (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988) as noted with respect to the guiding theoretical framework (see **Section 2.6**). Hence, this flexibility allowed for openness to new knowledge (Carson et al., 2001) – a necessity concerning this under-explored and evolving (theoretically and empirically) topic. Furthermore, in their article on “*Studying public deliberation after the systemic turn: The crucial role for interpretive research*”, Ecran et al. (2017, 196-9) “argue that an interpretive approach is particularly well placed to accommodate a systems perspective of public deliberation; particularly the multiplicity of actors, sites and activities, and forms and effect of communication between different sites”. Herein, the authors illuminate how “the two ‘turns’ in deliberative democracy—the empirical turn and the systemic turn—have pulled in different directions”, with an empirical focus on the internal dynamics within (C)CAs (utilising primarily quantitative methods) contrasting with a theoretical push to broaden the scope beyond these forums into the public sphere. Herein, Ecran et al. posit that “the empirical turn has left deliberative theory open to many of the criticisms that the systemic turn has sought to address”. Nevertheless, the authors propound how an interpretivist approach proffers “the methodological tools to capture the ‘fuzzy’ concepts of the deliberative system and its various components and linkages, rendering them amenable both to empirical analysis and normative assessment”. In short, the chosen interpretivist paradigm closely aligns with the research question, stated aims and objectives, along with the subsequent guiding theoretical framework, methodological tools and empirical case study analysis; in doing so, it follows Dryzek’s (2007, 240) call to utilise empirical research to make theory ‘more sensitive to real-world constraints and opportunities’.

3.2 RESEARCH POSITIONALITY

Regarding research positionality, the present researcher has acted as an independent and critical friend, objectively seeking to appraise the merits and flaws of the ICA to advance both the deliberative ideal and practical application of (C)CAs (particularly within the environmental sphere). Somewhat surprisingly, this approach is unique, as the OECD (2021, 12) notes that “only seven per cent {of deliberative processes} have had an independent evaluation”, with “self-reporting by members...the most common practice of evaluating representative deliberative process”. This research thus shared the same “originality” as Courant (2021, 3); specifically, the present researcher did not have an “involved position” within the ICA. However notably, this positionality is “contrary to a fair share of scientists...studying assemblies (they) actively advocated for or organized” in Ireland (Ibid). For instance, a leading member of the official EPA evaluation team (i.e. Devaney et al. 2021) also served on the ICA’s expert advisory group (EAG), while other prominent academics publishing research on the ICA (series) were also intimately involved in (promoting) the process (both before and after). Herein, Demski and Capstick (2022, 16) note that “it is important to exercise caution in attributing impact even on the basis of expert perspectives”, and subsequently that researchers should seek “specific examples and cases in order to support more general claims”. Similarly, Smith (2009, 17) propounds that “it is too easy to be swept along with the rhetoric of participation and not ask hard questions of institutional designs”, something Carolan (2015) has illuminated with respect to the prior ICC case. Indeed, seeking answers to such “hard questions” is one of the primary purposes of this present research. Moreover, in drawing attention to the potential for bias, the present author in no way wishes to question the creditability or ethics of previous ICA evaluators with “involved positions”. Nonetheless, transparency and context are arguably essential for ensuring (perceived external) legitimacy – not only within the specific policy domain but for the long-term legitimacy of CAs. This is particularly important given Demski and Capstick (2022, 12) warning that “evaluations should also be mindful of any unintended adverse consequences...(as) there exists the potential in some cases for raised expectations to be unfulfilled or for a backlash to be prompted as a result of certain recommendations, or simply due to a reaction against the nature of the process”. Overall, Demski and Capstick (2022, 12) aptly conclude that:

“because of the subtleties involved in detecting and attributing impact to climate assemblies, it is advisable that those carrying out an evaluation have no real or perceived conflict of interest. Ideally, any evaluation process should be fully independent of those organisations and individuals commissioning, designing, carrying out, or affected by the outcomes of a climate assembly.”

In short, the stated research positionality allowed for a fully independent, transparent and “external point of view” (Courant 2021); consequently, the present researcher concurs with Demski

and Capstick (2022, 12) that “(f)or these reasons, evaluators who are separate from other aspects of a climate assembly are in a better position to assert their findings, than are those who are intimately invested in the success of process”. Nonetheless, like Courant, the researcher remained deeply “connected” to the case by virtue of “long qualitative fieldwork”. However, arguably, the research positionality was even more advantageous than Courant's, as not only did the present researcher have in-depth knowledge of the theory and the chosen empirical case (like Courant), but they were also perhaps more familiar with the specific Irish political, social, and linguistic context by virtue of having been born and raised in Ireland (unlike Courant). In short, the researcher's intimate “insider” knowledge of the country, culture, and conversational peculiarities may have allowed for certain access to actors', settings (e.g., Irish Parliamentary Committees) and analytical insights that “non-natives” may find more difficult to access.

3.3 JUSTIFICATION OF SINGLE CASE STUDY APPROACH

The significance of the seminal Irish case has been extensively outlined in this thesis's introduction (**Section 1.4**) and subsequent literature review (**Section 2.3**). However, it is nonetheless essential to justify the single-case country focus from a methodological perspective. According to Elstub and Pomatto (2022, 408) “case studies have been at the vanguard of empirical deliberative democracy research to date”. Nevertheless, some scholars have rightfully criticised the empirical focus on “discrete” deliberative cases both in Ireland and more generally (e.g., Courant 2021; Curato et al. 2017), although this criticism has largely pertained to process-related evaluations of (C)CAs. In contrast, this present research focuses not only on the input legitimacy but also the output legitimacy (i.e., policy consequences) and the interlinkages between inputs and outputs. Herein, Minsart and Jacquet (2023, 285) note that “the majority of research on the question of the impact of CAs on the decision-making process has indeed very often focused on single case studies.” Indeed, within the Irish context, Harris's (2021, 685) likewise focused on “a single case study, the recent {ICA} and {PCCA} deliberations on climate action” to explore representational issues within the Irish Climate Assembly. Moreover, given the evidence cited in the problem statement and subsequent literature review, the argument could be made that an in-depth focus on the input-output legitimacy and their interlinkages of one singular case (i.e., the ICA) is empirically more valuable than a comparative analysis of only the “input legitimacy” of two discrete CCAs. Nevertheless, the potential of a comparative case between the ICA and CAUK was also considered; however, conducting comprehensive empirical research on both the CAUK's process and outcomes was not deemed practically possible within the given timeframe (especially given Covid restrictions). However, primary and secondary data was collected on the CA on Biodiversity in order to produce a “mini” comparative analysis relating to process-inputs. Moreover, this also

strengthened the exploration of "input-output" interlinkages in line with the research question, aim and objectives; specifically, it allowed for an analysis of feedback loops and learning processes between the respective CCAs.

However, overall, the singular ICA focus "from process to outcomes" was deemed justifiable, especially given Langkjær and Smith (2023, 5; also see Courant's 2021) observation that "(p)arliamentarians and parliament as a corporate body need more clarity about their role post-Assembly". Importantly, the authors also propound that thus far, "(o)nly the Irish assembly process has a clear role for parliament". Indeed, Minsart and Jacquet (2023, 290) cite that "beyond the necessity of more comparative studies, it is also more detailed process-tracing (Beach and Pedersen 2019) of single case that are needed, to understand the causal mechanisms at stake when a CA has (or not) some impacts on policymaking". Furthermore, Stasiak et al. (2021, 10) also note how the "variability" of individual (C)CA designs "is one of the core strengths of (C)CAs...more generally since it allows sensitivity and fit to their respective contexts". Hence, given the perspective "institutionalisation" of the "Irish model" (Courant 2021) – for example, with the subsequent establishment of the CA on Biodiversity (2022) – it is important to assess the Irish "variability" given its trailblazing status. Finally, given the international propagation of the ICA's "success" and stated desire of practitioners, academics and administrators to take lessons from the "most often cited" Irish case Averchenkova and Ghilan (2023, 6; also see Coleman et al. 2019), a deeper case study analysis is both required and justified. Overall, this research heeded the call for a shift in empirical research towards studying the "macro-political impact of micro-political innovations" (Goodin and Drysek 2006, 220-1; also see Rummens 2016) and therefore sought to "analyze if and under what conditions {CAs} transform the formal rules and informal practices of the policymaking process." In short, the case study approach also enabled an exploration of several questions "on how instances of micro deliberation relate to the broader public sphere, such as how politicians view a particular site or the discourses that emerge from it" (Elstubb and Pomatto 2022, 409).

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

With regard to data collection techniques, the OECD (2021, 23) provides an "(o)verview of applicability of methods for assessing evaluation criteria" (see Table 7). Specifically, it outlines a "three-step" process – which broadly encompasses the holistic guiding criteria set out in **Section 2.3** (i.e., Towards a Guiding Theoretical Framework) – alongside "measurement methods for evaluation". Both qualitative (e.g., open-ended interviews) and quantitative (e.g., member/public survey) are cited as tools to effectively evaluate criteria, with the authors also noting the "need to

balance objective and subjective measures”, something which has been achieved herein by a triangulated mixed method approach. Specifically, primary data consisted of direct observation (of the ICA & PCCA) and in-depth semi-structured interviews with *ICA actors* (i.e., citizen participants **(P)**; secretarial organisers **(Sec)**, scientific experts **(SE)**, observers **(ENGO)** and independent deliberative experts who served as advisors **(DE)**) and *political actors* (i.e., elected representatives **(ERs)** and their advisors **(A)** associated with PCCA and who acted as political sponsors of CAs in Ireland). Moreover, desk-based research of official documentation (e.g., official reports on the ICA & PCCA websites), public submissions, and archived video footage of the respective processes was also utilised. The latter methods correspond with Harris’s (2021) approach of analysing representative discourses within the ICA and PCCA. Moreover, with respect to the unique objective (compared to other empirical literature) of assessing the policy consequences, the OECD (2021, 24) note how “policy analysis can include document review and interviews with stakeholders and policy makers”. Specifically, data collected from ERs and advisors (A) - who are both intimately connected to public and group concerns by way of the Irish democratic system⁵² – along with the analysis of transcript data from the PCCA debates (i.e., invited witnesses, including stakeholder groups) allowed for such “unofficial” concerns (e.g., the impact of carbon taxes) to be captured within the research data and subsequent analysis. Specifically, this present research combined PCCA observational data, analysis of official PCCA reports and debate transcripts and process tracing of policy/legislation, along with in-depth interviews to illuminate the congruence, influence and consideration of ICA recommendations within the PCCA, in addition to structural changes within the policy domain. In short, integrating methods utilised herein has ensured that all three outlined steps and their accompanying criteria – which broadly equate to the “input & output legitimacy” evaluation frameworks within this research – have been adequately considered.

⁵² Which is characterised as highly localised

Table 7: Overview of the applicability of measurement methods for assessing evaluation criteria (OECD, 2021, 23)

Step	Criteria	Measurement methods for evaluation							
		Member survey	Public survey	Organiser or expert survey	Document review	Deliberation observation	Open-ended interviews	Media coverage review	Policy analysis
Process design integrity	Clear and suitable purpose		X	X	X		X		
	Clear and unbiased framing	X	X	X	X				
	Suitable design	X		X	X				
	Procedural design involvement		X	X	X		X		
	Transparency and governance	X	X	X	X		X	X	
	Representativeness and inclusiveness	X	X	X	X				
Deliberative experience	Neutrality, inclusivity, and balance of facilitation	X		X	X	X	X		
	Accessible, neutral, and transparent use of online tools	X		X	X	X	X		
	Breadth, diversity, clarity, and relevance of the evidence and stakeholders	X			X	X	X		
	Quality of judgement	X		X		X	X		
	Perceived knowledge gains by members	X		X		X	X		
	Accessibility and equality of opportunity to speak	X				X	X		
	Respect and mutual comprehension	X		X		X	X		
	Free decision-making and response	X		X	X	X	X		
	Respect for member's privacy	X		X	X	X	X		
Pathways to impact	Influential recommendations	X						X	X
	Response and follow up	X	X		X		X	X	X
	Member aftercare			X	X		X		

3.4.1 *Passive Observation*

According to the OECD (2021, 23), observation “is essential to evaluate the deliberative experience of the process”. In particular, it notes that direct observation allows evaluators to judge whether participants had “equal opportunity to speak, respect amongst the members, and quality of judgement”. Indeed, Ecran et al. (2022, 3) state how “the insights gained from the close study of deliberative practices...help 'in the process of identifying normative principles themselves' (Bächtiger 2019, 657); hence aligning with the aforementioned interpretive approach. Herein, the initial research step involved observation (in-person and later via video archives) of the ICA, which not only helped form initial judgements on the guiding criteria, but also informed the tentative interview protocol. Moreover, video archives of presentations, Q&As, and roundtable discussions were also (re-)analysed to better understand the process, noting structure and observing actors' tone and body language in response to questions. Subsequent analysis of transcript data and interviews with fellow ICA observers and participants strengthened the data quality and helped reduce the potential for misinterpretation or (observational) bias. Importantly, private deliberations among members were inaccessible for observation – nevertheless, this is an obstacle almost all researchers face. However, cross-referencing against the official ICA member survey feedback and in-depth interview data allowed for this limitation to be partially overcome. Finally, this data collection method also extended to (in-person and online) observation of the PCCA's public sessions, which subsequently helped inform interviews with key policy actors (e.g., ERs & Advisors) and thus strengthened the quality of collected data.

3.4.2 *Interview Data*

A) Relevance of Data Subjects:

The OECD (2021, 24) note how “qualitative interviews with representatives of the commissioning authority, relevant stakeholders, policy makers, expert witnesses, journalists, or members is another useful method to complement evaluation”. Apart from journalists⁵³, all other relevant actors were included in the study, with interviews conducted from 2017 to 2023. This data collection duration is arguably one of the core strengths of the empirical data, as Demski and Capstick (2022, 9) propound that “(g)iven the importance of assessing how outcomes and impacts of climate assemblies change over time, it is important to collect data at multiple time points to enable tracking over time”. In total, 31 in-depth semi-structured interviews were undertaken as part of this research, with a full breakdown of interviewees and their relevant characteristics provided in **Appendix C**. In short, in-depth interviews with data subjects were utilised to describe, understand, and elucidate “participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell 2003, 8).

⁵³ As a media content analysis remained outside the confines of this research

Initial data collection relating to the ICA process predominantly focused on citizen participants (P1, P2...P12), as “interviews with a selection of members can provide additional insights to the quantitative survey results” (OECD 2021, 24). Additionally, other key figures were also interviewed: Irish (DE1) deliberative and international (DE2) deliberative experts with intimate knowledge of the ICA, an expert on the EAG for climate meetings (SE1), expert speakers at the ICA climate session (SE2; SE3), and an environmental NGO observer (ENGO). Herein, the OECD (2021) posit that such “interviews with stakeholders can shed light on the openness and transparency of the deliberative process design”. For example, Caluwaerts and Reuchamps, (2023, 244) state that “participants themselves should be consulted about what they think of the quality of the information they have received”, something which this present research has undertaken. Moreover, influential members of the Secretariat of both the ICA (Sec 1) and subsequent CA on Biodiversity (Sec 2) were also interviewed. Firstly, this allowed for a “mini-comparison” between the two processes to further strengthen findings relating to input-output interlinkages (i.e. assessing feedback loops, path dependencies and evidence of institutionalisation). Secondly, as the OECD (2021) observed, such discussions with the “commissioning body can be helpful in identifying the motivations behind the initiation of a deliberative process”, a key output legitimacy objective. Importantly, this specific data collection regarding “motivations” – which is explored in analysis **Section 5.3** – also extended to semi-structured interviews with Elected Representatives (ER1, ER2...etc) and political advisors (A1, A2...etc.), something Youngs (2020) notes is an often-underexplored area of research. Additionally, these interviews with “high-level informants” (i.e. ERs and As) were essential for evaluating the “pathways to impact”, namely the perceived congruence, influence and consideration of the ICA recommendations, along with any evidence of broader structural changes. Specifically, Demski and Capstick (2022, 12) note how “process tracing references to the climate assembly and its outputs is, however, limited because it likely misses out key stakeholders that are not vocal about the influence the assembly has had on them and their organisations....thus it is important to supplement with additional data collection methods”. Herein, Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2023, 249) note how “elite interviews offer another approach to assess political uptake {i.e. congruence and consideration of recommendations} as it always digs into rationales, values, and visions of the {CCA} by the political actors”.

B) Identifying and Ensuring a Representative Interview Sample

Regarding interviews with citizen members, a purposive sampling (Blaikie 2010) approach was utilized to ensure a high degree of diversity with respect to secondary characteristics (e.g., age, gender, geography), with demographic profile targets of ICA organisers used as a guide (**See Appendix C**). However, finding interviewees who participated in the ICA posed an initial

challenge due to privacy restrictions, with only participants' names and broad geographical locations provided by the organisational team. Herein, social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook) were instrumental in identifying initial data subjects. Once identified, initial communication stressed the academic nature of the research to build trust and distance from media (or other) requests. This approach yielded positive results and enabled other interviewees to be identified via snowball sampling, particularly those (predominantly older) age cohorts who may not have been (as) active on the above-mentioned social media sites. Moreover, purposive sampling was employed to ensure a diverse sample based on specified characteristics in line with the ICA's on sampling criteria).

Importantly, interviews with ICA members were also conducted separately from the official ICA apparatus, arguably adding to the contextual independence and transparency of this research⁵⁴. In contrast, during discussions with data informants, it emerged that (other) academic research interviews were commonly conducted over ICA sitting weekends, with prior requests first made to the Secretariat. Herein, it is argued that such pre-selected interviews – wherein interviews with data subjects are conducted within the organisational setting and potentially hand-picked by the Secretariat – could lead to a skewed (i.e. positive) sample and perhaps even a degree of self-censorship by participants. For example, evidence from the field of human resources has indicated how a sizeable proportion of employees provide artificially positive responses on feedback forms within their organisational circumstances (e.g. Huebner and Zacher 2021); and the potential for participants to do the same within a CA setting should also be noted and minimised (i.e., through fostering independence, trust and distance from organising staff when conducting evaluation and/or academic interviews).

In contrast, the ICA organisers (Sec.), deliberative experts (DE), and expert presenters (SE) were somewhat easier to identify, and email requests yielded higher response rates than those "cold calls" directed at citizens via social media. Conversely, elected representatives (ERs) and political advisors (A) proved harder to reach, perhaps due to obvious time constraints and a degree of political caution. Moreover, the same degree of diversity was not possible due to the PCCA's membership profile; nevertheless, the research endeavoured to achieve a balance of views regarding political persuasion (**See Appendix C**). Once again, snowball sampling was also utilized (in addition to traditional selection methods) to help identify further interview subjects (e.g. other unnamed advisors to PCCA members); herein, the selection process ceased once a "saturation point" was reached with respect to resources, access, and time constraints. Once selected, relevant

⁵⁴ Interviews with participants were predominantly done by request according to key interview informants and formal interactions with the ICA Secretariat.

consent was sought (see **Appendix D**) and interviewees were informed of their anonymity. Face-to-face interviews were preferred for building rapport and observing body language cues; however, due to access (e.g., Covid restrictions) and time (e.g., of high-level political actors) constraints online Zoom calls were often utilised. Nonetheless, conversations with informants were guided by tailored interview protocols (see **Appendix E**), which were adapted for specific types of data subjects (e.g., citizens, experts, organisers) while also continuously revised as new insights emerged. Overall, interviews were conducted in a relaxed and informal manner (in line with Irish cultural norms) in order to build rapport and trust and elicit frank opinions (i.e., beyond the official line).

3.4.3 Secondary Sources

In addition to first-hand primary data, secondary sources – such as documental analysis of official ICA and PCCA reports, meeting transcripts and surveys – also underwent empirical scrutiny. This enabled a detailed comparison between the official “espoused view” (i.e., the reasons one gives for their actions;) of ICA actors and the practical “theory-in-use” (i.e., the more complicated theory that explains how one actually behaved) through cross-checking oral statements with documental evidence and vice versa (Argyris 1990). For example, despite the declared recruitment of “99 full members and 99 substitutes” (Mooney 2018b, 2), interviewees unveiled that substitutes’ were not in fact enlisted upfront, with potential negative implications discussed within subsequent analysis (Section 4.1). Beyond this, official secondary data not only informed interviews (e.g. prompts) but also helped integrate the perspectives of non-interviewed members (via analysis of members' perceptions via transcript data, archival footage and feedback forms), fortifying the credibility and broad applicability of primary data and resultant findings. Moreover, analysis of secondary sources was essential for assessing output legitimacy and policy consequences, which the OECD (2021, 4) terms as “pathways to impact”. Moreover, they note how “identifying these links can help highlight the value of the deliberative process to public decision making”, an underexplored area of research (i.e., interlinkages between input-output legitimacy). Hence, the concepts of “congruence, consideration and structural changes” (Jacquet and van der Does, 2021) – in addition to the concept of “influence” (Vrydagh and Caluwaerts 2023) – have been outlined within the guiding theoretical framework and elucidated upon in the following literature review.

Firstly, as Vrydagh (2022, 66) notes, the congruence approach involves “a desk-based research method which assesses impact based on the textual correspondence between a citizen-created idea and public policy documents”. Herein, Demski and Capstick (2022) cite impact indicators within the policy domain that were instructive for assessing the outcome legitimacy of the ICA (see *Table 8*). Nevertheless, Vrydagh notes the limitations of this particular method,

specifically in relation to assessing “influence”, as existing research “tends to operationalize the impact disparately”. Similarly, Minsart and Jacquet (2023, 285) also state that “it is also the methodological challenge of measuring impact...(as) it is often difficult to trace the links of influence between various elements, and the question arises even more when it is a matter of entering the black box of policymaking process”. In short, they propound that “seeing a recommendation formulated by a CA translated in public policy does not mean de facto that without the assembly it would not have been implemented”. Consequently, Vrydagh calls for an approach characterised by “a mixed method which triangulates the congruency approach with interviews to obtain the contextualized experience of actors involved in the follow-up of the consultative participatory process”. Additionally, a “Sequential Impact Matrix” (SIM) is also proposed to address this notably empirical weakness within existing research (Vrydagh and Caluwaerts 2020; 2023), with both methods applied in this current research (see Section 3.4.4).

Table 8: Examples of impact indicators, evidence sources and content (Source: Demski and Capstick 2022)

Impact area	Impact category	Impact indicators	Evidence source	Evidence content
Policy	Instrumental	New law and/or policy	Parliamentary bills and advanced policy proposals (white papers)	Text in documentation that makes direct or indirect connection to outcomes of climate assembly
		Proposals for law and policy	National or sectoral emissions reduction strategy	Spoken reference to climate assembly in formal government proceedings
		New or amended targets and objectives	Advisory reports and documentation	Language that attributes change to climate assembly (eg, 'because of', 'led directly to')
		Formal advisory body recommendations	Departmental documents, press releases	
		Departmental strategy (e.g., transport, food, and agriculture)	Questions and statements in official records of proceedings	
		Use of findings in parliamentary debates and committee processes	Civil servant/policy-maker attribution of changes to climate assembly in evaluation interviews	

Secondly, Minsart and Jacquet (2023, 288) note that “assessing the consideration of the CA or its recommendations can be done in a very broad way, especially because it includes a large number of spheres and actors in society”. Specifically, they note documentary analysis of parliamentary debates – in addition to interviews with policymakers or civil society representatives – undertaken in this case. **Finally**, regarding structural changes, the authors note that thus far, “this

type of impact is certainly the one that has been the least studied” and requires thinking about impact beyond the initial fate of recommendations using similarly broad methodological approaches (e.g., documentary analysis; interviews). Hence, in addition to observed long-term structural changes within the policy domain, other factors (such as political sponsors motives for the CA in Ireland) were also explored.

3.4.4 Process Tracing & Sequential Impact Matrix

Process tracing was also employed in line with Jacquet and Van der Does (2021). Specifically, Pickering (2022, 293-4) notes how process tracing is suitable for single case studies and can be used "to explain the outcomes of individual cases" in addition to building and testing theories. Consequently, process tracing – a method similar to historical analysis of evidence (Dowding 2016) – has been used to identify “congruence” between ICA recommendations with observable PCCA report commitments, along with other significant policy and legislative outputs. However, Papadopoulos (2012, 127) cites the potential limitations herein, stating that assessing the impact of CAs “requires meticulous process-tracing, because participatory devices are only one of the inputs in the policy process, and their effects have a diffuse and temporally dispersed character”. Herein, the OECD (2021, 24) have noted that "sometimes it can be difficult to attribute policy changes to deliberative processes, but other times those links can be clear". For example, Duvic-Paoli (2022, 251) posits that "the extent to which the work of the {ICA} influenced climate legislation is difficult to assess". Moreover, Demski and Capstick (2022, 16) propound that “where a (parliamentary) commissioning body may appear to have responded to an assembly’s recommendations, it may already have been inclined in this direction...(i)ndeed, policy options may be offered for assembly appraisal on the basis that these are plausible proposals for implementation”. Similarly, Minsart and Jacquet (2023, 287) suggest that “the risk is therefore to conclude that a CA has impacted the policymaking process because a recommendation has been translated into a public policy, even though the policymakers were already in favour of this recommendation before the setting up of the CA”. Consequently, the OECD (2021, 24) recommend “looking at relevant changes in policy, legislation, and/or institutional structures before and after a deliberative process takes place”.

Herein, Vrydagh and Caluwaerts (2023, 119) have developed a “Sequential Impact Matrix (SIM)” in order to counteract this methodological shortcoming which “constructs the relation of influence between a {CA} and the subsequent public policy as if decision-makers do not have pre-existing policy preferences”. An adapted version of the SIM approach has been applied to this current thesis and in short “builds on previous congruency studies, by studying how CAs affect policies, all the while including policy makers’ pre-existing preferences”. Moreover, the model

distinguishes “between the type of influence (continuous, enriching, shifting, innovating and inhibiting) and the extent of influence (no uptake, partial uptake, full uptake)”, as outlined in **Section 2.8b** of the literature review. In short, assessing the ICA's influence required a temporal sequential approach, comparing effects to a null position (i.e. before the ICA) and assuming decision-makers preferences (e.g. PCCA actors) bridge the gap between the ICA and subsequent public policy (i.e. PCCA report; related legislative changes). Specifically, political manifestos, relevant national strategy documents and legislation were analysed to determine whether the ICA recommendations were circulating within the given policy domain *prior* to the assembly's commencement (or if they were completely new) and, therefore, assess if the Irish CCA simply continued, added to, altered or rejected such pre-existing proposals. Additionally, Vrydagh and Caluwaerts (2023, 124) also choose to aggregate “each proposal’s impact on public policy”, with the authors suggesting this is a natural next step “in order to evaluate the whole influence of a mini-public on public policy”. However, on the contrary, this present author argues (in line with DE2 below) that this approach neglects the implicit fact that some recommendations will clearly be *more* influential than others and consequently, a mere aggregation in numerical/percentage terms risked undermining the "richness" of what is foremost a qualitative research study; hence, a decision was made not to aggregate recommendations but provide a more stylistic account both in the analysis and discussion sections.

“Not all assemblies are equal, you can’t just add up the percentage of recommendations accepted as some are more influential than others” (DE2)

3.5 QUALITY AND VERIFICATION OF DATA

Firstly, to ensure quality interview data, interview protocols were designed based on insights derived from direct observations and initial informants (e.g. P1, DE1). These were subsequently updated and adapted to ensure clarity and relevance to individual data subjects (**see Appendix E**). Moreover, the interviewer sought to build rapport (through informal exchanges to "break the ice" before conducting the official interview), to actively listen to answers and use probing techniques to prompt informants' recollections of certain events. Furthermore, to ensure the ongoing quality of data, robust data management practices were implemented to maintain the integrity and security of primary sources. For example, recordings and transcribed interviews were stored safely (confidentially; backed up) and named anonymously within a secured computer folder(s). Various measures were also implemented to conceal participants' identities, including the use of gender-neutral pronouns (i.e., “they” and “their”) when describing participants' perspectives in the analysis

section. Finally, only official reports, surveys and transcripts were utilised as secondary sources to ensure their quality.

Regarding the overall temporal quality of data, Demski and Capstick (2022, 2) importantly note that "there are limits to any attempt to disentangle the threads of cause and effect from the many other influences on climate action...(and) this is particularly the case for the detection of longer-term and wider-ranging impacts, as compared to more immediate and discrete outcomes". Consequently, the focus of this research was confined to the more immediate and discrete outcomes, as "linking short-term outcomes to the climate assembly process is likely to be easier than tracing this influence in the longer-term and potentially more significant and far-reaching impacts" (Demski and Capstick 2022, 11). Furthermore, the authors add that "(d)rawing out the precise influence of a climate assembly, and separating this from the myriad other influences, will inevitably entail a degree of uncertainty and estimation". It is important to remember here that social science is not an objective science, but reflective cross-triangulation of data, checks (e.g. member checking) and reflective analysis has been utilised to reduce such uncertainty. For example, in-depth interviews were utilised along with secondary sources to ascertain the extent of "selective listening" (Sintomer et al. 2008), "cherry-picking proposals" (Smith 2009, 93) and whether they were watered-down in favour of "competing institutional imperatives" (Bussu et al. 2022, 136).

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The aforementioned methodological approach – which Courant (2021) notes has been rarely utilised within the chosen Irish case study – allowed for a comprehensive and critical analysis of the primary categories and guiding criteria outlined in the theoretical framework (*see Table 6*) and elucidated upon within the prior literature review. Data reduction of primary sources involved full transcription of interviews and electric copying of observation field notes. In terms of the coding and analysis stages, NVivo software was utilised to first refine and categorise the collected data, and to secondly organise it along a logical and temporal sequence in line with the ICA (i.e., from input to output legitimacy). Overall, without predefined criteria (only general guiding categories), the analysis aimed to extract underlying themes and patterns from qualitative data, providing rich insights into ICA and PCCA process in line with the interpretive research approach.

i) Input Legitimacy:

With regard to the analysis of input legitimacy (**Analytical Chapter 4.1 to 4.4**), collected data was firstly organised and deductively coded according to a predefined framework of categories set out in the guiding theoretical framework (**Table 8**). Specifically, the analysis sought to holistically examine how the ICA process compared to deliberative "best practice" according to

four key categories (i.e., *representation, procedural rules, information, process-outcomes*) explored in-depth within the literature research (**Section 2.7**). After initial categorical deductive coding of primary and secondary (e.g. member feedback survey) data, an exploratory thematic analysis (i.e. coding) was conducted to extract underlying themes and patterns. Specifically, this sought to identify patterns within the qualitative data, regardless of whether they were largely predefined (i.e. literature-informed analysis) or emerged solely during the analysis process. For instance, some themes were self-evident (e.g. *Category: representation à sub-theme: selection method*) while others were more intricate (e.g. *category: representation à sub-theme: Group Good Vs Group Representation*). Moreover, given the “messy” qualitative data and overlap between certain themes (e.g., Age and Gender), thematic synthesis or thematic integration was undertaken to maintain stylistic flow and generate higher-level interpretations (e.g., *Category: Procedural Rules à synthesised theme: Establishing the Rules: Facilitation, Time, Respect and Challenging the Experts*). Overall, coded themes are displayed as “sub-headings” within the relevant analytical chapters.

ii) Output Legitimacy & Interlinkages

After initial data collection and analysis (i.e., open coding), a thorough review of the existing literature (**see Section 2.8**) was undertaken to identify relevant categories for analysis. Drawing from scholarly works and theoretical frameworks (i.e. Jacquet and Van der Does 2021; Vrydagh and Caluwaerts 2020), four primary categories emerged: *congruence, influence, consideration, and structural changes*. These categories provided a guiding framework for the initial organisation and interpretation of the data. The description of the analysis herein can be divided into two main approaches.

A) *Congruence and Influence.*

In the analysis **Section. 4.5**, relevant data (e.g., PCCA official report) was firstly categorised and deductively coded according to each ICA recommendation. Secondly, process tracing (2022, 292) – which according to Pickering (2022, 292) “offers a promising method for structuring qualitative, explanatory case-study analysis of deliberative processes” (Pickering 2022, 292) – was utilised to illuminate policy congruence between ICA proposals and relevant policy documents (e.g. PCCA report; CAPs; policy legislation). Herein, primary interview data was used to triangulate, validate and ultimately strengthen interpretive findings. Finally, a Sequential Impact Matrix (SIM) was employed to ascertain both the extent (i.e., recommendation uptake) and type of influence (continuous, enriching, shifting, innovative, no influence).

B) *Consideration and Structural Changes*

In **Section 5.2 and 5.3** respectively, the analysis focused on two specific categories: consideration and structural changes. For consideration, the study explored how perceptions of the ICA process may have influenced decision-makers preferences. Specifically, it did so through the lens of two controversial ICA proposals related to carbon taxes (i.e. CT and CTAE) which were repeatedly raised (at first, unprompted) by PCCA actors within interviews. Thereafter, thematic coding was used to extract themes (e.g. *Expert Bias*) and patterns from the data to illuminate the underlying dynamics of decision-making. For example, ER1 remarked that they thought "*a lot of the evidence about carbon tax being an effective tool to reduce emissions wasn't really presented in a proper way*" (ER1), while other ICA participants (both primary data subjects and those referenced within ICA transcripts) also criticised experts and evidence. Hence, such data snippets were organised and analysed together. Similarly, for structural changes, the analysis aimed to detect shifts or "turbulence" (Torney 2021) within the environmental policy domain stemming (in part) from the ICA. Herein, the motivation of "climate policy actors" Averchenkova and Ghilan (2023, 2) – for example, elected representatives – also emerged as a key re-occurring theme pertaining to the interlinkages between input and output legitimacy. Hence, such relevant data was firstly organised and subsequently analysed according to this theme.

3.7 DATA VALIDATION AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

In order to guarantee the robustness and reliability of data, multiple techniques were utilised. Firstly, periodic "member checking" with key data informants was undertaken to ensure transcripts and key data insights (e.g., quotes) provided an accurate portrayal of interviewees perceptions. Similarly, ongoing thesis supervision, conference presentations and (pre-)defences provided an invaluable opportunity to obtain an external perspective and critical feedback on data interpretation, thus guarding against the potential of bias and/or misinterpretation of findings. Moreover, the "constant comparison method" – originally devised by Glaser and Strauss (1967) – was utilised to compare old and new data for similarities and differences (e.g. between Sec1 and Sec2). This method also helped identify the point at which data saturation had been reached, which also provided added confidence in the depth of data collection and comprehensiveness of subsequent findings. Finally, this author endeavoured to provide a "rich" and "thick" description of data within the analysis chapters, thus allowing other researchers to better assess the validity of findings and their potential applicability to other cases.

As previously noted, triangulation and cross-checking of multiple methods also strengthened the validity of data findings. For example, triangulation "across methods" involved comparing participant responses with official quantitative "Feedback Reports". Overall, this cross-

triangulation approach not only reinforced the quality of data and subsequent data analysis findings but also serves as a unique strength of this present research. For instance, with regards to "congruency", Vrydagh (2022, 68) notes how "most studies based...do not triangulate their methodology (for exceptions, see Bua, 2017; Font et al., 2018)". Consequently, he notes that "impact assessment is often based solely on document analysis, and researchers tend not to compare their results with experience of actors involved in the political follow-up...(and) this lack of triangulation undermines the reliability and quality of their results". In contrast, in-depth interview data and documental analysis have been combined and cross-examined herein; hence, this uniquely strengthens the validity of findings pertaining to (C)CA output legitimacy compared with prior research.

3.8 LIMITATIONS

This present research was subject to various limitations such as resource constraints (e.g., limiting the possibility for fully comparative research), access issues (difficulty accessing ERs and advisors), and time lags (e.g., due to Covid-19 restrictions). Regarding the latter, the gap between the ICA and subsequent interviews with PCCA actors and political sponsors must be noted, something which may have affected the quality of data (i.e, faded recollection of events). However, the triangulation of data sources arguably reduced this risk, as prior observational and interview data was used to prompt recollections of events and enhance data validity. Moreover, this time-lag may also have served as a strength of this research, as Demski and Capstick (2022) note the importance of collecting data at multiple points to assess the influence of a given (C)CA overtime. Another limitation pertaining to interview data relates to the potential of self-selection bias among interview participants. Firstly, Caluwaerts and Reuchamps (2023, 243) note the importance of interviewing "non-participants" for a less biased view of the recruitment process; however, such data was unavailable. Consequently, those who agreed to partake in interviews may not have been fully representative of the broader ICA membership. Nevertheless, the cross-triangulation of data – for example, checking interview data against official feedback forms and transcript notes – helped ensure the validity and rigour of primary data insights despite this limitation (which would also hold for other similar research).

Moreover, the research focuses on the specific ICA session – which formed part of a larger deliberative process (i.e. Irish CA 2016-2018) – at times raised difficulties. Specifically, attention was required to clarify if interviewees' comments related directly to the climate assembly session (or another topic or the process more generally). However, this often-allowed participants to naturally contrast the technical climate change session with other Irish CA topics (e.g., the more

"moral" abortion issue), which illuminated fruitful data findings. Overall, the focus on a discreet case study is arguably another limitation of this present research. Indeed, Toshkov (2016, 290) propounds that "there is not much point in testing a weak causal relationship relevant for a heterogeneous population with a single-case study design because the result of the investigation, whatever it may be, would have very little import". However, this critique is questionable when applied to the current thesis. Firstly, as Elstub and Pomatto (2022, 208; also see Pickering 2022) note, "we do not always need to seek generalization if the case is significant in its own right...(and) this is often how cases are viewed from an interpretivist perspective". The unique merits and broader significance of the ICA has been well established thus far (**see Section 1.4**). Secondly, this does not discount the fact that a degree of generalisation is still possible, with Flyvbjerg (2006, 229) stating that "atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied". For example, the general motives of organisers, experts and political actors associated with the ICA may be applicable beyond the Irish context. Hence, a "rich" and "thick" account of the data has been provided within the analysis section. Finally, Elstub and Pomatto (2022, 208; also see Elstub et al. 2016; Ercan et al. 2017) note that the shift towards a systematic approach "requires analysing the connections and relationships between different parts of the system...(which) are not always possible to address through statistical analysis". Hence, the findings herein may offer important clues, and research leads for other scholars studying similar cases within different countries while also having broader relevance to the utilisation of CAs across the Irish policy domain.

4 ANALYSIS PART 1 – “INPUT LEGITIMACY”: ILLUMINATING THE INTERNAL DESIGN OF THE ICA

The ICA was held over two weekends in the autumn of 2017. Although full contextualisation regarding the emergence of deliberation in Ireland, the Irish CA series (2016 – 2018) and specific ICA case study can be found in **Section 2.3** of the literature review. In short, the ICA was the third topical meeting within the Irish CA series (2016-2018), with assembly members previously sitting for five weekends on constitutional change (i.e. the 8th amendment re. abortion) and two weekends to discuss the challenges of an ageing population. As noted in **Section 2.3**, the first and highly sensitive topic on abortion was instrumental in shaping the overall organisation Irish Citizens Assembly series (2016 – 2018); for instance, Section 4.4 of the analysis highlights how a decision was made by the Secretariat not to publicly promote the findings of the ICA, something which stemmed from the prior conscious choice by organisers not to broadly circulate the citizens’ recommendations regarding the controversial abortion topic for fear this may (be seen) to unduly influence the subsequent constitutional referendum debate. Moreover, the choice of a notable and highly distinguished judge (Mary Laffoy, SC) as Chairperson of the Irish CA series (2016 – 2018) may have also been arguably more appropriate for the legalistic topic of abortion as opposed to the "wicked problem" of climate change. In contrast, a high-profile science communicator, academic and broadcaster (Dr. Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin) was selected as Chairperson for the standalone CA on Biodiversity (2022) – with a comparison between the two environmental assemblies to elucidate potential differences worthy of future research. However, such a comparative study and, indeed, a full exploration of the potential influence of the abortion topic on the ICA is beyond the remit of this current research (due to noted time, resource and other constraints - **see Section 3.8**), the present author has at all times sought to be aware of any potential impacts (as also noted in the Section 3) throughout the data collection phase and subsequent analysis section.

With regard to the specific ICA session, Torney (2021, 384) notes how "(t)his included a total of 26 hours of listening, discussion and deliberation, with presentations from 15 climate change experts and six individuals championing low carbon transition". Herein, the first weekend consisted of speakers outlining the fundamentals of climate science, followed by an assessment of the effect of climate change (both from the global and Irish perspectives) and existing policy responses. During the second weekend, the ICA shifted to a sectoral approach focusing on three prominent areas: energy, transport, and agriculture. Overall, Harris (2021, 681) notes that the ICA's work programme included "a call for public submissions; invited accessible ‘expert’ presentations; discussions with invited panellists; facilitated small-group deliberations amongst the members; and

a private ballot on their draft recommendations”. Herein, the below analysis presents the perspectives of various ICA actors, including participants (P1, P2, etc.), deliberative experts (DE1; DE2), an EAG member (SE1), expert presenter (SE2; SE3), a Secretariat member of the ICA (Sec 1) and subsequent CA on Biodiversity (CA2); an Environmental NGO observer (ENGO) of ICA, in addition to elected representatives (e.g. ER3) and their advisors (e.g. A4). These viewpoints are supplemented by and cross-triangulated with secondary sources, namely publicly accessible materials such as participant feedback forms, ICA transcripts, and official reports (e.g. ICA 2018). In short, the guiding framework set out in **Section 2.6** (*see Table 3*) has been used to guide the following analysis in conjunction with the relevant literature on best practice (**see Section 2.7**)

4.1 EXPLORING REPRESENTATION AND INCLUSION WITHIN THE ICA

The following section will analyse representation within the ICA with reference to theoretical insights and prior empirical findings elucidated in the literature review (particularly **Section 2.7a**) and the guiding criteria outlined in Table 3:

4.1.1 Representative Legitimacy – Selection and Oversight

With regard to representational legitimacy, ensuring both adequate “presence” and “voice” is crucial for preventing external inequalities from contaminating a given (C)CA (Smith 2009; Fishkin 2009). Evidently, this requires 'descriptive similarities between the body and the citizenry' to establish legitimacy (Warren 2008, 56), with various methods for achieving a representative sample (Street et al. 2014) outlined in the literature review (**Section 2.7a**). Overall, assembly organisers have described Irish CA participants as “*everyday citizens, chosen to be representatives of society*”⁵⁵ when promoting the merits of the process, in line with Gül (2019) “claim-making framework”. How representative this sample truly was will be subject to scrutiny in the following analytical sections.

After establishing the ICA, a tender was issued to procure '99 members of the public plus 99 substitutes who are willing to act as members of the recently-announced ICA' (ICA 2016). Notably, the recruitment remit sought for citizens to "be chosen at random and representative of society as regards age, gender, social class, regional spread and should also be on the electoral register to vote in a referendum". Herein, the ICA recruitment methodology (**see Base Targets, Table 11**) sought "precise demographic quotas to ensure a well-rounded sample" (Mooney 2018b), with a door-to-door strategy preferred over phone calls or mail for recruitment (partly to prevent

⁵⁵ Art O’Leary - Political co-lead from Ireland and pioneer of Ireland’s Citizens Assemblies: Video Launch of the Cohort on Deliberative Democracy and Citizens Assemblies - Summit for Democracy (summit4democracy.org)

the exclusion of those without phones, such as elderly people). Notably, politicians, journalists and those working for polling companies – in addition to those who have worked for organisations advocating on topics addressed by the CA series – were excluded from selection. Although the official ICA response rate statistics are unavailable, DE1 revealed that "a *significant number of people declined member invitations*". Moreover, the acceptance rate from the more recent CA on Biodiversity – where only 13% of those invited choose to partake in the assembly according to senior organisers⁵⁶ – is also indicative and aligns with other empirical evidence on representation (e.g., Jennst  2016). Notably, the ICA recruitment process also differed from the subsequent CA on Biodiversity. Specifically, the latter relied "upon written invitations to randomly-selected households"¹, as it was argued the "new methodology was designed to improve the geographic spread of members and to increase the quality and inclusivity of the random selection process", perhaps partly in response to identified representational issues which shall be illuminated throughout this section.

Table 9: Base Recruitment Targets of the ICA

BASE TARGETS (Based on CSO and QNHS Pop. Estimates)		
TOTAL	99	
Male	48	
Female	51	
18-24	10	
24-39	29	
40-54	28	
55+	32	
ABC1	45	
C2DE	48	
Female	6	
Dublin	28	
ROL	25	
Munster	27	
Conn/Ulster	19	

Overall, the recruitment approach appeared relatively successful according to the observations of some participants interviewed, as P4 asserted that the ICA members represented the "*average citizens*" of the country. At the same time, P10 also contended that the assembly included

⁵⁶ As remarked Art O'Leary - Political co-lead from Ireland and pioneer of Ireland's Citizens Assemblies: Video Launch of the Cohort on Deliberative Democracy and Citizens Assemblies - Summit for Democracy (summit4democracy.org)

members "*from various walks of life*". However, other data subjects expressed more critical concerns regarding the (perceived) under-representation of young people, low-SES participants and rural dwellers, as will be discussed throughout the following sections. Furthermore, DE1 raised notable concerns regarding the recruitment process, which was outsourced to RED C⁵⁷, stating that "*allowing civil servants total control over the project {was} a mistake*", as they are prone to outsource responsibility to the contract awardee without continuous oversight. In contrast, DE1 argued that independent expert advisors would have advocated for "*regular monitoring of membership turnover {etc.}*". Herein, DE1 stressed the need for such oversight given the prior recruitment issues within the ICC (as referenced in the literature review; see Carolan 2015). Nonetheless, this approach appears to have been maintained for the subsequent CA on Biodiversity according to Sec 2, who remarked, "*we {did} a lot of tendering-out*" and there were a lot of "*different companies*" involved. Additionally, DE1, Sec. 2, and other sources also highlighted how the various Secretariat teams were "disbanded" (Devaney et al. 2020, 144) after a given CA series. Indeed, this points to a potential loss of institutional knowledge between various Irish deliberative iterations, with each "*new Secretariat team*" (Sec 2) often starting from scratch; hence, arguably, this could increase the propensity for recruitment issues to (re-)occur. For example, DE2 anecdotally noted how other recruitment issues also emerged during the biodiversity assembly process regarding the closeness of some participants. Nonetheless, the lead organiser of the CA Biodiversity has previously led the prior ICC series, so this justification (i.e., "new" Secretariats) regarding basic recruitment issues should not be overstated. In short, the above empirical evidence strongly suggests an overall lack of transparency regarding the rationale behind (continued) recruitment decisions and a repeated failure to ensure contextual independence through adequate external monitoring of the process, as suggested by DE1.

"Because what happens is when there's a gap between assemblies and the team, the Secretariat goes, so everyone is new apart from one person" (Sec 2).

4.1.2 Gender and Age

As expected, gender balance did not appear to be an issue within the ICA, as affirmed by P1, who noted it was "definitely equal". This was borne out by official ICA report data (ICA 2018a). In contrast, when it came to the issue of age, despite the specific ICA demographic target of ten members for the 18–24 age cohort being (initially) achieved (Farrell et al. 2021), the qualitative interview data suggests there was a skew towards older participants as noted by P1 and Sec 1 for various reasons; something which may have been exacerbated by dropouts (particularly evident amongst younger cohorts) and the subsequent inclusion of substitutes. Firstly, the requirement for

⁵⁷ An Irish polling company [Latest Polls - RedC Research & Marketing](#)

potential participants to be registered voters (Harris 2021) evidently narrowed the available sample to 18-24s (and addition to other categories, such as low-SES who are less likely to be registered to vote; see Lijphart 1997), with Ireland's dismal global ranking of 137th in voter registration among OECD countries making this particularly problematic. Specifically, during the stated recruitment year (i.e., 2017), 43% of the 18-21 age cohort were not registered to vote, while additionally, some 150,000 young people aged between 18-29 (22%) were also ineligible to vote⁵⁸. Ironically, these unregistered individuals, who are notably challenging to recruit and retain, represent the demographic one might hope to engage within a (C)CA, particularly a climate assembly with a future focus (Harris 2021). Finally, the voluntary nature of selection (i.e., non-mandatory, in contrast to Irish jury duty, which may have increased self-selection bias amongst those “time-rich” individuals like retirees) combined with the decision to not provide compensation to ICA members (as discussed in the following section) may have also contributed to the (perceived) representational bias in favour of older age cohorts.

4.1.3 Non-Payment and Member Motivation

This absence of an honorarium for ICA participants was a controversial organisational decision that inevitably had clear consequences for the assembly's representative legitimacy, particularly regarding the inclusion of lower-SES and younger cohorts. Notably, it also contrasts with the more recent Irish CA on Biodiversity, which made a “*payment of a nominal honorarium to Assembly members to recognise their civic commitment*”⁵⁹. Indeed, the non-payment of ICA members was heavily criticised by DE1 who argued this contributed to the “particularly acute” self-selection bias within the ICA. Moreover, DE1 noted that despite the potential of a “skewed” sample being openly acknowledged within the polling companies own methodological report (Mooney 2016, 1), the Secretariat “refused to accept advise on that”. However interestingly, numerous ICA participants interviewed as part of this research were also strongly opposed to the idea of honorariums. Instead, they stressed the importance of having a “*genuine interest*” (P8), “*a social conscious*” (P1) and “*civic mindedness*” (P4). Such opinions arguably correspond with evidence from the official methodological report which acknowledged that the ICA’s representation was skewed towards those with a “stronger civic interest” (Mooney 2016, 1), something which may have “exacerbated inequalities in political influence between resourceful and marginalised groups” (Elstubb and Khoban 2023, 120) and subsequently undermined the perceived (input and output) legitimacy of the ICA.

58 <http://www.youth.ie/nyci/150000-young-people-may-not-be-electoral-register-deadline-nears>

59 Terms of Reference | Citizens' Assembly (citizensassembly.ie)

“if you get money to take part, you might get a different type of person” (P5)

Herein, participants (e.g., P5) notably conveyed their own "interest" in relation to perceived (external) others. For instance, many participants openly identified as "*civic-minded*" (P1), "*truly interested in politics*" (P3), and/or "*engaged in the topic*" of climate change (P6). This corresponded with the BCCA "joiners" who were "more committed, eager, and willing" (MacKenzie's 2023). Such comments again point to a high degree of selection bias, conforming with DE1's observations and Red C's own predictions. Arguably this undermined the deliberative quality of the ICA, with Lindell (2011, 4) suggesting this may be restricted "if participants are like-minded and hold the same ideas before discussion". Nonetheless, some participants shared MacKenzie's (2023) view that self-selection bias is "advantageous", with P6, for instance, suggesting it would be "*a better idea is to create a pool of anyone who is interested and engaged with those topics, and then from that pool try to get {a representative sample}*". While there may be a legitimate theoretical case for selecting individuals with vested interests in specific topics, akin to the "chamber of discourses" concept (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008), the ICA methodology excluded members of advocacy groups related to the topics under consideration. The justification offered was that advocacy groups had been encouraged to provide their perspectives via the public submission process; however, they recognised that "by the random nature of its make up, (the ICA) may include Members who have views on either side of a debate...{and} these would not be excluded" (Mooney 2018a, 1). This contrasted with the approach taken by the UK and Scottish CCAs respectively who were conscious of perceptions that the process could be "populated only by those concerned about climate change" (Stasiak et al. 2021, 10). Indeed, Stasiak et al. (2021, 10) note how these respective organisational teams therein feared that this could "undermine the perceived legitimacy of the membership", both amongst the broader public and politicians (see **Section 5.2.2 for an analysis of political actors' perception of the ICA's representation**). Notably, numerous interviewees also noted they were "particularly interested" in the climate change (CC) topic even "before" the ICA process. (P1, P7, P8).

“like I'm really interested in hearing about climate change and was before anyway” (P1)

“I was interested in CC before the process. So the topics were quite nice and I was interested from the very start”. (P7)

“I looked at the topics before and the energy one - I'd be particularly interested in” (P8)

4.1.4 ICA Dropouts and Replacements

Arguably, self-selection bias also contributed to the number of dropouts, with a staggering 38 members dropping out from the Irish CA process even before the specific ICA session commenced. According to DE2, this may have been in part due to the limited “onboarding” of

participants⁶⁰, with other CCAs (for example, Scotland) experiencing only a marginal attrition rate in part due to their comprehensive onboarding and support process. Moreover, according to P7, there was a “*significant drop-off*” after the abortion and climate topics “*because people had strong views*”. Likewise, P5 observed that such people who had left the CA series after (either of) the two aforementioned topics had “*felt they had achieved their goal*”. This may also partly explain the drive by ICA members to move the climate meeting forward from the 5th to the 3rd meeting session. This suggests there may have been a pro-climate bias prevalent within the ICA, with the failure to screen for attitudes (in contrast to the Scottish CA) leaving the door open to such accusations. Moreover, the lack of prior screening also makes it difficult to unpick the authentic impact of the deliberative process on members opinions.

“people coming out of {CCAs} will be climate activists” (DE2)

Overall, some 13 members also dropped out after the ICA session in November 2017 (the biggest drop-off across the CA series)⁶¹. Moreover, DE1 contended that “*the fact that they appointed substitutes at the same time as original members*” may have contributed to the higher dropout rate. Specifically, they argued that it could send a “signal” to participants that failing to show was acceptable. On the contrary, of those citizen members interviewed as part of this study, the vast majority cited their strong “*commitment*” (e.g., P12, P7) to the process, with only P2 confessing to quitting the assembly due to the availability of substitutes⁶². Nevertheless, contrary to the stated terms of reference within the Oireachtas⁶³ Resolution and DE1’s remark, a triangulation of sources revealed that replacements were not, in fact, recruited in advance. Specifically, secondary sources and the Secretariat (Sec 1) clarified that substitutes were recruited on an ongoing basis (i.e., as required) to replace dropouts (with only 20 substitutes recruited prior to the CA series commencement). This decision, as later illuminated (i.e., the ICA replacement scandal and the lack of transparency regarding substitute integration into ICA sessions), ultimately undermined the assembly’s representational legitimacy.

Nonetheless, while the official ICA website noted that “*most of those who have withdrawn have done so for personal reasons*”⁶⁴, other process-related reasons were elucidated by interviewees. For example, P2 believed that the quantity of material, particularly for the ICA session, may have

⁶⁰ For example, DE2 noted how other CCAs, such as Scotland, invested significantly in onboarding and subsequently had an extremely low dropout in comparison.

⁶¹ [Selection of Members | Citizens' Assembly \(citizensassembly.ie\)](#)

⁶² However, herein the dangers of self-selection bias within the interviewee sample itself must also be acknowledged; specifically, it is perhaps likely that those who remained committed throughout the entire CA process were more likely to respond to interview requests.

⁶³ i.e. Irish Houses of Parliament

⁶⁴ [Selection of Members | Citizens' Assembly \(citizensassembly.ie\)](#)

influenced some individuals' decision to quit. Similarly, P6 also exclaimed that those members *"were so exhausted, it was very long run for us, it was hard going, very heavy work"*, which inevitably took a higher toll on those juggling social, professional, and family commitments. In the quote below, P9 expanded on this theme by drawing a comparison between those with young families and their own status as a retiree, even despite the efforts of ICA organisers (for example, the provision of creche services noted by Sec 1). Indeed, when prompted on this issue, Sec 2 retorted that (C)CA organisers can only do so much to mitigate such external barriers when remarking: *"there's always going to be something like that unfortunately (family arrangements)"*. However, Sec 2 noted that participants *"can actually bring their partners and their family if they want but just need to pay that supplement themselves"*; nevertheless, this additional supplement could be difficult for certain disadvantaged (e.g., low SES) groups. Moreover, the CA series' duration was also cited as a contributing factor for *"otherwise motivated individuals"* (Jennstå 2016, 19). For instance, P2, P7 and P9 all suggested that the extended duration of the Irish CA may be the reason for the high dropout rate, with P2 noting it was *"dragging on"* and they'd *"had enough!"*. This attitude seemed particularly prevalent after the five weekends on the *"heavy"* abortion topic (P3). Furthermore, young people like P2 – a group already difficult to recruit – were thought to be less dedicated, reluctant to miss their weekends and thus more likely to dropout. Notably, P6 stated that *"young boys in particularly dropped out more than the girls"*; something the Secretariat also acknowledged.

"if you look at the age profile, I'm an empty nester so I can dictate my own schedule, but there was a lot of people with very small children. I remember one lady, she had to drop out as she had two children...she wrote and said she regretted so much having to leave the process..." (P9)

With a significant number of participants (53 members in total) dropping out during the entire Irish CA series (2016 – 2018), it is also necessary to dissect how replacements were selected and integrated into the ICA. Firstly, it's critical to account for replacements' ability to adequately integrate into the process and any potential effect on the quality of deliberations. Regarding the former, P3 – an ICA substitute – remarked: *"I wouldn't say it was difficult to get up to speed, as you had all the information you needed, everything at your fingertips, you had the site, the experience of the other people up there, the speakers, the panels...it was fantastic the set up"*. Likewise, P6 noted how replacements could *"find their feet easy enough"*, with P3 and P8 noting how original members showed empathy towards substitutes repetitive questions and required process-learning. Nevertheless, P9 indicated that over ten per cent (13%) of original members had to be replaced for one session – a significant number; however, P9 did *"not think it made an overall difference to process or the outcome as the highest number of replacements for a session was 13, so there could only be max. one at each roundtable"*. Nonetheless, arguably a clear, transparent and systemic process should be implemented to safeguard the ongoing legitimacy

of representation (in line with the original sampling criteria). Herein, P5 raised a crucial concern about the perceived lack of transparency when assimilating replacements into the assembly when stating:

“Sometimes they added in people and sometimes they didn’t, and it was something I never really felt was clear what they were doing...that whole area of “who left, who’s coming in” should have been more publicised and public to us (the ICA members) as to what was happening. It should have been a bit more transparent – 3 people dropped out, 3 people came in” (P5)

This lack of transparency was also apparent regarding the recruitment of replacement members. Despite the claims of rigorous sampling methodology (Mooney 2018b) – specifically that substitutes were chosen using the identical methodology as the original members – there was a notable controversy wherein a recruiter enlisted “personal contacts” as replacements for one of the Irish CA (2016 – 2018) sessions⁶⁵. An internal Red C audit (Mooney 2018a) revealed that “seven individuals were enlisted during the December 2017 and January 2018 Christmas period to replace members who had withdrawn **after** the Assembly’s discussion on addressing climate change” (**emphasis added**). Crucially, both Red C and the ICA Chairperson concluded that this an “isolated issue” involving “one recruiter” who acted “without authorisation”. In short, organisers claimed this incident had “no impact on previous topics” (for example, the ICA session) and duly suspended the recruiter.

However, while publicly acknowledging this error may seem commendable at first sight, two issues must be questioned. Firstly, the situation raises significant concerns regarding institutional learning between CA processes within Ireland, given previously noted errors within the ICC (as noted by DE1 and Carolan 2015). Specifically, DE1 stated that “*it was an error that should never have happened...I don’t think they (i.e., Secretariat) had enough oversight over {RED C recruiters} because we’ve already had errors with the {ICC} so there were questions about proper due process of that polling company, so radars should have been high for this one to make sure it didn’t happen again*”. Secondly, the empirical data obtained from interviewees also casts doubt on this claim of an “isolated issue”. For instance, P1 exclaimed “*the way everyone was picked first off was completely fair...(but) whatever happened after that, I don’t know*”. Herein, they expressed scepticism regarding the similarity of the replacements, noting how “*several young men in their twenties stepped in to fill the gaps, and I believe their interest might have stemmed from their engagement in fields like politics or law*”. More pointedly, one data subject interviewed revealed that they, too, were recruited improperly before the ICA session in question (i.e., before the climate session). Specifically, they stated they had been selected by “*a friend*” during the controversial 8th

⁶⁵ <https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/recruiter-for-citizens-assembly-suspended-after-replacement-members-enlisted-through-personal-contacts-and-not-randomly/36629881.html>

amendment session. Thus, this casts a shadow on the narrative of an "isolated incident" involving "one recruiter". Moreover, some cynics may argue that it was preferable for the organisers to admit to a minor fault and scapegoat an individual recruiter rather than risk the exposure of a major process-design failure across multiple CA series.

Regardless of whether this was a larger structural error or simply a rogue recruiter, the error clearly led to "*legitimacy problems*" (DE1), with Stasiak et al. (2021) also stating that "who participates" is core to the (perceived) legitimacy of CCAs. Consequently, this supposedly isolated incident provided critics of the ICA with a genuine opportunity to challenge and undermine the process and its subsequent recommendations. This was evident in a contentious parliamentary debate, with some politicians characterising the ICA as a "stitch-up" and a "debacle," while others contended that the process had been "compromised" and called for a "postponement" along with a "full and immediate audit of the entire Citizens' Assembly recruitment process over the last 18 months"⁶⁶. However, despite these noted concerns (apparent within the ICC and ICA), no external audit of Irish CA processes has yet been undertaken to date (to this researcher's knowledge) despite their significant profile, influence and expense to the Irish taxpayer. Overall, the opinions of the ICA participants interviewed in this study were largely split. Specifically, some, such as P3, believed that this denied members an authentic opportunity to engage in deliberations with a representative and legitimate population sample. However, on the contrary, others, such as P1, noted how external actors sought to use any such incidents to (unfairly) undermine the legitimacy of the process. Herein, as Rountree and Curato (2023, 80) conclude, "it will not always be clear whether genuine concern or strategic interest leads groups to criticise assembly processes".

"I think there was a lot of interest though in proving we weren't recruited correctly..." (P1)

"I heard something in the paper that one of Red C recruited one of their friends...it took me back a bit when I heard that. I felt it wasn't done in the right manner then, it just denied us the opportunity to meet other people from a cross section of society". (P3)

4.1.5 Social-Economic Status (SES), Voice and Facilitation

Regarding the issue of "class" or low socio-economic status (SES), an analysis of the interview data suggested a clear "socio-economic class bias" (Lijphart 1997), which was apparent within the ICA. For example, according to P1, "*if there was a divide (between participants), it was more to do with class or education levels*" as they recalled that "most people who did it were from a certain class I suppose". Similarly, when prompted, P1 recalled how "*(recruiters) really wanted my mom but she would be too nervous, she didn't go to school for very long - it would be very intimidating for her*". Additionally, P3 –

⁶⁶ [Dáil descends into row over Citizens' Assembly recruitment criticism \(thejournal.ie\)](https://www.thejournal.ie/dail-descends-into-row-over-citizens-assembly-recruitment-criticism-1234567890/)

who identified as "working-class" – also noted that *"there wasn't many {working-class people} represented...but there were a lot of professional people"*. Moreover, the ICA Secretariat (Sec 1) broadly acknowledged these findings when questioned on the issue; specifically, they explained that despite the provision of expenses, other financial barriers (e.g., participation in social events, no compensation, etc.) may have contributed to the under-representation and increased dropout rates among low-SES participants. This conforms with Parvin's (2021, 280) viewpoint that the barriers to participation among low socio-economic status (SES) citizens "shouldn't be underestimated". This situation may have been further exacerbated by the decision to amalgamate social-class categories such as ABC1 and C2DE. Specifically, social-economic status (SES) or "class" dynamics may evolve with changing occupational roles, and some "E"-category pensioners interviewed had previously held prior professional status (i.e., ABC1), which may have (further) skewed the ICA in terms of educational attainment and SES. Hence, the evidence herein suggests that a review of the application social-class categories may be required for future CAs in Ireland.

"I would like to see more diversity in the assembly, more foreign nationals, more people with disabilities, the unemployed also. To me it seemed it was more middle class, retirees - they were a certain type of class...I would like it to be better representative of the population" (P3)

Nonetheless, two self-identifying working-class people (P1 and P3) interviewed did feel able to express their opinion, with P3 stating that *"I think every voice was valued"* while P1 agreed that *"every voice had to be heard, if someone had a problem with what another said, they'd have to let them speak first before giving their counterargument"*. Moreover, the ICA indeed gave some degree of consideration to low-SES groups. For instance, a condition was added to Recommendation 3 on carbon taxation that *"(a)n increase in the taxation does not have to be paid by the poorest households (the 400,000 households currently in receipt of fuel allowance)"*. Herein, the ability to voice and thus include (possibly) under-represented viewpoints within the proposals was helped by the structure of deliberations, with P9 stating that *"there was lots of provision made for individual points of view, they were all gathered."* Indeed, some ICA members interviewed also noted how their initial hesitance (and that of others) to express their opinions receded as they gained confidence throughout the CA process. For example, P6 recalled that *"(in) the beginning there was an element of that – people shy to share their opinion – but I think they learnt quickly, and the process would make greater citizens of all of us."* Herein, the evidence conforms with the literature (see **Section 2.7.4**) regarding the propensity for "civic learning" within CAs (e.g., Stasiak et al. 2021), akin to civic education in the context of jury duty (Barber 2003). Importantly, however, as the data indicates, such changes took time, which suggests that maintaining a consistent group of participants over an extended period may be required to achieve individual-level effects. For instance, P2 stated, *"I think it's best for largely the same group of people to do*

it month on month...you get better listening, better engagement, better at debating and conversing with people on it."

Nonetheless, as noted in the literature review, this needs to be balanced against the danger of assembly members becoming co-opted and unrepresentative of the average lay citizen (Elstub and Khoban (2023).

"One of the most revealing things for me about the process was people I met at the beginning of the process – particularly we'll say twenty or thirty-year-olds – they were quite different when I met them a bit later, their understanding of processes, it was almost like they had graduated in that time to a different level of understanding...from a personality angle as well, they almost in the beginning didn't have an opinion on things, and then when I met them the following year they were very much leaders of the conversation" (P9).

Either way, credit for this learning process is partly attributable to the ICA facilitators and notetakers who, as P8 recalled, *"ticked off people's name of how many times they contributed to the discussion during the roundtable...and were trying to be inclusive of everyone around the table."* This concurred with the official feedback survey (ICA 2018b, 1-3) results which found that "there was strong support for the view that the facilitators did a good job." Moreover, nearly all the interviewees commended the facilitators for their impartiality and for maintaining balanced, inclusive, and respectful deliberation. Additionally, they also served an important role – particularly from the perspective of interviewed participants without a formal education and/or from a “working class” background who may have felt a degree of apprehension – asking citizens’ questions to the top table for those who were uncomfortable or unwilling to speak. For instance, P1 recalled how members were *"always encouraged to ask questions via facilitators"*. Moreover, there was clear oversight regarding the facilitators’ performance, with P1 continuing that *"we were asked every day to give feedback for facilitators and 90% of the time they were great, and if we did have problems, you always let them know, and they aware next time"*. Indeed, the ICA Secretariat (Sec 1) also clarified how members' survey feedback forms (filled after each session) were crucial for assessing the performance of facilitators and integrating citizens' insights. Similarly, Sec 2 also explained this meticulous process with respect to the more recent CA on Biodiversity:

"So we basically get a really thick report from them (i.e. facilitators) a few days after, and we have a specific staff member who goes through that with a fine tooth comb and has reports done from meeting to meeting and that feeds in a way to the final report". (Sec 2)

Hence, the empirical evidence would therefore appear to suggest that “advanced facilitation” (Trénel 2009) was utilised within the ICA (and subsequent CA on Biodiversity), as the facilitators – in conjunction with the Secretariat – appeared to have successfully engendered a high degree of mutual respect between participants. For instance, P10 remarked that *"the facilitators, along with the Secretariat, made it such a respectful space for everybody. There really wasn't much struggle around the tables, everyone let everyone speak"*. This undoubtedly set the tone and etiquette for deliberations in line

with the ideal theory (Trénel 2009), as P12 remarked that *“the tone was incredibly respectful, there was no sense of antagonism at any stage, people listened to everyone's point of view, listened fairly...genuinely it was very very respectful towards everyone's point of view and that made it easier and much more enjoyable to work in, as people did respect you”*. Additionally, there was evidence from the collected interviews that participants moderated their own behaviour in accordance with deliberative atmosphere, with P9 stating that *“I was very aware of myself at the roundtable, that I was probably more familiar with some topics than others, so I kept a rein on myself never to enter and speak first, I would allow the others to out of respect”*. These data findings concurred with the ICA's survey feedback for the two meetings, where the clear majority of participants were satisfied “those fellow members respected what they had to say...even when they didn't agree” (ICA 2018b, 1-3). In addition to maintaining a civil atmosphere and keeping citizens on track, P10 also recalled how moderators *“might give us conversation starters or suggest what discussions we should have to best get insights into the information we were given”*, while likewise P7 noted that *“the facilitators at the table were able to calm people, get the best out of the questions and the best answers”*. One might question the danger of leading questions, prompts or bias from facilitators, but no such evidence was found.

“Each table was given facilitators to orchestrate the way things went. At the very least what they did was just prompt people to join in. I remember they had charts and they made sure everyone spoke at least twice for each topic...they took their job very seriously so there was enough to stimulate each individual person and not have them dragging their feet” (P10).

Nevertheless, the empirical findings add weight to Willis et al. (2020) postulation that even with advanced facilitation, concerns persist regarding CCAs' ability to address existing participation disparities. Specifically, the data suggests that perceived or actual biases may have impacted representation within the ICA, especially the diversity of voices (Smith 2009). For instance, P1 noted that individuals from lower-SES or less-educated backgrounds found it challenging to assert themselves, as they *“wouldn't have the same confidence and there wasn't many of them there”* and admitted they felt *“insecure”* regarding their ability compared to other participants. Similarly, P3, although comfortable speaking out, acknowledged that *“some people might have felt silenced (as) there were professional people who very obviously spoke better”*. This suggests that “Type 1” deliberation (Bachtiger et al. (2018) may have been more prevalent, with Lövbrand and Khan (2010, 40) noting how *“the style and standards of deliberative reasoning further disadvantages already disadvantaged citizens”*. However, this fear of rational discourse was not confined to just the working-class participants. For example, P2 recalled a *“fear of looking stupid”* as a reason for withholding questions, while P8 also noted an *“intimating setting”* that could particularly affect *“uneducated persons”*. Similarly, P5's reflection aptly portrays both the potential and inevitable limitations of such design features, with P6 remarking that *“there is only so much preparation they (organisers) can do”*. Herein, cultural differences

may also influence the propensity of participants to contribute. Moreover, much deliberation theory and empirical data (mainly quantitative) assumes that formal deliberation occurs only in a structured environment guided by facilitators, overlooking the potential for informal deliberation among participants outside the official ICA setting. These informal exchanges, where persuasion and alliances can influence formal discussions, were illuminated by P5 in the below quote:

“It didn’t get easier (speaking up), or I didn’t feel I wanted to. I didn’t engage in arguments or debates at the roundtable discussions. I’m a shy person, and I would never speak my mind there. Instead, I expressed my point of view and had debates outside {the formal meeting setting}, one-on-one. That’s where I mostly tried to persuade people”. (P5)

“I think it was the kind setting that if you were invited to come to something like that, I think people want to know a little about things...I think it would be intimidating if you came in as quiet uneducated person and tried to sit there through that, and try to comprehend things” (P8)

“but I saw people who changed massively, who wouldn’t have said a word for the first 3 weeks, and then all of a sudden they would have said something and then after that they were always talking (P6)”

4.1.6 Geographical Spread, Delegates and Trustees

In terms of geographical diversity, the polling company’s methodology involved a two-step process (Mooney 2018b): first, random stratification by region across 15 areas representing the Urban/Rural split in the four main regions, and second, selecting individual points based on the number of representative points within a given district electoral division (DED). Herein, it is important to note that the specific ICA session did not have its own individual selection process; on the contrary, the vast majority of participants⁶⁷ were recruited for the overall Irish CA series (2016 – 2018), with “replacements” (for assembly dropouts) being the only fresh participants in a given topical session. This raises the question of whether the ICA membership truly represented a “legitimate” sample for the specific issue of climate change, as Parkinson (2003, 190) notes that “what is legitimate in one {CA} context will be illegitimate in another”. Specifically, the question of whether rural constituents were adequately represented was a prominent theme which emerged from the data.

Herein, data analysis revealed disparities in member selection in addition to the Red C “recruiter” scandal. Specifically, two data subjects (DE1 and P2, respectively) disclosed that four ICA members originated from a town with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants, and one participant (P3) revealed that they and two other ICA members lived within the same residential estate. Moreover, DE2 – drawing on intimate insider knowledge of the process – noted anecdotally that some “recruiters were knocking on every door” rather than every nth house (to ensure a more random sample).

⁶⁷ Excluding dropouts and substitute replacements

Notably, such evidence also corresponds with the recruitment flaws identified within the prior ICC (see Carolan 2015), thus pointing to a lack of oversight regarding the selection process, as noted by DE1. Moreover, these findings illuminate the perceived geographical imbalance within the ICA, a matter of concern to various stakeholders – particularly regarding county representation and especially for rural areas – given the potential disproportionate impact of recommendations on rural communities (See Appendix A). In line with Font et al. (2018) and Hendriks and Lees-Marshment's (2019) findings regarding politicians' perspectives of process-design flaws and representational bias informing their response, this also clearly affected elected representatives' (ER) opinion of the ICA (as will be further discussed in Section 5.2). Specifically, one PCCA member illuminated the link between input and output legitimacy when stating that:

"Well, I think it wasn't reflective of wider Irish society. I think there was an under-representation of farmers. Now you're going to say, 'Well, yeah, that's your unconscious bias'. Now, there probably is some. But no, genuinely. I think it was genuinely under-representative of those people. And they think that too..." (ER2).

This viewpoint by ER2 conforms with the "delegate model" of representation outlined by Parkinson (2003), a view also shared by some rural participants interviewed (e.g., P7 and P8). Likewise, the data adds weight to Fraser's (1990) rejection of an all-encompassing 'we' and the assumption that self-interest and group interest claims are not valid within deliberative settings. Specifically, these interviewees had a clear sense of identity and who they represented, while also being conscious that they were *"in the minority"* (P8). Similarly, P1 observed that a farmer's partner (i.e., who was a member of the ICA) was *"trying to represent the farmers, to ask their questions"*, and emphasised their stated need *"to ask the questions for the farmers, to represent them...to make this fair"*. Moreover, P7 believed that *"everyone at the table is probably thinking about their own area, (be)cause that's what you're thinking when you're listening to all those different speakers"*. P1 added weight to this observation when stating that members – most of whom were from the (greater) capital area due to demographic sampling – were *"mostly talking about Dublin"*. Herein, P7 believed that:

"there was a huge void between rural and urban (members) in what could be done". (P7)

Beyond the question of whether the chosen recruitment methodology was appropriate for a CCA, the apparent "huge void" between rural and urban ICA members also raises doubts about whether ICA members were adequately sensitised to the concerns of minority citizens (i.e., farmers and rural constituents) who would be disproportionately affected by the proposed recommendations. Specifically, only six farmers were selected during the recruitment process (6% of ICA membership), while *"no regular farmer"* (P8) was invited to address the assembly despite the heavy emphasis on agricultural reform within the agenda and subsequent recommendations. Herein, DE2 remarked that this was a significant oversight that did not occur in other rural

countries (e.g., Austria and Scotland) with CCAs. Additionally, the static urban venue (i.e., a Dublin hotel) may have further compounded this issue and the perception of a "*city-centric*" assembly, with both P5 and P12 explicitly stating that the ICA should have been "moved around the country". On this matter, the latter participant added, "*why does everything need to be centralised!*". Indeed, DE1 noted that this was the "*original plan*" based on the past positive experience of the WTC but that it could not be achieved due to "*practical reasons*". In contrast, the BCCA – held a decade earlier – demonstrated how such mobility could successfully "sensitise many members to the challenges of rural areas" (Fournier et al. 2011, 102). Nevertheless, it appears that the subsequent CA on Biodiversity made a concerted effort to rectify this issue through "*optional events*" and "*a field trips*", although the "voluntary" nature of these sensitising trips may be somewhat self-defeating:

"Yeah, there were a few kinds of optional events, and we had a few tickets to some farm events over the summer. And there were a couple of day trips that were open to people, and it was the citizens assembly {on biodiversity} had a field trip as well" (Sec 2).

Overall, the experience of rural members within the ICA broadly echoes the challenges faced by Aboriginal members within the BCCA case, with James (2008, 122) citing the need for a "critical mass or threshold" for a minority group's "voice" (Smith 2009) to be sufficiently heard. Indeed, the data validates Curato et. al (2019, 68) opinion that "getting a seat at the table is vastly different from having a voice at the table" and suggests that increasing the number of participants from "affected communities" is required to ensure "greater voice" García-Espín (2023, 3). This process-design issue was also acknowledged by Sec. 2 when referring to the make-up of small roundtable discussions, specifically, the difficulty of achieving a balance with regard to geographical representation. In short, they explained how organisers would "*mix the tables up for every meeting, so age and gender (would) come into consideration... (and) in an ideal situation, the location would too, but it's hard to get the balance of that*". Overall, this oversight may have led to increased geographical polarisation – especially pertaining to recommendations which significantly impacted under-represented rural communities – both inside and outside the assembly. Additionally, it may have also undermined the legitimacy of the ICA in the eyes of some PCCA members (as alluded to by ER2) and affected communities.

"I think they voted against farming - there was a whole load of conversation about anti-farming, and the {rural area} went mad after that when it hit the papers...we (the members) got a bit of stick over that" (P7)

"the farmers have to get in line, the farmers have really called the shots here for too long" (P9)

However, not all participants or experts shared this view regarding geographical sampling and "delegate" representation. For instance, P1, an urban dweller, recalled that "*there were a few counties not represented*" but believed this was acceptable as "*their population is so small*". Moreover, DE1 provided a more academic rationale when arguing, "*these individuals are not representing anyone other than*

themselves; they are randomly selected, so when they go into the room, they go in as themselves". Herein, DE1's opinion aligns with Lindell's (2011) postulation that participants should solely reflect on their preferences in light of new information and arguments. In general, most participants on most issues seemed to align with DE1 and Lindell's normative viewpoint, what Parkinson's (2003) refers to as the "trustee model" of deliberative delegation. For instance, P10 argued that "it's not really about getting your own opinion across" but rather about attempting to move towards a consensus position on "what's best for the country." Likewise, P4 believed the overarching purpose was to find "something bigger than ourselves" and not regress to pure self-interest. Similarly, P9 echoed this sentiment when stating, *"it was about seeing the bigger picture rather than private interest"* and highlighting that *"all change affects people, and you just have to rise above it"*. However, it remains to be seen if such opinions changed when proposed recommendations directly affected ICA members, as shall be discussed in the following section.

4.2 PROCEDURAL RULES: FRAMING, AGENDA SETTING, AND DELIBERATIVE PERSUASION WITHIN THE ICA

The following section will analyse the ICA's procedural rules with reference to theoretical insights and empirical findings outlined in the literature review (particularly **Section 2.7b**) and the guiding criteria established in Table 3:

4.2.1 Opinion Change or Self/Group Interest?

The question of whether "opinion change" was triggered by deliberation naturally follows on from the discussion – drawing on the work of Parkinson 2003 – of whether citizens' believed they should focus on the greater good (i.e., trustee) or represent their given self/group's interest (i.e., delegate). Herein, the data suggests that participants pre-existing opinions tended to harden when certain groups or individuals (e.g., rural ICA members) felt their identified interests could be negatively affected by a given proposal. This was particularly notable in the case of recommendations related to carbon taxation (CT) and agricultural emissions (e.g., CTAE), which primarily impacted rural communities. For example, P11 noted that people from farming backgrounds *"didn't want to lend advocacy to ideas that would put them or their ilk under more pressure, or under more financial constraints"*, and subsequently suggested that such people *"were a bit sluggish to change their opinions on that specific issue"*. This was reaffirmed by two rural participants (P7, P8) who expressed concerns about the perceived *"anti-farming"* agenda. Moreover, P8 – who noted they were in the *"minority"* as a rural constituent – summed up this rigidity of opinion change when stating:

"I stuck to my guns and didn't change my mind" (P8)

“I wouldn’t have agreed with those recommendations...as being from {a rural area}, I know how important farming is to the community, that’s our income over here, so if you take that out, what are you going to replace it with?” (P7)

However, Fraser’s (1990) “self-interest” assumption also held true in a more general sense, as for instance, the carbon tax (CT) recommendation notably received the lowest support of all proposals and was subject to numerous qualifications to lessen the financial hardship of this measure. Moreover, both P1 and SE2’s observations supported the idea that self/group interest (i.e., the delegate model) could be applicable beyond the controversial topic of agriculture. For example, SE2 felt that the responsibility of citizens was to “*try to visualise what I’m saying in their locality and whether or not it would work on not*”. Hence, this illustrated the importance of the delegate model for providing localised feedback and legitimacy to expert recommendations. Furthermore, while P1 acknowledged “*there is such strong opposition from the farmers {towards certain ICA recommendations}*”, they also empathised that “*it would be the same if it were to affect my job as a person, you’re always going to try to benefit your own interest*”. Overall, data analysis suggested that opinion change was somewhat limited, contrary to the official quantitative findings of the ICA evaluation (ICA 2018b) and evidence from the prior WTC (2011; also see O’Malley et al. 2021). Herein, the empirical data supports Goodin and Niemeyer’s (2003; also see Thompson et al. 2021; Lindell 2011, 2023) supposition that the information phase had the most considerable impact on participants’ (shifting) sentiments. This is perhaps unsurprising given the stated importance of expert opinion with respect to the issue of climate change and the time allocated for contributors’ presentations. Nonetheless, Shaw et al. (2021, 2) posit that (C)CAs should seek “to provide space to recognise and explore values as much as technical questions”, and thus the question is whether the ICA’s framing, agenda-setting and general procedural rules – in addition to the utilisation of experts and information which shall be explored in **Section 4.3** – enabled deliberation on other important “value” issues (e.g., economic, cultural and social dilemmas) pertaining to climate action.

“I wouldn’t say my opinions changed, but I’d say my views got a little less concrete” (P11)

“I learned a lot, but I didn’t have my mind changed” (P5)

4.2.2 Perceptions Regarding the Legitimacy of the ICA Process

To assess the legitimacy of the ICA process, it is crucial to first illuminate the catalyst behind the formation of the CA series (2016-2018) and specific ICA case. While the motivation of deliberative sponsors (i.e., ERs) will be outlined in **Section 5.3** of the analysis, it is essential to consider the perspectives of the citizen members regarding the legitimacy of the process, as they may offer valuable insights from their first-hand experiences within the given CCA. Overall, the interview data revealed a varied response regarding the (perceived) political rationale surrounding

the ICA's foundation. Specifically, some participants, such as P8, believed it was a "*genuine noble thing to get people on the street involved in the legislative process*". This view was also shared by P11 who stated it was "*a great initiative to engage the public*". However, others expressed more realist or perhaps cynical views. For example, in line with Torney's (2021) view that the Irish CA series (2016 -2018) was predominantly focused on the abortion topic, P10 suggested it would have been "*career suicide*" for the Government to make a decisive decision on the long-standing issue; hence, they argued that conveying the CA series made it "*easier for people to get on board and push the subject out into the public*". Similarly, P8 noted that "*(politicians) are looking to win their seats*" and therefore did not wish to make difficult decisions. Herein, P3 expressed a more nuanced viewpoint. For them, it was obvious that the Government wished to "*postpone making a decision...as there are always other priorities than climate change...{which} doesn't win you votes*". Nonetheless, they still believed it was a worthwhile process that they were "*glad to be part of*". Indeed, the overwhelming consensus from interviewees and official feedback forms (ICA 2018b) was that both the general CA process and specific climate topic were a legitimate and worthy subject for deliberation (even if citizens questioned the value of their input, which will be later discussed in **Section 4.3**).

4.2.3 Establishing the Rules: Facilitation, Scheduling and Time

With regards to general procedural rules, ICA members could exert considerable oversight and influence. Herein, participants had the discretion to evaluate the deliberations through feedback forms, with P9 for example, remarking: "*I did provide feedback in my reflection forms, and I believe they considered these inputs*". This allowed for the enforcement of ground rules and ongoing assessment of facilitators, which helped foster a respectful atmosphere for deliberations (Muradova 2020). For example, P10 noted how they "*did feed into the process, just to make sure it was right*" and elaborated that "*in the early days, there were a few people speaking over each other, but it was sorted out very quickly*". Specifically, the interviewee recalled that they "*brought it to the attention of a facilitator, so at the beginning a page was handed out with the ground rules*". In short, the data conforms with Muradova's (2020, 8) empirical findings that the assembly "provided the members with a safe environment in which to air...differences".

Moreover, membership control also extended to the scheduling of the ICA within the overall CA series (2016 – 2018). Harris (2021, 681) notes how "originally it had been intended that {the ICA} would be the final issue for deliberation and that it would take place over one weekend...(h)owever, at the assembly members' request, it was moved up the programme and allocated a second weekend". Interviews with participants shed light on this notable schedule change, with P7 stating that "*from the start, we actually had a few citizens who wanted to deal with the climate change issue straight away, as that was originally further down the list (last session), but we moved it forward*".

Herein, this strong desire from some participants to bring forward the ICA session may be yet more evidence of a self-selection bias amongst citizens with a prior interest in climate action (as previously discussed in **Section 4.1**). Moreover, regarding the specific ICA weekend sessions, P9 remarked, *"we had extended time more than once where the citizens sought extra input from other experts, which happened on climate change."* Such citizen control regarding scheduling was also extended to the subsequent CA on biodiversity, with Sec 2 stating that *"there was a vote on the floor to have more time; that has been granted"*. Notably, Sec 2 added the context that it had been *"extended numerous times before"* (i.e., with reference to the previous ICA series), suggesting a positive feedback loop between assembly processes on this matter. Moreover, it also illuminates that the ICA – and subsequent CA on Biodiversity – had elements of both *"top-down"* and *"bottom-up"* agenda-setting processes, akin to a *"hybrid approach"* (Bussu and Fleuß 2023).

However, despite ICA members' demands for an additional weekend sitting, the issue of time pressure remained a reoccurring theme within the primary (interview and observation) and secondary (transcript data and feedback forms) data. Herein, the empirical evidence contradicted the official feedback survey data: *"members were happy that they were given ample speaking time at the table discussions"* (Mooney 2018b, 1-3). Specifically, participants and experts alike expressed frustration at *"feeling very rushed"* (P5) and clearly desired more time for meaningful deliberations. For instance, P7 remarked, *"it would have been nicer to have more time (for climate change), I think we all agreed on that"* while P8 felt they were *"always against the clock"*. Similarly, SE1's colleague questioned, *"How could anyone there make an informed decision on the basis of two weekends?"* and added there was *"not a lot of time, especially when talking about leadership"*. Moreover, SE2 concurred with this sentiment when stating, *"it could have been longer because you are asking them to consider very important things"*. Finally, Sec. 1 also acknowledged that at least one more weekend would have been necessary given the breadth and inherent complexity of the climate topic. Overall, interviewees called for an extended timespan for future (C)CAs, which would allow for more thorough deliberation, a call that was heeded with respect to the subsequent CA on Biodiversity (thus suggesting a positive *"output-input"* feedback loop between specific CA sessions in this regard).

"The frustration is that we didn't give enough time and what we said to them was such a limited scope and needed more time {to develop} I suppose. It's a huge topic and I don't feel like we gave it half enough time. I would have much rathered two topics, five weekends each...we would have covered a lot, it would have allowed a lot more time for deliberation" (P5)

Nevertheless, not all interviewees shared this perspective, with P2 for example, complaining that the discussion on the ballot paper *"would take hours and hours...to the point that people didn't really care at the end, 'fine yeh, we'll just go with that'...it did get a bit tedious at the end"*. However, this view was an outlier and may indicate the frustration involved in finalising recommendations on the

afternoon of the final day. Moreover, Müller et al.'s (2023, 473) quantitative text analysis from the ICA suggested that less than 10% of the ICA "topic proportion" was devoted to discussions on the final ballot, the lowest across the entire Irish CA series (2016-2018). Similarly, less than 10% of the total time was also devoted to citizens' deliberations – with the rest of the time devoted predominantly to speaker contributions – something noted by interviewees. For example, P3 stated that while they *"did enjoy the speakers"*, they felt that *"you need more balance for the group work. I think it's more important, the interaction between people"*. This sentiment was also shared by SE2, who believed that *"maybe more balance towards deliberation is needed"*. In short, there seemed to be more weight given to expert presentations than citizens deliberations, which perhaps partly explains the earlier finding that ICA members seemed to be persuaded more by "internal reflection" (Goodin and Niemeyer 2003; Thompson et al. 2021) after expert evidence than "deliberative talking" (Malley et al. 2019) with fellow participants.

"the experts did help you form an opinion, but there wasn't enough time to explore that" (P12).

Moreover, given the noted time pressures, some participants remarked how the ICA Chairperson kept a tight rein on proceedings. For example, P9 commented that the Chair *"was actually a bit of a lady for keeping time, it was a hobby horse really. I think she was good for directing, as her opinion wasn't going into process, and you have to keep things on track. If you don't keep things in order it comes crashing down pretty quickly"*. For example, evidence from the CA (2018c, 548) official transcripts (quoted below) illustrates this point. Furthermore, while most participants interviewed held the Chair in high regard, others questioned the suitability of a judge leading a deliberative process intended to empower citizens. Regarding the former point, P7 remarked, *"she was great -very fair, balanced, everything was very well structured, everything was transparent, very professional"*. However, in contrast, both P3 and P9 questioned the judge's appointment and whether the Chair's more authoritative style was suitable for a deliberative setting. Indeed, similar questions could also be raised regarding the Chair's appropriateness (in terms of expertise) for the topic of climate change. Herein, the evidence suggests that careful consideration should be given to the choice of Chair in future CAs, with full transparency also required with regard to the stated selection criteria.

"{the Chair} is quite a formidable lady. I took it that she was a woman used to making her statements and not having them questioned too much. She was very much a model of her background. The legal life, it's quite fixed, there is a point of view and very little altering of that view" (P9)

"So in respect of each of those questions six or more tables have expressed a view that they want to discuss the matter. So I mean we will be here as the saying goes until Tim's Eve if we go beyond that" Chairperson, (ICA 2018c, 548)

"I just think it's ironic it was a judge... it didn't have to be a judge, did it?" (P3)

Finally, the shared frustration over the tight schedule was also compounded by a sense of time wasted – as some interviewees complained – on uninteresting or unsuitable CA topics within the broader Irish CA (2016 – 2018) series. For example, DE1 argued that the “*agenda was crazy*” and the inclusion of topics like “*fixed term parliaments, that was silly*”. In contrast, DE1 noted that the prior WTC (2011) deliberative process – driven by a bottom-up, citizen-led agenda – allowed participants to focus on topics of genuine importance. Similarly, P8 remarked that during the ICA session, citizens “*were constantly talking, there might have been a 30-minute discussion, and we did talk about the {climate} topic to hand for the full duration*”. However, in contrast, they noted that “*at the political ones (i.e., Referendum and Fixed-term parliaments), you might talk for 5 mins and then have nothing more to say because I don’t really know or don’t care, but people did have a genuine interest in the climate ones which was great, we just needed more time*”. In short, this highlights the general lack of control citizens had over topic selection and agenda-setting processes, which will be explored in detail in the following section.

4.2.4 Citizen-Input into Framing and Agenda Setting

With regard to framing and agenda-setting, the ICA process differed from the other CA topics according to the Secretariat (Sec 1). Specifically, in line with the literature review (See **Section 2.7.3**) regarding the complexity of the climate topic, they noted how the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) played a much more prominent role in shaping the overall emphasis and specific categories for discussion. Similarly, Sec. 2 noted with respect to the CA on biodiversity that “*it is challenging for a broad topic like that*”. Herein, they explained that organisers are “*civil servants, we’re not experts on these issues, but we need to make sure that we’re doing a good job and that we’re covering all the right area*”; consequently, they outlined how the EAG would ensure “*that we’re hitting on relevant areas*”. Nonetheless, Sec. 1 and Sec. 2 both stated that citizens (members) were provided ample opportunity to input into agenda items (via the public submission process, requesting topics and speakers). For example, Sec 1 insisted that citizens’ views were considered via feedback forms and stated that this is where the emphasis on “*leadership emerged*”. However, this is somewhat questionable considering the term “leadership” was already explicitly stated in the founding Oireachtas⁶⁸ Resolution proposed by the Green Party leader (Deputy Eamon Ryan) – “*How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change*” – and thus pre-determined by political sponsors. The data, therefore, adds weight to Harris’s (2021, 683) assertion that the title “framed the discussions in a particular way”. Moreover, Torney (2021, 384) remarks that the mandate of the {ICA}...was exceptionally broad”, with “no indication of what being a ‘leader’ might entail”. However, Devaney et al. (2019, 12) also note “a preoccupation with national policies, measures

⁶⁸ Irish Parliament

and strategies for tackling the climate crisis". This may have consequently restricted debates on pressing "value" issues surrounding climate action, as exemplified by A4's and SE3's comments below:

"With climate change? We haven't had that explicit debate on 'well, you know, is there something we do need to do something about? Is there a moral imperative to take action? Because you could say Ireland is probably one of the least effective countries...some would say we should just shore up our defenses and deal with our own jurisdiction. And the other side, there's a moral argument for the developing world since people are being affected. That debate could have been had" (A4).

"you've got two things, a debate on facts, but you also have a separate debate of what should we do? Or what can we do? Which is why I think that should have been separated {i.e. within ICA}" (SE3)

Nonetheless, both organisers emphasised the importance of the public submission process, with "1205 public submissions on the climate action topic" (Harris 2021, 682) – the most of any topic. Furthermore, SE2 explained how *"there would definitely be consideration taken of whatever submissions we had received as well. And then you're being cognizant of the different thematic areas, the different kind of sectors"*. Devaney et al. (2019) have noted that the public submission processes acted as an important "midi-public" between the external "maxi" public and the ICA "mini-public" – something which may have strengthened the perceived legitimacy of the process. Herein, the official ICA report (2018) claimed that the assembly focused "on the most prominent {issues} in the public submissions as ranked by its Secretariat, namely, energy, transport, and agriculture, food and land use" (Harris 2021, 681). However, Sec. 1 contradicted this official narrative when explaining that it was, in fact, the EAG who *"arrived at the viewpoint that obviously because the main drivers of GHG in the Irish economy are those three sectors {i.e. energy, transport and agriculture} that it would make sense to focus on them"*. Notably, unlike other CCAs (e.g., Scotland and France), the ICA organisers did not separate participants into topical "workstreams" – meaning every citizen could listen, deliberate upon and contribute to recommendations within each sub-section. Notwithstanding the aforementioned selection flaws cited in Section 4.1, this may have enhanced the representative legitimacy of proposals.

According to interview data derived from ICA participants, the extent of citizens' control to influence agenda-setting processes appeared limited and also significantly contrasted with the other seminal CA session on abortion (i.e., 8th amendment). Regarding the latter, P1 noted how assembly members had ample opportunity to shape both agenda topics and speaker selection. Conversely, they explained that *"the {ICA} session was different, so they (organisers) set the agenda for that...it was set by the assembly {organisers}"*. Similarly, P8 shared this view when stating that: *"we didn't {have much input} to be honest, the agenda was already set, the speakers were already chosen, we had nothing to*

with that, just 2-3 weeks before we would have the papers to have a look over... there was no option for us to change the agenda or kind of ask our opinion on the agenda, and I suppose we just kind of accepted it". Evidence of this apparent lack of citizen control (Smith 2009) also came from the official ICA (2018, 287) report wherein the facilitator of Table 2 highlighted members' concerns regarding a particular sub-topic. Specifically, they noted that *"there was very little attention given to the industry of marine, be it cruise liners coming in or out or the fishing boats from harbours and the net contribution they make to pollution and their responsibilities in terms of a cleaner, greener environment"*. Herein, direct observation data from archival video footage noted the Chair's response that:

*"this is something we didn't have on our agenda and we didn't address because the topic is so large, and we had to specify what we thought were the most important areas. So I don't think we can go there really in the absence of a discussion on it."*⁶⁹ (Chair, first weekend of ICA).

Herein, the Chairperson's remark that *"we had to specify what we thought were the most important areas"* (**emphasis added**) adds weight to other empirical evidence that the ICA agenda was largely crafted *for* rather than *by* the citizens, with the EAG, organisers and Chair playing the primary role in keeping the assembly on track. Moreover, the Chair's claim regarding the *"absence of discussions"* on particular issues only underlines the top-down agenda-setting process (Bussu and Fleuß 2023) within the ICA. Specifically, despite the Chair's comment, ICA members explicitly sought to raise such issues (as evidenced by Table 2's aforementioned contribution). Similarly, SE2 stated that participants *"wanted more information on {aviation}...but the thing is with aviation, the emissions are huge, but it's not a thing that people want to tackle (emphasis added)"*. Again, the reference to *"people"* by SE2 – like the use of *"we"* by the Chair – does not seem related to the ICA members who clearly *did* wish to deliberate on such important matters. Perhaps as P11 hinted in the below quote, this was because political sponsors, organisers and perhaps the EAG did not wish to entertain an open-ended deliberation on issues which were not aligned with Government priorities, something also alluded to by ER7. Overall, the empirical evidence concurs with Torney's (2021, 387) finding that the ICA was *"run in a way that did not give as much agency to the participants"*. More generally, the evidence conforms with Lafont (2023, 53) postulation that *"(s)o far, most actual CAs have followed the top-down approach in so far as they have been organised by policymakers or administrators with the aim of delivering some "input" that was of interest to the sponsors"*.

"It may sound cynical, but I don't believe {the government} will take substantial action with tangible economic consequences, such as a drop in tourism" (P11)

"But we're still very paternalistic as a state and the civil servants. It's not the politicians who have the power in this country. It is senior civil servants. And if you're in a line department, that is dealing with the citizens assembly"

⁶⁹ Video Archive: [Eighth Meeting of the Citizens Assembly - How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling Climate Change \(Weekend 8\) - YouTube](#)

type issue, you know, I think the instinct, the institutional instinct is to try and control it as much as possible, not to let it get out of hand. Because what you don't want after the fact is that if there is something that is radical, in terms of what it seeks to recommend, its 'Jesus, how is my minister going to implement this?' I'm going to try to keep it within the ditches as much as possible. That's been my personal experience as a politician. There's an inherent conservatism, you know" (ER7)

Overall, the cross-triangulation of primary and secondary data strongly suggests that the framing and agenda-setting of ICA was intended to “steer” assembly members towards certain pre-determined ends (Löfbrand and Khan 2010, 51; Lafont 2023; Courant 2022). Herein, there is clear evidence of “eco-filtering” and an overall “eco-technocratic” approach (Wong 2016) concerning which issues were permitted for discussion and the “narrow cost-benefit” approach to topics which were predominantly pre-selected by the EAG. This arguably denied citizens the opportunity to express their true preferences as part of an organic “bottom-up” process (Estlund et al. 2021), which could have “opened up” (Blue 2015) the possibility for more innovative – as opposed to largely pre-prescribed (see **Section 5.1**) – citizen-led proposals. Herein, the findings concur with previous analysis of the ICA, which has similarly raised “questions around the framing of the deliberations in ways that possibly limited the CA’s focus and recommendations” (Harris 2021, 684).

Moreover, the findings also point to a lack of transparency and contextual independence regarding the ICA’s procedural rules. For example, P8 stated that “*maybe as part of the methodology of the whole thing, they could have people's opinions on the papers before or could have addressed it before the start of the ICA*”. Similarly, P3 remarked, “*I like to set my own agenda if you know what I mean*”. These perceptions of citizens are significant given “a tendency for individuals to draw on climate justice arguments more than experts”, with the latter group traditionally placing “greater emphasis on national policy measures” (Devaney et al., 2020, 13). Finally, it is notable that the ICA title failed to reference the issue of “fairness” as other prominent CCAs have done (Shaw et al. 2021, 3); indeed, this had clear implications for the recommendations and how they were perceived by elected representatives (i.e. input-output legitimacy interlinkages), as will be discussed in **Section 5.2**. In sum, despite some marginal citizen input, the predominant feeling from the majority of ICA members interviewed (and cross-triangulated data analysis of primary observation and secondary sources) was that they were by-in-large “being led” towards a certain “destination”. Indeed, even Torney (2021, 387) – who served as a member of the EAG for the ICA – has acknowledged that the assembly “was...run in a way that did not give as much agency to the participants”, as perhaps best surmised by P5:

“the agenda was set, I don't mean we couldn't bring up new stuff, but it did at times feel like we were being led. When we went to the climate session, of course, it was too short, we could only look at three areas...and even though they said we had the final say, and they included some topics and speakers we requested (etc.), there was

always the underlying feeling...that they knew the destination before we even took off - although we changed quite a few". (P5)

4.2.5 Influence of the Steering Group (SGs)

Despite these aforementioned concerns raised regarding citizens' apparent control over assembly proceedings, Estlub et al. (2021, 4) positively cite the utilisation of a "steering group" of members who were charged with providing feedback and guidance on meeting plans" within the ICA. Within the ICA, the SG consisted of the Chair, the Secretariat, members of the EAG, and between 8 to 12 citizens, according to interviewees (Sec 1; DE1; P4 and P12). According to the official ICA (2018a, 52) report, the grouping had specific responsibilities, which included assisting the Chair in the "ongoing monitoring of the Work Programme; ratification of the specialists/experts to appear before the Assembly following advice from the EAG and the Chair; and evaluation of the Assembly procedures and arrangements". Indeed, as the prior literature review illuminated, empirical evidence has suggested that such SGs can give (C)CA members an avenue to influence proceedings (e.g., agenda-setting, speaker selection, recommendations). Moreover, SGs could also conceivably contribute to increased transparency, inclusivity, and contextual independence, thus enhancing the democratic quality of the decision-making process. Herein, DE1 emphasised the importance of the SG, stating that it "*gives a sense of ownership to the members that they have had some inputs through their peers in designing somewhat the agenda and finally choosing experts*", with P4 – a member of the SG – stating that "*we were there representing the citizens*". Furthermore, according to P4, "*when it came to the SG, they would have a pre-agenda there for us, we would have discussed if there were anything we (the citizens) would like to see, they would have gone through all the paper with us, and we discussed if anything was to be added or taken away*". For example, they noted how the SG convened twice before the climate change session, "*as discussions were going on longer, so we needed {more} meetings to discuss the agenda*". Similarly, P12 explained how they would be "*introduced to who the speakers would be*". Additionally, they also "*talked about the first draft of the ballot (recommendations) and sometimes that would be changed at the SG, and the Chair would say she would be transparent with all the citizens', she would talk them through the changes and why*". Hence, the experience of P4 and P12 contrasts somewhat with the aforementioned participants (e.g., P3, P5, P8), who felt they had little input into procedural rules such as agenda-setting, speaker selection and recommendations, while additionally, it suggests a greater deal of transparency at the SG level.

"there might be one or two things (members of SG) thought of, but they (the experts) would say they didn't put that in there because of such and such, and then they'd explain that we had thought about this, but it might cause a problem if you read further down (the recommendations)...so it was all explained to us, there was no conflict at all, there was space and time there to speak your mind...everything was so open and transparent" (P12).

Nevertheless, this positive perspective did not appear to extend to non-members of the SG who were unaware of their work, such as P2, who stated: *"I'm not quite sure what they actually did, to be honest"*. Others held quite sceptical and cynical views of the SG, including the (perceived) opportunity for citizenry input, with P6 remarking that: *"If I thought I could change things, I would have got involved, but I didn't feel like I'd have much of an impact on it. Their proceedings were confidential, so it's just an impression I got, I can't say for definite"*. Both comments also illuminate an apparent lack of transparency of the SG workings among general assembly members, calling into question its (perceived) contextual independence. For example, P6 noted how they *"knew someone who was on it and (they) kind of felt the agenda was set, that the thing was a bit of a rubber stamping of a pre-set agenda. My impression was that it was set up in a particular way and there were viewpoints that kind of led you in a certain direction"*. However, this scepticism may have been partly caused by an evident lack of communication (and perhaps transparency) between the ICA members and the SG. For instance, P4 – an SG member – expressed disappointment that *"members wouldn't contact us at all"* despite claiming that *"we were all made known to the citizens', they were aware of us"*. In contrast, non-members voiced concerns about the SG's effectiveness and argued that a more proactive approach was needed. For instance, P2 remarked: *"I actually have questions in my mind about {the SG} to be honest...they should have had a function, and it should have really been feedback to the members, which did not happen"*. Similarly, P6 complained that *"we elected a {SG} as we needed to have somebody to represent us...but I don't think they (citizens members) were actively involved with us (the non-members) enough...they could have sent out questionnaires etc. 3 weeks before"*. Overall, these conflicting accounts concur with the observation of Torney (2021, 385) – an EAG member – who states that *"the extent to which the participants were able to shape the process through this channel is unclear"*. Either way, a disconnect between the SG and ICA members was clearly apparent which casts doubt on the "positive" role cited by Estlub et al. (2021).

Moreover, it is notable that participation in the SG was voluntary, with DE1 noting that *"there didn't seem to be much of an election for the steering group; it's whoever puts their hands up"*, something confirmed by other participants. This would appear to be an extremely lax procedure for a process which prides itself on democratic values, with DE2 noting how other CCAs (e.g. France) had stricter protocols for the involvement of citizen members (e.g. rotation). In addition to the somewhat sceptical views cited by some interviewees for declining to partake in the SG (e.g., P6), numerous other reasons were outlined for the apparent low interest. Firstly, the additional time commitment was a commonly cited concern, especially among those with young children and/or shift workers. Moreover, SG meetings were more difficult to attend for those living outside the capital, as noted by P5 and P3. Herein, P2 suggested that meetings could be held remotely, which

should be considered for future (C)CAAs. However, surprisingly, it seems this problem of low interest was not addressed within the subsequent CA on Biodiversity, with Sec 2 noting a continued reluctance among participants to engage with the SG, something which may lead to a skewed representation and internal inequalities:

“So everyone has asked if they want to join us there and that basically whoever gets back like, that's, that's the steering group. We've never had like fifty people asking us to be asking to be in SG, we've never had to say no to anyone! So you'd have about eight people, one digit anyway. And they'd sit down with the Chair. And one or two of the most senior of staff” (Sec 2)

Additionally, although P12 shared a positive experience regarding the role of the SG and the capacity for SG (citizen) members to provide input, they illuminated that *“the draft ballot was written by the experts”*. This was confirmed by the Secretariat (Sec 1) and EAG member interviewed (SE1) who explained how they *“set up draft questions {i.e. recommendations}”*. While there existed a potential for additional input or modifications, this seemed only to apply to SG members (due to noted communication issues). Moreover, this same structure also continued within the CA on Biodiversity, with Sec. 2 stressing the distinction between organisers meetings with the EAG and that of the SG when stating: *“No, we consider them {EAG} kind of separate, you know, and so the meeting with them would be often separate to the SG”*. Hence, it could conceivably be argued the small number of citizens on the SG – who had limited contact with broader assembly members – had limited capacity to challenge (pre-determined) inputs and recommendations presented to them by the EAG, Chair and organisers. Moreover, rather than reducing the power dynamics between the official ICA apparatus and citizen members, the SG could have possibly exacerbated existing inequalities due to its voluntary membership (i.e., self-selection bias), additional time commitment (i.e., affecting younger members and those with families) and its Dublin-centric meetings (i.e., making it more difficulty for rural constituents to attend).

4.2.6 Selecting the Speakers

Another key area of citizens' control regarding procedural rules pertains to the selection of speakers, however, as Roberts et al. (2020, 4) note, there is “very little research on the process of involving experts and their motivation for involvement”. Nevertheless, the selection of experts – both the EAG and ICA speakers – and subsequent information, especially for complex topics like climate change, is paramount (Roberts et al. 2020), particularly with respect to the degree of “contextual independence”; thus, it should be subject to adequate evaluation. According to SE1 – a member of the EAG – the latter speaker selection was predominantly undertaken by the five expert advisors (i.e. EAG) in conjunction with the Secretariat (as confirmed by Sec 1 and Sec 2, respectively). This conforms with Estlub et al. (2021, 4) view that “expert selection is usually a task performed by the organisers or their {expert} stewarding board”. Herein, questions remain

regarding the selection of EAG members who have such a crucial role in recruiting ICA contributors and shaping the overall proceedings (e.g., agenda-setting, advice and drafting recommendations). Indeed, Roberts et al.'s (2020) empirical evidence notes how such expert decisions significantly influence outcomes and may even replicate expert bias. Herein, Knops and Vrydagh (2023, 221) have alluded to the "ambiguous role of expertise" within the context of CCAs, which also appears to be the case concerning the ICA. For example, unlike other CCAs (for example, the CAUK⁷⁰), the ICA had no "academic" and/or "advisory" panels to provide oversight and assistance to the expert leads. However, this is not to question the credentials of the chosen speakers themselves, with interview participants broadly complimenting the selection of speakers:

"I think a lot of people would agree with me, especially for the {ICA}, it was very objective, very comprehensive on effects, causes, possible solutions and what other countries are doing...nothing was really left out." (P9)

"people were really appreciative of each speaker, because they picked really good speakers, who did really good presentations, spoke well... and it was clear each was accomplished on a certain level" (P11).

Given the prominence of the EAG members and their crucial role in shaping the agenda, selecting speakers and ultimately drafting ballot recommendations – in addition to guiding citizens throughout deliberations via the Q&A process – one would expect a clear, credible and transparent process regarding their recruitment. This is especially the case considering the first key principle cited by the ICA was "openness" and an expressed commitment to "operate with complete transparency" according to its publicly stated "Key Principles for the Assembly"⁷¹. Herein, Sec 1 disclosed that the Secretariat aimed to incorporate "fresh voices" and achieve a balance of capabilities within the EAG, including legal, scientific, and procedural expertise. However, the lack of transparency regarding the EAG's selection process inevitably raises significant concerns regarding the contextual independence and (input and output) legitimacy of the process, something noted by both ICA participants and PCCA actors alike (**See Section 5.1**). Even SE1 – an EAG member on climate change – remarked on the opaque process, while DE2 posited that participants would inevitably note such lapses (whether intentional or not):

"people {i.e. participants} will pick up if the process is deceitful in any way" (DE2)

"(h)ow you get identified to be on the committees, it is a total black box, I have no factual evidence to how it works" (SE1)

This lack of transparency was not lost on ICA participants either. For instance, when questioned on their knowledge of the organisational structure (such as the EAG), P8 exclaimed that "one of the things they pride themselves on is being so bloody transparent, they record it live and this that and

⁷⁰ [Academic panel - Climate Assembly UK](#)

⁷¹ [2016-2018 Citizens' Assembly | Citizens' Assembly \(citizensassembly.ie\)](#)

the other...but before you walk in the door nothing is transparent'. More specifically, P3 stated how they'd "have questions about the experts (EAG) that I didn't know...like who are they, were they trying to promote their own thing, how are they appointed...that's what I'd be interested in knowing". Notably, the official ICA report also failed to provide any information or criteria regarding the recruitment of EAG experts (e.g., gender, epistemological backgrounds, potential conflicts of interest). Herein, as Carolan (2015) also propounded with respect to the prior ICC, this lack of transparency – regardless of the qualifications of the chosen EAG members – can only serve to undermine the legitimacy of the ICA. Indeed, this appears to be a reoccurring pattern with respect to Irish CAs, with the most recent CA on "Biodiversity Loss" (2022) even failing to publish the names of EAG members on the official assembly website (in contrast to the previous ICA process). Moreover, a simple email request for details on those chosen EAG members by this researcher was (repeatedly) refused and ignored by the Secretariat⁷² - again, contrary to the espoused values of openness and transparency. As Carolan and Glennon (2024, 201) propound, "to release the information only after the process has concluded is liable to invite suspicion about the motivations and reasons for such secrecy". Finally, the final report of CA on biodiversity merely states that "*the Chair established an {EAG} from relevant disciplines and fields to assist with its work in terms of preparing information and advice*" (CA 2023, 39), while providing the list of members. However, no details are provided on how the EAG members were selected, if they received remuneration or expenses, or if there was any other potential conflict of interest. The above again raises (perhaps needless) doubts about the contextual independence of the EAG and speaker selection process, while it also mirrors Carolan's (2015) criticism regarding the prior ICC.

This opaque process also extended to the selection of speakers to address the ICA, with Roberts et al. (2020) warning how biases in recruitment may be reproduced and amplified throughout the process. Specifically, SE1 described an ad hoc, informal and ultimately non-transparent manner of speaker selection when prompted on their own recruitment. Herein, they stated that there was no official expression of interest or interview process, mirroring SE2's earlier "black box" comment. However, SE1 exclaimed, "*this has always been the way...someone suggests who we should have {i.e., to present}, and someone else provides a name. Then they'll ask, 'Have you worked with them? What are they like?'*". However, this laissez-faire approach is deeply problematic given the noted power imbalance between experts and citizens (e.g., Abelson et al. 2023), with Estlub et al. (2021, 4) propounding that "if the witnesses and evidence are not incorporated in an appropriate manner,

⁷² Email addressed to info@citizensassembly.ie info@citizensassembly.ie on 12th December 2022. No response was issued. A follow-up email was sent requesting EAG members' names on 9th January 2023, along with a request for an interview with General Secretary Art O'Leary (Lead of the CA series). Both requests did not receive a response.

{CAs} can be highly susceptible to manipulation”. Nevertheless, while the selection process clearly lacked transparency regarding this issue, SE1 revealed that the EAG did have specific criteria for choosing speakers. These were partly derived from feedback on the prior ICC, focusing on what worked effectively and what didn't, with SE1 explaining that the EAG and Secretariat sought “*the best way to give people information in the time available in a way that made sense to them, which would be comprehensible, engaging, not just pure science or facts, not just high-level science talk*”. Moreover, SE1 stressed they “*were looking for people who were thought leaders but also communicators, that was a key thing for us in terms of giving presentation*” as they “*didn't want people to switch off and wanted people to relate*”. Additionally, they chose a mix of international experts and local examples customised to fit the Irish context, with SE1 exclaiming that “*you can't just cut and paste {i.e. from abroad} into the Irish context*”. Furthermore, with regard to the extent of citizens' input into the speaker-selection process, the official ICA report noted that ICA members were asked after the first climate weekend “*(w)hat would you like to see covered at the next meeting of the Assembly and who would you like to hear from?*” (ICA 2018c, 291). This was corroborated by the Secretariat (Sec 1) and P12, who explained that participants were provided with a feedback form to complete at the end of each session, wherein you could “*say what you didn't hear enough of or what you'd like to get more info on, and if a few people said it they would try to get (a speaker/person) in for the next session*”. Nevertheless, similar to citizens' complaints regarding the largely pre-determined agenda-setting process, P8 stated:

“it's almost too late when you're given those {feedback} sheets because it's over and done with then” (P8).

Hence, in spite of the apparent efforts by the Secretariat and EAG to address members' requests, some interviewees expressed clear dissatisfaction with the selection of certain presenters over others; specifically, the prioritisation of academic experts over lay-speakers (i.e. practitioners). For instance, P3 remarked that “*they were all academic people*” and added: “*It might have been good to have someone from the community, or someone delivering workshops, more hands-on, like practitioners, more of a balance...the people to me who had the most impact and increased my learning more were the practitioners and those presenting local initiatives*”. Likewise, P4 stated that “*as an ordinary citizen, I want to know how I can make a difference, I want to bring it down to the lowest possible level...so there'd be something for everyone*”. This viewpoint was also shared by the ENGO observers who noted that “*people wanted a lot more concrete examples, a lot of questions were like 'oh is this possible' and they'd (the experts) would be like 'oh yeh, they're doing it in Germany', and then the next question would be 'is this possible in a country in Ireland'*”. For example, the presentation most frequently praised by participants was “The Story of Kilbarrack Fire Station” by firefighter Neil McCabe, with the ENGO also noting that it was “*the one that stuck with most...this one-man mission has made it the most environmentally-friendly fire station in Ireland if not Europe - it was a lovely story*” (ENGO). In stark contrast, several ICA participants interviewed, such as P8 quoted below,

heavily criticised the failure to invite a "regular farmer" to address the assembly - one heavily dominated by a discussion on agricultural emissions.

"they got an eco-farmer who changed and showed energy savings, but a lot of us were saying was that there was no farmer who lived in the modern day, and that was something that we did notice all right because we thought - okay, you're giving this guy (eco-farmer) a podium to stand up, but why can't you give the average farmer a chance to stand up, is it because they didn't want to? Maybe that could have been mentioned before any talk took place, can we get an actual farmer here, because that is something I noticed" (P8)

The call for "more of a balance" mirrors Abelson et al.'s (2003) suggestion for lay speakers to provide a counterweight to academic experts, with Roberts et al. (2020) and Elstub et al. (2018) similarly noting the need for a greater diversity of speakers within (C)CAs. Indeed, this feedback was incorporated within the subsequent CA on Biodiversity according to Sec 2 – illustrating more evidence of an input-output-input feedback loop. Specifically, Sec 2 noted that: *"it was definitely important {to include farming groups}, we were advised like...so it was important to us that there's a lot of different farming groups, and they have different perspectives. We were told that this was one of the first events where these big farming organisations that represented different aspects of that sector actually sat together at the same table on the same issue"*. Overall, the empirical findings concur with Müller et al. (2023, 483; also see Roberts et al.'s 2022) conclusions from their quantitative analysis of *"Reactions to experts in deliberative democracy: the 2016–2018 Irish Citizens' Assembly"*. Specifically, the authors argue that "assemblies should invite more practitioners and representatives of organisations" and that "inclusive decision-making requires experts from a variety of background". These sentiments were also shared by assembly participants within the official ICA feedback forms, as illustrated by "Respondent 9" (ICA 2018c, B6) below. Nonetheless, not all experts agreed with this approach, with SE3 warning of the dangers of prioritising "persuasion over information", something will be discussed in further detail within the following Information Section (4.3).

"lock the scientists away and get the practitioners to the forefront. Too much apocalyptic speculation and condescension with the terms like "denier" attributed to those who seek to question their speculations. Having to buy into scientific apocalypticism is an unnecessary distraction. So my recommendation: Bin the scientism and promote pragmatism through plain speaking, uncontroversial and successful practitioners" (Respondent 9: ICA 2018c, B6)

"I think it's one of those things, you can certainly sway people through, say, emotional storytelling. And we know people are often swayed by a single anecdote, as opposed to a wall of statistics. So, it has persuasive power. But you're then into persuasion rather than information!" (SE3).

4.3 INSIGHTS FROM THE “INFORMATION STAGE”: EXPERT INFLUENCE & EVIDENCE

The following section will analyse the information stage of the ICA with reference to theoretical insights and empirical findings outlined in the literature review (particularly **Section 2.7c**) and the guiding criteria established in Table 3:

4.3.1 Accessibility & Readability of Information

As noted in **Section 4.2**, traditional experts heavily outnumbered “lay” practitioners at the ICA, a view also confirmed by Harris’s (2021, 684) empirical analysis. Although Elstub and Khoban (2023, 121) acknowledge that “knowledge acquisition is indeed an important aspect of (C)CAs”, they warn that “an over-emphasis on the educative function...may risk overshadowing their empowering and emancipatory capacity (cf. Böker and Elstub 2015)”, specifically by undermining those participants “who are considered to have relatively little knowledge and skills”. Herein, the expertise provided to the assembly members predominantly came from “academics, and senior officials and researchers” (Ibid), with such official discourses tending to favour western, well-educated and predominantly male speaking styles, thus having the potential to marginalise other groups (Löfbrand and Khan 2010, 57). However, these speakers contrasted with the memorable “story” regarding Kilbarrack Fire Station, which was repeatedly cited by interviewees (and noted in ICA official feedback surveys). This is perhaps unsurprising, given Drysek (2001) emphasises the significance of such emotive “storytelling” or typical “Type 2” deliberation in contrast to the “rational, dispassionate discussions” of Type I deliberations (Bachtiger et al. 2010). Indeed, the empirical evidence suggests that not only is such “Type 2” deliberation important in terms of accessibility (and thus inclusion), but it also has an important role in shaping outcomes. For instance, Müller et al. (2023, 483) note “the lower influence of academics” within the Irish CA series and thus conclude that organisers “should invite more practitioners and representatives of organisations”. However, despite the clear desire of citizens for more “plain speaking” (Respondent 9), it is clearly apparent that “Type 1” style deliberation prevailed over “Type 2” (Bachtiger et al. 2010) at the ICA, something clearly compounded by the lack of citizen-input into the speaker selection process as earlier dis.

Despite these drawbacks, the official ICA survey data indicated that most participants found the material appropriately pitched, and the input of experts useful. Specifically, 80% of the members found the input of speakers to be “*useful or highly useful*” and to be pitched “*about right*” (ICA 2018b, 1-3). However, yet again, the primary data somewhat contradicts the official ICA (secondary) survey findings, with various interviewees stating that it was either “*too basic*” or “*heavy*” and “*intimidating*”. Regarding the former viewpoint, P5 stated that the assembly session “*wasted an awful lot of time on stuff that we didn’t really need...really really basic stuff like what is climate change, you should*

only have an hour in the morning". Importantly, they added that *"what's happening in the Irish context...what needs doing"* should have been prioritised. Moreover, others criticised this technocratic focus on the climate crisis for other reasons. For example, according to the official ICA report, one member noted how *"people get bored and feel powerless, the sheer scale of information, graphs and figures are complicated and very technical"* (ICA 2018a, 174). Other interviewees also shared this view. For example, while P8 *"found {the material} okay"*, they added that *"I know there was a lot of people who didn't, there was a lot of graphs, a lot of jargon"*. Similarly, P8 remarked, *"some of the topics were heavy, maybe they were pitched a bit high, if the general population were to be engaged it would probably be better if it was pitched more level, it was too academic"*. In both cases, the two interviewees emphasised how the material would be particularly challenging for an *"uneducated person"* while also differentiating between their own understanding and that of the *"general population"* (P8). Likewise, DE2 noted that some papers seemed *"too academic"*, which they explained may exclude *"a significant number of people with poor reading skills"*. Indeed, some 18% of the Irish population scored below level 1 (i.e., very poor) for literacy proficiency (ranking in the bottom half of the OECD average) in 2017⁷³. Overall, the material quality also varied from speaker to speaker as noted by P8, therefore suggesting that greater oversight and quality control of written material is required for future (C)CAs.

"people often forget that the average adult reading age is 12-14 years old" (DE2)

"I think it depended on the person and the paper...and this one (holding paper in hand) ...it was very easy reading I must say, most people could read it, it's pretty fine...but then there are different papers (holding up another), with graphs and things like that...I kind of got bit overwhelmed by those types of graphs and technical jargon as well" (P8).

Reading materials were also provided during the "learning phase" of the ICA, something which may have allowed participants to further their knowledge in advance of the climate sessions. This was seen as particularly important given the more technical and complex topic, with P11 remarking that *"there is no really getting around that if you want to have a fully informed and objective view of something, you need to do all the reading"*. Herein, P9 suggested that *"people in general did come prepared"*, while P2 recalled that *"in most cases, you get a lot of read in time"*. However, time availability was evidently not equal for all participants. Moreover, the interview data strongly indicated that younger people and/or those with family commitments were less likely to read the pre-materials. For example, P3 – who had a young child – admitted that they could only *"skim"* through the material. Another parent (P8) noted how they *"had a busy life"* and quite often couldn't find the time. Similarly, P9's observations added weight to these other comments, as they noted that *"when we checked in Friday evening, the first thing that people asked for was the hard copies (of pre-material) because they were going to*

⁷³ [Literacy Levels – Wednesday, 18 January, 2017 – Parliamentary Questions \(32nd Dáil\) – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

catch-up – particularly people who were at work – before the next morning". This apparent inability of some participants to read the assigned material in advance may have also been compounded by internal design issues according to P2's experience (see below quote). Overall, the official ICA feedback surveys indicated that less than half of the members had reviewed the pre-materials for the first weekend, with a slight improvement for the second weekend (ICA 2018b, 1-3). Hence, as discussed in the literature review, inequalities between participants (e.g., educational) may have been exacerbated – rather than reduced – due to the fact that some participants lacked the time, resources or motivation to study written papers (Huitma, 2007, 303).

"If you were retired and had a bit more time, maybe {participants could read all the pre-meeting material}, but most people couldn't" (P5)

"some of the speakers were confirmed late, so they didn't get enough lead-in time to write their own material...and there were some things you didn't get until you showed up at the hotel, so that was a little bit taxing going over the whole thing in the one evening, it's kind of hard to get a grasp of it". (P2)

4.3.2. Scope, Selection and Presentation of Information

With regards to the speakers' contributions, the qualitative interview data illuminated key differences between various presentation styles, with P8, for instance, stating: *"Some of them are really interesting, others are more heavy on their content, but the citizens would have rathered listen to some over others"*. Regarding the heavy content, P6 recalled being *"bombarded with so much technical information"*. Specifically, they noted that *"there {was} a lot of statistics, a lot of scientific terms, a lot of volumes of pollutants, etc; it can be a bit overbearing, just the volume of information"*. Likewise, P12 remarked that while *"it was very interesting....trying to focus all that time was heavy going - there was a bit too much information"*. In short, it appears that the condensed timeframe – with 22 speakers, signpost documents, and pre-materials – clearly resulted in mental fatigue among participants. Indeed, the empirical data findings concurred with the official ICA report, which stated that the sheer volume of information was something that *"some people may find intimidating"* (ICA 2018a, 183).

However, P12 was more generous in their remarks when recalling *"the way people (i.e. presenters) were explaining things, a lot of them did break things down as much as possible so that the majority of people could come to terms with what they were saying"*. Similarly, both P9 and the ENGO observers emphasised that ICA members could easily understand the material when presented with concrete examples. Herein, SE1 – an EAG member – noted that the effectiveness of speakers sometimes varied depending on the specific topic's relevance to the Irish context. Specifically, they added an important caveat: the fact that some presenters were *"more successful in some areas than others...is more a reflection of the current state of Irish context on climate change"*. Nonetheless, presentations from *"officialdom"* were also criticised, with P5 commenting that *"some were civil servants who just rolled out presentations – which were glossy, beautiful – but saying nothing in reality"*. On this point, P3 also criticised the lack of

“interactive methods” when stating that “most of the presentations were PowerPoint...they could have come down into the groups, different methods might have been more interesting, more colour and different forms of presenting”. This observation conforms with Shaw et al. (2021, 1), who note how “people learn in different ways...(and) presentation styles in {CCAs} tend to rely on standard presentation techniques such as PowerPoint that privilege particular participants”. Moreover, the limited time was cited by experts (e.g., SE2; SE3) and participants alike as problematic. For example, SE3 noted the challenge of condensing a complex topic into a twenty-minute speaking slot. Similarly, P8 remarked that:

“you kind of get speakers rushing through papers, and then you have the judge banging the glass against the table trying to get them to stop speaking (laughter!)” (P8)

Concerning the combined material (i.e., presentations and written papers), both the Secretariat and the EAG appeared to wield significant editorial control. For instance, according to those in an organisational role who were interviewed as part of this study (e.g., Sec 1, SE1 and SE2), they directed speakers on the specific topics required and even influenced the visual aspects of the material – with Cherry et al. (2021, 16) noting “how different visualisations (e.g., using images of climate impacts, protest or scientific processes) lead to different types of reactions from people”. While a degree of organisational control is clearly required to ensure clarity, consistency, and coherence within a (C)CA, particularly concerning the given remit, it once again leads to (aforementioned) critical questions about who determines the importance of information, how it is selected and presented, and the criteria used for such decisions – questions also raised by Carolan (2015) in respect to the prior ICC. Regarding the ICA, the selection and framing of information provided to members heavily depended on the expertise of the chosen speakers, who were, in turn, predominantly chosen by the EAG. Herein, DE2 argued that “if you have contested information, ideally you want a separate body overseeing things {i.e. the selection of speakers and information}”, with the CAUK cited as an example of where an extensive group of academic⁷⁴ and stakeholder groups⁷⁵ oversaw the “expert leads”. However, such oversight was lacking from the ICA, which inevitably raises questions about its degree of transparency, contextual independence and (perceived) legitimacy.

This lack of oversight also arguably had implications for the diversity of information provided to ICA members. For example, SE2 highlighted that those areas outside their direct expertise, like freight and aviation, received less coverage, with only a single slide offered on such important (structural) topics with notable economic implications. In contrast, observations and

⁷⁴ The “academic panel” consisted of 12 experts who “reviewed the written briefings created for assembly members to support the Expert Leads in ensuring they were balanced, accurate and comprehensive”: [Academic panel - Climate Assembly UK](#)

⁷⁵ The “advisory panel” consisted of 19 stakeholder members who “supported the Expert Leads in ensuring that the information provided to Climate Assembly UK was balanced, accurate and comprehensive and that the assembly was focused on the key decisions facing the UK about how to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.

documental analysis revealed that the ICA emphasised subjects involving individual behavioural and technological changes. Similarly, another example came from the discussion on agriculture, as Table 2 participants “*felt that there was a missed opportunity not to tie the amount of subsidies currently in agriculture and farming businesses...to greenhouse gas emissions*” (ICA 2018c, 572). However, the Chair retorted that it was “*not something that anybody who spoke to us raised or discussed. Am I right in that? It is not something -- I mean, we are not clear on the implications of that. We would have had to have some advice on that*”. In short, the empirical evidence suggests the contours of deliberations were constructed, constrained, and confined by ICA organisers, thus restricting citizens’ capacity to shape proceedings.

“from the previous weekend, it came up from the citizens that they wanted more information on this...but the thing is with aviation, the emissions are huge, but it's not a thing that people {in government} want to tackle...” (SE2)

In short, the above quote indicates that the members were eager to address issues like aviation emissions and agricultural subsidies. However, it also implies that specific topics – particularly those with potentially negative economic impacts – were (intentionally?) omitted from the ICA’s agenda and subsequently decreed as being off-limits when citizens subsequently attempted to raise them for deliberation. Hence, one also needs to question if the citizens wished to address certain issues, but some “*people*” did not, then which “*people*” exactly was SE2 referring to? Herein, SE2’s subsequent comments regarding officials’ response to the ICA’s (transport) recommendations are revealing. Specifically, they noted how “*there is nothing there that **people** could disagree with...and a lot of the stuff in there is actual government policy to a certain extent*” (**emphasis added**). More candidly, SE2 remarked, “*I know people from the Department (of Transport) were delighted with recommendations*”. The above strongly suggests two things. Firstly, there was a degree of ICA alignment with government policies (**see Section 5.1** for a complete analysis on this point). Secondly, such a “top-down” (Lafont 2023) approach arguably limited the scope and breadth of information provided to the assembly members. Consequently, this may have restricted the ICA’s recommendations accordingly and denied the possibility for other “pluralistic” (Wong 2016) considerations to emerge, with Müller et al.’s (2023, 483) evidence from the Irish CA series finding “that a higher focus on a certain topic in expert presentations predicts the prevalence of this topic in the following Q&A sessions”. In sum, different outcomes may have emerged if citizens had greater control over the agenda and speaker selection. This also undoubtedly had an impact on the perceptions of the ICA in the eyes of ERs and advisors (as further discussed in **Section 5.2**), with A4, for example remarking that:

“if somebody just gives them a narrow menu, then whoever does that has a lot of power in influencing the direction of travel”. (A4)

“in Ireland we have a type of politics which historically focused on the smaller bits and pieces rather than the bigger picture” (P9)

4.3.3. Expert Influence and Citizens Capacity to Challenge

The above quote also raises another significant question: whether ordinary citizens are capable of comprehending and challenging expert recommendations regarding wicked problems such as climate change. Indeed, Stasiak et al. (2021, 3; also see Parkinson 2003) note how “concerns are often raised as...to what extent {citizen members’} are suited or qualified to make policy recommendations or influence decisions”. Such scepticism was also shared by some of the experts interviewed who were involved in the ICA process. For instance, SE1, a member of the EAG, recalled how their expert colleague questioned: *“what’s the point {of the ICA}...how could anyone there make an informed decision on the basis of two weekends – we are the experts and we know about this stuff – they had a couple of people speaking to them and made a decision”*. This conforms with Roberts et al.’s (2020, 17) empirical evidence from a Scottish CCA which found that experts “did not see the participants as equals who they can learn from and doubted that the jurors could critically scrutinise and evaluate evidence”. However, it is worth noting here that SE1 disagreed with the “*neo-classical economic perspective*” of their peers and instead emphasised the benefit of engaging citizens in a deliberation about climate change when stating: *“we live in a democracy, so there is absolutely a benefit to talking to citizens about CC”*. Nonetheless, SE3 raised practical concerns about the notable “*power imbalance*” between experts and citizens’ and stressed that it “*requires a very conscious effort to redress the imbalance*”. Specifically, they added:

“You know, that requires a slow process and an in-depth process. You almost need to develop their competencies before introducing them to that specific topic. And it’s probably more than you could do over maybe over the series of weekends”. (SE3).

Herein, the interview data also supported Parkinson's (2003) postulation that the position of power of others (in this case, the experts) may not necessarily be perceived as elitist, as citizens themselves may prefer others to represent them (i.e., climate experts in this case). For example, P1 exclaimed: *“Why are they getting a load of people (i.e. non-expert citizens) who don't know about it to give them ideas of how to make us leaders of {CC}?”*. Similarly, P5 remarked that *“{CC} is very technical and more distant...that is what was coming across, the only person up on that stand listening should be {the responsible Minister}”*. Moreover, P11 stated, *“unless I’m some sort of social scientist or engineer, I don’t have so much to offer, nothing to add to the conversation”*. These feelings were juxtaposed against other moral Irish CA topics like abortion, wherein P5 believed *“citizens should have a say because it’s an emotional enough issue; it affects people”*. Likewise, SE3 – in their below-quoted comment – also illuminated the difference between moral and more technical topics. Nevertheless, perhaps citizens' doubt about their own ability to meaningfully contribute to recommendations regarding CC is a direct consequence of the

eco-technocratic framing and top-down agenda-setting of the ICA (as discussed in **Section 4.2**). For example, during an in-depth interview, A4 made the distinction between the presentation of the facts (on climate change) and the subsequent moral arguments about how (best) to respond to the given competing concerns (e.g., inequality). In short, they believed that the latter debate was not had within the ICA, which may have restricted citizens' capacity to contribute.

"I think it's one of those things; it depends on what you want. If you want, let's say there are topics that are complex, say mental health, you might allow an open-ended discussion of that because you want to air as many views as possible. So there's a lot of complexity that comes in, and you just want to air them; you don't necessarily want to close down the conversation. Whereas, you know, if it's something like, you know, you want to make a recommendation, then the thing needs shape" (SE3).

"I'm sure they {ICA members} had a presentation of fact, but rather than giving it to them as 'here's the gospel', they could have had a debate on...{the} moral arguments". (A4)

"topics like abortion, yes, I do agree citizens should have a say because it's an emotional enough issue, it affects people...but with CC, is very technical and more distant ...that is what was coming across, the only person up on that stand listening should be him {the responsible Minister}" (P10).

Nonetheless, citizens' capacity to challenge information was undoubtedly influenced by the knowledge gap between experts and the ICA members, potentially limiting their ability to critique information effectively. Consequently, the question of citizens trust in the experts is essential, with Gutmann and Thompson (2009, 5) propounding that "citizens are justified in relying on experts if they describe the basis for their conclusions in ways that citizens can understand; and if the citizens have some independent basis for believing the experts to be trustworthy". Herein, the empirical data, both from participants and speakers, suggested a significant level of trust and respect for the experts among ICA members. For example, P11 stated that: "Yes, I feel people trusted (the experts), at no point was anyone insecure about their intellect to say 'look at this guy, he thinks he's so smart'...there was no mistrust". Likewise, SE2 remarked how "{citizens}" realise you are an expert because of where you come from and with your titles, so that garners the trust, and then you use your platform to distil your research". Moreover, putting aside the noted concerns regarding the selection process, experts like SE2 also explained how they sought to provide citizens with an evidence-based understanding of the issue when stating: "This is what the science says, I don't have a vested interest either way...that is what academic does, they consider the evidence". Similarly, SE3 concurred with this approach, remarking that "the nature of the speakers was more techy, less polemical. So, as a result, those who are for or against it are still speaking from an evidence base or speaking from different research, and they are making an argument. So to that extent, rather than being sort of extreme political sort of yes or no, they were more nuance". In short, (for the most part) citizens' were trusting of experts, and experts felt trust. Moreover, those experts interviewed (SE1, SE2, SE3) also seemed to conform to the role of the "honest broker" (van Beek et al. 2024).

"I can't say that was down to me. But the range of presentations probably moved them beyond a knee-jerk reaction into a bit more of a nuanced understanding" (SE3).

"80% of the members agreed that they would agreed they would pay higher taxes to tackle climate change, to get 80% of anyone to agree to pay more tax is outstanding...you know, when people understood the seriousness of the issue, they were happy to say "you know what, I would pay a bit extra". (ICA participant⁷⁶)

Nonetheless, as will be discussed in further detail in **Section 5.2**, direct observation data cross-triangulated with secondary sources revealed that some influential presenters – such as a “prominent economist” and another prominent academic – acted as clear “issue advocates” (van Beek et al. 2024) for given policies, as particularly evidenced by the proposals for carbon taxation (CT) increases and a new carbon tax on agricultural emissions (CTAE). Herein, the contrasting case of two ICA speakers relating to agricultural proposals is illustrative. Firstly, regarding the CTAE proposal, the ICA report (2018, 40), Rec. 11 “*did not appear in the original draft of the Ballot Paper*” but instead “*was a new question, introduced in the revised draft...in response to Members deliberations...specifically following on from the presentation from Alan Matthews*”. In short, one prominent and persuasive expert single-handedly persuaded ICA members to accept an untried and untested policy with potentially significant unintended consequences. In contrast, other agricultural supports referenced by a speaker from Teagasc (Gary Lanigan) – the state agency providing research, advisory and education in agriculture, horticulture, food and rural development in Ireland – were much less prominent on the ballot paper. This is perhaps down to the matter-of-fact speaking style of the Teagasc presenter, who did not seek to “push” a particular policy direction but instead provided a factual-based presentation outlining such supports. Indeed, this approach – which strongly contrasts with the style of Prof Matthews – was elucidated by another Teagasc presenter during their subsequent evidence to the PCCA. Specifically, the Teagasc representative explained that the organisation did not deem it appropriate to “prescribe policies”, nor did they wish to be “policy advocates” regarding what should or should not happen. In sum, the empirical findings concur with van Beek et al. (2024, 9), who observed that “although the expert witnesses tried to act as ‘honest brokers’ providing a range of policy options, they sometimes stepped out of this role and acted as ‘issue advocates’, strongly advocating for specific policy options (cf. Pielke, 2007)”.

“The costs caused by the greenhouse gas emissions associated with agricultural production are not taken into account by farmers when deciding how much to produce, and in my view, that's not right. So the most practical way to sort of send a signal to reflect that cost is through some kind of charge or levy or tax on carbon emissions (Prof Alan Matthews – Presentation to ICA⁷⁷).

⁷⁶ [Citizens' Climate \(Citizen's Assembly on Climate Change\) EE17 EP5 - YouTube](#)

⁷⁷ [Alan Matthews ~ If Ireland was a leader in tackling climate change - Agriculture/ Land use Policy - YouTube](#)

"From my perspective, I would prefer to confine my comments to the economic and scientific aspects, rather than getting into a discussion of what should and should not happen" (Teagasc presenter to the PCCA)⁷⁸"

Hence, while trust in experts is essential for the functioning of the process, there is an underlying concern that this trust could turn into unquestioning deference or excessive expert influence (or manipulation), particularly given the complexity of the climate topic. For instance, P8 aptly surmised this danger when remarking that: *"when you're just an average person of society, and you have people who have their doctorates and whatever, you do take them on their word, so obviously you are going to be 'they know what they're on about, why am I questioning them'...but then I suppose how they (experts) got there was by questioning other people"*. Herein, as noted by Abelson et al. (2003, 246), "the vast majority of the public will defer to the "experts"... because they may not have the expertise required to critically appraise the information presented". Similarly, Cherry et al. (2021, 20) cite strong evidence of "acquiesce bias" within the CAUK wherein citizens supported the overwhelming majority of expert proposals. Moreover, the potential for expert manipulation and/or bias was arguably compounded in the ICA case due to the lack of "lay" practitioners or other (opposing) expert viewpoints to counteract certain controversial proposals (see **Section 5.2**; also van Beek et al. 2024). Consequently, citizens alone were subsequently forced to serve as "judge, lawyer, and jury" (Abelson et al. 2003) on complex and contentious issues like the CT and CTAE. Arguably, this lack of contextual independence and transparency – as previously noted in relation to the selection of experts and speakers within the assembly – exacerbated such issues and may have undermined the ICA's internal and external legitimacy.

"We didn't have many practitioners, so there was no concrete information here from {other speakers} saying "actually expert, you're wrong" because you almost assume the academics have done a degree already, and there is definitely a degree of assumption there that people (experts) are more knowledgeable than perhaps they are" (P2)

Nonetheless, in spite of these concerns, the ICA members seemed to strike a balance between "trusting" and "verifying", with P11, for example, noting how inherent distrust of *"the experts is a really dangerous and a slippery slope"*, which could ultimately undermine the entire process. For instance, P8 recalled that another participant, although *"a bit of a loud-mouth...asked some questions that kind of challenged the experts"*. However, they complained that the person ultimately *"asked too many of questions...{they} challenged them on every bloody thing (laughter), people were sick of (the participant) at the end of it"* (P8). Overall, the interviewees expressed (both personal and general members') confidence in challenging the experts, something also confirmed by observation of the ICA "Q&A" sessions and accompanying transcripts (ICA 2018c). For example, P7 stated that they were *"never*

⁷⁸ [Joint Committee on Climate Action debate - Wednesday, 12 December 2018 \(Oireachtas.ie\)](#)

intimidated, there was never a problem with pass-me-the-mike, that was something that built up over time'. Likewise, P6 recalled that *"we did challenge what the specialists said, or we asked difficult questions"*. Notably, both P6 and P7 referred to positive ICA design-features that helped citizens' capacity to challenge the information. For example, P7 noted, *"we were all encouraged to ask questions. It wasn't a case of all the educated were going to dominate, everyone got their chance, and if you were afraid to ask a question, that was why the facilitator was there"*. Moreover, P6 believed that challenging the information provided *"is the whole point of it in the first place"*. Nonetheless, they also suggested that future (C)CAs should focus on *"opening up a little bit more space {to challenge experts}"*. This view was also shared by SE2 and SE3 who both implied that there was limited time and space to interact with citizens on a more intimate level:

"No, I kind of came in, did my piece, left again. So, I didn't, you know, I didn't call to the table to interact"
(SE3)

"it would have been good to have a longer time to discuss things individually {with citizens}". (SE2)

Overall, SE1 believed the ICA demonstrated that *"if you do provide people with a serious conversation – from what we found – they do have an opinion and something quite strong to say about increasing the commitment from Government around CC"*. However, the primary data cited above raises questions of whether *"the traditional mode of top-down scientific expert knowledge {was} still retained...while dressed in the language of transparency, dialogue and participation"* (Bäckstrand 2003, 31). Herein, the empirical evidence suggests a capacity between citizens and at least some experts to engage in a sincere "bi-directional" learning exercise (Petts and Brooks 2006), as opposed to a mere one-sided endorsement of expert views (i.e., uni-directional). For example, P11 recalled that *"during the Q & A there was a good bit of engagement with speakers...they weren't coming across as arrogant at experts, the only thing they were speaking about was the scientific fact"*. Moreover, P11 believed that experts were *"of the same mind as the citizens that we are here to collaborate and come up with solutions rather than throwing solutions down your throat"*. Likewise, SE2 – an expert speaker – stated that *"it wasn't me lecturing them - it was me saying "this is what could work" based upon my research and what works elsewhere...you now consider whether it works for you and the people in your area"*. Similarly, SE1 – a member of the EAG – suggested that *"we {EAG members} weren't seeking to get citizens action on CC, we wanted to hear what citizens felt. I think that's the difference – we are not advocates, not activists"*. Moreover, SE1 believed that the EAG *"were there to provide a balanced response to the question we were given...but we weren't there to set-up a framework that would mean citizens would give the answers that we wanted - we wanted them to listen to the information of experts and make their own minds up...along with the breakout discussions in groups"*. Again, citizens such as P11 shared a similar view when stating:

"we {i.e., citizens and experts} were there for the same process, they inform us and amongst ourselves – with their help again – we discuss it and try bring solutions on from there" (P11)

However, as aforementioned, some expert speakers *did* in fact, act as "issue advocates" (van Beek et al. 2024) and therein, there was indeed a clear organisational failure to provide a broader and more "balanced" perspective to citizens on contentious issues such as agricultural, carbon taxes and transport (e.g. aviation)⁷⁹. Nevertheless, when the opportunity was provided, the potential for critical collaboration between citizens and experts was evident within the ICA. For instance, P1 aptly surmised this process with reference to deliberations on windfarms which "*came out in the roundtable discussion, and then was put back to experts in questions and comments*". Specifically, they noted how "*there was more on the gap between theory and implementation, people saying it's a great theory and we all want it, but what is the best way for everyone – and you (the experts) are not following the best way of doing it*". Moreover, another example of citizens' capacity to challenge expert advice – in particular the narrow "eco-technocratic" cost-benefit frame (Wong 2016) – pertains to the discussion about public transport and electric vehicles (EVs). Herein, SE2's presentation emphasised the individual behaviour in shifting to public transport or EVs to reduce emissions. However, P7 noted the practical concerns of rural constituents who had limited access to public transport and genuine anxieties (e.g., range; access to charging points) – many of which were subsequently found to be warranted⁸⁰ – with regards to EVs. Consequently, SE2 acknowledged this situation when commenting: "*That's exactly what I'd be thinking if I was on {the ICA}, it's all well and good me saying get the tram, but how realistic is in their area*". In short, the exchange illustrated how a genuine "bi-directional" exchange stemming from authentic deliberations could not only be informative for experts and provide stronger recommendations, but also may serve to highlight the "popular will" on pressing issues to policymakers (Elstub et al 2021).

"There was one lady, and I'd said something like, 'we are in love with our cars'. I was probably flippant...and then she stood up and said how much she had to drive, etc. And then I said, then this is maybe the way that makes it greener for you...but then again, for me to say you need to buy an electric car; she may not be able to afford, it may not be feasible for her, she might be driving too far...it was great that viewpoint was given!" (SE2)

"I said about the transport. It's different up in Dublin... here (rural Ireland) there is no train service, no plane and the bus services are bad. My point is, even though we are all in Ireland, we are two different worlds away, and what would work over there (i.e., the city), is completely different, the needs are completely different" (P7)

Finally, the above referenced quote by P7 arguably illustrates the prevailing gap between experts and (particularly rural) citizens within the ICA. Specifically, the former group tended to focus on "big-picture" theory (e.g., national strategies and emission targets), while the latter were often more concerned with the practical constraints regarding the implementation of proposals (e.g., lack of public transport or rural charging points). This also mirrors Devaney et al.'s (2019, 12)

⁷⁹ As will be discussed in Section 5.2

⁸⁰ [Lack of EV network in rural areas 'putting the brakes on green motoring' \(irishtimes.com\)](https://www.irishtimes.com/news/transport/lack-of-ev-network-in-rural-areas-putting-the-brakes-on-green-motoring-1.4644444)

observation regarding “a preoccupation with national policies, measures and strategies for tackling the climate crisis” within the ICA at the expense of issues such as “climate justice”. For example, SE2 recalled that during the discussions on transport, *“citizens bring it back to their own personal journey”*. Herein, they noted how often their role resembled something of a “counsellor” in terms of advising citizens on personal consumer choices. However, despite this two-way exchange, rural members like P7 still felt that their concerns *“were acknowledged but not really taken into account... we were still left without answers, so it was very frustrating”* – something which will be further discussed in **Section 4.4**.

“one lady was talking about a bus service down in {i.e., rural area}, and why it's so poor, and if it was better...look I can't get from A-B, then I'd say, "look, an electric car is what you need", to travel the greenest way as possible, but that was afterwards”. (SE2)

“like with carbon emissions, we have to go to EVs apparently, but we don't have enough plug-ins over here, how are we going to make this massive change? It wasn't realistic for everywhere, especially us in the West; we don't have the facilities, we don't have the infrastructure, investment...” (P7)

4.4 PROCESS-RELATED OUTCOMES OF THE ICA

The following section will analyse the process-related outcomes of the ICA with reference to theoretical insights and empirical findings outlined in the literature review (particularly **Section 2.7d**) and the guiding criteria established in Table 3:

4.4.1 Degree of Consensus

According to Devaney et al. 2020, 142), “the Assembly’s deliberations on climate change {i.e. ICA} received the highest consensus scores of all topics considered {i.e. within the Irish CA series}, with 80% or more citizens voting in favour of each recommendation proposed”. However, as noted by Felicetti et al. (2016, 440-441), the crude voting metric used to accept recommendations – in addition to the potential for excessive expert influence (as discussed in **Section 4.3**) – in the ICA may “constrain deliberation by imposing an oppositional and aggregative logic...(wherein) the focus in conveying the outcome was supposed to involve the justificatory arguments”. For example, as previously noted, P7 – despite the rural references noted within recommendations (see **Appendix A**) – still felt strongly that these concerns were *“acknowledged but not really taken into account.”* This frustration may be evident from the Chair’s comment that they *“were very conscious of the fact after discussions there is a distinction between urban areas and rural areas and we didn't want to ignore the difficult situation that rural areas may be in, but we have left it in a very very general way”* (ICA 2018c, 573). Similarly, all members of Table 2 strongly believed it was unjust to single out rural areas for special attention, indicating a degree of polarisation between urban and rural dwellers. Specifically, the given facilitator remarked that *all* on the table sought for *“the specific reference to particular attention on rural areas be omitted {i.e. from the relevant recommendations}”*. The logic offered herein was *“that it's a*

complete nation that needs to be addressed in terms of the public transport system and how resources are allocated, so just giving particular attention to rural areas was deemed to be unfair". Overall, the above suggests that ICA's process-design – specifically, the perceived urban bias regarding representation, the failure to select an “ordinary farmer” and/or sensitise ICA members to rural concerns (e.g., via field trips) – may have contributed to a lack of consensus (or shared understanding) among urban and rural participants. Moreover, these internal issues also negatively shaped some PCCA members' and key stakeholders' (e.g., farming lobby) perceptions of the ICA's legitimacy, as shall be discussed in **Section 5.2**.

Moreover, even where a strong degree of consensus was apparent – for example, with regard to Recommendation 1 (**See Appendix 1**) which sought for a new or existing technocratic climate body to have more power to inform policy, set carbon budgets and sue the government of the day for climate inaction – it is questionable whether this can be considered a democratically legitimate consensus if “minipublics might in practice be captured by elite interests” (Moore 2016, 22), as discussed in the previous **Section 4.3**. Specifically, it illustrates the potentially paradoxical danger that (C)CAs – if left unchecked via untransparent processes, questionable contextual independence and concerted pressure on receiving bodies “to blindly defer to the deliberations of a few selected citizens” (Lafont 2014, 2) – may perhaps lead to undemocratic recommendations (see Saward in Wong 2016). For example, P11 explained that one “*clear takeaway*” from the expert presentation and Q&A sessions was “*that the only step in the right direction is if we give agency and responsibility to actual scientists and let them put the plans into action*”. Similarly, P10 recalled, “*that idea was a prime one, that there does need to some panel of experts, of scientist, with authority and power but, from there, we were not able to come up with anything more refined than that unfortunately*”. Likewise, P6 stated: “*it's a great idea, let's have a body, give it real powers, real goals with specific dates*”. Interestingly, P5 also highlighted the apolitical technocratic frame that was emphasised in relation to Rec. 1 when stating:

“Oh yeh, this was the one thing that came out, the only way it {emissions reductions} will be achieved is to keep {i.e, a “new or existing climate body as envisaged by Rec 1.} it non-political...so you would have experts on a panel, who work with CC in all the policies that are coming out, keep up to date research, make affordable plans and implement them” (P5).

In contrast, Youngs (2022, 6-7) propounds that perhaps more politics, not less, is what is really required – a view also shared by ERs and advisors (A1, A2, A4 etc.) as shall later be discussed in **Analysis Part 2**. Specifically, the author posits that “selection-based deliberation is often celebrated as a way of softening political differences or polarisation between participants. Yet combating democratic erosion arguably requires more political contestation in political debate and a wider, not narrower, spectrum of policy options”. Indeed, despite the perceived overwhelming

consensus (i.e., 97% of members voted in favour of Rec 1 – see **Appendix A**), the primary data revealed that those participants interviewed were cognisant of the democratic paradox and potential pitfalls of such an approach. For example, P11 believed “it’s a *slippery slope giving power to people who aren’t politicians...it’s just not a great idea, so we didn’t really develop those ideas past the prototype stage, but everyone was cognizant of its own pitfalls*”. Similarly, P5 (who voted for Rec. 1) believed other members shared such concerns despite the high majority in favour of the recommendation. Finally, SE1 confirmed the EAG was in favour of enhancing the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council (**hereon CCAC**) powers; hence, this strongly suggests that this recommendation emerged from those experts (some of whom had ties to the CCAC), and not the ICA members.

“I think the general feeling from our table was, who is this body, what type of powers do they have, and if they are genuinely trying to make it better should we give them more power...but I think the overall feeling was, who is this, how did they get there and why are they there” (P5).

“we {the EAG} would be generally supportive of strengthening the CCAC, they are quite experienced academics who work across that science-policy divide and know the nitty-gritty of political decision making and how to keep things moving” (SE1). “

4.2.2 Decision-Making

After the ICA learning phase and roundtable deliberation, citizens subsequently voted on thirteen ballot paper recommendations (see **Appendix A**), along with four ancillary recommendations. According to Sec 1, the decision-making process started with gathering members' opinions after the first-weekend meeting on 1 October 2017. However, the extent of citizens' apparent influence on the initial ICA draft ballot might be somewhat overstated by the Secretariat according to interviews with data subjects and as noted in the case of Rec. 2. Specifically, there may have been a strong expert interest in strengthening the Irish Climate Change Advisory Council (**hereon CCAC**) as the above quote by SE1 indicates. This is especially the case considering that no fewer than four of the CCAC’s then eleven members presented at the ICA, while one more served on the Expert Advisory Group (EAG)¹⁵ – which somewhat questions the contextual independence of the ICA with regards to excessive expert influence. Indeed, two pieces of data suggest this may have been the case. Firstly, the Chair clarified during discussions that “*the reason we have referred to a new or existing independent body {in Rec 1} is because we were thinking of the CCAC*” (ICA 2018c, 578). Who “we” is herein is unclear, but it can only be assumed to refer to the organisational team (EAG, Secretariat and Chair). Thus, it strongly implies that the EAG had strengthening the CCAC specifically in mind when proposing Rec 1. In short, the empirical evidence conforms with Carolan (2015, 748), who notes how “(c)ynics might also point out that these {assembly} bodies are likely to provide academics with their best opportunities to positively influence public policy”.

More generally, P12 – a steering group (SG) member – also recalled that “*the draft ballot would be written by the experts, it wasn’t us that was putting the paper together*”. Herein, DE2 also noted (drawing on their interactions with high-level organisers) that the ICA experience contrasted with other CCAs – such as the Polish case – wherein “*the first draft of recommendations was made by the citizens*”. Indeed, even the Secretariat admitted that the climate session (i.e., ICA) was distinct from other Irish CA topics and that their expertise, along with that of the EAG, significantly influenced the initial ballot draft. Nonetheless, P12 noted how “*everything was explained to us (and) there was no conflict at all*”. Indeed, changes from the initial draft were presented transparently, with revisions marked in red, as P12 observed and as cited within the official ICA report (ICA 2018a). Furthermore, P12 explained how “*there might be one or two things we thought of, but they (the experts) would say they didn’t put that in there because of such and such...and then they’d explain that we had thought about this but it might cause a problem, so it was all explained to us*”. However, one could argue that citizens’ distinct ideas or value concerns could be easily – if politely – dismissed in such an (untransparent) setting as the SG (where for instance, no minutes were kept or made publicly available, as previously discussed in **Section 4.3**). Furthermore, according to SE1, citizen members were the last to have input into the ballot paper draft:

"some questions were already prepared by the Secretariat, and these were discussed by the EAG, and modified (extensively) and added to both by the EAG and then by the members of the ICA. The suggestion of the members was then considered alongside other considerations" (SE1)

4.4.3 Quality of Decisions

Finalising the draft ballot paper (recommendations) proved to be the most challenging, if albeit crucial, phase of the process according to observational data, feedback from interviews (participants, Secretariat and EAG), and comments from the Chair (ICA 2018a). However, according to Müller et al’s (2023) analysis of the Irish CA series (including the ICA), less than 10% of the overall session time was dedicated to finalising proposals. Not surprisingly, given the aforementioned time pressures (see **Section 4.2**), there was a notable sense of frustration among some citizens and experts interviewed. For instance, P11 recalled that “*that was probably the most difficult part of the ICA, refining the draft ballot paper...people didn’t want to leave any stone unturned, even if they thought something was irrelevant they thought ‘we are here to do it properly’*”. Moreover, P8 described the process as “*quite tedious...because people take their time, and we were really scrutinising every question*”. Undoubtedly, the limited time to incorporate floor suggestions into a new draft added to this stress for both members and organisers, especially given that the process took place on a Sunday afternoon after an already busy weekend of affairs. Hence, one might reasonably question whether this was the most appropriate way for the ICA to conclude proceedings, especially given the

apparent focus on citizen learning and deliberations that went before. Herein, P5, among others, noted that for future (C)CAs, a one-whole day minimum should be designated for the drafting process, allowing citizens to adequately reflect on what they have discussed and enabling time to consider any proposed changes properly.

"I think we have heard an awful lot of material from you that we have to consider. So we will have to go outside and consider what you've said and come back to you. I don't know how long it's going to take and I'm conscious of the fact that some of the Members have time considerations so we will try and do it as quickly as possible so that the voting can start as quickly as possible...(Adjournment)...We spent I think 40 minutes going through the suggestions you've made" (Chairperson: ICA 2018c, 589).

"people ended up splitting hairs, and each time the paper would have to get rewritten and brought back and then someone else would have some niggly thing, and then it would take hours and hours, to the point that people didn't really care at the end, "fine yeh, we'll just go with that"...it did get a bit tedious at the end". (P11)

In addition to the limited time and "crude metric" of voting on recommendations, the substantive quality of some recommendations must also be called into question. Indeed, the actual "influence" (Vrydagh and Caluwaerts 2023) of the ICA's proposals will be fully assessed in **Section 5.1**. Specifically, some of the recommendations were "more aspiration than reality" (P10) and "probably not even well thought out" (P5), according to two data subjects interviewed. These comments also mirrored the critique by SE1's colleague – a member of the influential CCAC – who questioned "how could anyone there make an informed decision on the basis of two weekends". Likewise, A4 believed that you "can't replace 10 or 20 years experience as a senior civil servant, or whoever, you know, with any amount of {ICA} training like that". Similarly, elected representatives (ERs) such as ER3 were also critical of the quality of recommendations within the ICA's report (as shall be further illuminated in **Section 5.2**). For example, Recommendation 2 (see **Appendix A**) – which stated that "the State should take a leadership role in addressing climate change through mitigation measures, including... retrofitting public buildings, having low carbon public vehicles, renewable generation (...etc)" – was described as "vague" (P2), "generic" (P12) and "without any real targets" (P4). In contrast, P10 argued that a concrete list of proposals with a clear deadline should have been proposed; however, this raises the question of whether receiving bodies (e.g. government) should be obliged to implement citizens' recommendations or not, as will be discussed in the following section.

"I put down on my (feedback) paper, let's just give them a 10-point plan, and give it to them, and give them a year or two to do the 10 points, things that are very quick to do and would make a difference quickly. Not like we recommended...more aspirations than reality" (P10)

"After 2 weekends, there are probably recommendations that we made which were totally not feasible and probably not even well thought out" (P5).

"I felt a bit of a problem here. And I could be completely wrong on this. But here's what I felt was the silent problem. We were presented with a fairly lengthy, nicely bound, ICA report. So it infers it's kind of professional and peer-reviewed and validated. It's actually not!". (ER3)

4.4.4 Legitimacy of Outcomes and Perceptions on Follow-Up

Given the aforementioned concerns regarding input legitimacy – i.e., representational, framing/ agenda-setting and expert bias – it is perhaps not surprising that both independent experts (DE1), members of the EAG (SE1) and participants themselves strongly believed the ICA process should be advisory only (i.e., non-binding). Indeed, elected representatives (ERs) and their advisors (A) also concurred with this opinion, as will be further elucidated in **Section 5.3**. Notably, interviewees directly stressed the “*legitimacy question*” pertaining to the ICA and, in doing so, indirectly made inferences about the inherent weaknesses of the process itself. For instance, with reference to the previously noted representational issues (see **Section 4.1**), DE1 remarked: “*And that's why I hold the view that the outcomes of processes like this should only ever be advisory. Never declaratory. Because you just can't crack that problem on legitimacy question*”. Likewise, P11 shared these concerns relating to representational legitimacy when positing that: “*I don't think anything should be binding, as no matter how representative it is, it's still only 100 people. So, I don't think the government should be bound - but answerable yes*”. Moreover, SE1 alluded to the potential limitations of the recommendations – and therein the ICA's output legitimacy – when stating that: “*It's absolutely impossible to do that {i.e. binding-recommendations} without swallowing all the recommendations whole and saying we have to implement everything. I think there are issues about feasibility, practicability and the legitimacy of doing that*”. Indeed, as will be illuminated in **Section 5.2** and **Section 5.3**, respectively, political actors and their advisors also repeatedly questioned the “feasibility, practicability and the legitimacy” of the ICAs recommendations and were unequivocal regarding where they ultimately believed decision-making authority lay (i.e., with elected representatives, the parliament and government of the day). Herein, DE1 argued that emphasising that (C)CA outcomes are just “*a stage in a process... (is) the best way to push back about legitimacy {concerns}*”. This viewpoint broadly mirrors that of Rountree and Curato (2023, 73), who suggest that “rather than consider CAs as authoritative forums...CAs should be viewed as conduits of public deliberation that are influenced by public discourse and have the potential to reshape public sphere deliberations”.

"I think the way to reduce criticisms is to say look, it's a stage in a process, it's not taking a decision, it's making a recommendation. And in doing so is helping frame the debate in ways that might not have otherwise emerged but for this way of doing this. The best way to push back about the legitimacy of this process is to hold the line that is only advisory, a stage in a process...I don't think forcing the politicians is the way to go" (DE1)

Nonetheless, this prompts the question regarding the ICA members' own perceptions of “output legitimacy” and possible policy impact. For instance, P1 expressed concerns among participants about the effectiveness of the process, questioning whether it might be a futile exercise with no real impact when stating: “*We were all kind of thinking, is this a wasted exercise, is this just a*

weekend of us listening with you doing nothing we advise you to do after you heard it?". Another notable elephant in the room – as expressed by P4 – was the broadly held perception that the climate session (i.e., ICA) was merely an add-on (as confirmed by the amended founding legislation) to the Irish CA series (2016-2018) designed purely to address (and perhaps provide political cover for) the controversial constitutional question regarding the 8th amendment (i.e., abortion legalisation). This contextualisation of the ICA – and its potential impact on the process design and follow-up – has previously been noted within the literature review (**Section 1.4**) and the introduction to Analysis Part 1 (**Section 4**). Indeed, the primary data from this study suggests that ICA participants broadly concurred with an EAG member's supposition that “climate change was added to the agenda of an assembly focused primarily on the topic of abortion, almost as an after-thought”. However, ICA members, such as P6, also saw the potential benefit of the ICA being part of the broader Irish CA series (2016 – 2018), particularly with respect to the prominent abortion topic, which raised the overall profile of assemblies in Ireland (and across the world). Specifically, such participants interviewed suggested that political action may be more likely given the prior impact of the abortion CA topic (i.e., which ultimately served as a catalyst for seminal constitutional change in Ireland). Indeed, it is important to qualify that, unlike the abortion topic, there was no pre-determined procedural mechanism outlined for considering and responding to the ICA's outcomes. However, Torney (2021, 385) notes how "(d)espite not being required, in the case of the climate change topic, a similar model to that required for follow-up on the abortion topic was adopted, and a special parliamentary committee was established to consider the recommendations". Hence, it is conceivable that the seminal abortion case did indeed put "extra wind behind" the ICA's mandate and increased the political imperative to act on what was arguably the second most prominent topic in the Irish CA (2016 – 2018) series.

"I would hate to think it was just there for the 8th Amendment" (P4)

"the fact that the referendum result {on the 8th amendment i.e., legalisation of abortion} was so close to what we voted, I think it has put extra wind behind the mandate given, and I'd personally like to see them act ASAP"
(P6)

Overall, many ICA actors interviewed in this study expressed optimism about the potential follow-up of recommendations, specifically, that decision-makers “*will use them*” (P9). For instance, P10 – like P6 quoted above – expressed similar confidence based on the experience of the 8th amendment topic: “*I’m hopeful they will take some of the big issues, as they seemed to have taken on the abortion one*”. Moreover, not only were some participants interviewed expectant based on the result of the constitutional referendum (on abortion), but others also referenced the (perceived) impact of the prior ICC, particularly on issues such as the legalisation of same-sex marriage (with Ireland being

the first country in the world to do so by popular vote⁸¹). For example, P12 added that *"they showed us what was done in the ICC, they said a fairly high percentage were taken (onboard)"*. However, such perceptions contrasts with evidence from Farrell et al. (2019, 119) who noted that a “lacklustre, tardy response by government was experienced after the {ICC}, which saw movement on some of its recommendations but a number of others that are still on-going – several years later – and others that probably will be simply ignored”. Indeed, the uptake, consideration and response to ICA recommendations will be discussed in detailed in the following “Output Legitimacy” analysis section (i.e., **Part 2**). However, for now, it is important to note that Farrell et al.’s empirical data “(o)ne concern regularly raised in the interviews {with participants} was over the degree of follow-through by the government”, something which mirrors the concerns cited by Abelson et al. (2003) with regards to the lack of perceivable outputs and its impact on (future) CA participants. Indeed, P4 alluded to the dangers of “selective-listening” or “cherry-picking” (Font et al. 2018) by politicians when stating:

"you see...at the end of the day, all we did was make recommendations, but that has no weight. It's the government decision, they can take it or leave" (P4)

"they gave us a mandate...{but} of course there is no obligation on them" (P5)

"we don't want to see the report that was written on CC sitting there gathering dust...then people become cynical about the process and then say the assembly, 'how good is it really!'" (SE2).

Other ICA members interviewed, such as P3, also shared this pessimism when remarking that *"I don't think is going to happen, with this present Government anyway...they have their own agenda, so I don't think much will happen"*. However, such cynicism is clearly dangerous for the future of (C)CA processes and illustrates – with respect to the stated research question – how output legitimacy may negatively affect the input legitimacy of future (C)CAs, in addition to the broader institutionalisation of such deliberative processes. Indeed, while members acknowledged the advisory nature of the ICA, they also felt their proposals should be treated seriously, given the time, effort and (taxpayers) resources invested in the process. For example, P10 exclaimed that *"if they are going to spend taxpayers' money, get a whole load of people up to Dublin, you'd expect them to act"*, an opinion also shared by Sec 2 with respect to the CA on Biodiversity. On the latter point, an exact breakdown of the cost of the ICA cannot be determined as public figures are only compiled annually for CA processes in Ireland (i.e., spanning multiple CA topics in a given year)⁸²; however, the Irish CA series (2016 -2018), in its entirety, cost in the region of €1.5m. Similarly, P4 remarked, *"it'd be a pity if they ignored them {the ICA recommendations}, when a lot of thought and work has gone into it, and the citizens*

⁸¹ [Ireland becomes first country to legalise gay marriage by popular vote | Ireland | The Guardian](#)

⁸² [2016-2018 Citizens' Assembly | Citizens' Assembly \(citizensassembly.ie\)](#)

have a spoken. They have a voice there, and it is a pity if they didn't listen to it...it would undermine the process". This sentiment was also shared by experts (EAG and speakers), the Secretariat and environmental NGO observers (ENGO), whose viewpoint on the potential impact of the ICA also conformed to a more instrumentalist approach (Demski and Capstick 2022, 5).

"the problem is that if nothing happens, people's scepticism will grow". (SE1)

"that {failure to follow-up on ICA recommendation} is something I think I could find frustrating, and the citizens would find frustrating..." (SE2)

"The ICA is a lovely process, it was interesting to see it in action, and it's unique...like it is a great idea, but are they actually going to listen?" (ENGO)

Moreover, the responses strongly aligned with Goodin's (1992; also see Wong 2016) view regarding the importance of environmental ends over democratic means, in addition to Lafont's (2023) depiction of (C)CAs as a predominantly taking a "top-down" instrumentalist approach. Specifically, interviewees – particularly those with a vested impact in environmental change (e.g. experts and ENGO) – emphasised that the actual ICA outcomes is *"almost the most important bit"* (ENGO). Firstly, many ICA participants interviewed broadly shared P4's *"hope that they {i.e., the responding body – the PCCA} break down each topic and recommendations and give it due consideration"* (P4). Furthermore, SE1 agreed that: *"what should absolutely be necessary is for the Government to actually respond to what the citizens have said, to say why we can't do some of these actions, or we are going to address these actions within the next 5 years"*. Similarly, the ENGO observers clearly outlined their priorities when stating that: *"I think for us in Environmental groups we're wondering what's going to happen now, are the government actually going to act on the recommendations, because that's all that really matters"*. This view regarding the interlinkages between input and output legitimacy of the ICA was also shared by politicians like ER7 (a member of a smaller, pro-climate action party) and the Secretariat (Sec 2) of the subsequent CA on Biodiversity (2022).

"Well, they kind of have to be {taken seriously}, if they're taking the {CA on Biodiversity} seriously and if they want citizens to take the {CAs} seriously, then they're going to have to follow up on the recommendations and take that process seriously" (Sec 2)

"And without being too verbose about it, if you were a participant in a citizens assembly, and you were coming up to Dublin from {the country} and you felt you were making a contribution, and you've made your conclusions and then arising from that you felt that none of what was concluded in our recommended by the CA was ultimately implemented in terms of a legislative piece of legislation or a bill for a referendum, then I think you'd feel fairly insulted" (ER7).

"I can see how it would undermine the process if the government didn't take certain actions" (P10)

Importantly, DE2 noted a key difference between the ICA and other CCAs when stating that the process *"was driven by the Department of the Prime Minister"*. Herein, they argued that there was

a “*system buy-in*” that would not have happened if the ICA was left under the remit of another Government Department (e.g., the Department of Climate Action). While this political and policy follow-up to the ICA recommendations by the PCCA will be discussed in detail in subsequent **Analysis Part 2 section** – in addition to the potential motivation of elected representatives (ERs), advisors (As) and other stakeholders involved – it is also important to elucidate ICA assembly members’ and actors’ knowledge of the follow-up processes (i.e., to illuminate input-output legitimacy and their interlinkages). Herein, the comments of the EAG member interviewed are concerning, particularly in light of the OECD (2021) best practice report stressing the need for “member aftercare”. Specifically, SE1 stated that they “*would of liked a bit more follow in terms of communication of the findings, and timeline around when is it going to Government committee etc...going forward*”. Indeed, DE2 cited the failure to provide a clear “*timeline for response in Ireland*” as a weakness of the ICA in comparison to other countries (e.g., Scotland). DE1 added, “*I imagine it's because people who are organising it don't know themselves*”. Indeed, Torney (2021, 387) – an EAG member – also noted that there was “little explicit pre-commitment except to consider {recommendations}”. This problem was also illustrated by Sec 1 and Sec 2, who both lamented how the respective CA Secretariats were disbanded before any subsequent parliamentary processes, hence denying a vital link between the input and output processes. Notably, this point has also been raised by Suiter et al. (2021) in their most recent evaluation of an Irish CA process⁸³, thus indicating that this potential shortfall still persists and there is a lack of institutional learning between CAs (at least with respect to this important issue). Moreover, unlike other CCAs (e.g, France), the ICA members were granted no oversight role of the follow-up process, with only the Chair left to advocate for the adoption of assembly recommendations at the PCCA⁸⁴. This again raises obvious concerns regarding the output-input legitimacy link (pertaining to future assembly processes), as even if concrete outputs emerge, without effective communication to participants (and indeed the broader public), the aforementioned scepticism regarding the influence of citizens deliberations will possibly remain:

“I don’t have too much time to be looking at the {PCCA}” (P8)

4.4.5. Perceived Impact on “Maxi” Public

Herein, Fournier et al. (2011, 142) have questioned, “If one attaches great importance to the necessity of education and preparation before deliberation and decision-making for the former, why disregard that logic for the latter?” (Fournier et al. 2011, 142). Regarding the ICA's own broader influence, the empirical evidence suggests that the assembly largely failed to resonate with the maxi-public. For instance, Devaney et al. (2021, 14) state how “(u)nprompted referrals to the

⁸³ The Irish CA on Gender Equality held in 2020.

⁸⁴ Ireland’s Citizens Assembly - National Assembly (knoca.eu)

Assembly deliberations on the climate change topic were minimal {amongst focus group participants}, indicating a general lack of awareness". Additionally, the authors noted that "when questioned on the perceived impact of the {ICA} recommendations on climate change, {focus group} participants were not aware of {PCCA}, which was established to take them forward in the policy process". Likewise, McNally (2018, 32)²³ notes an "unexpected finding" that "many more {focus group} participants had heard of the Citizens' Assembly in relation to other issues" rather than climate session. Similarly, observation data of the YouTube streaming of the ICA sessions – one of the primary means of the broader public being able to view content transparently – had limited reach, with the most watched video reaching merely a thousand people⁸⁵. This mirrors Carolan's (2020, 10) analysis of the "desultory online viewing figures" for the more prominent Irish CA on abortion, which the authors propounds calls "into question how much attention was paid to the deliberative proceedings themselves". The apparent lack of broader public relevance was not lost on advisors such as A4, who stated that: *"most people are blissfully unaware of it {the ICA}... but say {organisers} spend a couple of million Euros sending out transcripts or details from the ICA, it may add value. So it's not just there as an ornament, or even there just to give legitimacy."* Herein, Rountree and Curato (2023, 74) also propound that "(t)he outcomes of {CAs}, as well as the reasons that support these outcomes, should be communicated to those who were not part of the forum as another input to on-going public deliberations". Similarly, Abelson et al. (2003, 247) note the desire amongst CA participants for a "greater accountability for their participation" when stating that: "at a minimum, they want the resulting decision communicated to the public with some demonstration of how the public's input was used or considered in the decision-making process".

"we need this in all our communities...I'd like the ICA {model} to be more accessible" (P3)

"the more that we can work to communicate with people, the better".(SE1)

"it's a way forward for the country... {but} we were lucky, as we had such amazing information, and this was the only time ever I've voted fully informed". (P10)

Moreover, as the above quote from P10 alludes to, failure to disseminate core elements of a (C)CAs proceedings (e.g., learning phase; deliberations; nuanced recommendations) may have even ironically served to exacerbate (existing) inequalities between the "mini-public" participants and the "maxi-public" (Abelson et al. 2003), while also leaving the process open to scrutiny regarding its contextual independence. However, notwithstanding the above evidence, it is also worth noting the level of stakeholder, media and international (e.g., academic) engagement within

85 Accessed May 2024: Ninth Meeting of the Citizens' Assembly - How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling Climate Change (Weekend 9) - YouTube

the ICA process itself, with ENGO and SE2 recalling that more observers were present at the ICA than other Irish CA sessions. Similarly, P11 believed that the process “*probably gets people outside the assembly more engaged with it...even if you don't throw up any golden ideas, on a macro level, it is more engaging and puts it in the spotlight*”. However, when prompted on the matter, DE1 rejected this optimistic viewpoint and instead suggested that “*the vast bulk of people don't have an idea of it, so I don't think the ICA contributes to a wider discourse in Irish society*”. This comment – and the subsequent division with the PCCA (as shall be discussed in **Analysis Part 2**) – perhaps suggests that the ICA was successful in engaging *already* engaged actors (e.g., relevant experts, academics and civil society actors, in addition to relevant policy actors) both in Ireland and further afield, as noted by Averchenkova and Ghilan (2023). For example, when interviewed, DE2 contrasted the “*overwhelmingly positive international reception*” of the Irish CA model – which they interestingly remarked was “*boarding on propaganda*” at times given the glowing appraisals of key organisers, political sponsors and (predominantly Irish) academics – with the “*limited domestic pick-up of the climate session*”. Consequently, DE2 argued that:

“having an assembly and nobody knows it's happening – it doesn't add much weight to the process”. (DE2)

However, this apparent failure to penetrate the broader public consciousness was perhaps exacerbated by the premeditated decision not to broadly publicise the findings of the Irish CA series (including the ICA), with the Secretariat (Sec 1) explaining: “*we {the ICA secretariat} put a lot of thought into it...{and} very deliberately didn't do that. We didn't want to be out there sort of trumpeting the assembly, because of the nature of the topic, specifically, the 8th referendum*” (Sec 1). In short, Sec 1 explained that this was a conscious decision in light of sensitivities surrounding the 8th amendment (i.e., abortion) topic. Thus, they wished “*to let the facts speak for themselves*”. Notably, this again highlights the seminal 8th amendment topic's impact on the ICA design and follow-up. Moreover, the organisational decision contrasts with the choice of other (C)CA organisers “*which have distributed copies of their findings to residents*” (Rountree and Curato 2023, 75). Indeed, A4 – an advisor attached to the PCCA – was also critical of this decision to withhold distribution of the details and nuances of the ICA's deliberations. Additionally, the primary data also revealed that some members were unhappy with the negative media coverage of the ICA, with P4 noting how: “*I think it is a bit unfair to the members that people could say we were all brainwashed all, it's not possible*”. Some members also expressed dismay that the Chair did not publicly defend the assembly process.

“they didn't present it in a way for those who want the details, and the nuanced debate, that wasn't really available....{they} didn't do that for the {ICA}” (A4)

“people were saying it was skewed this way or that way – it wasn't” (P4)

“but when people kind of see that, if you go on Facebook and see articles published by the media, and you do get slated. If you’re a member {of the ICA} you’d want to have thick skin, as you have all these keyboard warriors coming up and giving their opinion saying: ‘what do they know, they are hired by the Government’ {etc}! At the end of the day, we took a decision, we had free speech, and that’s exactly what they wanted from the ICA”. (P2)

Nonetheless, the above comments from P4 and P2 pertaining to public and social media commentary that was sceptical of the ICA once again illustrate the discrepancy between citizens inside and outside the assembly (adding further weight to evidence of “self-selection” bias as noted in **Section 4.1**). This distrust – even if expressed only by a vocal minority – undoubtedly was exacerbated by the aforementioned process-design issues (pertaining to representation, agenda-setting and speaker selection) and the concurrent lack of transparency. For example, as one politician (ER4) remarked, *“if only one person is vocally complaining, you can guarantee that at least ten others silently feel the same”*. Indeed, as shall be discussed in **Section 5.2**, elected representatives, advisors and stakeholders alike also felt suspicious of and sometimes aggrieved with the ICA process and its subsequent outcomes.

4.4.6. More Informed Citizenry

Nonetheless, despite the above-noted concerns with regard to external actors and the "maxi-public", the cross-triangulated empirical data from both in-depth interviews and official ICA feedback surveys) clearly showed that ICA participants experienced significant personal development (in terms of personal efficacy and topical knowledge) throughout the assembly process. Herein, the findings broadly concurred with Stasiak et al. (2021, 8) who note that a CCA “improves a person’s ability to participate in other political processes and augments overall trust that citizens can meaningfully engage in debating and solve complex issues (Farrell et al., 2019; Roberts and Escobar, 2015)”. Likewise, the finding also concur with Lindell’s (2023, 260) cited empirical findings, as there was also evidence of “long-lasting impact on participants’ interest in politics, political engagement, and policy attitudes”. Moreover, the positive impact on individual assembly members also extended to their enhanced understanding of climate change. For instance, P1 stated that they *“definitely felt more educated after the climate sessions, and I’ve noticed I’ve changed my habits a lot as well”*. Even those with prior knowledge, such as P11, acknowledged that they knew *“only a fraction of what was taught over the weekend, because there are lot of stuff, even if you think you are clued into things, you have a lot of misconception - it was really helpful clearing things up”*. In short, several participants also reported a shift in their knowledge, opinions, and behaviours, expressing heightened environmental “mindfulness” following the assembly – something which mirrored the official ICA survey findings (ICA 2018b). With regards to the latter point, one ICA participant (quoted below) described the ICA as a *“turning point”* as they subsequently went on to study and work on climate policy. Similarly, P3 reflected that *“it’s been a learning curve for me”* in terms of personal growth and efficacy. Likewise,

P9 noted how they are “*definitely better able to debate and I definitely feel more knowledgeable and more confident about speaking out and saying my opinion*”. Moreover, they believed they were now even capable of entering mainstream politics (as illustrated by the below quote). However, such comments also highlight Abelson et al.’s (2003, 246-7) warning that (C)CA participants “may lose their lay perspective and their views may become more closely aligned with those of the ‘professionals’” (Abelson et al. 2003, 246-7).

“I absolutely learnt more, I was very heedless before. Why would I care, it didn't really affect me! I'm a lot more mindful now” (P4)

“It really made me think I'd like to run for {office}. You kind of get to the point where you see you could make policy decisions, and could argue with the best of them. It would make better citizens of us all” (P9)
“the {ICA} was a real turning point for me” (ICA participant⁸⁶)

⁸⁶ [Citizens' Climate \(Citizen's Assembly on Climate Change\) EE17 EP5 - YouTube](#)

5 ANALYSIS PART 2 – “OUTPUT LEGITIMACY”: EXPLORING THE PCCA’S RESPONSE TO THE ICA

The preceding analysis section outlined a clear desire amongst ICA participants, organisers and contributors (e.g., expert advisors and speakers) – in addition to environmental observers – for some form follow-up to, or at least consideration of, the ICA’s recommendations. However, as noted within the introduction (**Section 1.3**) and literature (**Section 2.4 and 2.5 respectively**), (C)CA processes are seldom subject to adequate follow-up; thus, the Irish and particular ICA case is indeed rare in terms of discernible policy outputs (2021). Indeed, MacKenzie (2023, 24) propounds that CAs may *only* be “considered legitimate when they are situated in, or integrated with, other institutions that are authorised and accountable to the publics they serve”. Herein, with regard to the ICA, the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action – referred to within this research as the “Parliamentary Committee on Climate Action (PCCA)”⁸⁷ – was established in July 2018 by parliamentary motion eight months after the completion of the ICA (i.e. Nov 2017). The PCCA was tasked with considering the ICA’s 13 proposals – outlined in the “Third Report and Recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly” (ICA 2018a) – with reference to the National Mitigation Plan (NMP) and draft National Climate and Energy Plan (NECP). Moreover, the terms of reference also importantly stated that the committee representatives should respond to recommendations “while taking the National Development Plan (NDP) into consideration” (PCCA report 2019, 89) – an important national-strategy document setting out medium to long-term infrastructural spending priorities.

Notably, the responsibility for responding to ICA recommendations lay with the PCCA (reporting to the Parliament), not specifically the government. A cynical viewpoint may suggest this design choice may have been envisaged to intentionally distance the government from potentially unpopular suggestions and allow political pushback from Government politicians (rather than the responsible Minister directly). However, a more positive interpretation may suggest it was intended to foster broad political consensus regarding the future of climate action, similar to the seminal Sláintecare report, which was established to achieve cross-party consensus on the long-term vision for health care in Ireland⁸⁸. Herein, the PCCA consisted of elected representatives (ERs) from all political parties and non-party “independents” with representation from both the lower house (Dáil Éireann) and upper house (Seanad Éireann) of the Irish Parliament (the “Houses of the Oireachtas”⁸⁹). However, it is necessary to illuminate the prevailing Irish political climate during

⁸⁷ For the purpose of ease for non-Irish readers, especially given the strong international interest in the ICA

⁸⁸ [Committee on the Future of Healthcare \(32nd Dáil\) – 32nd Dáil, 25th Seanad – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

⁸⁹ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/>

the PCCA – which undoubtedly influenced proceedings and the subsequent response to the ICA. Specifically, the Fine Gael-led Government consisted of a rare “minority coalition” with several independent (i.e. non-party) TDs (MPs) and a “confidence and supply” agreement with the largest opposition party Fianna Fáil. As Little (2017, 487) notes, this was mooted as the start of a “new politics” in Ireland, one of “negotiation and compromise in parliament to ensure stability and legislative productivity”; however, the author notes how “the durability of these arrangements {was} in doubt” from the very outset. Nonetheless, the parliamentary arithmetic meant that during this rare political moment of the 32nd Dáil (i.e. Parliament), non-Government parties and independent groupings had substantially more representation and thus influence on parliamentary committees in a country which “has always been among the most executive-dominated parliamentary democracies” in the world (Little 2017, 487; also see MacCarthaigh 2005; 45–51; Martin and Vanberg 2011, 40–42). In short, the PCCA composition was arguably more conducive to robust deliberation and “across the aisle” political compromise than the status quo of government-led committees’.

“It will now be a matter for the Oireachtas, in the first instance, to consider how it will take forward consideration of the Assembly's report. The government will study the report and recommendations and will provide its response in the context of the agreed mechanism in the Oireachtas for further consideration of the report.” (Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications⁹⁰ - June 2018)

Overall, the PCCA's deliberations lasted some seven months, culminating in the publication of the “Report of the Joint Committee on Climate Action Climate Change {i.e. PCCA}: A Cross-Party Consensus for Action”. As Harris (2021, 681) outlines, the PCCA “was structured according to the {ICA’s} recommendations...(and) the Committee invited evidence from the Chair of the CA and its Secretariat, the Minister with responsibility for climate action, eight Secretaries General and key stakeholders namely, employers’ organisations, trade unions, and farmers’ organisations”. Moreover, like the ICA before, the PCCA also included a public submission process (a regular feature of all “Oireachtas” committees) and “received 107 submissions from 78 different bodies that included Government departments, individuals and organisations” (Ibid). In sum, the PCCA “cross-party” report, in response to the ICA’s, proposed 42 priority recommendations and 39 ancillary ones in total. However, as will be discussed (in **Section 5.2**), the claimed all-party “consensus” was not in fact achieved, with the main opposition party (outside the “confidence and supply” agreement) Sinn Féin and smaller left-wing party (i.e., People Before Profit) issuing their own respective “minority” reports, primarily in response to the contentious carbon tax issue.

⁹⁰ Written response to Parliamentary Question seeking update on response to ICA recommendations: <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2018-06-12/1021/>

According to Harris (2021, 682), the PCCA report is broadly “structured according to the {ICA’s} recommendations, each receiving a *considered response*” (emphasis added). Moreover, Dr Diarmuid Torney (2019⁹¹) – a member of the EAG and co-author of the Irish Environmental Protection Agencies evaluation into the ICA⁹² – argued that the report is “detailed, ambitious and far-reaching, and provides a roadmap for climate policy and governance”. Furthermore, Harris (2021, 682) – a member of the EAG on the more recent CA on Biodiversity⁹³ – argues that the PCCA report “heavily influenced the cross-government Climate Action Plan {CAP}, that was published in June 2019” and overall “did enjoy some success in influencing climate policy”. Indeed, the subsequent Government Climate Action Plans (2019; 2021) and seminal “Climate Bill”⁹⁴ putting Ireland on the path to net-zero emissions by 2050” each claimed they were “informed by, and strongly reflects the recommendations as set out {by the ICA} and {the PCCA} report.”⁹⁵. However, as previously discussed in the literature review, there is a need to critically assess this narrative of success, particularly given the “involved positions” and possible vested interests of those propagating it (see Courant 2021; Carolan 2015). Moreover, there is an obvious need to assess the institutional response to the ICA’s recommendations, which is questionable in some cases – as will be elucidated in **Section 5.1**. Moreover, as set out in the introduction, literature review and methodology sections, there is a theoretical and empirical need to shed light on the “considered response” of PCCA actors (i.e., ERs, advisors and other relevant stakeholders) and how their perceptions of the ICA process (i.e. input legitimacy) may have shaped their response – something which will be explored in **Section 5.2** with respect to two controversial carbon tax recommendations. Finally, to fully understand the interlinkages between input and output legitimacy (and the subsequent input legitimacy of future CAs or the deeper “institutionalisation” of deliberative processes), one must also assess the “elite” motivations for establishing the ICA in addition to any resulting “structural changes” (Jacquet and Van der Does 2021) evident within the Irish environmental policy domain – something which will be illuminated in **Section 5.3** of the following “output legitimacy” analysis chapter.

5.1 ASSESSING THE UPTAKE & INFLUENCE OF ICA RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter aims to identify to what extent the ICA recommendations translated into

⁹¹ [What's in Ireland's landmark climate change report? \(Rte.ie\)](https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2019/06/14/ica-report/)

⁹² [Research 314: Deepening Public Engagement on Climate Change: Lessons from the Citizens' Assembly | Environmental Protection Agency \(epa.ie\)](https://www.epa.ie/research/314/Deepening_Public_Engagement_on_Climate_Change_Lessons_from_the_Citizens'_Assembly/)

⁹³ [Clodagh Harris - Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss \(cyp-biodiversity.ie\)](https://www.cyp-biodiversity.ie/)

⁹⁴ The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill: [gov - Climate Action and Low Carbon Development \(Amendment\) Bill 2021 \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publications/2021-06-14-the-climate-action-and-low-carbon-development-amendment-bill-2021/)

⁹⁵ [gov - Climate Action and Low Carbon Development \(Amendment\) Bill 2021 \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publications/2021-06-14-the-climate-action-and-low-carbon-development-amendment-bill-2021/)

discernible policies, referred to as "policy congruence" by Jacquet and van der Does (2021, 470-471). Herein, the following analysis will map recommendations with observable policy consequences through "process tracing" (Pickering 2022; Beach & Pedersen, 2019). Given that the PCCA was specifically established to consider the recommendations of the ICA, the analysis will compare its proposals primarily with the final report of the PCCA: "*Climate Change: A Cross-Party Consensus for Action*" (PCCA Report 2019)". Additionally, it will also examine the thirteen ICA recommendations in the context of the Irish Government's 2019 Climate Action Plan² (**hereon CAP 2019**); 2021³ Climate Action Plan 2021 (**hereon CAP 2021**); and the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 (**hereon CALCDA 2021**) respectively. These respective policy documents and seminal legislation have been chosen given their prominence (in setting national climate policy) and proximity to the ICA (with the PCCA report informing both national climate action plans and the subsequent Climate Action Act). For example, the CAP 2019 noted that:

"The {ICA} identified a clear roadmap for climate action in Ireland, and the follow-up {PCCA} report, adopted with cross-party consensus, has identified the policy tools and options which can be used to make progress. This plan will ensure that these recommendations are operationalised and supported" (CAP 2019, 135)

In short, in following Font et al. (2018, 615) and Vrydagh and Caluwaerts (2020), the following analysis will examine whether there was *no uptake, partial uptake or full uptake* of specific ICA recommendations by the PCCA, in addition to subsequent national-level policy documents (CAPs) and legislation (CALCDA). However, as previously noted in the literature review, there are obvious limitations herein. Firstly, recommendations may be little more than "abstract values", and consequently, identifying a clear set of recommendations is not always possible (Jacquet and van der Does 2021, 475-476). Secondly, as Jacquet and van der Does (2021, 475-476) propound, "observing congruence between recommendations and subsequent decisions does not imply that the {(C)CA} was the determining factor in the adoption of the respective decisions...(nor) tell us what the exact role of the minipublic is in the policymaking process". Hence, in addition to illuminating *what happened* in terms of policy congruence, the following chapter will also utilise an adapted SIM framework analysis (**outlined in Section 3.2.4**) to determine the actual *influence* of the ICA in inducing the (partial) uptake of proposals. As outlined, the decision has been taken not to aggregate policy adoption as a measure of overall "influence", given that some recommendations are indeed more influential than others.

"Not all assemblies are equal, you can't just add up the percentage of recommendations accepted as some are more influential than others" (DE2)

Recommendation 1:

Recommendation 1 (Rec.1 – see Appendix A) arguably had the potential to profoundly

change the environmental policy domain if enacted by greatly enhancing the power of the expert Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC). Although the commitment to “*ensure climate change is at the centre of policymaking in Ireland*” could be considered rather abstract, this was concretised by the subsequent call for a “*new or existing independent body...(with) new functions and powers in legislation to urgently address climate change*”, with noted qualifications (see annex⁴). Specifically, qualification i. (i.e., regarding climate proofing of legislation) and qualification ii. (i.e., “*to propose ambitious 5-year national and sectoral targets for emissions reductions to be implemented by the State, with regular review and reporting cycles*”) are of particular relevance as they recommend the power to evoke both immediate and long-term structural changes within the policy domain⁵. Herein, the PCCA report concurred that “*there is a need for a new governance model, that puts coordinated climate action at the centre of Government policymaking and expenditure, underpinned by a clear statutory framework*” (PCCA report 2019, 8-9). Moreover, as part of this “*new governance model*”, it explicitly stated that:

“(a)n independent external expert body, the Climate Action Council, will have enhanced powers, functions and resources, and will supersede the existing Climate Change Advisory Council. This body will, amongst other things, devise and recommend five-yearly carbon budgets and monitor the progress of the State in reducing GHG emissions” (PCCA report 2019, 9).

Likewise, there was a strong congruence between Rec. 1 and the CAP (2019), while CAP (2021), acknowledged how the seminal Climate Bill (2021) gave effective statutory footing to Rec. 1. For example, it stated:

“Reflecting the central priority that climate change will have in our political and administrative systems into the future, this Plan sets out a series of new governance arrangements that will be put in place, including carbon proofing of our policies, the establishment of carbon budgets with clear sectoral targets, a strengthened Climate Change Advisory Council, and greater accountability of Ministerial performance to the Oireachtas”. (CAP 2019, 17)

“...significant strengthening of the governance structure to support ambitious climate action, underpinned by the enactment of the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021.” (CAP 2021, 35)

“Strengthens the role of the Climate Change Advisory Council, tasking it with proposing carbon budgets to the Minister” (extract from the Climate Action Act 2021⁶)

In short, the PCCA and subsequent CAPs strongly endorsed the ICA proposals to enhance the powers of an expert climate body. However, one important caveat was the strong pushback by the PCCA (to be explored in detail in **Section 5.2**) against the ICA proposal to allow a new Climate Advisory Body to “*pursue the State in legal proceedings to ensure that the State lives up to its legal obligations relating to climate change*”. Nevertheless, the PCCA also built upon the ICA recommendations by proposing a new standing parliamentary committee on climate action, a measure subsequently agreed in the PfG.

SIM Analysis:

In terms of the influence of Rec. 1, as discussed, the reference to "*an existing independent body*" pertains to the pre-existing Climate Advisory Council, as noted by the ICA Chair (and outlined in **Part 1** of the analysis). Hence, a "***continuous influence***" was evident herein. Moreover, regarding qualifications i) and ii) pertaining to legislative functions to mainstream climate action and accompanying national targets, the 2017 National Mitigation Plan (2017, 149) – released prior to the ICA – cites the need to "*develop proposals for identifying, monitoring and reporting of climate-related expenditure through the Exchequer*". However, the ICA and PCCA undoubtedly had an "***enriching influence***" herein, with the PCCA (2019, 8) call for the "*setting of legally binding GHG emissions targets for mitigation*", with legislation subsequently enacted on a legally binding national emissions target⁹⁶ and sectoral emissions⁹⁷. However, the controversial recommendation to give a Climate Advisory body the power to sue the State (i.e., Qualification iii) was widely rejected by the PCCA, and thus had **no influence**.

Table 10: Recommendation 1 Summary

Recommendation (Components)	Uptake?	Influence?
Overall – " <i>new or existing body</i> "	<i>Uptake</i>	<i>Continuous influence</i>
Qualification i) & ii) – <i>mainstreaming legislation & targets</i>	<i>Uptake</i>	<i>Enriching Influence</i>
Qualification iii) giving " <i>body</i> " power to sue State	<i>Rejected</i>	<i>No Influence</i>

Recommendation 2:

Similarly, Rec. 2 begins with an abstract value which few could disagree with (not surprisingly, 100% of ICA members voted for it). Specifically, it called for the State to take a "leadership role" as already implied within the ICA's framing title (i.e. "*How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change*"). In terms of congruence, the word "leadership" is referenced 18 times within the PCCA report while acknowledging that it was "*clear that citizens were cognisant not just of the challenges but also the opportunities that climate leadership may entail*" (PCCA report 2019, 21). Moreover, the subsequent CAP (2019, 37) explicitly states that "*the aim of the Climate Action Plan is to make Ireland a leader in responding to climate disruption*". However, as will be discussed in **Section 5.2**, how much of this rhetoric was political "virtue signalling" (A3, ER2), particularly in response to the threat of the Green Party, remains to be seen.

Additionally, other concrete measures referenced within the specific ICA recommendation – such as the issue of "retrofitting" – featured prominently within the PCCA's debates, with a call to carry out "*a needs assessment in order to determine the requirements for the delivery of the Government's target*

⁹⁶ [gov - Government publishes new climate law which commits Ireland to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/government-published/2020-03-26-government-publishes-new-climate-law-which-commits-ireland-to-net-zero-carbon-emissions-by-2050/)

⁹⁷ [Ireland's Energy Targets | SEAI](https://www.seai.ie/2020/03/26/irelands-energy-targets/)

of retrofitting 45,000 homes per annum from 2021 and explore increasing it incrementally to 75,000 homes” (PCCA report 2019, 86). Numerous interviews (e.g., A3, A4) remarked how the retrofitting target was a source of significant background negotiations between advisors, with some seeking a more ambitious target (A4), while others cited the need for deliverable targets in the context of labour shortages etc. and other constraints (A3). Nonetheless, the push for a reformed model of delivery and comprise call for an incremental increase of the target towards 75,000 appeared to have had some impact given the subsequent commitment in the CAP 2019, something which was further built upon within the CAP 2021:

*“We committed to 45,000 energy efficiency retrofits per annum from 2021....This Plan has stepped that target up to 50,000 and we have committed to design **a new delivery model** for retrofitting, which will examine grouping large numbers of houses together to achieve economies of scale, leveraging smart finance, and ensuring easy pay-back methods” (CAP 2019, 79).*

In short, this relatively uncontroversial and abstract recommendation was primarily accepted by the PCCA, with ample room left for political contestation over specific details, such as in the case of retrofitting targets.

SIM Analysis:

Rec. 2 clearly represented only a “**continuous influence**” of existing political rhetoric (i.e., “leadership”) and general policy measures (i.e., retrofitting). For instance, the Programme for Government (PfG 2016, 121-122) – which sets out the legislative and policy priorities of the given government as agreed by coalition parties – noted how the “*first National Mitigation Plan will be published within 6 months of the new Government forming and will focus on four key sectors: Electricity Generation; Built Environment; Transport; Agriculture*”. Therein, the role of specific policies, such as retrofitting and other such measures noted in Rec 2., were also cited. Hence, Rec. 2 could not be described as exerting any new or innovative influence.

Table 11: Recommendation 2 Summary

Recommendation	Uptake	Influence
Recommendation 2	Uptake	Continuous Influence

Recommendation 3:

Rec. 3 was perhaps the most controversial of the ICA’s proposals, both with regard to citizens deliberations and subsequent political debate. Indeed, the issue led to a withdrawal of support for the cross-party “consensus” report by the largest opposition party and smaller left-wing party (as will be discussed extensively in **Section 5.2**). Nonetheless, the report noted that:

“That the Minister for Finance should set out a carbon price trajectory that rises to €80 per tonne by 2030, and

this should only be implemented when an evidenced-based plan is in place to increase supports and incentives for climate action measures, including the protection of those vulnerable to fuel poverty” (PCCA report 2019, 112).

The latter qualification concurs with "Qualification ii" of Rec. 3, which states that “*an increase in the taxation does not have to be paid by the poorest households (the 400,000 households currently in receipt of fuel allowance)*”. Indeed, as previously discussed (see **Section 4.2**), this call came directly from the citizen members of ICA in response to a “prominent experts” proposal for CT increases (as will be discussed in the following **Section 5.2**). However, the PCCA ultimately did not deliver a consensus position on this, as they noted various Government Departments (i.e., Finance, Public Expenditure, and Climate) “*failed to produce a policy paper on the results of the public consultation and the fuel poverty review as recommended by the Committee*”⁷. Nonetheless, the then-Irish Prime Minister (PM)⁹⁸ subsequently declared that CT revenues would indeed be ringfenced for climate action and to help the poor deal with higher fuel costs⁸.

However, the subsequent political “*institutionalisation*” (A4) of an annual CT increase – which was put forward by the Chair of the Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC), Prof John Fitzgerald, in his presentation to the ICA and previously recommended in the CCAC’s 2018 annual report¹⁰ – in national Budgets ultimately appears to have prioritised technocratic advice over the public will (as will be further explored in the following **Section 5.2**). In short, despite notable political and public opposition (for example, with opinion polls showing 82% against CT increases in 2021, even prior to the 2022 cost-of-living crisis¹¹), “*new legislation {was} put in place giving greater clarity and transparency on CT rates to 2030*” according to CAP 2021. In short, the government “*legislated for increasing the rate of {CT} that applies in Ireland on a phased basis to €100 per tonne by 2030*”. This not only surpassed the initial €80 per tonne recommendation of the ICA and PCCA but also “baked-in” automatic annual increases, leaving current and future governments little discretion (or at least significantly increased political and legislative difficulty) to adjust the policy direction according to given demands (e.g., energy inflation). Notably, this goes against one of the core tenets of deliberative democracy as defined by Gutmann and Thompson (2004, 7), namely, that decisions should be “open to challenge in the future”. Moreover, arguably, this shows the danger of “de-politicising” such technocratically endorsed policies, as CT – which effectively acts as a “price signal” – has continued to rise despite near record energy inflation (i.e., price signal), with its technocratic proponents still wedded to the policy¹². In short, there is a clear congruence between the ICA Rec. 3 and subsequent policy and legislative proposals enacted by consecutive governments.

“And the way in which we've institutionalised it {i.e. CT} to have an annual increase automatically, that was for

⁹⁸ Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar

political convenience, because it's so damn hard to get this thing passed, that if you had to vote on every budget, it would just become a punching bag. So by legislating for automatic increases, you have a kind of a ratchet effect, but then it takes a bit of the heat out politically. The disadvantage is it becomes unnuanced. So if the market price is already fluctuating, such as now, you're locked in by legislation, and I'm not sure if the legislation allows the break, but I think they probably have to legislate at the budget to have a break. And then it gets messy again" (A4)

Sim Analysis:

Overall, the CT proposal was a continuation of the pre-existing CT legislation and policy position, which was introduced in 2009 (Budget 2010) and saw subsequent adaptations and increases in 2013 and 2014, respectively⁹⁹. Moreover, the NMP (2017, 148) also called for an “*examination of impact of carbon tax and future tax rate*”. However, herein, the ICA seemingly had an **enriching influence** as the two qualifications (Qualification ii & iii) were taken up by the PCCA and ultimately added specifics to the NMP's vague reference regarding the “impact” and “future”. More significantly, Qualification i. arguably caused a **shifting influence** as key Government decision-makers moved away from a favoured carbon cheque model to supporting a ringfencing model as proposed by the ICA recommendation. Herein, the ICA succeeded in “in fundamentally changing the decision-makers' preferences” (Vrydagh and Caluwaerts 2023, 123) as the then Irish PM – in addition to the Green Party, senior civil servants at the Dept. of Finance and experts at the leading Irish economic think-tank (i.e., ERSI) – initially favoured a “carbon dividend cheque” model. Not surprisingly, Vrydagh and Caluwaerts (2023, 127) describe this as “the rarest type of influence”. Indeed, it also proved the case within the ICA, as citizens first needed to alter the initial CT recommendation drafted by the EAG (see **Section 4.3**) and then A4 remarked how this debate for ringfencing was “*hard-won*” within the PCCA. Notably, the PCCA report also called for a public consultation on the matter, which subsequently found that “*the predominant view...is that the additional CT revenues should be ringfenced for the purposes of enhancing the current...grant scheme for household energy efficiency improvements...and to fund sustainable transport infrastructure*” (Tax Strategy Group 2020, 30⁹), with overwhelming opposition against the revenues being added to the central fund. This trajectory has since been concretised within the CAP 2021 and also during previous national budget cycles. Specifically, the latter policy document notes that:

“The Government has sought to ensure that revenue from increases in the carbon tax will be ringfenced to protect those who are most exposed to higher fuel and energy costs, to provide support for displaced workers, and to invest in new climate actions. We have also committed to use approximately one-third of all additional carbon tax revenues over the next decade on targeted measures to ensure that the carbon tax increases are progressive...{which has informed} our decisions in Budgets 2021 and 2022 to provide a targeted package of social protection supports that offset impacts on lower-income households”. (CAP 2021, 46)

⁹⁹ [2024-02-29 carbon-tax-series-part-1-of-3-what-is-the-carbon-tax_en.pdf \(oireachtas.ie\)](#)

Table 12: Recommendation 3 Summary

Recommendation (Components)	Uptake?	Influence?
<i>Overall</i>	<i>Uptake</i>	<i>Continuous</i>
<i>Qualification 2 & 3</i>	<i>Uptake</i>	<i>Enriching</i>
<i>Qualification 1</i>	<i>Uptake</i>	<i>Shifting influence</i>

Recommendation 4:

Regarding Rec. 4, this predominantly focused on climate adaption, rather than mitigation. As Shaw et al. (2021, 1) note, CCAs thus far have “almost exclusively” prioritised mitigation measures over adaption measures. However, despite its noted importance, the PCCA did not see fit to prioritise the issue and cited “time constraints”, again illustrating how adaption is neglected. This may have also been influenced by the term of reference of the PCCA, which specifically called for the consideration of ICA recommendations in the context of Ireland “National Mitigation Plan”, but not its “National Adaption Plan” (NAP):

“Because of time constraints, the Committee was not in a position to examine adaptation measures to the required level of detail and therefore, the extent to which such measures are sufficiently comprehensive, and the financial measures needed to address critical infrastructure in particular will be a matter for the Standing Committee on Climate Action”. (PCCA report 2019, 38).

Similarly, the CAP 2019 failed to reference Rec 4 (i.e. critical infrastructure), which highlights how the chain between ICA recommendations and Government Action Plans can be broken (in comparison to previous recommendations noted in the PCCA report and subsequently referenced in Climate Action Plans). Herein, as A4 noted, “text matters”, and the failure to flesh out Rec 4 within the PCCA may have limited its subsequent influence and policy path dependencies. Moreover, the NAP – including an assessment of critical infrastructure – was already published in 2018 and approved by the government in 2019, highlighting the importance of timing regarding CCA recommendations. Although the ICA, PCCA and consequent public attention on climate change may have hastened the government's approval of the plan, these proposals were already set in motion. Hence, it arguably highlights the problem of engaging citizens too late in the policy cycle, with Langkjær and Smith (2023, 9) noting how “timing proved critical in terms of embedding assembly {CCA} recommendations within the administration processes”.

“There are very few people {i.e. civil servants} who work on specialised policy matters {within Government Department’s}. So, they're not holding a vast amount of knowledge. So text matters. They will have key texts, including the {PCCA} report and the {ICA} report, which they will read and they will draw on and but at the same time when the government responds to something. So in a way, the climate action strategy {i.e. CAP} is a response to the PCCA report and citizens report. ‘And here's what we're going to do’, and it kind of draws a line under it” (A4)

Sim Analysis:

This was arguably an important and innovative adaption proposal by the ICA, however, no reference to an assessment of critical infrastructure was evident in prior national policy or political documents; hence, the recommendation was both rejected and had no influence.

Table 13: Recommendation 4 Summary

Recommendation (Component)	Uptake?	Influence
Recommendation 4	Rejected	Innovative but No Influence

Recommendation 5:

Rec. 5 regarding the issue of microgeneration was also endorsed by the PCCA (2019, 54), which agreed that the sale of surpluses “*should be set to at least the wholesale point price*”. Moreover, it is a clear example of where the parliamentary system balanced out some of the oversights of the ICA, particularly relating to “fairness”. Specifically, while the PCCA (2019, 54-55) supported “*an appropriate tariff*”, it qualified this by adding that “*(t)he level of payment for microgeneration should be carefully examined as not everyone is able to be a prosumer*” so that “*vulnerable groups are not excluded from the energy transition*”. On this note, Shaw et al (2021, 4) note how “the absence of fairness as a frame in the {ICA} is notable, when one considers that fairness is a key consideration in public support for climate policies” (Sovacool et al., 2017; Moberg et al., 2018; Demski et al. 2015). Moreover, the authors cite how “the word fairness does not appear once in the 13 recommendations and consequently suggest “the framing of the remit does shape the way in which topics are chosen and deliberated, which in turn may shape the recommendations offered” – something explored in further depth within **Section 5.2**. Notwithstanding the issue of fairness, there was again a clear congruence between the ICA recommendation, the PCCA report and subsequent CAPs (2019; 2021), which concretised proposals on microgeneration and linked it to the wholesale price:

“We have established a pilot micro-generation grant scheme... which provides a grant of circa 30% of the installation costs for individual homes” (CAP 2019, 58)

“We will introduce a Microgeneration Support Scheme (MSS)...including an export payment for all micro- and small-scale generators that reflects the market value of their electricity to the grid, society and the environment” (CAP 2021, 99)

SIM Analysis:

Recommendation 5 arguably had an “**enriching influence**” according to the documental analysis undertaken as part of this research. Although it was not explicitly referenced by Government (2016-2020) parties involved in a “supply-and-confidence agreement”, numerous opposition parties – including Sinn Féin, the Green Party and Social Democrats – specifically

referenced plans to introduce microgeneration in their 2016 Electoral manifestos¹⁰⁰. Hence, the idea was not new or innovative, but already circulating broadly within the political and stakeholder (e.g. Friends of the Earth) domain. However, the enriching influence herein arguably came from the “consideration” of the recommendation by the PCCA, which provided the space for the existing proposal to further expand (in terms of detail, application, political support etc.).

Table 14: Recommendation 5 Summary

Recommendation (Component)	Uptake?	Influence
Rec 5	Uptake	Enriching Influence

Recommendation 6:

Rec. 6 regarding “community ownership” again highlights the perceptible lack of citizen control over recommendations and the subsequent inability to make “radical” recommendations (Courant 2022). For instance, regarding the issue of community ownership, the ICA report (2018a, 30) notes how: “A number of suggestions were received from Members about the wording of this question in the draft Ballot Paper, expressing a view that all future renewable energy projects should be publicly State-owned, in light of concerns about Ireland's energy security into the future and a desire to retain ownership of our renewable energy assets. The Chairperson explained that this could involve complex areas of EU law including issues such as state aid rules. As the Members had not covered either the factual ramifications of such a proposal or its legal implications, it was deemed inappropriate that the Assembly should vote on this” (ICA report 2018a, 30). However, the Chair of the ICA was subsequently questioned on this issue within the PCCA by Deputy Paul Murphy, who robustly asked:

“Why did Ms Justice Laffoy feel that the wording of the question that was being suggested should be changed in light of EU rules? Is it not the case that many of the recommendations in this report would involve changes in domestic law?... Surely it was up to the {ICA} to make recommendations. If that means certain laws need to be changed, so be it. If a majority of the members of the assembly felt that there should be public ownership of all future renewable energy projects, they should have had a chance to vote for that.”

In response, the ICA Chair noted that “(o)viously, the {ICA} cannot change it (i.e. EU law), just as it cannot change the law in Ireland” and questioned whether the final recommendation “is below the level at which the Deputy would like to see it”. In response, the Deputy noted, “Is it possible that it is below the level at which the assembly members wanted to see it? That is the important question”. This raises a significant issue regarding the scope of assemblies and the power of citizen members to challenge the existing

¹⁰⁰ [Election 2016 Climate Manifesto Analysis \(caraaugustenberg.com\)](http://caraaugustenberg.com)

status quo. As Duvic-Paoli (2022, 258) notes, “citizens have to work within existing legal frameworks – relative to local, EU and international levels – which they do not have the power to change in the context of the assembly”. However, she continues that various CCAs “have responded differently to this difficulty”, with the ICA rejecting recommendations that did not fall within state competencies (i.e. citing EU State aid rules, as in the case of State ownership), while in contrast, the French Climate Assembly (i.e. Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat) “made proposals to guide the national government on how it *should* position itself in decision-making processes at local and supranational levels” (emphasis added). Herein, the restrictive “top-down” ICA approach arguably “closed down” (Sterling 2008¹³; Blue 2015; van Beek et al. 2024) the creative capacity of citizens, with one Assembly member citing:

“There wasn't that holistic looking at the system that would contribute to the climate crisis. It looked just at different sectors. [...] There was just a very narrow lens, and there wasn't room for creativity, innovation or radical alternatives” (interview 11, Assembly Member in van Beek et al. 2024, 9).

Indeed, it appears the ICA Chair, in acting as the “honest broker” (van Beek et al. 2024, 13), may have undermined “citizens' creative capacity to identify policy options”. Specifically, van Beek et. al (2024, 13) note how “experts’ framing can foreclose more ‘radical’ ideas and policy options, and citizens are susceptible to forceful communication of policy options by individual experts, especially if the setting and staging emphasises unequal power balances”. Herein, the Chair – a Judge and lawyer by trade – could be considered an “expert” and arguably a power imbalance was evident in line with the prior authors' description of the “honest broker”. Overall, the evidence supports Blue's (2015, 155) assertions that CCAs can both “close-down” as well as “open-up” alternative policy options, which conforms with Wong's (2016) idea of “eco-filtering” of green inputs. Moreover, the evidence also supports Font et al.'s (2018) hypothesis that the involvement of a higher authority – in this case, EU law – may influence the likely acceptance of a proposal.

Nonetheless, the PCCA report (2018, 61) acknowledged the importance of “community ownership”, again with arguably a greater emphasis on fairness. Specifically, it recommended that “(t)he Department should put measures in place to ensure that ‘community ownership’ benefits all members of communities in equal measure and not just those in a financial position to engage with renewable energy projects”. Moreover, elected representatives and their advisors were able to advance the issue of “State ownership” which was rebuffed within the ICA, as the report requested that the PCCA (2018, 58) “look into the various aspects of having interconnectors in State ownership” as part of its future work. This again highlights the importance of the representative system in “opening” back-up mini-public recommendations which may have been subject to elite capture and/or excessive eco-filtering.

Nevertheless, both the 2019 and 2021 CAPs note commitments regarding community

ownership, which are referenced within the context of the Government's Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). For example, the latter document specifically notes that it *"will further strengthen the community energy framework, including consideration of community-benefit funds and community ownership provisions in the RESS"* (CAP 2021, 99). Indeed, these have since been actioned, however, an independent assessment of Ireland's provisions by the "European federation of citizen energy cooperatives" shows that the country is still lacking when it comes to "(a)ccessibility to low-income & vulnerable households"; "fair, proportionate, and transparent registration & licensing procedures" and "non-discriminatory treatment as market participant", thus concluding that "Ireland's community energy sector is still in its early stages of development"¹⁴⁹.

Sim Analysis:

Given the stated imposition on citizens' control (by the Chair, organisers and EAG) with respect to excluding a reference to "State" ownership within the recommendation, the proposal, unfortunately, could not be deemed "innovative" but merely a continuation of existing political and policy pledges. Specifically, the PfG (2016, 125) noted, *"it is also important that there is community participation in renewable energy and energy efficiency projects as it is in both the national and local interest"*. Likewise, the subsequent NMP (2017, 140) called for *"approaches to community participation in renewable energy projects to be finalised"*.

Table 15: Recommendation 6 Summary

Recommendation	Uptake?	Influence
Recommendation 6	<i>Uptake</i>	<i>Continuous</i>

Recommendation 7:

With regard to the ICA Rec. 7 on the ending of peat subsidies, the PCCA (2019, 59) responded: *"that using peat for electricity generation should be stopped **at the earliest opportunity (emphasis added)**"*. Importantly, they added the caveat that this should be *"consistent with the planned Just Transition"*. There are two points to note here. Firstly, the PCCA evidently watered down and nuanced the 5-year phase-out deadline (supported by only 61% of ICA members) when using the phrase "earliest opportunity" and failed to support the re-direction of existing peat subsidies towards peatland restoration. However, this ties into the second point regarding a "just transition". Although the terminology was not explicitly referenced within the recommendations, the ICA did call for resources to instead be spent *"on...making proper provision for the protection of the rights of the workers"*. The PCCA (2019, 17) subsequently fleshed out and enhanced this and, in doing so, recognised the importance of *"engaging with communities and developing new employment opportunities and re-skilling workers to enable a smooth transition with broad community buy-in and local benefits"*. Indeed, the PCCA report highlighted that although speed was important, a climate transition could not be

achieved at the expense of local communities. Arguably, the ICA lacked such nuance given the under-representation of affected communities (e.g. rural constituents) and its failure to explicitly include the issue of "fairness" within its framing (Shaw et al. 2021, 4). Nonetheless, the issue of "just transition" featured prominently within the PCCA report, as noted by A2 and ER7:

"On just transition it (the PCCA report) definitely had an impact. It certainly had an impact in terms of that discussion, it made it a big issue in the politicians' minds that climate wasn't the enemy...so climate {measures} wasn't taking away peoples' (peat workers) jobs, but there is actually a better way to do this, and the report was quite good in allowing those discussions to happen. A more reactive "climate policy is bad" approach was avoided because of the {PCCA}" (A2)

"there was a broad sense {that} a just transition needed to be embodied within the {PCCA} report" (ER7)

Consequently, the proceeding CAP (2019, 136) called for "embedding the concept of just transition in policy instruments" and noted the establishment of a "Just Transition Review Group", following on from the PCCA's call for a "Just Transition Taskforce". Notably, the issue of "fairness" – specifically "ensuring fairness to all and supporting a just transition" – was cited as the first "key principle" which guided the most recent CAP 2021 (pg. 129). Hence, the just transition concept has clearly become embedded within the policy domain (Jacquet and Van der Does 2021), with ICA recommendations regarding the ringfencing of CT revenues (Rec. 3), community ownership (Rec. 6) and a just transition for peat workers (Rec. 7) echoing this approach¹⁰¹.

Although no specific reference to "peat subsidies" could be found within the respective Government CAPs, (2019; 2021), Toner (2019) notes that "by the end of 2019, the Irish government will eliminate all of the roughly €100 million in annual industry subsidies it now pays for peat-generated electricity¹⁵". Moreover, the CAP (2019, 56) noted a target to "(d)eliver an early and complete phase-out of...peat-fired electricity generation", while the 2021 CAP restates this target. Furthermore, the OECD Inventory of Support Measures for Fossil Fuels notes that "(s)upport to peat-fired power plants was discontinued as from 2020 in line with Ireland's commitment to phase out peat electricity generation by 2028". Hence, it appears that the policy direction broadly conformed with the ICA recommendation.

Finally, regarding the issue of peatland restoration, the PCCA (2019, 79) recommended

¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, it appears the ICA may have missed a trick concerning the failure to deliberate upon the banning of peat, as O'Connor (2022) notes how "(t)he so-called 'turf wars' has been one of the most contentious topics in Irish politics of 2022". Specifically, she notes how "the ban, which will come into effect on 31 October 2022, is viewed as controversial for two primary reasons: because turf-cutters fear losing their 'way of life' and energy 'independence'; and because peat is often the cheapest fuel in rural Ireland for heating homes" (particularly amongst vulnerable groups). In short, a more balanced assembly representation may have conceivably brought this issue to light at an early stage and proposed recommendations which could have prevented the later polarisation and politicisation of the issue.

that the “*Climate Action Council together with the National Parks and Wildlife Service develop a verifiable pathway for the rehabilitation and restoration of various peatland types in line with the overall national targets set out...to achieve net sequestration from peatlands nationally by 2050*”. Moreover, the CAP (2021 52) subsequently referenced peatland restoration “*through funding various programmes*”¹⁰². However, it is unclear how ambitious such proposals are within the context of the ICA and PCCA recommendations and it seems thus far, little progress has been made, with the European Commission referring Ireland to the EU Court of Justice in 2024 for failure to adequately protect its peatlands.¹⁰³

Sim Analysis:

Policy and political discussions on ending traditional peat extraction have been ongoing for decades. For example, in 1997 – 20 years before the ICA – “*the State took steps to end commercial extraction on raised bogs - paying compensation to companies which were required to cease operations....the hope was that domestic cutting could be phased out over that period*”. (National Peatlands Strategy 2015, 11¹⁰⁴). More recently, the PfG (2016, 126) recognised Bord na Móna's – the semi-state company harvesting peat – “*strategy of moving away from peat*”. Similarly, the NMP (2017, 150) called for a “*review of future of peat generation plants*”. Herein, the targeted ICA proposal can be seen as an **enriching influence** – through adding extra emphasis and attention on the issue. Likewise, the recommendation itself also allowed PCCA actors and stakeholders to enrich existing policy discourse by embedding the concept of a “just transition” (A4). Regarding peatland restoration, once again, the NPS strategy (2015, 33) noted “*the potential contribution of peatlands rehabilitation, restoration and enhancement to climate change mitigation and adaptation, in addition to peatland preservation, will be fully explored*”. However, the proposed redirection of peat subsidy expenditure “*on peat bog restoration*” was an innovative idea, but ultimately had **no influence**, with Ireland still seemingly lagging in this area.

Table 16: Recommendation 7 Summary

Recommendation (Components)	Uptake?	Influence
Overall (ending of peatland subsidies within 5 year)	Partial uptake (i.e., failure to accept timeline)	Continuous influence
Just Transition for peat workers	Uptake	Enriching influence
(Ringfencing for) Peatland Restoration	Rejected	No Influence

¹⁰² Bn'M Climate Action Scheme, the National Parks and Wildlife Service Peatlands Restoration Programme and supporting research and innovation

¹⁰³ [EU to take legal action against Ireland over peat protection failures | Irish Independent](#)

¹⁰⁴ [NationalPeatlandsStrategy2015EnglishVers.pdf \(npws.ie\)](#)

Recommendation 8:

Rec. 8 was the first of three explicit transport recommendations provided by the ICA. Herein, the PCCA (2019, 89) report generally concurred with the ICA recommendation to prioritise and greatly increase the number of bus lanes, cycling lanes and park and ride facilities. However, notably, the PCCA report (2019, 88) elucidated how such abstract values are nothing new, as it notes how “*solutions are available, many of which remain unimplemented parts of Government policy dating back to 2009*”. Indeed, this concurs with SE2 view of the specific recommendation when stating that:

“there is nothing there that people could disagree with...and a lot of the stuff in there is actual government policy to a certain extent. I know people from the Department (of Transport) were delighted with recommendations” (SE2).

The subsequent Government CAP largely restated these long-standing transport objectives, with CAP 2021 (pg. 148), for example, targeting “*an additional 500,000 daily public transport and active travel journeys*” by 2030. However, the above once again highlights the stated limitations of this research (i.e. in terms of assessing policy impact) and, indeed, the ICA process itself, as arguably vague policy aspirations – without specific binding targets – often fail to materialise into concrete policy action. For example, the 2022 Irish Census¹⁶ results showed that the number of people who drove to work increased by 4% to 1.2 million between 2016 and 2022; 4% fewer people commuted to work by train, light rail or tram; and there was only a marginal increase in people commuting by bus and cycling over the 5 years.

Sim Analysis:

This largely uncontroversial recommendation had been previously stated within prior national and regional policy documents (e.g. GDA¹⁰⁵ Transport Plans). The NMP (2017, 152) also referenced the need for “*investment in infrastructure and behavioural change interventions to encourage and support a shift to sustainable modes of transport.*” Herein, Recommendation 8 only had a **continuous influence** by reinforcing long-standing political commitments.

Table 17: Recommendation 8 Summary

Recommendation (Component)	Uptake?	Influence
Recommendation 8	Uptake	Continuous

Recommendation 9:

Immediate support for the transition to Electric Vehicles (EVs) was the primary focus of Rec. 9, which was subject to a number of qualifications (see **Appendix A**). Specifically, they called

¹⁰⁵ Greater Dublin Area

for “an expanded national network of charging points”, “additional incentives, particularly aimed at rural communities,” and to “progressively disincentives” the purchase of carbon-intensive vehicles. On the former point, the PCCA (2019, 94) heard evidence “about the need for investment in an extensive recharging network to encourage motorists to make ‘the switch’ as recommended by the {ICA}” and subsequently called on the relevant Department to “expedite the rollout of public charging points starting in 2019”. Subsequently, CAP (2019, 84) called for the development of “the EV charging network necessary to support the growth of EVs to at least 800,000 by 2030 and set a target for the supply of infrastructure to stay sufficiently ahead of demand”. Notably, it set a target of one million EVs by 2030, which would require 100,000 public charging points according to one analysis¹⁷. However, the following CAP (2021, 53) committed to delivering only “200 on-street public charge points” annually, far short of what is required. Indeed, that same year, then Tánaiste (i.e., Deputy PM) stated:

“It is a high target and to reach a million electric vehicles by 2030 is going to be something that’s difficult to achieve”¹⁸.

Herein, ER2 and A3, respectively, raise an important point (further illuminated in **Section 5.2**) regarding the politics versus practicalities of climate policy. For example, A3 noted how “there is all this discussion about what the targets should be, but no discussion of how the hell we’d achieve this, and how difficult implementation is. Most projects don’t scale up very well!”. Specifically, A3 described a process of “out-bidding each other on the basis of showing off” by some parties, elected representatives and “fundamentalist” advisors within the PCCA, something which was referred to as “virtue signalling” on climate. Similarly, ER2 remarked that the rise of the Green Party may be fuelling such “knee-jerk reactions”, ambitious rhetoric and lofty targets when stating that:

“I think sometimes there’s the need to virtue signal and have knee-jerk reactions. Because remember, the rise of the GP was everyone was looking at it. “Oh, my goodness, what do we do?” (ER2)

However, notably, as these pragmatists stated, less attention has been given to the detail of implementation. Indeed, the PCCA report notably failed to reference the issue of “additional incentives, particularly aimed at rural communities”. Additionally, while referencing the National Development Plans (NDPs) policy provision to put a “ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars after 2030”, the PCCA report did not expand on the issue of “progressive disincentives” (e.g., increased carbon-related motor tax), perhaps due to the controversy of such taxes, particularly on rural communities. This again highlights the propensity for politicians to cherry-pick and support uncontroversial proposals (e.g., more charging points) while neglecting to discuss more difficult topics (e.g. increased taxes) in line with Font et al.’s (2018) findings. Nevertheless, the CAP (2021, 79) cited a number of progressive actions taken in this regard, with “a generous regime of taxation incentives to promote the uptake of EVs” and “a CO₂ emissions-based VRT and motor tax regime for private motor cars that imposes a higher tax liability on vehicles with higher emissions”. Hence, there has been some

practical progress on this front that is in line with the ICA recommendation, in spite of somewhat unrealistic political targets.

SIM Analysis:

Regarding the overall thrust of Rec. 9 (i.e., support transition to EVs), this goal was well-established within the political and policy domains. Specifically, the PfG (2016, 127) stated the then government's ambition for "*Ireland to become a leader in the take-up of EVs*" while numerous opposition parties also made strong commitments with regard to supporting EVs in their respective 2016 manifestos¹⁰⁶. Similarly, the NMP (2017, 152) sought to "*maintain a grant scheme for EVs*". Hence, Rec. 9 can be seen as only exerting a **continuous influence** on an existing consensus regarding the need to expand EVs. Moreover, regarding the specific actions proposed within Rec 9, references to i) expanding the network of charging points was also previously promised by Fianna Fail (a key partner in the minority Government's "supply-and-confidence" agreement) and the Green Party. Thus, it can be confidently argued that the proposal was already circulating in the policy domain prior to the ICA and thus, the specific recommendation only served as a "**continuous influence**". In contrast, the innovative proposal for targeted incentives for rural communities – pushed by rural citizens within the ICA – was ultimately ignored and had **no influence**. Likewise, the call for iii) "progressive disincentives" was again innovative (i.e. not previously suggested in party manifestos or PfG) but was ultimately rejected and had **no influence**. However, such disincentives were ultimately introduced – which perhaps illustrates that political parties may be unwilling to publicly support difficult policy recommendations from (C)CA's even if policymakers subsequently introduce these measures at a later date.

Table 18: Recommendation 9 Summary

Recommendation (Components)	Uptake?	Influence
<i>Overall (support for transition)</i>	<i>Uptake</i>	<i>Continuous</i>
<i>i) Expand charging points</i>	<i>Uptake</i>	<i>Continuous</i>
<i>ii) Targeted supports for rural communities</i>	<i>Rejected</i>	<i>Innovative but No influence</i>
<i>iii) Progressive Disincentives</i>	<i>Rejected</i>	<i>Innovative but No Influence (although ultimately introduced)</i>

Recommendation 10:

With regard to the ICA's call for a 2:1 spending ratio in favour of public transport over

¹⁰⁶ [Logistics and Transport Aspects of General Election Manifestos 2016.pdf \(cilt.ie\)](#)

roads, the PCCA report (2019, 90) noted that “*such a ratio is not tailored to adequately guide all transport investment, given that investment in a road can incorporate bus lanes, cycle lanes and footpaths*” and consequently called for a further “*examination*” of this issue. Similarly, the largest opposition party in their minority report univocally stated that “*we do not endorse an arbitrary 2:1 ratio of Public Transport to Road investment as proposed in Recommendation 10 as such metrics fail to allow Government to respond to the most pressing priority year on year*” (SF 2018, 45). This also highlights the importance – as highlighted in the Gutmann and Thompson (2004, 7) definition of deliberative democracy – that such decisions should be “open to challenge in the future”. Moreover, a vote called by Green Party Leader, Deputy Eamon Ryan, on support for the 2:1 ratio lost by 16 votes to 4, highlighting the strong opposition to the policy within the PCCA, while a similar Parliamentary “Private Members” Motion put forward by the Green Party was also lost on this issue.¹⁹ Again, this arguably illuminates how the majority of PCCA members could easily support “abstract values” (as noted by their support for Rec. 8), but were far less likely to commit to concrete targets or timelines. On the other hand, it perhaps also highlights that such assemblies are not best placed to provide such concrete proposals due to their lack of technical knowledge (as noted by A4 and others), lack of awareness regarding overarching policy complexities (ER3) and lack of broader legitimacy. Yet somewhat surprisingly, this proposal appeared to have been drafted by the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) according to the ICA report (2018, 39), with only very minor changes proposed by citizens. This arguably also illustrates the limitations of a narrow “eco-technocratic” viewpoint which perhaps neglects the broader socio-economic concerns and political considerations. Nonetheless, despite not appearing in the CAP 2019 or 2021, respectively, this recommendation appeared to have a significant policy consequence. Specifically, as outlined below, the Green Party used this recommendation and the stated 2:1 ratio as a key plank in their government negotiation talks after the 2020 Irish General Election.

Sim Analysis:

While the innovative ICA policy proposal re. 2:1 public transport infrastructure over new road spending was ultimately rejected by the PCCA, the fact it was endorsed by a prominent committee member, namely the Green Party Leader (Eamon Ryan) – who subsequently enacted the policy when entering government as the Minister for Transport in 2020 – points to a “**innovating influence**” wherein it succeeded in “in bringing new ideas to the public policy” by recommending “a solution to a problem that was previously not on the agenda” (Vrydagh and Caluwaerts, 2023, 123). Specifically, the 2020 Programme for Government “*committed to a 2:1 ratio of expenditure between new public transport infrastructure and new roads over its lifetime*” (PfG 2020, 14). More importantly, the revised 2021-2030 National Development Plan (NDP 2021, 65) stated that “*(t)hat*

prioritisation will be in line with the 2:1 Programme for Government commitment on new public transport and new roads²⁰. This highlights how (C)CA's and their recommendations can be used by "policy entrepreneurs" (Kingsdon 1984, 21) to make lasting structural changes to the policy domain even if the official responding body initially rejects such proposals. Yet, as previously discussed, such ambitious targets often fail to translate into policy action despite lofty political rhetoric. For example, Deputy Eamon Ryan, speaking about the 2:1 ratio shift in his capacity as Minister for Transport in 2022 (five years after the ICA and two years after the PfG commitment) remarked:

"I'll be honest, we've been very slow in delivering that" (Minister for Transport, Deputy Eamon Ryan on 2:1 ratio)²¹

Table 19: Recommendation 10 Summary

Recommendation (Responses)	Uptake?	Influence
<i>Response by PCCA</i>	<i>Rejected</i>	<i>Innovative but No Influence</i>
<i>National Politics & Policy</i>	<i>Uptake (by subsequent Minister for Transport post-2020)</i>	<i>Innovative Influence (PfG; National Development Plan).</i>

Recommendation 11:

A tax on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture (described herein as a carbon tax on agricultural emissions, hereon **CTAE**) was the primary subject of Rec. 11. The recommendation, along with Rec. 3 on carbon taxation (CT), proved extremely controversial within the committee and will be discussed extensively in the following **Section 5.2**. In short, the specific CTAE proposal was rejected by the PCCA and consequently was not referenced within subsequent Government CAPs (2019; 2021). However, the proposal also stated that there "*should be rewards for the farmer for land management that sequesters carbon*", something which was notably augmented by the PCCA.

Firstly, the PCCA report (2019, 63) acknowledged that "*Ireland has a large agricultural sector relative to the overall economy with agricultural emissions accounting for a disproportionately large portion (32.3%) of our total national emissions, which is projected to increase*". Consequently, the report expressed "*an urgent need to reduce GHG emissions in agriculture*". However, in comparison to the somewhat punitive ICA recommendation which lacked a frame of "fairness" (Shaw et al. 2021), it stressed the need to "*simultaneously improve farm incomes to ensure the delivery of sustainable livelihoods across Ireland and a healthy natural environment*" in line with a just transition (as earlier discussed with respect to other PCCA proposal responses). The report subsequently fleshed out and built upon a number of "*funding support mechanisms to lower agricultural sector GHG emissions*" (PCCA 2019, 65), drawing on a fuller range of perspectives than ICA members (as shall be discussed in the following chapter). For example, the report discusses in detail the "*(m)itigation potential in agricultural practices identified by Teagasc*", the state agency providing research, advisory and education on agriculture etc. Interestingly, the ICA

also received a presentation from Teagasc on these issues, yet they did not feature to the same extent as Prof. Alan Matthews's proposal for a CTAE. Indeed, a Teagasc expert – Mr Trevor Donnellan – who presented to the PCCA session on agriculture, stated:

“My colleague, Gary Lanigan, had the opportunity to address the {ICA} and will have provided some of the detail I have presented today in his presentation to the assembly. I am not sure it is fair to say that none of that information was available to the Citizens' Assembly” (Teagasc witness, PCCA session, Dec 2018)²².

Nevertheless, this again highlights the important “counterbalancing” role of the PCCA in both (re-) scrutinising proposals (wherein ICA members were not provided with counterevidence) and (re-) opening proposals that were perhaps not given adequate consideration within the ICA (in this case, arguably due to under-representation of rural constituents and relevant experts, as shall be discussed in the following **Section 5.2**). Herein, building on the work of scholars (such as van Beek et al 2024; Blue 2015), this present research adds an important contribution to the field by highlighting how “the opening-up and closing-down of policy options and perspectives” may not only happen within the formal deliberative setting but also during prior consideration by responding bodies (in this case, the PCCA).

Sim Analysis

No political or national policy commitment for a CTAE could be found prior to the ICA. Hence, this was clearly an innovative solution – proposed predominantly by one expert – which was ultimately rejected and had **no influence**. However, relatively uncontroversial and long-standing proposals for additional support for farmers to assist in lowering GHG emissions within agriculture – which the PCCA supported – exerted a **continuous influence**.

Table 20: Recommendation 11 Summary

Recommendation (Component)	Uptake?	Influence
CTAE Proposal	Rejected	Innovative but No Influence
Supports for Farmers	Uptake	Continuous

Recommendation 12:

Food waste was the focus of Rec. 12, with ICA members calling for the State “to introduce a standard form of mandatory measurement and reporting of food waste at every level of the food distribution and supply chain”. Surprisingly, this received scant attention from the PCCA (2019, 77) – both in terms of the report and committee sessions – with “time constraints” cited. Interestingly, the two “minority reports” published by the leading opposition party (SF) and smaller left-wing party (PBP) also largely ignored the issue. Nevertheless, the proposal was “accepted in principle” as the PCCA called upon “the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in conjunction with relevant public bodies (to) examine the need for public information programmes on the climate and environmental impact of food choices and on the

elimination of food waste with a view to improving citizens' habits and consumption patterns". Although it called for findings to be presented by 31 December 2019, no such analysis could be found apart from an acknowledgement of the problem in the Department's subsequent address to the PCCA in Oct 2019:

"There are challenges around food waste, the EU has a requirement to reduce food waste per capita by 50% right throughout the food chain from harvest to consumer by 2030 (Department of Agriculture Official, PCCA, October 2019)".

The reference to the EU requirement to half food waste by 2030 may explain the lack of political deliberation surrounding this issue, as the EU had already dictated the national policy target – something which adds weight to Font et al's (2018) finding that the propensity for the uptake of proposals may be affected by the constraints of "higher authorities" beyond that of the receiving body. Nevertheless, the CAP (2019, 116) committed to compiling *"a strategy with the food sector and the food cloud to deliver our commitment to 50% reduction of food waste by 2030"*. Two years later, CAP (2021, 188) subsequently committed to developing *"a Food Waste Prevention Roadmap that sets out a series of actions to deliver the reductions necessary to halve our food waste by 2030 and promote our transition to a circular economy"*. Additionally, Ireland's "National Food Waste Prevention Roadmap 2023-2025" was published in Q4, 2022 and committed to *"review the effectiveness of the voluntary approach to food waste measurement and reporting to determine if there is a need to set mandatory requirements for measurement and reporting"* (NFWPR 2022, 8)²⁴.

In short, although there is some movement towards *"mandatory requirements for measurement and reporting"* in line with the ICA recommendation, it is beyond the limits of this research to determine whether this is merely correlation or causation. However, it could be reasonably argued that the ICA process added impetus to this policy direction, even if it was not the primary catalyst. Indeed, one wonders whether a stronger PCCA deliberation and recommendation on the issue would have participated in an earlier push towards mandatory reporting requirements – as opposed to a mere "review" which shall not be completed until 2025 – as Wells (2022, 123) notes how CCAs can prompt *"momentum for climate action which allows policymakers to introduce more drastic policies, as often seen in practice where stronger climate policies are announced following them"*.

Sim Analysis:

The policy and political analysis revealed scant prior attention to the issue of food waste in Ireland prior to the ICA, with only the Green Party committing to a "zero food waste policy" in their 2016 manifesto¹⁰⁷. Moreover, the ICA's "upstream" proposal for mandatory reporting was

¹⁰⁷ [Election 2016 Climate Manifesto Analysis \(caraugustenberg.com\)](https://caraugustenberg.com/)

ultimately watered down by the PCCA into support for a “downstream” public information campaign. Hence, although there was a partial uptake in principle, in reality, the innovative idea had little to no influence, with later policy moves on the issue most probably a response to EU requirements.

Table 21: Recommendation 12 Summary

Recommendation (Component)	Uptake?	Influence
Action on Food Waste (in principle)	Partial Up	Continuous
Mandatory Reporting	Rejected	Innovative but No Influence.

Recommendation 13:

The final full recommendation of the ICA called upon the State to “*review, and revise supports for land use diversification with attention to supports for planting forests and encouraging organic farming*”. Firstly, regarding the latter issue of “organic farming”, the PCCA report (2019, 69) stated, “*it was an issue that the {PCCA} did not consider to any degree*”, with no explanation noted. However, it stated that the State’s role in broadening opportunities for organic farming should be “*examined by the Standing Committee on Climate Action*”. This highlights the need for a transparent and accountable process to ensure that citizens’ proposals – such as organic farming and food waste (as earlier discussed) in the ICA case – are not simply ignored, with favourable or controversial issues cherry-picked or solely prioritised for discussion. As Wells (2022, 123) posits, “(e)nsuring that recommendations from a {CA} are incorporated into the policymaking processes in an appropriate and transparent manner is vital to ensure they are seen as legitimately integrating citizens’ views into policymaking”.

Regarding incentives for planting forests, this is a particularly important strategy given that “*afforestation is the single largest land-based climate change mitigation measure available to Ireland*” (CAP 2021, 173). Nevertheless, the issue is controversial due to competing concerns. Herein, the PCCA (2019, 72), in its deliberations, again added nuance to the ICA's proposal regarding “planting forests” when stating:

“The Committee, in accepting the recommendation of the {ICA}, was not in a position to examine afforestation in any level of adequate detail. Nonetheless {PCCA} notes general concerns regarding future afforestation policy and acknowledges the shortcomings of current and previous policies...the PCCA notes that there are problems with the planting, management, and clear-felling of these Sitka spruce plantations, including impacts on biodiversity and water quality. There is also a growing resistance in regions where there have been high planting rates, where it is considered to have negative impacts on communities”.

Overall, this highlights the weakness of the ICA's singular frame, which perceivably neglects other cross-cutting and equally important considerations (e.g., biodiversity and community impact). For example, the PCCA noted “*the need to balance afforestation with community development so as to address community resistance*” and to set targets for “*native trees*” and for “*diverse*” agro-forestry

projects. Similarly, the subsequent CAP (2019, 106) stated, "*we have reviewed the current afforestation programme to enhance participation rates, and inform land use policy to increase the benefits for climate, the environment, and rural communities*". Moreover, CAP (2021, 173) committed to "*afforest in pursuit of commercial, climate, water and biodiversity objectives, both through planting and natural regeneration*".

The above illustrates a number of other issues. Firstly, as previously discussed, the lack of an explicit "fairness" frame and under-representation of rural communities arguably may have contributed to a lack of nuance regarding deliberations on "planting forests" within the ICA. Secondly, as Duvic-Paoli, (2022, 245-246) has noted, "because {CCA's} mandate has so far concentrated on reducing emissions, assemblies focus on climate mitigation, with little attention given to adaptation". Furthermore, she notes how "{ICA} members in Ireland... gave little attention to how their recommendations related to each other and did not reflect on whether their combination could have unintended negative consequence". Indeed, one manages what they measure, and the singular focus on climate change mitigation may have been at the detriment of equally important issues such as biodiversity, as noted by A3 and A4:

*"Biodiversity isn't in the (ICA) recommendations – that's missing. I think climate change and biodiversity, both are equally massive threats. So if we are not worried about biodiversity, we could, for example, grow a whole load of f**king spruce or fuel crops all over the country, and have pesticides on them, and therefore you don't get the biodiversity, you don't you lose all your insects – that's as big a treat as climate change. So you are dealing with climate change, but there is a massive cost in terms of biodiversity". (A3)*

"It should be climate change and biodiversity; they're both interrelated" (A4).

Sim Analysis:

Regarding the ICA's organic food proposal, a previous commitment had been made within the PfG (2016, 110) that "*the new Government will ensure this funding is fully committed to supporting growth in agriculture and sustainability of family farming through the rollout of schemes including...organic scheme*". Nevertheless, despite this, the ICA seemed to have **no influence** on further shaping the policy direction. In contrast, the ICA's afforestation arguably had an "**enriching influence**" building upon the NMP (2017, 158) commitment to review the "*current afforestation programme... consider participation rates, climate change, environmental impact, rural communities and land use policies*". However, rather than the ICA itself "enriching" the pre-existing policy proposal, the sub-recommendation again highlights the importance of the PCCA – and responding bodies more generally – in "opening" back-up issues and serving as an additional catalyst for influence therein. Specifically, the PCCA arguably played an essential role in mitigating the ICA's recommendations through scrutinising proposals, providing countervailing evidence and perspectives, while additionally providing nuance according to competing pluralistic values and policy concerns (in the case of afforestation, important biodiversity and community concerns were cited). In conclusion, the

above highlights how the tension and interlinkages between the ICA and PCCA conform to Gutmann and Thompson (2004, 7) description of deliberative democracy as “a form of government in which free and equal citizens (and their representatives), justify decisions in a process in which they give one another reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding in the present on all citizens *but open to challenge in the future*” (emphasis added).

Table 22: Recommendation 13 Summary

Recommendation (Component)	Uptake?	Influence
<i>Organic Food</i>	<i>Rejected</i>	<i>No Influence</i>
<i>Afforestation</i>	<i>Uptake</i>	<i>Enriching Influence (by PCCA)</i>

In sum, the above analysis illustrates that while most of the ICA’s recommendations were adopted to some degree (i.e. uptake or partial uptake), the majority of these only exerted a “continuous influence” and to a lesser extent, an “enriching influence” on pre-existing policy and/or political positions within the given domain (Vrydagh and Caluwaerts 2023, 119). This is an important finding given that Demski and Capstick (2022, 12) propound it “is problematic to view climate deliberation primarily as an exercise to provide public legitimacy for policies that are already on the political agenda”. Moreover, the empirical investigation revealed only one specific example of an “innovative influence” relating to the call for 2:1 spending on public transport over new road infrastructure (which was in fact initially rejected by the PCCA but subsequently adopted by an influential “policy entrepreneur”). Similarly, only one instance of a “shifting influence” could be found pertaining to the ICA’s (sub-)proposal for the ringfencing of CT revenues – something which will be further explored in the following section.

5.2 CONSIDERATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS - POLITICAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE ICA

“Well, basically, I think that a lot of the evidence about carbon tax being an effective tool to reduce emissions wasn't really presented in a proper way”. (ER1)

“Well, I think it wasn't reflective of wider Irish society. I think there was an under-representation of farmers. Now you're going to say, ‘Well, yeah, that's your unconscious bias’. Now, there probably is some! But no, genuinely. I think it was genuinely under-representative of those people. And they think that too!” (ER2).

The above quotes by two elected representatives (ERs) from opposing sides of the political spectrum criticising the ICA process pertaining to two separate – but ultimately similar – carbon tax recommendations perhaps best surmises how PCCA actors (specifically ERs, their advisors

{A}, civil servants and stakeholder groups) were often highly critical of the ICA's process quality. The quotes also highlight how perceived failings with regard to the ICA's representational balance, framing and utilisation of expertise (as explored in **Analysis Part 1**) also emerged during PCCA actors' *considerations* (Jacquet and Van der Does 2021) of two controversial recommendations: i. **Rec. 3's** proposed annual increase of carbon taxation (**hereon CT**) and ii. and **Rec. 11's** proposal for a carbon tax on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture (**hereon CTAE**), which are both outlined in full within **Appendix A**. In short, (some) parties on the "left" led what could be termed a "populist" opposition against the imposition of CT increases, while predominantly government (supporting) parties and independents with a rural base rallied against the CTAE. The acknowledged potential for "*unconscious bias*" by ER2 alludes to the possibility of "selective listening" (Font et al. 2018) on behalf of PCCA members who may have simply rejected proposals which did not conform with their given political and/or policy stance. For example, ER1 rather conveniently stated that "*the citizens were, again, way ahead of the politicians. It's just this **one** issue of carbon tax*" (**emphasis added**). This comment also aptly illustrates Hendriks and Lees-Marshment's (2019, 608-609) concept of 'participatory dissonance' within the Irish CA case; specifically, the authors note how there is often a "notable discrepancy between the forms of public input that leaders *identify as ideal* (e.g. structured group-based participatory forums) and the *forms they find valuable* in political practice (e.g. informal interactions with individual citizens), and suggest "that this apparent 'participatory dissonance' represents a pragmatic response by leaders to deliberative...failings", with the twin challenges of limited representativeness and potential bias noted therein.

Herein, with regard to ER2's criticism pertaining to the (apparent) "*under-representation of farmers*" and their own possible "*unconscious bias*", Rountree and Curato (2023, 80) posit that "it will not always be clear whether genuine concern or strategic interest leads groups to criticise assembly processes". Nonetheless, the potential for "strategic interests" and "cherry-picking" of recommendations should not invalidate or discount elected representatives and their advisors' "process" critiques regarding the ICA, especially given Font et al.'s (2018, 630) finding that the (perceived) "quality of participation" influences the subsequent rate of proposal adoption by responding (local) authorities. Moreover, as more recent scholars have noted, the perceptions of political sponsors, their advisors and other (climate) policy actors (e.g. civil servants and stakeholders) is crucial for deliberative scholars and practitioners to understand, especially given that most recent CAs are "top-down" and "elite-driven" initiatives (Lafont 2023), with Courant (2022, 163) for instance critically noting that "(t)heir creation and impact, or lack thereof, are (thus) determined by their sponsor". Hence, it is essential to explore how the PCCA actors perceived the ICA process and how this in turn, may have influenced their "*consideration*" (Jacquet and van der

Does's 2021) of recommendations (while the following analysis chapter – **Section 5.2** – will explore the overall and specific motivations behind the use of such {C}CAs). The following sections will, therefore analyse the PCCA actors' perceptions of the ICA's shortcomings predominantly through the lens of two respective carbon tax recommendations (CT and CTAE), which have been selected given their prominence within committee debates (derived from observational and transcript data) and in-depth interviews with elected representatives and advisors attached to the PCCA. Additionally, the controversial proposals also serve as a litmus test of the ICA's capacity to illicit support for difficult decisions and secure buy-in for (contentious) climate action – one of the main claims of deliberative proponents (e.g. Devaney et al. 2020; Lenzi 2019). The analysis – following on from the research focus on the ICA's inputs, outputs and their interlinkages – will firstly assess how these respective proposals were presented to assembly members in order to contextualise critiques and illuminate interlinkages between the two processes (i.e., the ICA and PCCA respectively). It will then subsequently explore the perception of the ICA amongst PCCA actors through the prism of the aforementioned recommendations.

5.2.1 ICA Process-Issues

As previously discussed, 80% of the ICA members stated they would be willing to pay higher taxes on carbon-intensive activities (i.e., CT), the lowest supported recommendation of the ICA. Notably, the proposal also changed significantly from its original drafting (by the EAG and the Secretariat), with substantial qualifications added by citizens to ensure a ringfencing of CT revenues for climate mitigation and the protection of low-income households (**see Section 5.1 and Appendix A for details**). Regarding the emergence of the CT issue, both primary observational and official ICA data revealed that the proposal was strongly and repeatedly stressed by a prominent Irish economist, the then Chair of the Climate Change Advisory Council (**CCAC**), during his presentation¹⁰⁸ to the ICA and within his accompanying paper¹⁰⁹. Indeed, direct observation of archival footage revealed that substantial time and space was devoted to this recommendation. Additionally, despite stated citizens' concerns – such as the “*disproportionate effect on people in rural areas who rely on their cars and have no alternative forms of transport available to them*” (*Response 17 ICA Report 2018, B8*) – no opposing counter-expert viewpoint was provided to ICA members on what has been a contentious policy issue. Indeed, this is somewhat surprising given the acknowledged capacity for “carbon taxes to provoke much more public opposition than other climate policies” (Levi, 2021), with Umit and Schaffer (2020) study of European Social Survey data,

¹⁰⁸ [Prof. John Fitzgerald, Chair of the Climate Change Advisory Council - Citizens' Assembly - YouTube](#)

¹⁰⁹ John-Fitzgerald-Paper.pdf (citizensassembly.ie)

for example, concluding that there is limited public support for CT in most of the 23 countries analysed.

Nevertheless, potential obstacles to implementing proposed CT increases were largely presented as behavioural rather than broader structural problems within the ICA. For instance, the stated senior expert's paper cites an example wherein "*a commuter may not be able to reduce the amount of fuel they use in the short term if there are no public transport options available*" (Fitzgerald 2017, 4). However, rather than noting the obvious structural issues that may need to be addressed at the macro-level (e.g., provision of public transport), the author purports that "*if they are confident that the {CT} will be maintained or increased in the long term, they may decide to purchase a more fuel-efficient or a low emission vehicle to reduce their transport costs*" (Ibid)⁶. Furthermore, during his presentation, the same public academic noted that "*we need the revenue to compensate the people who are very badly affected by climate change*" while omitting that these may also be the same communities that will be most affected by the proposed carbon taxes (e.g., low-income households and rural communities) due to the regressive nature of the tax and unavailability of alternatives (e.g., public transport). Finally, the prominent speaker also remarked to ICA members during his presentation that "*we don't like paying taxes...{and CT revenues} can be used to reduce other taxes which are damaging to employment, we could actually be better off*"¹⁰. This could be deemed as quite a populist and ideologically driven statement, particularly given that CT is broadly recognised as a "regressive" tax – particularly in high-income and unequal countries (Andersson and Atkinson 2020) – and the fact that Ireland has the most progressive employment tax system in the OECD¹¹. Moreover, the framing of CT as intrinsically "good" and "other taxes" as seemingly "bad" could be considered problematic and certainly not ideologically impartial, in contrast to the more "honest broker" approach of other ICA contributors (van Beek et al. 2024).

Accordingly, the analysis strongly suggests that the notable public economist's presentation on CT conformed with Wong's (2016, 146) conception of an "eco-technocratic" approach⁷. In short, this is one which "eco-filters" inputs (i.e., only green) into the decision-making process while also prioritising a narrow "cost-benefit analysis" in response to climate action proposals. Consequently, Wong purports that such a technocratic frame may overlook "the importance of other values and principles in assessing decision alternatives". As aforementioned, although the ICA members were able to amend the CT recommendation to ringfence revenues to support climate action and cushion low-income groups (ICA 2018a, 24), it nevertheless appears that the

¹¹⁰ Prof. John Fitzgerald, Chair of the CCAC, evidence to the ICA, 5 November 2017: [Prof. John Fitzgerald, Chair of the Climate Change Advisory Council - Citizens' Assembly - YouTube](#)

¹¹¹ <https://www.oecd.org/gov/gov-at-a-glance-2021-ireland.pdf>

lack of opposing contributor viewpoints may have curtailed citizens' ability to fully deliberate on the CT proposal and adequately interrogate the given evidence. Nonetheless, citizens repeatedly raised concerns. For example, the below remark by the "Citizen on Table 3" pertaining to "*Official Ireland*" (i.e., a term used widely to denote "the establishment") suggests some ICA members perceived this measure as a top-down and punitive dictate, while Citizen Response 17 highlighted the noted lack of alternatives and disproportionate impact CT increases would inevitably have on rural dwellers, with Ireland having one of the most rural populations in the EU⁸. Moreover, another ICA participant questioned whether additional tax revenue would be adequately utilised – perhaps underscoring the ICA members' strong desire for ringfencing CT revenue (in spite of the expert and Government consensus against such hypothecation).

"Listening to your presentation and some of the official presentations we got, there seems to be a sense of amazement from 'Official Ireland' that people aren't buying into climate change and all that goes with it. But yet all that you seem to suggest as a remedy to the problem is CT and more tax, and that's turning people off?"

(Citizen on Table 3 response to Prof. Fitzgerald during ICA Q&A session)⁹

"To be honest, I think the government don't handle tax that well as they are, so giving them more money, you wonder is it going to make it any more efficient" (ICA participant¹¹²)

"I believe we have to minimise any increases in CT on fuel as it could have a disproportionate effect on people in rural areas who rely on their cars and have no alternative forms of transport available to them, it could also cause inflation if increases were significant" (Response 17, Feedback Form, ICA Report {2017, B8}¹⁰)

Moving to the CTAE recommendation (i.e. Rec. 11), according to the ICA report (2018, 40), the proposal that there "*should be a tax on...emissions from agriculture....did not appear in the original draft of the Ballot Paper*". Instead, the report suggests that the controversial CTAE proposal was introduced "*specifically following on from the presentation from {Prof.} Matthews*". This finding conforms with the empirical evidence of van Beek et al. (2024) and Muradova et al. (2021,1323), with the latter authors propounding that "it is surprising that no one has analysed why these specific recommendations were forwarded to the government and how expert information played a role in these processes". Herein, the stated expert presented a paper which argued that "*(c)limate leadership should start by sending a signal to farmers...that in planning on what to produce and how much, they must take their greenhouse gas emissions into account*" (Matthew 2017, 429). Likewise, it also claimed that a CTAE would serve as "*an incentive to farmers and to research institutes to improve efficiencies*" without adequately contextualising the current structural constraints faced by such farmers (who are indeed not one homogenous grouping¹¹³). Indeed, Prof. Matthews acknowledged the ambition of his proposed

¹¹² [Citizens' Climate \(Citizen's Assembly on Climate Change\) EE17 EP5 - YouTube](#)

¹¹³ Note evidence by Teagasc (the State Agricultural Agency) to the PCCA, for example: "We are telling farmers who are not making very much money but are farming at low intensity that they need to intensify their production and become more profitable and similarly we are telling farmers who are quite profitable that they are not doing enough in terms of consideration for the environment. Perhaps we should consider that both groups are delivering on two

policy and its potential feasibility when admitting that “no country in the world has yet adopted the steps that I am advocating”. Moreover, any potential disadvantages proffered – such as the issue of “carbon leakage”¹¹⁴ – were couched within the context of the need for Ireland to become a “climate leader” as an overarching goal, which again underlines the narrow technocratic framing of the ICA (with the apparent exclusion of values such as fairness and a just transition). In sum, limited attention was given to the negative drawbacks such policies may have on farmers, rural communities and the broader citizenry (e.g., food prices and general economic prosperity).

“It would be part of Ireland’s bid for climate leadership to investigate and research how these problems could be addressed... the role of leadership is to point the way, knowing that other countries will be willing and able to follow” (Matthews 2017, 6).

Thus, likewise to the CT issue, the CTAE proposal arguably represented another “eco-technocratic” approach which neglected “pluralistic values” and instead sought to impose top-down economic “incentives” to induce behavioural change (Wong 2016). Moreover, the pre-determined framing of “climate leadership” and the lack of alternative viewpoints offered to assembly members also had implications with regard to citizens’ capacity to deliberate, challenge experts and shape recommendations effectively. For instance, no opposing speaker or “regular farmer” – as noted by ICA participant (P8) – was invited to present evidence to the ICA. This process failure was even acknowledged by the ICA Chairperson when stating, “(i)n truth, if we had time we could have had more information on the agricultural sphere and, in particular, on how various parts of the sector are and would be affected” (ICA Chairperson, Justice Laffoy, evidence to PCCA, September 2018¹¹⁵). Not surprisingly, many of the ICA members interviewed from rural communities felt the evidence was “anti-farming” (P7), that they were “demonised” (P11), and it was “a vote against farming” (P8) whose “delegates” (Parkinson 2003) were “in the minority” (P8). In contrast, other ICA members stated that “farmers have to get in line, {they} really called the shots here for too long” (P9) – thus illuminating the stark division on such issues. In short, it appears the ICA procedural design may have exacerbated “the huge void between rural and urban in what could be done” (P7) not only within the ICA, but also within the subsequent PCCA process as shall be discussed. Importantly, the suggested importance of design in shaping potential (acceptance) of outcomes also contradicts the opinion of (EAG member) Torney (2021, 387), who evidently cites the CTAE recommendations as “the most significant exception” in terms of the adoption of ICA proposals. Specifically, the author points to “the limitations of focusing on the specific design characteristics of {CCAs} in

different objectives, both of which are important from the perspective of Irish agriculture” Joint Committee on Climate Action debate - Wednesday, 12 December 2018 (oireachtas.ie).

¹¹⁴ For instance, the prospect that any reduction Ireland may make in dairy or beef exports may be replaced by less environmentally friendly production (e.g. the importation of Brazilian beef)

¹¹⁵ [Joint Committee on Climate Action debate - Wednesday, 5 September 2018 \(oireachtas.ie\)](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/committees/joint-committee-on-climate-action/2018/09/05/)

order to understand their likely impact”; conversely, this section and overall study illuminates its crucial importance.

"It would be unfair to impose a tax before you give farmers a realistic, affordable alternative. Reduction of the National Herd...ignores the fact that if our beef stock is reduced to such an extent we will be importing beef from Brazil, the carbon footprint of that beef will be much higher, and we will have lost an integral part of our agricultural heritage for nothing. There was no recognition of farmers as a profession that protects the Irish environment...{CTAE} would just be costly admin – pointless unless the whole world is doing the same"

Response 35, ICA report 2018, B16-17)

"We had some people who wanted to get rid of animals altogether, to make some slaughterhouses and end dairy farming". (P7)

"We were in the minority...but I stuck to my guns and didn't change my mind". (P8)

Interestingly, this “minority” comment also alludes to the perceived representational bias against rural constituents within the ICA, something which may have skewed deliberations. Specifically, 10 counties (of 26) had no representation, while over a quarter of ICA members came from the capital (which may have been skewed further after replacements were added), with one interviewee remarking that they were “*mostly talking about Dublin*” (P1) during roundtable (i.e., deliberation) sessions. Moreover, P7 noted how their rural community “*went mad*” at the recommendations, with such hinterlands also disproportionately affected by the CT. Furthermore, the debate on a regressive CT tax may have also been affected by self-selection and socioeconomic class biases within the ICA (as discussed in **Analysis Part 1**). For example, P1 noted a “class divide” and stated, “*most people who did it were from a certain class, I suppose*” while adding that those working-class members present “*wouldn’t have the same confidence and there wasn’t many of them there*”. Hence, this perception of representational bias – in addition to the aforementioned issues with speaker selection, (indirect) agenda-setting and framing – clearly undermined the legitimacy of the ICA in the eyes of key cohorts whose “buy-in” is arguably required for effective policy implementation (e.g., rural and working-class constituencies). Additionally, these perceived ICA failings or intentional biases – with Lacelle-Webster and Warren (2023, 98¹¹⁶) importantly stating that (C)CAs could “also have limitations built into their design” – also raised significant doubts in the minds of PCCA actors, as shall be discussed in the following section.

5.2.2 Political Perceptions of ICA

In contrast to the arguably one-sided presentations provided on the controversial carbon tax proposals within the ICA, the respective issues were robustly deliberated and debated upon within the PCCA (particularly given the enhanced power of opposition parties during the 2016 - 2020 parliamentary term as previously discussed at the outset of **Analysis Part 2**). For example,

¹¹⁶ A problem-based approach to citizens’ assemblies

ER1 – concurring with the earlier cited comment of Respondent 17– remarked that “*the idea that you change people's behaviour simply by penalising them, rather than giving them an alternative was misleading in terms of the {CT} presentation*”. Likewise, A2 stated that trying to push CT given Ireland’s recent experience with water charges (for example, see Clinch and Pender 2019) was “*madness*” and lacked “*cultural context*”. Interestingly, criticism of the CT’s framing also came from those PCCA members who strongly supported the call for proposed CT increases – such as the Green Party (GP) Leader Eamon Ryan TD (i.e. MP). Specifically, the deputy criticised the Economic Social Research Institute’s (ERSI’s) focus on the CT during their evidence to the PCCA, arguing that it represented “*marginal change...{not} system change*” and “*isn’t going to win the public over to us*”¹¹⁷. Notably, the aforementioned prominent economist who presented the CT proposal to ICA members was also a Research Affiliate of the ERSI. Moreover, likewise, to the earlier cited comment from the citizen on ICA Table 3, A1 alluded to a “top-down” technocratic approach from “Official Ireland”:

“if you try to impose a CT on people who can't afford to heat their home, for example, or impose it on somebody who lives in rural Ireland, has no access to public transport, which penalises them because you're putting up the price of their diesel or whatever, then all you're doing is creating stealth taxes for people rather than reducing emissions” (ER1)

“Trying to implement {CT} after water charges, after austerity – absolute madness! Cultural context is extremely important. It’s a perfect example of where they just implemented something, took it top-down and said ‘this will work, and if they don’t implement their climate deniers’, rather than actually listening and discussing.” (A2)

Overall, this led to a robust debate within the PCCA on the CT issue, with expert witnesses invited by ERs to provide counterevidence on the effectiveness of the policy in different contexts – something which the ICA failed to do (see **Section 4.3** and **Section 5.2**). Herein, the PCCA debate appeared more deliberative and “pluralistic” than the ICA’s singular “eco-technocratic” approach. For example, ER1 explained how “*it has been a minority position to be opposed to CT, most particularly, you know, people who are around the environmental movement of the GP would ‘say, of course, you should tax carbon, of course’. And that the idea that it doesn't actually work hadn't been explored properly*”. Indeed, when speaking publicly on the assembly’s CT proposal, the prominent economist who proposed it stated that: “*Well, the first thing is to get the price right, and people don't like, they say all, ‘typical economists’, but we need a carbon tax*”¹¹⁸. In short, space was provided for both these opposing viewpoints with the PCCA. Moreover, not only were the merits of CT itself deliberated upon by the PCCA, but also its potential implementation, with ER7, for instance, recalling “*having arguments around the model, not so much about the principle of what a CT should be deployed*”. Specifically, as noted in **Section 5.1**, despite the clear desire among ICA members for a ringfencing of revenues, there was a strong push for a “carbon dividend cheque” model (i.e. *hypothecation*) from the main Government

¹¹⁷ Joint Committee on Climate Action díospóireacht - Wednesday, 5 September 2018 (oireachtas.ie)

¹¹⁸ [Citizens' Climate \(Citizen's Assembly on Climate Change\) EE17 EP5 - YouTube](#)

parties, senior civil servants and experts (e.g., both ICA and PCCA contributors), in addition to think-tanks like the ERSI. However, others, such as ER7, *"felt that, dare I say, from a class politics point of view, that ringfencing was a better way of ensuring that those (lower income) households who could benefit from the proceeds of a CT would benefit"*. Ultimately, A4 (in addition to ER7) noted how the argument for the ringfencing model – in support of the citizen-led ICA recommendation – was *"hard-won"* within the PCCA.

"...but I was very definite and strong on insisting that the PCCA need to look at the evidence from Canada, from scientists who carried out research and other areas where CT was implemented, but actually didn't have an impact on the reduction of emissions" (ER1)

"An hypothecated model, in my view, whether I'm right or wrong, would benefit those people living in South County Dublin {affluent urban area} and large houses who had the means to be able to pay their CT" (ER7)

However, it appears the debate ultimately became politicised and polarised, with A4 citing the CT issue as *"an example of a recommendation which is vulnerable to what has been affected by political opportunism"*. At the same time, ER7 concurred that *"people divided on party lines"*. Similarly, ER2 noted how they *"felt that the politics trumped the rationale to support it...so that's why {the main opposition party} didn't support it"*. Likewise, ER7 believed there was *"grandstanding"* from certain parties who had a politically calculated view on CT and *"ergo, you had the Minority reports"*. Herein, A3 also robustly challenged the merits of the evidence against CT provided by some expert witnesses invited to the PCCA by those opposed to the recommendation. Moreover, they recalled how *"(Prof.) John Fitzgerald {who presented at the ICA} said at one of our meetings that the only practical tool we know that works is a CT, and a lot more fundamentalist members of our committee were against it, even though it was the only tool we knew that worked"*. Nonetheless, the fact remains that counterevidence was provided to PCCA members which offered other *"pluralistic environmental values and opinions"* (Wong 2016) regarding the proposed increases to CT. Indeed, such (counter-)evidence raised in the PCCA echoed legitimate concerns that some ICA members also attempted to raise. In contrast, ER7 noted how the ICA process had only *"one expert"* on the issue of CT, something which they ultimately criticised. In short, ER7 believed that the ICA should have *"allowed academics in opposition to each other to be equally represented"* in order to fully explore the various trade-offs and allow for effective critique of expertise, something which may have alleviated the subsequent polarisation of the issue within the PCCA:

"...because you had one expert {presenting on the CT issue in the ICA}. Well, that's flawed. I certainly would have benefited from a greater degree or a greater amount of time given to explore all of that to the enth degree, so that you allow for the space for somebody to ask the stupid question. And our own committee {i.e., the PCCA}, we demanded that, we wanted to hear from more people, that's a better system that makes for more informed decision" (ER7).

“As a cross-party forum deliberating on transformative change of grave importance, it was initially anticipated that consensus might be attainable across all issues. However, as the work progressed, a number of divergent views emerged...It is the issue of imposing an increased CT that has led to the greatest divergence between SF members on the Committee and others. SF is clear and unambiguous on the issue of increases in CT – we are absolutely opposed to them” (Sinn Féin minority report 2019, 3-4)

“(The ICA) did contain a recommendation on CT but was careful to make clear that it should not be a tax which was regressive or hit those unable to shoulder the burden. Tellingly, while the {ICA was} used to justify the Committee’s support for its version of a CT, other recommendations such as {CTAE}...were quietly ignored by the majority. (PBP minority report 2019, 5):

The final quote from the PBP minority report also alludes to push-back against the CTAE recommendation by the majority of the PCCA. For instance, some of those interviewed (e.g. ER2, ER3, ER7) shared the concerns of rural ICA members’ regarding (perceived) representational, expert and framing biases. Firstly, the “huge void” between city and country dwellers noted by ICA members (e.g., P7, P8) was also cited by PCCA actors and subsequently manifested within the committee itself. For example, with regard to the representational balance of the ICA, ER3 stated that: *“I think with a CA, there's a number of things you need to be very, very cognizant of, what's the makeup of that assembly to get fairness and balance and fair representation. Because if you go on demographically on the numbers, you just get more of the city people, or if you go on the area land or the consistencies you may have more of a balance with rural voices”*. Similarly, ER2 remarked that they thought *“there was an-under representation of farmers...and they think that too”*. Moreover, it appears that this city-country divide also played out within the PCCA, with ER3 noting how the *“tension was always there between rural and urban”* representatives. For example, ER3 depicted a PCCA wherein *“you had the Dublin socialists, they just wanted to stop farmers, because they were dirty, grubby people, they didn't really understand what relevance they had. And then you had the rural TDs {i.e. MPs}, which were obviously very strong...farmer base, you know, they would always speak up in support {of farmers/rural issues}”*. Consequently, they concluded that *“every conversation came back to ‘do you live in the city, or do you live in the country’”* – with the perceived bias of the ICA possibly further exacerbating (pre-existing) divisions within the PCCA¹¹⁹. Similarly, ER2 also noted how these divisions transpired as politicians played to the gallery:

“...because what you found was that the rural-based {politicians} were very much playing to the gallery. The city-based elected representatives were also playing to their gallery, and they weren't really concerned with farming and food because it wasn't their electoral base. So...people played very much to type” (ER2).

“One of the things I thought maybe was disappointing was the parochial nature of the politics...it's a national parliament, yet descended very much into the parochial - so people in the {PCCA} would make points about something which was very much a constituency issue, rather than the overarching National Strategic Plan” (ER3)

¹¹⁹ For example, PCCA actors were highly critical of the perceived bias from the very first committee session, wherein they raised both the under-representation of rural communities and the failure to invite farming stakeholders to address the assembly (see here: [Joint Committee on Climate Action debate - Wednesday, 5 September 2018 \(Oireachtas.ie\)](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action_debate/2018/09/05/))

Moreover, A3 believed that any nuanced discussions which did occur within the PCCA “*didn’t penetrate to the general public*” (as also noted in **Section 4.4** with respect to the public’s knowledge of the ICA), something which may have further exacerbated the politicisation of certain issues. For instance, A4 lamented the lack of factual media reporting on the PCCA deliberations, suggesting that: “*it’s because {the PCCA} just isn’t exciting in the same way that reporting of politics is extremely narrow*”. They continued that the media prefer “*the ‘bunfight’, it’s the smart remarks, when some politicians or experts are standing up in the {parliament} and saying outrageous things because they know they’ll be in the news. And they can certainly clip it and use it on social media, even if the traditional media doesn’t use it. So that makes a farce of things. Whereas it’s tedious, hard work to produce an actual report of the affairs of state decisions*”. Likewise, ER2 concurred with this caricature of the political system and the failure to communicate substantive debate within the PCCA when stating that “*unfortunately, when on camera and recorded, people very much played to type*”. Similarly, A3 argued that behind the scenes, the PCCA “*was driven by the extremists*” and “*fundamentalist*” climate advisors who were unwilling to compromise. They also added that: “*People could call their experts, the fundamentalists would call their experts, but people who were middle of the road, they were ambivalent*”. However, interestingly, ER2 noted that the closed PCCA sessions were much more deliberative and consensual in nature, suggesting that certain politicians/groupings were forced to publicly defend their constituent/stakeholders’ interests even if privately conscious of the bigger picture. Herein, one can only hypothesise that the PCCA’s public discourse may have been more constructive and deliberative if the ICA’s own proceedings were (perceived to be) more representative, balanced, and nuanced regarding the different (legitimate) concerns at stake.

“as I said, where I thought they got around that was when they were in private sessions, then people were much more liberty to speak, speak freely and comfortably, where they were maybe more sensitivity of decisions to be made, and could say things that maybe they didn’t want to hit the front page of the {newspaper}, so that that certainly was a better place. But obviously, in the interest of transparency and FOI {freedom of information}, people have access to those public {PCCA} sessions, but there’s no question that in the private sessions, sometimes there were conversations that were more informative and fed into the process much better” (ER2).

“The ones (advisors) who were more prominent were the ones who were the more {climate} fundamentalist...there was one from Fine Gael (i.e. government, pro-farmer party), they were never invited along to those (sub-group) meetings. I didn’t get that (exclusion) probably because I kept my mouth shut because I wanted to keep in the loop – if I told them what I really thought, they would have excluded me, so I just kind of kept silent... I never showed my true colours, because I wanted to be on the inside” (A3)

Overall, with regard to the CTAE proposal, ER2 felt – like A3 above – that rather than seeking deliberative consensus on “*win-win solutions*” that would achieve the same results in terms of emission reductions, instead, farmers had “*fingers pointed at them*” and were “*treated as the villains of the piece*”. This echoed the aforementioned sentiments of rural ICA members P7 and P8, who felt “*demonised*” and that the assembly was “*anti-farming*”. For example, the fact that no “*regular*” farmer was invited to share their views within the ICA was repeatedly cited. Herein, ER7 alluded to this

inherent weakness of the ICA when stating that *"you can't have a just transition without farmers involvement, and they need to be part of that conversation and need to be key stakeholders in terms of driving that"*. Likewise, ER2 and the General Secretary of the Dept. of Agriculture – Mr. Brendan Gleeson – highlighted in their below quotes the danger of a narrative wherein a given community feels signalled out and the potential for “buy-in” is lost. Notably, the then Chair of the Committee on Agriculture, Pat Deering, also *“concur{ed} with the comments that the farming organisations and agriculture in general did not get a fair hearing in the ICA”*¹²⁰, with one prominent farming stakeholder describing the CTAE as the *“bluntest of instruments”*¹²¹ during a PCCA session. Indeed, such points echo ER1’s earlier criticism of *“penalising people”* with few alternatives (with regard to CT) and A1’s reference to the importance of *“cultural context”* (given the traditional importance of agriculture within Ireland).

“I remember telling them I said, ‘Look, you're not selling this (i.e. climate action), because what you're selling the minute to the farming industry, it's reduction, it's restriction, it's legislation. This is wrong because this is what you've got to go to farmers and say, 'Okay, we'll make you more efficient, and we make you more money, and you'll do less work'. That's a different proposition. But you get the same result” (ER2)

“The most effective way to persuade people to do things is to persuade them that it is in their own best interests, which is often their economic interest. It is a message that we have to get out there, and we must get better at doing this” (General Secretary Brendan Gleeson, Nov 2018³⁶).

“So the just transition has to involve the stakeholder which is the farmers. I didn't see the just transition {approach} as being contrary to farmers interests” (ER7)

With regards to PCCA actors’ perception of the use of experts and evidence within the ICA, interviewees such as A1 complained that the assembly was *“mainly expert-driven... (with) the same type of people”* selected as speakers. For example, the ICA also received a presentation from Teagasc on agricultural issues, yet they did not feature to the same extent as Prof. Alan Matthews’s proposal for a CTAE. Indeed, a Teagasc expert – Mr Trevor Donnellan – who presented to the PCCA session on agriculture stated: *“My colleague, Gary Lanigan, had the opportunity to address the {ICA} and will have provided some of the detail I have presented today in his presentation to the assembly. I am not sure it is fair to say that none of that information was available to the Citizens’ Assembly”* (Teagasc witness, PCCA session, Dec 2018)²². This again highlights the power imbalance within the ICA and the potential for excessive expert influence or capture by “advocates” (van Beek et al. 2024), particularly when counterevidence is not provided (as in the case of the CTAE recommendation). Specifically, van Beek et al. (2024, 9), with reference to the ICA, observed that *“although the expert witnesses tried to act as ‘honest brokers’ providing a range of policy options, they sometimes stepped out of this role and acted as ‘issue advocates’, strongly advocating for specific policy options (cf. Pielke,*

¹²⁰ https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action/2018-12-12/speech/189/

¹²¹ Joint Committee on Climate Action debate - Wednesday, 12 December 2018 (oireachtas.ie)

2007)". Indeed, in contrast to the CTAE presentation, it is clear that Teagasc acted as the "honest broker", as their representative Mr Donnellan remarked to the PCCA that:

"Our position is that we do not prescribe policies, we look for people to come to us with suggestions of policy because we do not want to be put into the position of being policy advocates".

In contrast, the ICA report (2018, 40) notes how the controversial CTAE proposal *"did not appear in the original draft of the Ballot Paper"* but instead *"was a new question, introduced in the revised draft...in response to Members deliberations...specifically following on from the presentation from (Prof.) Alan Matthews"*. Indeed, this finding concurs with van Beek et al. (2024, 9; also see Muradova et al. 2020) empirical findings that *"proposed policy options suggest that options that were either strongly advocated by experts...were likely to end up in citizens' recommendations"*. Similarly, the primary research conducted for this present analysis strongly conforms with van Beek's et al.'s empirical data that:

"[the recommendations] very much reflected the information that we had been told" (interview 11, ICA Member in van Beek et al. 2024, 9).

Similarly, ER1 suggested that the ICA was composed of *"mainstream 'ESRI heads' {referring to the prominent Irish think-tank, of which Prof. Fitzgerald, who presented the CT proposal, was a research affiliate} who are never really going to challenge the status quo"*. This view was shared by A2, who described chosen experts as *"a kind of an elite", "a clique"* and noted how the influential CCAC¹²² members were *"all economists and classical ones"*. Furthermore, A2 elaborated that *"with people {i.e., referring to experts involved in the EAG and CCAC} of that ilk...it's not really about climate action, really their neo-liberals"*. Such comments are notable given that *four* of the CCAC's then-eleven members presented at the ICA while one more served on the Expert Advisory Group (EAG), which played an influential role in agenda-setting, speaker selection and drafting the ICA's recommendations. Notably, PCCA actors also cited the potential danger of expert capture of deliberative processes, with A2 explicitly warning that *"you have to be very careful here that CAs aren't taken over by experts"*. Likewise, A3 also raised concerns regarding *"who picks the experts"*, while A1 similarly criticised the type of *"technocratic"* expert on the influential EAG. In short, their views echoed the concerns of ICA members, with P3 stating they'd *"have questions about the experts...like who are they, were they trying to promote their own thing, how are they appointed"*.

"There is a real sense in the mainstream climate movement that the public are populist, and that the public need to be taught and guided and the politicians need to be guided...and that's like a fundamental underlying tone, all of it, all the time. And for me, it's really problematic..." (A1)

¹²² Climate Change Advisory Committee

“Who picks the experts {i.e. within the ICA} – I don’t know, I don’t know, and that makes such a big difference” (A3)

“But even have a look at {a member of the EAG}, the type of experts {they} have coming into his classes – it like a little clique, a general clique. You kind of have mainstream environmental thinking– so kind of emissions trading, carbon taxation, very technocratic and so on”. (A2)

Overall, some actors, such as ER3, questioned the very legitimacy and quality of the ICA report itself (akin to the evidence outlined in **Section 4.4**). For instance, ER2 expressed being “shocked” by the contents of the ICA report and felt “it was a very simplistic approach to a very complex problem”. Similarly, A2 believed “there wasn’t an in-depth discussion” within the ICA and that an opportunity was not genuinely provided for citizens “to kind of think or hash out those things {i.e. recommendations}”. Moreover, most PCCA actors interviewed broadly shared A1s view that “that people came in {to the ICA} and presented, and their words were just taken and copied and pasted and put down {as recommendations}”. Likewise, A2 concurred that “what happened for good or for ill was that you kind of had climate experts and NGOs coming in and then that just being translated onto the page as they were kind of trusted” (akin to the evidence outlined in **Section 4.3**). Herein, A4 noted the “‘one-up’ relationship” and “very big imbalance of power” between citizens and experts (including civil servants). Specifically, the advisor explained how “in any situation where the ordinary punter is coming in to discuss policy...the information asymmetry is huge”. Consequently, they raised serious concerns about the prospect of elite manipulation and/or expert bias within the ICA (and other deliberative processes) when stating that “if somebody just gives them a narrow menu, then whoever does that has a lot of power in influencing the direction of travel”. Specifically, A4 felt that the ICA’s discussion on CT was “a narrow exercise” which sought “legitimacy” rather than facilitating a substantial debate on opposing viewpoints and difficult policy questions. Importantly, this view conformed with ICA members who felt they were “being led” and that “there was always the underlying feeling...that they knew the destination before we even took off” (P5). This was not lost on some politicians, with ER7, for example stating, that within the Irish context, “the institutional instinct” of senior civil servants dealing with CAs to date has been “to try and control it as much as possible” in order to avoid “something that is radical” emerging (in line with the evidence presented in **Section 4.2**). However, while they appreciated the need for “terms of reference”, they believed there “has to be a certain amount of ownership by the participants of what the agenda is...(or) if it's too restrictive, it just discredits the process”. In short, advisors and elected representatives alike were not naïve to the potential for manipulation of (C)CAs by elite actors (e.g., political sponsors, experts and civil servants); thus suggesting they believed the ICA had limited contextual independence (in line with the evidence which shall be presented in **Section 5.3**).

“But we're still very paternalistic as a state and the civil servants. It's not the politicians who have the power in this country. It is senior civil servants. And if you're in a line department that is dealing with the citizens assembly type issue, you know, I think the instinct, the institutional instinct, is to try and control it as much as possible, not to

let it get out of hand. Because what you don't want after the fact is that if there is something that is radical in terms of what it seeks to recommend, then it's, 'Jesus, how is my Minister going to implement this?' I'm going to try to keep it within the ditches as much as possible. That's been my personal experience as a politician. There's an inherent conservatism, you know" (ER7)

"You know, some people wanted to bring in CT or felt it was necessary, or an obligation under the EU system¹²³, therefore, they wanted legitimacy. And {the ICA} was a narrow exercise, saying, 'can we get these people to agree? And that's that, and then it helps us with our PR'. But more broadly, it could've been a situation where they said, 'Well, we have to do this'. But is it the case that if we explain it to people, that they come around and say, 'Actually, I do agree with that, after all, that I understand it', rather than the reflexive anti-tax sort of knee-jerk reaction we saw" (A4)

"I felt a bit of a problem here. And I could be completely wrong on this. But here's what I felt was the silent problem. We were presented with a fairly lengthy, nicely bound, ICA report. So it infers it's kind of professional and peer-reviewed and validated. It's actually not!". (ER3)

Herein, the data broadly conforms with Hendriks and Lees-Marshment's (2019, 600-608) criticism of "deliberative thinkers" who too often paint "a simplified picture... {of} elected officials passively and willingly receiv{ing} public input". Specifically, rather than *just* "passively accepting" or "cherry-picking" proposals (as indeed happened in some cases, **see Section 5.1**), it appears that PCCA actors also played an important (and thus far, under-researched) role in robustly contesting evidence and counteracting potential biases within the ICA. For instance, A1 believed that *"for the first time, instead of experts talking down, political parties were able to hire experts {i.e. political advisors attached to the PCCA} who they thought were in line with their political view, which {they} thought was brilliant, because it led to a much richer debate on climate change and action"*. Likewise, A2 believed that this *"is why the {PCCA} is so interesting, as if you take politicians as representatives of the public, the discussions became that more complex or human"* – in short, it appears the parliamentary system offered more space for "pluralistic values and opinions" (Wong 2016) which were evidently absent from the ICA deliberations (**see Section 4.2, 4.3 and 5.1** respectively). For example, ER1 was *"very definite and strong on insisting that the {PCCA} need to look at the evidence from scientists who carried out research in other areas where CT was implemented, but actually didn't have an impact on the reduction of emissions"*. Similarly, regarding the CTAE, politicians commended the *"very important scientific information"* requested by the PCCA which was not provided to the ICA members. Overall, as A2 saw it, the PCCA challenged the *"the dominant perspective {among climate experts} that 'politicians are weak'"*. Nonetheless, the capacity of political actors to push back against the potential of "elite capture" (Lafont 2023) should not be overstated, as the empirical evidence suggests that some ERs were often *"unsure or ambivalent"* (A3) with respect to climate issues, *"never questioned"* the evidence (ER2) or were *"badly briefed"* (ER3) – partly due to their lack of familiarity with the given subject area. In contrast, other

¹²³ Moreover, the reference to "EU" regulations again highlights how this authority may be used to promote or reject certain subjects and/or solutions within the ICA process. It therefore builds on Font et. al's (2018) hypothesis that the involvement of a higher authority may influence the likely acceptance of a proposal, and, in addition

interviewees (A2) noted the “*transformation*” that some PCCA members went through with regards to their knowledge on climate issues, similarly to ICA members (see **Section 4.4**).

"For too long, the dominant perspective {among climate experts} has been 'politicians are weak, you can't have climate policy through politicians'...I think to be honest, what's really going on is that climate policy has so long been written by these technocrats or people who are climate scientists, they are not from (other) backgrounds, a kind of an elite as well and...maybe the problem is how we talk about climate, it's not the politicians fault if you get me" (A2)

"It's easy for me because I say I live this stuff. But for those {ERs} that weren't familiar {with the policy domain}, they kind of got to take {the ICA report} at face value, to kind of go with the flow, because unless you're sure of it, you'd never question that or really challenge it" (ER3)

"If {counter evidence on the CTAE} had been available or, more to the point, requested in advance of the 99 independent people meeting and deliberating for a period of time, the {ICA} may have taken a different slant¹²⁴".

Moreover, interviewees also challenged the narrow framing of the ICA, particularly the emphasis on “*climate leadership*”, something also corroborated by examination (i.e., analysis of transcripts, observational data) of evidence provided by relevant actors within the PCCA. For instance, a practical example of such a narrow framing can arguably be seen within the aforementioned CTAE proposal by Prof. Matthews (provided to the ICA) and specifically his repeated emphasis on the importance of “*climate leadership*” in response to the significant challenges this policy would impose, particularly on affected agricultural communities and arguably the broader citizenry. Herein, the ICA’s “leadership” frame contrasted with other CCAs wherein the issues of “fairness”, “social justice” and “effectiveness” were explicitly addressed (Shaw et al. 2021). This was not lost on PCCA actors, with Senator Marshall, for example, remarking that “*the environment is one element, but it is important to recognise that there are social and economic issues relating to sustainability as well*¹²⁵”. For example, in their contribution to the PCCA, Teagasc (the State Agricultural Agency) noted that: “*We are telling farmers who are not making very much money but are farming at a low intensity that they need to intensify their production and become more profitable and similarly we are telling farmers who are quite profitable that they are not doing enough in terms of consideration for the environment. Perhaps we should consider that both groups are delivering on two different objectives, both of which are important from the perspective of Irish agriculture*¹²⁶”. Herein, the evidence suggests that PCCA members from both the left (as evidenced by the push-back on CT and the defence of the ringfencing model) and right of the political spectrum played an important role in counterbalancing this narrow framing (as perhaps best evidenced by ER7's quote below). Specifically, they strongly pushed for an emphasis on a “*just transition*”, “*fairness*”, and a consideration of the “*social impact*”. For example, ER7 believed that “*there*

¹²⁴ https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action/2018-12-12/speech/189/

¹²⁵ [Joint Committee on Climate Action debate - Wednesday, 5 September 2018 \(oireachtas.ie\)](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action/2018-09-05/speech/189/)

¹²⁶ [Joint Committee on Climate Action debate - Wednesday, 12 December 2018 \(oireachtas.ie\)](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_climate_action/2018-12-12/speech/189/)

was a broad sense {within the committee} in which a just transition needed to be embodied within the {PCCA} report”, while similarly, A2 noted how “on just transition it (the PCCA report) definitely had an impact”. Nonetheless, some interviewees, such as A1 and ER7, believed that Government ERs sought to “water down” and “jettison that piece”. This concurs with Esaiasson et al. (2019) evidence that unfavourable (C)CA outputs (which differ from elites’ strategic interests) may temper elected representatives’ enthusiasm towards deliberative processes and specific recommendations (as further explored in **Section 5.3**).

“I felt at the time the government of the time wanted to jettison that piece; that’s certainly my perception that they wanted to jettison and that they would have easily and happily jettisoned a lot of it, just to come up with a report to have ticked the box on the issue. Now, myself, and others pushed back on that, and I remember threatening the Secretary to say that ‘look, myself, and maybe one or two others will probably end up doing a minority report on this if the transition was taken out. We certainly felt on a point of principle they had to be included, you can’t talk about climate action without the just transition piece” (ER7)

“It is interesting that it gets watered down to that when it comes to a worker rights issue. So that’s a good example of where the {PCCA} advisors majorly improved it, or even the politicians themselves” (A1).

“Because of climate change, the conversation affects every one of us and must impact every one of us. Because if it doesn’t do that, there’s not fairness and transparency right across society, we’re never going to actually deal with this” (ER3)

“We have defined what can be done in the agricultural context. If more needs to be done, say in the dairy sector, it would require a somewhat perverse step to reduce production in the most environmentally friendly milk production system in the world. There are policy options in the context of all of this, none of which are easy, but in considering what options we take in future, we must consider the cost and the social and environmental impact” (Mr Brendan Gleeson – evidence to PCCA, Nov 2018³³)

Overall, some interviewees believed that the ICA failed to account for “interrelated issues” (A3) and “the interconnectedness of everything” (ER3). Specifically, they felt that the complexity of the debate was also lost within the PCCA, as they suggested that “virtue signalling (A3, ER3) and “knee-jerk reactions” (ER2) took precedence over deliberations on realistic targets, unintended consequences and complexities, and an overall focus on what was practically achievable. This may have, in part, been influenced by the framing of the ICA, with Torney (2021, 387) noting that “the mandate in the case of {ICA} was much more open-ended, without a specified timeframe or decarbonisation target”. For example, A3 recalled a discussion among “progressive” PCCA advisors on culling the national herd wherein they questioned: “‘how are we going to move in this direction’ – and {other “fundamentalist” PCCA advisors} were like, ‘it just has to be done, it just has to happen, or otherwise the world will end!’ (sarcastic tone!)”. Herein, ER2 remarked that “the rise of the Green Party has driven politics and say, well, ‘we need to do this, we need to do it faster, we need to be the best’”. However, ER2 continued: “I’m saying ‘ok guys, just slow down here’, because we’re a nation of 5 million people. If everyone in China decides that they want to buy McDonald’s tomorrow, that’s everything we do is blown out of the water”. Similarly, A3 noted how “Ireland doesn’t have that big of an impact on the universe, you know” when criticising the all or

nothing attitude amongst what they described as the “fundamentalist” sub-group of PCCA advisors.

“The Irish government could legislate tomorrow morning to deal with climate change to reduce the carbon footprint of our food industry. But that citizens' assembly will not be able to afford food or even get food. So it's a very complicated thing. There are all kinds of unintended consequences” (ER3)

“It's virtue signally – ‘my target is bigger than your target’, not ‘my implementation is better than your implementation’... We do have lead (by example) and to do our level best, but let's start thinking how we are going to do our level best” (A3)

“I think sometimes there's the need to virtue signal and have knee-jerk reactions. Because remember, the rise of the GP was everyone was looking at it. “Oh, my goodness, what do we do?” (ER2)

Nonetheless, A2 noted how the PCCA provided an important space to “*shift*” the debate when claiming it was “*first time climate change wasn't debated by just a few experts, with technocratic approaches, or generally green thinking having to be translated into neo-liberal economics through emissions trading or whatever*”. On the contrary, A3 complained the PCCA itself was captured by “*climate fundamentalists*”. But overall, regardless of these ideological differences and tensions, the PCCA (in contrast to the ICA) allowed for “*a variety of climate advisors and variety of way to approach different policies*”, something A1 remarked “*seemed interesting, because we've come to stage now where climate is becoming mainstreamed, so dominant approaches that once were considered the only way forward are now being debated by different disciplines*”. Moreover, in line with Hendriks and Lees-Marshment's (2019, 608-609) findings pertaining to “participatory dissonance”, PCCA participants interviewed also presented paradoxical views on the ICA. Specifically, on the one hand, they generally praised the overall concept of citizen input, but on the other hand, they were also critical of the aforementioned process issues. For example, ER1 stated, “*...the citizens were, again, way ahead of the politicians. It's **just** this one issue of CT (emphasis added)*”. Furthermore, they too showed “pragmatic responses” to these flaws by incorporating knowledge “beyond experts....so they can connect and talk to ‘real’ people...and check the facts ‘on the ground’” (Ibid). Indeed, this tendency for reliance on informal information may be particularly strong within the Irish case due to the noted “localism” of Irish politics, with elected representatives on average spending more than half (53%) of their working week on constituency-based (i.e. local) issues compared to 38% on parliament-based duties according to one study¹²⁷. Not surprisingly then, A1 noted how “(t)he technocratic science was often filtered through {ERs} who have to deal with real people”, while A4 also cited the “*responsiveness*” of the Irish representative system in contrast to the ICA (in the below quote). Overall, politicians like ER7 outlined their duty to reflect the views of their own constituents when responding to recommendations while also raising doubts regarding some academic experts' ability to “*translate {issues} into regular discourse*”.

¹²⁷ 2013-02-08_spotlight-localism-in-irish-politics-and-local-government-reform_en.pdf (oireachtas.ie)

"I find sometimes talking to academics, myself, and I'd be fairly well educated and attuned to the language of academia. Sometimes, their ability to communicate is {obscenity} abysmal. On the other hand, if there is a conflict {i.e., between the expert view and the constituency interest}, in a politician's mind, if I have a mandate from the people {of their constituency}, ultimately, my first duty is to the people {of their constituency}. So there is no perfect process, I suppose in that regard". (ER7)

"The technocratic science was filtered through ordinary people (i.e. politicians) who have to deal with real people who literally come to their door crying because they...can't pay the heating bills, and you'd (i.e. advisor) have to talk about climate with them the next morning, so they see it, they connect it – and I thought that was great. And I think that's why the CT issue was so emotive because it's a clash between that old world and the new world {of climate activism}" (A1)

"Well, I think it's about responsiveness. There is always new information. So the ICA is a point in time; if you've got the same people in five years or a new set of people in five years, you'd almost certainly get a different set of answers. Every day, politicians are interacting with people, with organisation, with news media. So you have a vast, highly responsive system, which processes vast quantities of information at a far larger scale than a ICA... it can react to up-to-the-minute findings. And so that's, that's what it does". (A4)

Ultimately, the PCCA rejected the CTAE proposal while the issue of CT caused a 50/50 split within the committee; consequently, a cross-party “consensus” on climate action was not achieved as intended, despite the continual reference to such a “cross-party” consensus in national policy documents as part of a “claim-making framework” (Gül 2019). This polarisation also permeated the public sphere, with over 80% opposing a higher CT according to respected polls (conducted before the cost-of-living crisis). Moreover, rural regions (73%) and working-class voters (65%) were most opposed to CT increases, which suggests the ICA failed to successfully persuade or influence these cohorts (as noted in **Section 4.4**), perhaps due to noted representational skew within (as noted in **Section 4.1**). Similarly, the response from the farming community within the PCCA and the public domain was scathing (as also alluded to in **Section 4.2**). This concurred with the remarks of rural ICA members who felt their communities “*went mad*” at the recommendations. Indeed, the ICA was subsequently described by agricultural groups as the “*wrong model*” wherein “*you end up with...a lot of people who don't necessarily have a stake in agriculture, who don't have an understanding of what it is to farm*”¹²⁸. Herein, there is also the perceptible danger that (C)CAs are utilised “to bypass engaged civil society actors” (Bussu et al. 2022, 136; Young 2022), such as farmers groups. However, this criticism was also not lost on deliberative organisers in Ireland, with a member of the Secretariat for the subsequent CA on Biodiversity (Sec 2) stating they “*were strongly advised*” to include all farming groups and that “*it was definitely important to us that there's a lot of different farming groups, and they have different perspectives*”. This also highlights the potential for self-reflection and improvement of the Irish CA model once issues are openly acknowledged.

“it can't be felt by any one sector {i.e. agriculture} that the targets are being foisted on them” (Deputy Sean Sherlock, Member of the PCCA)

¹²⁸ [Cork TD Seán Sherlock calls for citizens' assembly to discuss future of the agri sector | Independent.ie](https://www.independent.ie/cork/cork-td-sean-sherlock-calls-for-citizens-assembly-to-discuss-future-of-the-agri-sector-123456789.html)

"Because I think it's in the 'what can we do debate' that the farmers' voice is very relevant, because we say, 'well, you have to cut emissions by x, and they say we can't'. Or if we do, we require a subsidy of the following amount to replace the lost income from cattle or whatever it might be. So, then you're talking 'brass tacks'. But that means that it certainly makes sense to have a debate on that at that point" (A4)

In sum, on both these controversial carbon tax issues, it appears the ICA failed to secure the requisite buy-in from political actors, key stakeholders and the broader public – including affected communities – on the contentious carbon tax issues, with numerous PCCA contributors noting the danger therein. For example, the most recent negotiations on sectoral emissions targets (which stemmed from the new Climate Bill, **see Section 5.3.2**) saw farmers voice their anger, with warnings of “uprising in rural Ireland¹²⁹” by the biggest farming lobby, the Irish Farmers Association (IFA). Similarly, charities (such as St Vincent de Paul) and the largest opposition party (Sinn Féin) have also rallied against carbon tax increases, noting how lower-income and older people are most affected by regressive CT increases and face “an impossible choice” between food and heat¹³⁰. Overall, the empirical data suggests that the ICA had characteristics of what Courant (2022, 170) calls a “tamed consultation model” wherein the (conscious or subconscious perhaps) “goal is to ‘reconcile’ the ‘ordinary citizens’ with decision makers” or as (Bussu et al. 2022, 136) put it, to provide “a democratic veneer to legitimate policy that has already been decided elsewhere”. Hence, it therefore seems ironic that rather than garnering support and legitimacy for “climate leadership” and “eco-technocratic” proposals, the ICA instead partly mobilised key cohorts (e.g. PCCA actors and opposition parties; farming lobbies; grassroots environmental groups) against contentious recommendations such as the CT and CTAE, with these core issues remaining as polarised, politicised and divisive as ever.

“We need to bring the people along with us. Without people collaborating and participating in a decision it becomes top-down quickly leading to what we have seen in France {i.e. yellow vest movement}” (Ms Clare Watson, expert evidence to PCCA, Dec 2018).

“Regarding tax under duress, it is important to learn from what is happening in Paris and the experience here with water charges. We need to learn from such experiences in how we implement policies and how we engage. Dialogue is very important in that. It creates this challenge where we have both this urgency to act and the need to bring people in a full societal movement. That is a very difficult one to square.” (Prof. Brian Ó Gallachóir³⁸ – expert evidence to PCCA, Dec 2018³⁹)

"in an ideal world, with great support, press on (with climate action) at maximum speed. Yeah, democracy is slow and cumbersome. But arguably, if you skip that bit, you don't have the public buy-in, and stuff gets reversed in 10 or 20 years, and so you're worse off situation" (A4).

¹²⁹ [PressReader.com - Digital Newspaper & Magazine Subscriptions](#)

¹³⁰ [Carbon tax hike leaves people with 'impossible choice' between food and heat \(irishexaminer.com\)](#)

5.3 ICA STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND THE PERCEPTIONS OF KEY ACTORS ON THE ROLE OF (C)CAs IN (CLIMATE) GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS

As noted in the literature review, an examination of structural changes emanating from (C)CAs – which relate to “a change in policy practices” within a given policy domain – have been under-explored within the empirical literature to date (Jacquet and van der Does 2021, 471). Herein, Jacquet and van der Does (2021, 479) note that “it seems insufficient to focus on the first two dimensions {alone}” – namely, the *congruence* and *consideration* of recommendations¹³¹ as outlined in the previous two analytical chapters (**Section 5.1 and 5.2 respectively**) – as “even when both citizens and policymakers consider a {CAs} recommendations and these recommendations translate into concrete policy decisions, a minipublic might still have little impact on the functioning of the policy-making process itself”. Conversely, the opposite may also be true; namely, the failure to adopt specific recommendations does not necessarily imply that CCAs, such as the ICA, do not induce significant structural change(s) within the policy domain. The “institutionalisation” or “embeddedness” (Bussu et al. 2022, 136) of (C)CAs within a given policy domain is one obvious example of a potential long-term structural change, with the Irish CA on Biodiversity – which followed the ICA – perhaps fitting this description.

Consequently, it is important to move beyond the analysis of specific recommendations (and indeed CCAs) and illuminate the broader “strategic considerations” (Niessen 2023, 327) of elected representatives (i.e., political sponsors of {C}CAs) – in addition to other key actors’ such as advisors, deliberative proponents and experts – towards the utilisation and institutionalisation of (C)CAs. Specifically, Averchenkova and Ghilan (2023, 2) propound that “whether {climate policy actors} perceive citizens’ assemblies to be undermining their decisional power has a decisive influence as to whether an assembly is endowed with constrictive power over the decision-making process, if the emergent recommendations are implemented, and even whether the assembly is organised in the first place”. Moreover, given the outlined problem statement (**see Section 1.3**) regarding the limited empirical evidence of discernible policy outcomes emanating from (C)CAs at the national level (Vrydagh 2023, 1), it is essential to understand the perceptions of such actors with regards to the role of (C)CAs within the (climate) governance system. Herein, Sandover et al. (2021) note how “there is relatively little research on the views of either the public officers or political office holders who commission and organise citizens’ assemblies”. Hence, the present analysis will help address existing empirical research gaps, with Averchenkova and Ghilan (2023, 2) noting how “the literature on the attitudes of policy actors remains scarce...(which) is

¹³¹ in addition to the aforementioned “influence” component.

particularly the case in relation to climate assemblies”. In short, in addition to exploring specific examples of structural changes emanating from the ICA, this chapter will firstly illuminate the views of influential actors – namely elected representatives (i.e., political sponsors), advisors and deliberative experts (i.e., proponents) – with regard to the role (C)CAs should play within the democratic process.

5.3.1 Key Actors' Perceptions regarding the role of (C)CAs in Governance Systems:

As outlined in the literature review (Section 2.8d), deliberative critics have argued that (C)CAs “should be subject to much tougher scrutiny and not simply assumed to be benign” (Youngs 2022, 10) given that they may firstly serve as “tamed consultation models” (Courant 2022); secondly that they could “also have limitations built into their design” (Lacelle-Webster and Warren 2023, 98¹³²); or thirdly, that they could simply be contaminated by “the crisis of representative democracy” itself (Landemore 2022). Herein, Youngs (2022, 9-10) has noted how (C)CAs are often pushed “by a narrow circle of officials, experts, and participative practitioners” with little broader legitimacy. Moreover, the author subsequently suggests that it is a somewhat naïve supposition to assume “that elites are already committed to deepening democratic participation and that the germane political issue is about how to run more officially sponsored assemblies and amplify their impact”. However, despite this scepticism, the empirical data (i.e., in-depth interviews) derived from senior elected representatives (ERs), advisors (A) and deliberative experts (DE) as part of this research would suggest that the initial motivation behind deliberative processes in Ireland – while although “elite-driven” (Warren 2009) – could be considered relatively “benign”. Specifically, ER5 – a leading political figure behind the establishment of CAs in the country – cited the financial crisis, the ensuing loss of trust in the political establishment amongst the citizenry and the subsequent “*decline in public confidence in institutions more generally*” as the primary reasons behind the emergence of (C)CAs. Similarly, DE1 and ER6 – the latter being another prominent “political sponsor” behind the institutionalisation of deliberation within the Irish context – repeatedly emphasised the need for “*political reform*” after the crash of the late noughties, with citizen participation seen as a vital cornerstone for restoring confidence. Moreover, DE1 noted how prominent political scientists “*clubbed together*” in order to promote ideas and processes of reform, with the BCCA example (as referenced in the literature review) noted as a primary example of what may be possible in Ireland. Interestingly, DE1 also noted how the respective academic and political pushes for deliberative processes were “*mobilizing in parallel, just coincidentally*”, and consequently, “*all of the political parties in their manifestos for that (2011) election, talked about citizen-oriented processes, and many*

¹³² A problem-based approach to citizens’ assemblies

of them used the language of mini-publics or deliberation”, something which has been confirmed by secondary documental analysis:

“There was a huge amount of anger (after the 2008 Financial Crash). It was an existential crisis. So, we felt, as political scientists, that we had something to contribute to the debates. And what one way we could contribute was to make suggestions on possible areas for reform. But the other way, that we saw these as parallel processes, was to make recommendations on processes of reform, so not just on what to reform, but how to reform and in particular processes of reform that would engage citizens. So we started writing op-eds in newspapers and appearing on any radio or TV chat show that would take us, talking about {CAs}, and about potential merits of a {CA} at this important moment in our history” (DE1)

“I think there was a significant decline in public confidence in institutions generally (after the 2008 Financial). And we felt that there was a need to have a forum where citizens could participate. And we felt that this idea of an assembly or a convention of citizens selected in much the same way as juries are selected would be a good idea” (ER5)

Herein, Nielsen and Sørensen (2023, 129-30) propound that “every decade or so, a new deliberative mini-public variant has been promoted as a tool for policymakers to counteract the crisis of representative democracy, such as this crisis was understood at the time”. However, the authors purport that “the question, of course, is whether achieving precisely these effects was ever the real ambition of those who have experimented with and promoted mini-public formats (Warren 2009; Setälä 2011)”. Moreover, as noted in the previous chapter (**Section 5.2**), politicians often play lip service to the positive influence of participatory processes while favouring more informal forms of engagement (Hendriks and Lees-Marshment 2019; also see Rountree and Curato, 2023). Additionally, despite their positive public prise of such formats, they may privately hold more sceptical views about the value of (C)CAs. Furthermore, Elstub and Khoban (2023, 117) note how “elite-driven” (Warren 2009: 6) and pre-determined remits of CAs “can be done instrumentally and strategically to advance the interests of political elites (Dryzek and Tucker 2008)”. Hence, as Averchenkova and Ghilan (2023, 5) propound, “it is still up for debate what the specific factors influencing attitudes are”. Consequently, there is a need to delve deeper into the motivation of influential actors attached to the ICA case, with Niessen (2019, 405) noting that (C)CAs may be “driven both by actors’ interests in the outcome on a micro-level and by their general ideas about political decision-making on a macro-level”. For example, with reference to CAs in Ireland, ER7 was critical of Ministers’ who “use CAs, rhetorically as a tool, and then just completely ignore the recommendations”. This chimes with the evidence presented in Analysis Part 1, which highlighted how ICA members (and citizens more broadly) had relatively little control over the framing, agenda-setting and speaker selection of the assembly, with P5, for example, believing assembly members were “being led”.

“they knew the destination before we even took off” (P5)

“My view has certainly become a bit more sceptical about {CAs}. I feel that they are useful tools. But if the government uses them as a tool, and then completely ignores the recommendations, because it is not politically expedient to do so, then it makes a little bit of a mockery of the process in the first instance” (ER7)

Further evidence of this within the “Irish model” (Courant 2021) comes from the shift from a “bottom-up” to a “top-down” approach as CAs became formally institutionalised (i.e. enacted by parliament) in Ireland. Specifically, DE1 recalled that the first deliberative experiment therein, the “*We the Citizens*” pilot assembly (WTC 2011, 14), was designed to be citizen-led affair, with the interviewee stating how “*the funder Atlantic Philanthropies very firmly required it to be totally bottom up*”. Specifically, DE1 continued that “*they wanted the agenda for {the WTC} to be determined by the people of Ireland...so to that end, a huge chunk of our funding was spent on organizing roadshow...(and) the idea was for us to gather information from that to ultimately get a sense of the sorts of issues that mattered for the agenda for the {WTC} assembly*”. However, in contrast, DE1 cited that in the case of the initial state-sponsored Irish Constitutional Convention (ICC) held in 2012 – the first officially legislated CA in Ireland – and subsequent Irish CA 2016-2018 series (which included the ICA), the “*original plan*” for an agenda-setting roadshow was dropped and “*the agenda was set by the government in both cases...so there was no (citizen) control over that*”. For example, DE1 noted that in the case of the ICC, “*once they completed their work on the on the agenda that they'd been set, they could consider other possible topics*” as set out in the enacting legislation¹³³; nevertheless, according to DE1, “*the government immediately rejected*” a citizen-led proposal (which emerged from a subsequent ICC “roadshow”) which wished to explore the “*issue of inserting economic, social and cultural rights into our Constitution*”. This suggests that even from the outset of institutionalisation in Ireland, citizen-derived agenda issues deemed too controversial or “radical” were side-stepped or ignored, something which has already been discussed within the specific context of the ICA (see **Analysis Part 1**). Moreover, the ICC was also seen by both political opponents and commentators as a tool by which particular political parties could advance their own agendas. More recently, Dr Eoin O'Malley – one of the principal founders of the original “bottom-up” WTC and someone who has directly contributed to the Irish CA series (2016 -2018) – additionally noted that “there is a danger that citizens’ assemblies have now become a part of the policymaking system in Ireland that supports the various agendas of lobby groups”¹³⁴. Moreover, O'Malley warned that the process has been “captured” and called into question the (representative) legitimacy of deliberations and, thus, the quality of subsequent recommendations (Carroll 2024).

“The constitutional convention {i.e. ICC} which will be adopted today is, in nearly all respects, the forum that emerged during negotiations between Fine Gael and the Labour Party to form the government. It carries the title

¹³³ i.e. the enacting legislation gave the ICC the power to deliberate upon “other relevant constitutional amendments that may be recommended by it.”

¹³⁴ As quoted in Guardian article, March 2024: [Irish referendum fiasco puts future of lauded citizens’ assemblies in doubt | Ireland | The Guardian](#)

from the Labour Party manifesto, the membership from Fine Gael's and a narrower agenda than either promised” (Deputy Micheál Martin, Fianna Fáil Leader, address to the Irish Parliament during enactment of ICC Legislation, 10 Jul 2012¹³⁵)

“I think if you're in government, and you want to find a mechanism, to triage a sensitive issue, they can be a very useful tool to allow for an external process to come up with a set of conclusions to give the polity or government's political cover then to promulgate the issues of the day. So they're useful in that sense” (ER7).

Not surprisingly, from the outset of the institutionalisation of "top-down" CAs in Ireland, successive governments have been heavily criticised for providing a narrow agenda rather than allowing citizens to input into topic selection and framing. For example, Farrell et al. (2018, 10) note how even the “cerebral Irish Times was...condemnatory (of the ICC), accusing the government of ‘a political sleight of hand’”. Moreover, Fintan O’Toole (in Farrell et al. 2018, 10) – a prominent Irish opinion writer for the same paper of record – argued that the ICC would not offer “a comprehensive redesign of the Republic but a public chat about subjects selected in advance by the Government”. Similar, Carolan (2015, 743) – a notably Irish academic and expert in constitutional law – propounded that “unfortunately, the internal processes applied by the Convention were notable for their lack of transparency...(as) no guidance was issued, for example, about the principles or procedures applied to agenda-setting⁷”. However, rather than addressing these issues, according to DE1, the subsequent CA 2016-2018 series (which included the ICA) further regressed in terms of citizens control over topic selection and agenda-setting processes, with the stated terms of reference (TOR) outlining that “*the Assembly will also be asked to consider such other matters as may be **referred to it***” (**emphasis added**)¹³⁶. Consequently, DE1 regretted that “*perfect topics*” of broad public appeal, such as the ongoing national housing crisis, were not considered by elite sponsors, while other niche political and academic interests – such as the sessions on “Referendums in Ireland” and “Fixed-term Parliaments” – were chosen. Importantly, **Analysis Part 1** highlighted ICA members' frustration herein, as they complained how such sessions ate into valuable time, which could have been (in their view) better used to deliberate upon the issue of climate change.

“...but they haven't had that possibility (to add agenda items) in the case of the citizens' assembly {Irish CA 2016-2018 series}. So the agenda was set by the government. And the agenda, frankly, is crazy. I mean, there are really important topics. There's no doubt abortion, climate change, these would be examples of good important topics. But equally, there are some stupid topics. I mean, {the ICA session on} Fixed-Term Parliament's was absolutely daft. But there are plenty of topics that could be discussed that hadn't been put on the agenda. And I think that's, that's very regretful. And the most obvious ones that occurred to me is housing. So in that sense, the agenda was really done badly” (DE1).

¹³⁵ [Constitutional Convention: Motion – Dáil Éireann \(31st Dáil\) – Tuesday, 10 Jul 2012 – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

¹³⁶ [Terms of Reference | Citizens' Assembly \(citizensassembly.ie\)](#)

“we were constantly talking; there might have been a 30-minute discussion, and we did talk about the {climate} topic to hand for the full duration. But at the political ones {i.e. session on Referendum and Fixed Term Parliaments}, you might talk for 5 minutes and then have nothing more to say because I don't really know or don't care, but people did have a genuine interest in the climate ones which was great, we just needed more time” (P8)

Hence, it appears that “fundamental a priori questions of whether populations want citizen assemblies, on what terms, on what issues, and in what kind of relation to political actors” (Youngs 2022, 10) were missing from the Irish case as CAs became more formally institutionalised within the political system. Indeed, beyond limited public consultation processes (in response to pre-set topics and predominantly utilised by established stakeholders), Irish citizens have not been “presented with or invited to express clear choices on such questions” (Ibid). Consequently, instead of organic, bottom-up processes wherein citizens have a strong degree of input into topical agenda-setting as was the case with the WTC initiative, the data analysis of primary and secondary sources suggests that the institutionalisation of (C)CAs in the Irish case has largely remained ad hoc with topics proposed at the discretion and timing of their political sponsors. Indeed, as A4 remarked: *“These citizen assemblies are not all cut from the same cloth because, you know, some simple rules changes could make them very different”*. This is indeed evident concerning the Irish CA series (2016-2018), which included the ICA. Firstly, there is a broad consensus within the literature and from the interviews conducted as part of this research that the CA series itself was primarily established as *“a device” (DE1)* to provide “provide political cover and legitimacy” (Lacelle-Webster Warren 2023, 104; also note ER7 and A4s comments) for the long-standing and politically controversial constitutional question on abortion. Similarly, Torney (2021, 387) propounds that “climate change was added to the agenda of an assembly focused primarily on the topic of abortion, almost as an after-thought”. Indeed, this was not lost on some ICA participants, as P4's comment reveals. However, ER6 offered a mean-ends perspective on the success of the CA model, despite expressing initial concerns it was a cynical attempt by the government to delay or distance themselves from difficult decisions:

“I think that it may well be the case that the politicians are using citizens assembly as a device to make the argument for them. So just to make it easier for them to make the argument they were going to make in the first place. Don't doubt there's a little bit of that going on.” (DE1)

“{CAs} are ultimately set by the government...and very clearly follows the government agenda. So, to have citizens discuss abortion was useful because it opened the way for the referendum. So it helped the government win the referendum when they decided that's what they wanted to do” (A3)

“I would hate to think it was just there for the 8th Amendment and that (other topics) was just thrown on” (P4)

Herein, the in-depth interviews revealed that political sponsors, advisors and deliberative experts (e.g. DE1) perceived the utilisation of (C)CAs by government as an important tool to

“provide legitimacy” (A4). As ER4’s comment below alludes to, the perceived voice of “ordinary” citizens – as opposed to elite figures such as “academics or politicians” (ER4) – was deemed particularly important by elected representatives as a means for conferring legitimacy. This was also stressed by ER5, who noted the comparison between juries and deliberative representation, stating that “*we taught something similar in the political process would add to political reform*”. Hence, as previously noted (see **Section 4.1**), the analysis broadly conforms with Gül’s (2019, 35) finding that “the participants are argued to be ‘a representative sample of ordinary members of Irish society’” as part of a “claim-making framework” of political sponsors in Ireland. Herein, Silk (2022) warns against the potential for “citizenwashing” – defined as “giving the appearance of involving the public in decision-making without taking their views into account”. For instance, the author states that the “most damaging” form of citizenwashing is where “politicians and public authorities claim to have involved citizens in decision-making when...they misrepresent the outcomes of citizens involvement”. Specifically, Silk cites cases where “leading questions are asked, and biased information is fed to people before consultation” as primary examples of potential citizen washing. Indeed, as **Analysis Part 1** has suggested, there is indeed evidence that leading framing questions (**Section 5.2**; also see Shaw et al. 2021;), limited citizen-control of procedural rules (see **Section 4.2**) and the failure to provide counter-evidence (e.g., in case of CT and CTAE, see **Section 4.1**) – in addition to notably representational biases (i.e. self-selection) – restricted the capacity for genuine deliberation on climate action within the Irish case. Moreover, such “claim-making” may not be confined to politicians alone, with DE2 – an international deliberative expert – confiding that some of the positive academic commentary on the Irish deliberative experience has verged on “propaganda”. For example, they recalled a conversation with one Irish deliberative expert wherein they explained: “They {i.e. the prominent Irish academic} *were involved with running it (ICA), they were very enthusiastic about it...but of course {they} were involved in running it, so it’s perhaps not surprising they were so positive*” (DE2). This conforms with Carolan’s (2015, 748) postulation that “(c)ynics might also point out that these bodies are likely to provide academics with their best opportunities to positively influence public policy”, as evidenced by DE1’s earlier description of a group of “political scientists” who sought to push “*on possible areas for reform...(and) processes of reform*” in the aftermath of the post-2008 financial crisis.

“I mean, at one level, they’re {i.e. CAs} there to provide legitimacy. So, if the State wishes to take a difficult decision, then it gives legitimacy to that decision, if they have a range of citizens’ voices speaking about it, particularly if it’s outside the usual suspects. It’s sort of a way of conveying a message to the broader population that “people like you have thought about this”. And people like you are saying, “Actually, we’d be in favour of whatever, whatever proposal”. So there’s that...that’s one aspect.” (A4).

"I think it does it in a way that gives confidence to people that they can see that citizens are looking at issues, considering the evidence, considering the opinion of experts and making an informed decision. So I think it has a strengthening effect on democratic decision-making". (ER6)

So I think it does give a certain impetus that when it is the voice of a citizen, rather than just an academic or a politician, I don't mean to be dissing the academics or politicians. You know, sometimes people switch off when they hear us politicians" (ER4)

Herein, as noted in previous chapters, elected representatives often paid lip service to the positive role of citizen engagement while simultaneously questioning the process and, indeed, citizens' capacity, something which conforms to Hendriks and Lees-Marshment's (2019) concept of "participatory dissonance". For example, as noted above, prominent political sponsors of CAs such as ER6 espoused the virtue of giving "people responsibility", something they argued "*has a strengthening effect on democratic decision making*". However, this espoused view contradicted with the reality regarding ERs and advisors' general views on the capacity of ordinary citizens, agenda-setting processes, and responses to (C)CA recommendations. Firstly, with regard to key actors' views on citizens' capacity, A4 noted the "*division of labour*" between a lay citizens and civil servants (or experts) and believed that CAs "*can't replace 10 or 20 years experience as a senior civil servant, or whoever, you know, with any amount of training like that*". Consequently, they believed it was "*probably not possible*" to build up citizens' capabilities within a CA setting to the extent that they would be "*autonomous and independent in the decision-making*". Similarly, ER3 believed that the "*political construct*" of (C)CAs should be "*very formalised, regulated and controlled, it should set out a couple of options, which are presented to the citizens' assembly to debate, you know, after the experts and the civil servants, and other scientists have looked at it, and the politicians have gone across the status of each. Okay, Option A or Option B, use it to give us direction on this*". Likewise, A3 believed that "*if you want (citizens) to make a recommendation, then the thing needs shape*". Herein, they argued that "*a group of people no matter how well-meaning can only scrape the surface of a complex issue...(u)nless they're given something very specific to decide, yes, or no, or rank*". In short, the interview data conforms with Stasiak et al.'s (2021, 3) findings that "concerns are often raised as...to what extent {citizen members'} are suited or qualified to make policy recommendations or influence decisions". It also adds some weight to the existing – albeit limited – literature which "suggests that elites tend to be more sceptical about the value of mini publics than lay citizen...perceiving citizens as incompetent" (Averchenkova and Ghilan 2023).

"not only do they {i.e citizens} have a lack of knowledge about a specific topic, but they also have a lack of knowledge about how public policy works, and what is possible" (A4)

Moreover, this scepticism was also apparent with regard to data subjects' views on agenda-setting processes, with nearly all those interviewed (stemming from all sides of the political spectrum) affirming that the prerogative should remain solely with parliament and elected

representatives. For example, regarding CA topic selection, A4 noted the clear “*dividing line between sortition versus election*” wherein “*elected members (i.e. politicians)...certainly do claim to hold sovereignty*”. Moreover, ER2, in justifying their view that a tight framework should be provided to CAs, stated that “*for all the criticism about politics, on politicians, on the establishment, that's where decisions are made...that's where the mandates are, with elected representatives*”. Furthermore, ER5 – a prominent political sponsor of deliberative experiments in Ireland – noted that “*our experience here {in Ireland} is that the CAs looks at issues that it is asked to look at by the parliamentary system*” and added the important caveat that “*we (i.e. sponsors) have been careful to keep control of what the CA is considering*”. Similarly, ER6 stated that they “*feel it's better that, that the CA is guided by the politics*” and additionally, that they “*think the citizens conversation works better when the framework is firstly built and then is presented to them (i.e. citizens') to discuss*”. Finally, some ERs interviewed also believed that Irish CAs were an exceptional case and that “*you have to design a model for deliberative democracy, a deliberative element to decision making, which is tailored to the circumstances of the country in question*” (ER5). However, such tinkering has continued with regard to the application of CAs in Ireland, with Courant (2022, 163) – who has published extensively on the Irish deliberative “model” – purporting that “despite an increase in numbers and scope, mini-publics remain under-institutionalized, being convened ad hoc, changing formats, topic, mandate, with uncertain features and output”. Herein, the author warns that such “instability leaves the door open to arbitrary and opportunistic use of these democratic innovations”, with the recent and highly criticised Irish “consultative forum on international security policy” – which according to its main political sponsor drew “*on the principles along the line of the Citizens' Assemblies model*”¹³⁷ – perhaps an obvious point of example.

“What are their powers (i.e. CAs)? You know, should they have the power to propose topics? Or do they simply dispose of whatever is put in front of them...When you have elected members, and they certainly do claim to hold sovereignty, and within that, in their (parliamentary) terms of reference, or their, you know, whatever documents they agree as standing orders, include very much proposing topics for debate proposing legislation in the holding for one. So that's the dividing line between sortition versus election” (A4).

"I don't think you begin the {CA} process with a blank sheet of paper. Because I think that what I found in my experience is that, that I think you need to corral and guide the conversation with citizens assemblies" (ER3)

"I think the instinct, the institutional instinct is to try and control it as much as possible, not to let it get out of hand. The biggest bugbear that I have is that it's when Ministers use citizens' assemblies rhetorically as a tool, and then just completely ignore the recommendations, actually do a volte-face on the recommendations. That's what really annoys me" (ER7).

Finally, with regard to the follow-up of CA recommendations, the data broadly supports Averchenkova and Ghilan (2023, 10) recent empirical findings from interviews with “climate policy actors” across 15 EU countries. Specifically, the authors note how “the fear of losing control and

¹³⁷ [State's defence and neutrality to be examined in public forum \(breakingnews.ie\)](http://breakingnews.ie)

power came up in particular in relation to the members of parliament and policy makers”. Herein, ERs and advisors interviewed were unambiguous that the power to accept or reject recommendations should remain solely with elected representatives and the parliamentary system. For example, ER4 bluntly reiterated that: *“the government doesn't have to accept the recommendations of a {(C)CA}”*. Moreover, ER5 thought that *“because {CAs} are looking at issues, the parliamentary system, the political system, asks them to look at, the conclusions that they reach are then held with great respect by the parliamentary system and by the political system”*. Furthermore, they believed that the *“citizen’s assembly model”* provides *“public confidence”* and thus *“enables the parliamentary system to take it more seriously”*, which concurs with the view within the literature that the recommendations of top-down CAs are more likely to be enacted by politicians (Bussu and Fleuß 2023). Interestingly, ER5 implied that this might not be the case if citizens (assemblies) were allowed to determine their own topics and agendas, which again conforms with Averchenkova and Ghilan (2023, 5) finding that elected representatives’ *“opinions are shaped by the results of the {CAs} and the degree to which they satisfy the actors’ interests”*, in addition to their overall scepticism of deliberative processes and lay citizen input (Rangoni et al., 2021).

“first of all, the government doesn't have to accept the recommendations of a {(C)CA}, that's the first point. It's their prerogative to do so. And I think that should be made quite clear” (ER4)

“I think also the fact that there is public confidence in the citizens assembly model, I think, also enables the parliamentary system to take it more seriously. Perhaps there might be a different view of it if the citizen's assembly was looking at issues that maybe the parliamentary system might not be quite as happy to have them look at!” (ER5).

Nonetheless, political sponsors such as ER6 expressed *“worry”* that CAs *“could be seen to be a cynical exercise”* by those who *“argue that government didn't accept or didn't carry all the {CA} recommendations”* – a narrative in part shaped by accusations of *“cherry-picking”* (Font et al. 2018). However, ER6 once again asserted the prerogative of elected representatives when stating: *“We don't have to accept the recommendation”*. This finding mirrored the concerns raised by one civil society expert in Averchenkova and Ghilan’s (2023, 10) cross-country study. Specifically, the interviewee stated that: *“(i)f a Parliament or government says, we disagree with the recommendation from citizens, we have a different take, and we don't like it for this and that reason, that is legitimate. And if that is understood, then CAs are helpful. If that is not understood and if there's an expectation on CAs making decisions, then I would say it's really harmful”*. Herein, there is a legitimate concern amongst political and policy actors that the narrative of unresponsive decision-makers and their perceived propensity to solely cherry-pick recommendations – and the external pressure of deliberative proponents and vested stakeholders for politicians to accept “the citizens” demands – may serve to (further) undermine the public's faith in institutions and/or lead to poor policy decisions. For example, Averchenkova and Ghilan’s

(2023, 10) note that "some actors expressing critical views towards CAs in this context seemed to assume that the assembly would be taking decisions rather than making recommendations" – an apparent misunderstanding of the advisory role of all national-level (C)CAs to date. Overall, both ERs and advisors interviewed for this present study cited the need to weigh broader concerns (as illuminated with **Section 5.2**) and the views of other constituents and stakeholders as valid reasons for rejecting recommendations. In short, the findings strongly concur with the empirical data of Averchenkova and Ghilan (2023, 10: See Box 3¹³⁸) regarding the place of (C)CAs in climate and overall governance systems.

"recommendations are recommendations, government is not bound to take them" (ER4)

"There's no constitutional place for citizens assemblies, so ultimately, I think it's for the government of the day, given the mandate they have directly from the people, to decide whether or not they want to {accept recommendations}. So that's, that's the bald, bare bones with the ball truth of this. However, you can't come into the {parliament} as a minister and wax lyrical and rhetorically about the great work of the citizens' assembly. And what a great tool it was to help us to work through a sensitive issue, and then kind of completely disregard everything that they've said. So how do you strike the balance between at least recognising and respecting a process that is, has the imprimatur of the government of the day?" (ER7)

Nonetheless, despite their insistence that CA recommendations should not bind the parliament or government, ERs and advisors were cognisant that failing to adequately respond to proposals could potentially undermine the present and future legitimacy of CAs in Ireland. For example, ER4 believed that *"it impacts trust if you don't follow up on the having the {parliamentary} debate and the reports"*. Similarly, ER7 argued that *"if in the first instance, you have said as a government, that you're holding a CA for the purposes of working through a sensitive issue, such as climate change. I think, should be taken seriously"*. They added that, *"It's not to say that you should recommend everything, or implement everything that is recommended, lock stock and barrel. But I do think at the very minimum, there should be a respect for what it is that was recommended, and the spirit of those recommendations"*. Likewise, ER6 argued that *"there is a need to have the debate, a discussion, and to utilise the reports as a means of influencing legislation, or of governing, by all means, because if you don't, then the process becomes null and void"*. In such cases, ER6 argued that people can become *"rightly cynical"* and stated: *"that's something we have to overcome in the future"*. Notably, this chimes with the views of ICA members, organisers (e.g., Sec 2) and experts (SE1 and SE2) as outlined in **Analysis Part 1 (Section 4.4.)**. For example, P10 remarked that *"I can see how it would undermine the process if the government didn't take certain actions"*. Nevertheless, Esaiasson et al., (2019) note that unfavourable outputs may temper elected representatives' enthusiasm (at least towards

¹³⁸ For example, see below "the illustrative quotes on the place of CAs in climate and overall governance system": "It's difficult. We want citizen assembly to make proposals, but we want those proposals to be implemented. But if we say we want them to be implemented, it means that we don't want a Parliament to have a role" (civil society expert)

• "These people are advisors [CAs] they are not elected. So simply by that fact, they can't have the power to take decisions", civil society expert" (Averchenkova and Ghilan (2023, 10: See Box 3).

particularly “costly” recommendations). Herein, Fournier et al. (2011, 146) propound that political sponsors may “grant {CAs} a very limited advisory ‘power’” if they believe outcomes may not be aligned with their own agenda. For instance, in relation to the ICA’s proposals, Harris (2021, 685) has highlighted how “in setting the terms of reference for the {PCCA}, the Government shaped the lens through which the recommendations would be discussed”. Likewise, ER7 noted how in their view, certain Ministers’ may use CAs as a rhetorical tool while subsequently ignoring their recommendation, and additionally, how senior civil servants would seek to control CAs in order to prevent radical recommendations emerging.

"But we're still very paternalistic as a state and the civil servants. It's not the politicians who have the power in this country. It is senior civil servants. And if you're in a line department, that is dealing with the citizens assembly type issue, you know, you know, I think the instinct, the the instinct of the, the institutional instinct is to try and control it as much as possible, not to let it get out of hand. Because what you don't want after the fact is that if there is something that is radical, in terms of what it seeks to recommend, then it's, 'Jesus, how is my Minister going to implement this?' I'm going to try to keep it within the ditches as much as possible." (ER7).

In short, the above empirical interview data suggests that key political and (climate) policy actors within the Irish case questioned the capacity of ordinary citizens to make proposals on complex issues and strongly believed that the government and/or parliament should retain the right to control topic selection, framing and agenda-setting processes. They also maintained that the government of the day should not be bound by citizens' proposals, albeit recognising the need to (be seen to) adequately respond to such proposals. One caveat (as illuminated in **Section 5.2**) is that politicians, policymakers and the representative system in general may have legitimate reasons for doing so. Overall, these findings largely concur with the (limited) existing literature, with Niessen (2023) noting very low support amongst ERs for a more empowered and independent CA model (e.g. with “co-decision making power”). In sum, the data also illuminated a “participatory dissonance’ (Hendriks and Lees-Marshment 2019, 608-609) amongst political actors wherein ERs and advisors noted the normative and instrumental value of (C)CA in principle, while also pragmatically recognising their potential limitations (including their own lack of knowledge of the process) and affirming a strong desire to retain ultimately decision-making authority.

"Let's keep it at a high level. Are citizens' assemblies inherently good things? Yes, I believe they are. Do they have massive flaws? Yes, they do. From a politician's point of view, are they helpful in assisting the polity to work through issues? Yes, they are. How do they operate? Do politicians fully understand how citizens' assemblies operate? No, we don't. We have our doubts". (ER7)

5.3.2 Evidence of Structural Changes within the Environmental Policy Domain

In addition to primary political sponsors (i.e., the Government or given Ministerial authority) utilisation of (C)CAs, A4 noted how smaller parties have a “means-ends approach” and may

also seek to use deliberative processes “*to advance their agenda in any way possible*”. For example, as outlined in **Section 2.3** of the literature review, the ICA was not initially included as one of the original topics within the then government's convening legislation for the Irish CA 2016-2018 series. However, it was subsequently added as an amendment by the Green Party who incidentally had only two TDs (i.e., MPs) from 166 sitting in the lower chamber of the Oireachtas (Irish legislature)¹³⁹. Herein, this points out the risk of unrepresentative and perhaps biased (C)CA framing remits (as discussed in **Analysis 4.2 and 5.2**) if topic titles are left to the political whims of parliamentary debates and minority interests as in the ICA case. Hence, there is a perceivable danger that a CCA, which is seen to be supported by predominantly one party or narrow interest group, may lack the required cross-party or stakeholder support needed to achieve effective political uptake and subsequent implementation of recommendations. Indeed, Averchenkova and Ghilan's (2023, 10) research revealed how “several experts explicitly talked about CA's being seen by the political establishment as a product of the ‘green lobby’”. Likewise, within the Irish case, Dr Eoin O' Malley – one of the leading academic advisors behind the original “bottom-up” WTC pilot case in Ireland – has similarly warned that “*in certain policies NGOs do tend to set the agenda*”¹⁴⁰. Nonetheless, the ICA proved extraordinarily fruitful for the Green Party, particularly given their subsequent entry into the coalition Government after the 2020 general election, with party leader Eamon Ryan (who initially proposed the founding ICA amendment) assuming the role of Minister for the Environment, Climate and Transport with the power to enact both ICA and PCCA recommendations.

“I do think smaller parties use {CAs} as a tool. Because sometimes, the circumstances don't exist within the {Parliamentary} system to put issues on the agenda” (ER7)

“Typically, the smaller ones {parties}, are just keen to advance their agenda in any way possible. So they have a means-end approach. So if they're concerned about biodiversity, for example, it is extraordinarily important. But not everybody gets it. And the Green Party in government, presumably, get it and, on the whole, think it's very important. And they may see a citizens' assembly as a way to gain public attention, to gain advanced recommendations that they would otherwise struggle to advance. Possibly because they didn't manage to get them in the Programme for Governments (i.e. agreement among Coalition parties setting out agenda for government). And so this is another opportunity to push the agenda further” (A4).

“{Cas} are an appropriate step into radical reform. They are an important interface. We have seen significant success in this regard. Laura Devaney, an academic who examined this, said: ‘{the ICA} was an exceptional experiment in democratic governance and engagement. Comprising 99 citizens, it afforded participants the time, space and structure to deliberate on complex public policy questions, including climate change’. It afforded politicians the space to do what is right. That citizens' assembly led to the citizens' climate research project, the Oireachtas special committee {i.e. new permanent standing committee on climate action}, the programme for government, and the climate action legislation last year. We would not have that Act and the ambition in it if we

¹³⁹ [Citizens' Assembly: Motion – Dáil Éireann \(32nd Dáil\) – Wednesday, 13 Jul 2016 – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

¹⁴⁰ [Irish referendum fiasco puts future of lauded citizens' assemblies in doubt | Ireland | The Guardian](#)

did not have that citizens' assembly". (Green Party: Deputy Brian Leddin, 22 Feb 2022, parliamentary speech on the Parliamentary Resolution regarding the enactment of the Irish CA on Biodiversity¹⁴¹).

The above quote by Green Party TD (i.e., MP) Brian Leddin therein illustrates the series of significant "structural changes" within Ireland's environmental policy domain emanating from the ICA. Firstly, the comments were made during the parliamentary debate on legislation to enact the CA on Biodiversity. As previously noted, the perceived success of the ICA and other CAs more generally undoubtedly paved the way for the subsequent biodiversity assembly. More specifically, the Parliamentary debate on the PCCA's report¹⁴² saw an amendment moved to *call "for the Citizens' Assembly to examine how the State can improve its response to the issue of biodiversity loss¹⁴³".* Hence, there was a direct link between the ICA, the PCCA and the subsequent CA on Biodiversity. Consequently, the coalition parties (which included the Green party) agreed PfG (2020) ultimately committed to *"progress the establishment of a Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity...following on from the {parliament's} declaration"* (PfG 2020, 38). Secondly, the Deputy refers to "the Oireachtas special committee", namely the PCCA's recommendation for a *"Standing Committee on Climate Action"* as part of *"a new framework for delivering climate action"* (PCCA report 2019, 9). The PCCA argued that this "structural change" would serve as *"the main {parliamentary} accountability mechanism"* on climate action, giving real force to the ICA's Rec. 1 (see **Appendix A**). The PfG (2020, 34) subsequently proposed a standing committee on climate action with powers similar to the influential Public Accounts Committee. Since being placed on a permanent footing, the "Committee on Environment and Climate Action" has played an important role with the given policy domain; for example, in considering and reporting on the recommendations of the aforementioned CA on Biodiversity¹⁴⁴.

Additionally, the new permanent committee has also been granted the function of providing parliamentary oversight regarding the new 5-yearly Carbon Budgets recommended by the Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC). These new budgets were another key recommendation of the ICA (Rec. 2, See **Appendix A**) and subsequent PCCA report, consequently leading to significant "structural change" within the Irish policy domain. Specifically, the PCCA report (2019, 9) recommended that an enhanced CCAC *"would devise and recommend five-yearly carbon budgets"*, with the government of the day *"responsible for allocating carbon budgets and...the delivery of national targets"*. Ireland's first carbon budget programme – as proposed by the CCAC –

¹⁴¹ [Citizens' Assemblies: Motion – Dáil Éireann \(33rd Dáil\) – Tuesday, 22 Feb 2022 – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

¹⁴² Climate Change: A Cross-Party Consensus on Climate Action PCCA's

¹⁴³ [Report entitled 'Climate Change: A Cross-Party Consensus on Climate Action': Motion – Dáil Éireann \(32nd Dáil\) – Thursday, 9 May 2019 – Houses of the Oireachtas](#)

¹⁴⁴ [Report on the examination of recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly report on biodiversity loss \(oireachtas.ie\)](#)

was subsequently approved by the Government in Feb 2020¹⁴⁵. This “structural change” also highlights how expert (academic) influence (whether or not it is fully representative, transparent or legitimate) may grow substantially from a (C)CA – a point also stressed by Carolan (2015) with reference to the prior ICC. For instance, the ICA Chair stressed that the intention of citizens with regard to an augmented CCAC body was to “*compel the State to implement what the {expert} advisers consider to be the correct approach*” (*emphasis added*). However, herein lies the discrete danger of excessive expert influence, bias or manipulation (i.e., limited contextual independence), with the prior analysis (Section 4.3 and 5.2) highlighting the influential role of prominent CCAC actors in the ICA. Specifically, four of the then-eleven member CCAC presented to the assembly, while one more served on the Expert Advisory Group (EAG). The below quote by SE1 – a member of both the EAG and CCAC – is perhaps illustrative of the potential conflict of interest therein. Herein, it is also worth remembering Fournier et al’s (2011, 91) warning that “if the assembly members were to fall under the sway of some external actors - the chair or staff of the assembly, interest groups, or some other powerful political actor - they no longer can be said to represent the public”.

“I think the members of the assembly were in favour of the creation of a State body which could make the State do what is right. I think that is what recommendation 1 is about. The members wanted a body that could compel the State to implement what the advisers consider to be the correct approach” (ICA Chair, contribution to PCCA debate, 5 Sept 2018¹⁴⁶)

“(w)ell we (the EAG) would be generally supportive of strengthening the {CCAC}, they are quite experienced academics who work across that science-policy divide and know the nitty-gritty of political decision making and how to keep things moving” (SE1).

Finally, the enhanced role of the CCAC and the introduction of 5-year carbon budgets were enacted within the “*climate action legislation*” aforementioned in the quote from Deputy Leddin. Specifically, the seminal “*Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021*” established “*a legally binding framework with clear targets and commitments set in law and ensure the necessary structures and processes are embedded on a statutory basis to ensure we achieve our national, EU and international climate goals and obligations in the near and long term*”¹⁴⁷. As the Government press release accompanying the passing of the legislation sets out, “*the Bill has been informed by and strongly reflects the recommendations as set out in the Report of the {ICA} and the {PCCA} Report 2019*”¹⁴⁸. Herein, the findings largely support the view of Torney (2021, 385) – a member of the EAG – who states that “taking a longer-term perspective, the most consequential impact of the assembly’s recommendations may turn out

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/222805/697ec730-a09f-4216-a54a-6a5cd0b358df.pdf#page=null>

¹⁴⁶ [Joint Committee on Climate Action debate - Wednesday, 5 Sep 2018 \(oireachtas.ie\)](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/jointcommittees/climateaction/debate/wednesday-5-sep-2018/)

¹⁴⁷ [gov - Climate Action and Low Carbon Development \(Amendment\) Bill 2021 \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publications-and-resources/articles/2021-03-climate-action-and-low-carbon-development-amendment-bill-2021/)

¹⁴⁸ [gov - Government approves landmark Climate Bill putting Ireland on the path to net-zero emissions by 2050 \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publications-and-resources/articles/2020-06-government-approves-landmark-climate-bill-putting-ireland-on-the-path-to-net-zero-emissions-by-2050/)

to be the revision of the climate law”. Specifically, the author notes that the ICA “resulted in significant policy turbulence, most notably through a major overhaul of the 2015 climate law”. Nonetheless, the author is right to point out “the broader context” (e.g., IPPC report and school strikes for climate) which he argues “played a key role in creating the conditions for these significant development”. Indeed, cynics might question whether such legislative targets, which were ultimately bound under EU and international law, would have manifested without the ICA and subsequent PCCA. Regardless, it is clear that the assembly and the subsequent PCCA provided a political impetus and space for action. Importantly, DE2 noted a key difference between the ICA and CCAs when stating that the Irish process “*was driven by the Department of the Prime Minister*” – hence ensuring a central “all of government” support for the process and subsequent recommendations. Indeed, perhaps key recommendations would have been less likely to have been accepted if they were sponsored by a sole Department (e.g. Climate Action) and thus perceived to be the “pet project” of a given Minister or coalition party.

“Not all assemblies are equal; you can’t just add up the percentage of recommendations accepted as some are more influential than others” (DE2)

Overall, Harris (2021, 685) notes that the Bill “included a commitment to a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and provisions for: five yearly carbon budgets; a stronger Climate Change Advisory Council; and greater oversight and accountability powers for the Oireachtas (Parliament)”. The author likewise concludes that “(b)oth bills were strongly influenced by the recommendations of the {ICA} and {PCCA}”. In conclusion, it is clear the ICA was a catalyst for significant structural changes within the Irish environmental policy domain; however, whether such changes will be supported by the broader public, in the long run, remains to be seen, with Ireland set to fall well short of its stated 2030 climate targets¹⁴⁹.

“I think it moved the conversation along. I really do. And I think the Climate Action Plan, we have a Climate Action Plan. Now, you know that there is weight behind that. I think the political discourse around things like the just transition. I think it has firmly worked its way into the political debate. I think it has been a mover in shaping Ireland's response to climate action. I certainly do think that it has been a positive process overall” (ER7).

“And there are those who said this was an exercise of kicking the can down the road, but in kicking the can, you create an assembly that brought back a recommendation that galvanised the Oireachtas (i.e. Parliament) to act. So I would argue, having been questionable and worried about {the CA process} at the beginning, I’m not so worried anymore, convinced more than ever, that you need to have both {representative and deliberative governance}” (ER6).

¹⁴⁹ <https://www.irishtimes.com/environment/2023/06/02/ireland-to-fall-well-short-of-its-climate-targets-and-exceed-carbon-budgets-up-to-2030-by-a-wide-margin-epa-predicts/>

6 DISCUSSION

The following discussion chapter will highlight key themes and patterns that emerged from the previous analytical chapters with respect to the outlined research question, aims and objectives. In doing so, it will reflect upon the literature outlined in **Section 2** to illuminate new insights and perceptions relevant to the specific ICA case and the utilisation of (C)CAs more generally (i.e., both in Ireland and further afield).

Analysis Part 1 – which firstly focused on “*Exploring Representation and Inclusion within the ICA*” (**Section 4.1**) – challenged the “claim-making framework” (Gül 2019, 41) of ICA organisers that participants were “*a representative sample of ordinary members of Irish society* (ICA, 2017, 39)”. In short, the data supported the views of Dr. O’Malley – a prominent Irish deliberative scholar who co-led the first CA pilot (i.e. WTC) in Ireland – that although “assemblies could stimulate productive debate, (they) were not necessarily representative” (Carroll 2024). Specifically, the findings highlighted systematic recruitment issues regarding the sampling, selection and replacement of ICA members, with such (perhaps intentional? – see Lacelle-Webster and Warren 2023) limitations and perceived representational biases ultimately negatively influencing the views of climate policy actors (i.e., ERs, advisors and relevant stakeholders) within the parliamentary committee tasked with considering citizens’ recommendations (i.e., the PCCA). Firstly, regarding representation, Parkinson (2003, 190) propounds that “what is legitimate in one {CA} context will be illegitimate in another”. Herein, questions remain whether the ICA membership – which was selected for the whole Irish CA 2016-2018 series – was indeed a legitimate sample for the specific issue of climate change. Indeed, Torney (2021, 387), similar to those data subjects interviewed (e.g., DE1, P4), described the ICA as “almost as an after-thought” when compared to the seminal abortion (i.e., 8th amendment) topic within the same series. Consequently, despite the topic, the prominence of agricultural issues and the potential impact on countryside communities, the findings illuminated how citizens from rural and farming backgrounds were a significant minority within the assembly due to the “*precise demographic quotas*” utilised (Mooney 2018b). Moreover, the analysis highlighted how many (rural) counties had no members involved in the assembly proceedings. Furthermore, primary and secondary sources revealed that this (perceived) under-representation of farming and rural participants was heavily criticised by some ICA members, elected representatives and stakeholders (i.e., farming organisations) alike – in addition to rural communities – thus undermining the legitimacy of the ICA and its outcomes amongst important stakeholders. Additionally, this may have undermined the ongoing legitimacy (i.e., the input-output-input interlinkages) of (C)CAs in Ireland. For example, when questioned on the prospect of a CA on agriculture, the Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers’ Association (ICSA) described it as the

“*wrong model*” wherein “*you end up with...a lot of people who don’t necessarily have a stake in agriculture, who don’t have an understanding of what it is to farm*”¹⁵⁰.

Whether the decision of organisers to focus purely on demographic sampling was justified or not may be subject to scholarly debate – indeed, as Parkinson (2003, 147) attests, citizen members may act as “trustees” or “delegates”, with the interview data revealing contrary opinions amongst deliberative experts (DE1) and citizens (e.g., P8) about the ideal role of a deliberative participant. Herein, considering the findings of this research, this present author shares Parkinson’s (2003, 187) postulation that “deliberative representation demands that representatives act in a dual role”. Nevertheless, what is indisputable is that organisers failed to adequately sensitise ICA members to “the variety of opinions, ideas and backgrounds present in the broader public” (Stasiak et al. 2021, 4). For example, the failure to invite an “ordinary farmer” to speak – which shall be later discussed – was undoubtedly a missed opportunity to somewhat address the perceived urban-skew within the ICA. Furthermore, the decision not to include (a proxy for) climate attitudes within the sampling criteria – for example, akin to the Scottish and UK climate assembly cases – only exacerbates the perception of urban bias within the ICA in some quarters. Indeed, while there was clear evidence presented that participants’ desire for climate action strengthened as a direct result of the ICA (as outlined within **Section 4.4** – “*Process-Related Outcomes of the ICA*”), critics may (justifiably) argue that such citizens with pre-existing knowledge, motivation and capacity self-selected into the process. Indeed, without prior screening, it is impossible to disentangle the potential cause (i.e., ICA process or self-selection bias) from the effect (i.e., improved climate knowledge and civic motivation). Herein, the findings echo the most recent Irish CA evaluation (on gender equality), which noted that “this is something that future Irish assemblies could reflect on” (Suiter et al. 2021)¹⁵¹. Furthermore, they mirror the conclusions of Carolan and Glennon (2023, 202-203) who posit that: “What the Irish experience across multiple citizens’ assemblies suggests, however, is that they are susceptible to a systematic form of attitudinal bias that leaves them predominantly comprised of participants with prior interest in political issues”. Indeed, this present author concurs with their conclusion that “the claim to representative legitimacy cannot but be weakened if a putative “mini-public” is made up of people who are, in relevant ways, an attitudinal minority that are far more similar to each other than the population as a whole”.

Secondly, the selection and replacement procedures illuminated other systemic recruitment issues within the ICA, problems which also were apparent within other CA processes in Ireland. For example, one key finding of this research was that the Red C scandal – wherein the ICA

150 Cork TD Seán Sherlock calls for citizens’ assembly to discuss future of the agri sector | Independent.ie

151 Evaluation Report of the Irish Citizens’ Assembly on Gender Equality (tudublin.ie)

organisers admitted that numerous substitutes were inappropriately selected due to their friendship with one "rogue" recruiter – was not an "isolated incidence" (DE1), as claimed. Specifically, interview data revealed that such irregular recruitment practices (also) occurred *before* the important ICA session despite the official audit stating it occurred “*after the Assembly's discussion on addressing climate change*” (Mooney 2018a). Put simply, one interviewee stated that they had been recruited by "a friend" prior to the ICA session, while other participants remarked that substitutes were not like-for-like, nor were they introduced in a transparent manner. Such serious recruitment issues were also apparent within the prior ICC (Carolan 2015). For instance, Carolan (2015, 742) notes that “a number of the so-called ordinary citizens of the {ICC} were in fact known to each other”, including a married couple who actually approached the recruiting company to seek selection. Similarly, DE3 suggested similar anomalies had occurred within the subsequent CA on Biodiversity. These findings also echo the most recent Irish CA evaluation report (the 2021 CA on Gender Equality), which noted that "similarly to the previous Irish processes, there were issues over the numbers of members who turned up to meetings and the rate of turnover of members” (Suiter et al. 2021, 8). Specifically, over a third of members (37 out of 99) within the CA on Gender Equality had to be replaced, with 17 not turning up for one session and only 38 initially recruited remaining throughout the process. The authors note that "while these numbers are comparable with the previous citizens' assembly of 2016-18 (Farrell et al. 2019)” – which included the ICA session – they are nonetheless “markedly out of kilter with the practice in other countries, which tend to have higher levels of turnout and lower levels of turnover”. Overall, it appears that such failures have not been addressed between CA iterations (dating back to 2012), which may ultimately undermine the ongoing (representational) legitimacy of CAs in Ireland – despite the claims of organisers, sponsors and proponents.

The fact that the Secretariats for a given CA are subsequently wound down, leading to a lack of continuity between various iterations and, ultimately, another "steep learning curve" for new organisers (Suiter et al. 2021, 8), may partly explain this failure. Nonetheless, representation is so essential – if not *the* essential component of deliberative democracy (Dryzek 2009) and its subsequent legitimacy (Lindell 2023) – it seems inexcusable that such a pattern of significant recruitment and retention issues remains all the while that the rhetoric of “ordinary citizens” enacting recommendations is espoused by leading organisers, academic proponents, and politicians. Moreover, despite Suiter et al.’s (2021) observation regarding the disbanding of Secretariats, there has indeed been some continuity of senior organisers between CA iterations. For example, senior civil servant Art O’Leary served as both the leading Secretary for the ICC (the first State-sponsored CA in Ireland) and the most recent CA on Biodiversity. Nevertheless, despite this

prior expertise, the final Biodiversity report (CA on Biodiversity 2023¹⁵²) notes that 15 from 99 members were absent on average per session (i.e. 85% avr. attendance rate). Moreover, like previous reports, information on the demographic profile of members is only provided for the original cohort of CA members, with no data provided on replacements nor the ongoing representativeness of a given assembly (i.e. once substitutes are added); consequently, the apparent “descriptive similarities between the body and the citizenry” (Warren 2008, 56) may have been significantly altered during various Irish (C)CA proceedings, thus calling into question the true legitimacy of their final recommendations. In short, clear questions remain regarding the oversight, transparency and contextual independence of recruitment within Irish CAs and whether the assemblies are indeed as representative as claimed.

Moreover, the present findings also revealed that the ICA membership lacked an adequate regional spread, with some of those chosen for the CA coming from the same housing estate in some cases. Whether this is a sufficient degree of distance to engage in genuine deliberation is questionable (particularly on controversial topics); however, Lindell (2021, 4; also see Thompson 2008) propounds that “a deliberative discussion where citizens hold diverse viewpoints will have different outcomes than a discussion between like-minded individuals”. Additionally, the analysis also revealed other notably representative biases beyond geographical sampling. Specifically, the interview data and official ICA sources strongly corroborated that ICA members displayed a “*stronger civic interest*” (Mooney 2016, 1) than the general public. Moreover, the empirical findings suggest that a “systematic class-bias” (Lijphart 1997) was also evident within the ICA, with P1, for example, stating that “*if there was a divide (between participants), it was more to do with class or education levels... (as) most people who did it were from a certain class I suppose*”. This is somewhat ironic, given the claims of deliberative proponents that (C)CAs are a means “to help to artificially repair the unequal distribution of power and voices in representative democracy” (Vrydagh 2023, 7; also see Vandamme 2023). These (perceived) biases were undoubtedly exacerbated by the failure to provide an honorarium for members participation, something which may have also contributed to the noted under-representation of young people¹⁵³. However ironically, the vast majority of ICA participants interviewed as part of this present research believed that no payment should, as many proffered that people should only partake in assembly processes if they have a “*genuine interest*” (P8) – something which again strongly suggests a difference between the general public and the so-called “ordinary” ICA members interviewed.

152 Report-on-Biodiversity-Loss_mid-res.pdf (citizensassembly.ie)

153 In addition to the decision to only include participants on the electoral register, with high-numbers of young Irish people (particularly those from low-SES backgrounds) unregistered.

Although there is a possibility that such genuinely interested ICA members could have also self-selected to partake in interviews, this potential research bias has been guarded against through the cross-triangulation of sources and thus can be considered a robust finding. Furthermore, this failure was noted in the ICA Chair's own recommendations (ICA 2018c) and ultimately addressed for the subsequent CA on Biodiversity wherein "*payment of a nominal honorarium to Assembly members {was made} to recognise their civic commitment*"¹⁵⁴. Nevertheless, the open claim of one of the chief organisers of CAs in Ireland – Secretary General Art O'Leary¹⁵⁵ – that one-third of those participants surveyed within the biodiversity assembly "*wanted to be involved because they'd an interest in the issue*" while another one-third "*wanted to make a contribution to public service*" suggests that self-selection biases have not been fully acknowledged or addressed within the "Irish model" (Courant 2021). Consequently, there is a worrying potential that (C)CAs in Ireland may amplify – not alleviate – pre-existing disadvantages within Irish society (Sanders 1997). This is perhaps most evident by the strong disconnect between the ICA's recommendation on increasing CT and the public's (particularly working-class groups) strong opposition, as outlined in **Section 5.2** of the analysis, which focused on the "*Consideration of Recommendations*" by the PCCA. Herein, similar to the aforementioned discussion regarding the under-representation of rural communities, Section 5.2 also illuminated the crucial role of the parliamentary system in counteracting such ICA representative imbalances (i.e., via political parties' representation of core constituencies under-represented in the ICA). This is another important contribution of this present research, as it counteracts the often naïve (at best) or somewhat disingenuous (at worst) claims of some deliberative proponents and organisers alike that "*the citizens*" (emphasis added) recommendations are not being listened to or implemented by the political system. Indeed, as outlined in **Section 5.3** – "*ICA Structural Changes and the Perceptions of Key Actors on the role of (C)CAs in (Climate) Governance Systems*" – political actors are concerned that such assertions (i.e., regarding the apparent "need" for parliament or government to enact CA recommendations) may even (paradoxically) erode the public's faith in the representative system by fuelling a perception that politicians willingly ignore 'citizens' recommendations.

Herein, Lafont (2023, 51) poses an important question: "But if participants in CAs and non-participating citizens disagree about the decisions at hand, then who is supposed to speak in the name of the citizenry? Whose views ought to count as the views of "the public" that officials are supposed to consult?". The present research's findings from the ICA case add credence to

154 Terms of Reference | Citizens' Assembly (citizensassembly.ie)

155 Video Launch of the Cohort on Deliberative Democracy and Citizens Assemblies - Summit for Democracy (summit4democracy.org)

Lafont's (2014, 2) argument that it would be unwise for political actors "to blindly defer to the deliberations of a few selected citizens" who may not be (fully or legitimately) representative of affected communities or the broader society. Indeed, she rightfully raises the concern – often neglected by some deliberative proponents – that "in contrast to other political actors, CAs can easily be taken to be "proxies" for the citizenry as a whole" (Lafont 2023, 51), as is evident through the "claim-making framework" (Gül's 2019) employed by ICA organisers and academic evaluators alike, with many of the latter cohort also having "involved positions" within the Irish case (Courant 2021, 3). However, importantly, **Sections 5.2 and 5.3**, respectively, challenged this "simplified picture" often painted by "deliberative thinkers" wherein "elected officials passively and willingly receive public input" (Hendriks and Lees-Marshment 2019, 608-609). On the contrary, the unique empirical findings from the seminal Irish case illuminated that ERs and their advisors (A) interviewed – in addition to relevant stakeholders – were acutely aware of representational flaws and general bias (e.g. framing and expert) within the ICA. Moreover, such climate policy actors were importantly clued into other relevant channels of information in line with Hendriks and Lees-Marshment's (2019) supposition (e.g. constituents; stakeholders; alternative expert viewpoints) – which in turn shaped their response to specific recommendations (e.g., regarding the proposed CTAE – **See Appendix A: Rec. 11**). Consequently, this researcher rejects the criticism of Torney (2021) and others, who for example, criticise the failure of the PCCA to support the controversial CTAE recommendation. Instead, the findings support Lafont's (2023, 52) conclusion that "(e)xpecting public officials to simply follow the policy recommendation of a CA against the opinion and will of the bulk of the citizens who will be subject to the policy in question would hardly be a democratically legitimate option". Likewise, Rountree and Curato (2023, 78) – who cite evidence of "blind deference" within the Irish case – note that "the recommendation of an assembly could alternatively require serious consideration rather than deference"; herein, they continue that "public debate would centre on the merits of policy proposals rather than the recommending power of the assembly". Similarly, Harris (2021 685) – speaking within the context of youth representation within the ICA – questions whether the "claim" by organisers (meant here in the broadest sense to include sponsors, experts, and evaluators) that the process was guided by the concerns of under-represented groups (e.g., young people) is "sufficient in terms of democratic legitimacy?". The author consequently questions whether one can "contend that the views of all those impacted by the policies, and in some cases their irreversible consequences, have been considered?". Indeed, the findings of this research strongly suggest that the views of rural communities, working-class groups and young people were not adequately represented nor

considered by the ICA; consequently, this inevitably negatively impacted both the input and output legitimacy of the ICA, with apparent implications for the long-term utilisation of CAs in Ireland.

In addition to the above representational issues, which illuminated the interlinkages between inputs and outputs (i.e., via some PCCA actors' negative perceptions of the ICA's procedural design), **Section 4.2** of the analysis – which explored “*Procedural Rules: Framing, Agenda Setting, and Deliberative Persuasion within the ICA*” – revealed how (initial) decisions pertaining to Irish assembly's framing and agenda-setting fundamentally shaped subsequent proceedings. Moreover, **Section 5.2** elucidated the impact of such influential “top-down” (Lafont 2023, 53) organisational decisions – of which **Section 4.2** revealed that ICA members had little or no control – on subsequent outcomes, while **Section 5.3** illuminated the views of ERs and advisors that (C)CAs should be (or are) kept under the tight reign of the institutional actors (whether government, politicians more generally or the civil service, in addition to anointed expert advisors). Taken together, the findings suggest that the ICA followed a familiar pattern of CAs so far according to Lafont (2023, 53); specifically, that it was (at least partially) organised “with the aim of delivering some “input” that was of interest to the sponsors” rather than a genuine process of open issue-exploration and citizen-led deliberation. Indeed, given the interview data findings that the ICA (and other CAs) may be used as a “tool” or “device” (A4) by Government and (particularly smaller) political parties to advance their specific interests, the evidence supports Elstub and Khoban (2023, 118; also see Courant 2022) critique that (C)CAs may be “benign and easily co-opted by public authorities who organize them for symbolic reasons, to provide a veil of legitimacy to elitist policymaking and to make it look as though they are enabling the public to have a say, when the decisions have already been made”. Overall, this authors empirically derived conclusions concurs with Harris's (2021, 689) “systemic analysis {which} finds that the Irish CA was ‘too tightly coupled’...and that while this may have been beneficial in terms of uptake and impact, it came at the expense of input legitimacy”.

For instance, despite the claims of senior organisers (Sec 1) that the “leadership” emphasis of the ICA emerged from the public submission process, the reality is that the influential framing title – “*How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate*” – was “elite-driven” (Lacelle-Webster and Warren 2023, 100) and emerged solely from a Green Party (GP) amendment to the enacting CA (2016-2018) legislation. Herein, given the then minority (only two TDs) parliamentary representation of the GP, this arguably represented the ‘mobilisation of bias is at its highest’ (Smith 2001, 84). Not surprisingly then, it was the GP who ultimately benefited most from the ICA and the subsequent PCCA proposals, as they were able to strategically utilise the process to push forward specific policy recommendations, even those fundamentally rejected by the cross-party

PCCA (i.e. such as the decision to “prioritise the expansion of public transport spending over new road infrastructure spending at a ratio of no less than 2-to-1” – **See Rec. 10, Appendix A**). Nevertheless, cynics might rightly question the real influence of the ICA recommendations, pointing to the concurrent “green wave” probably best captured by Greta Thornburg’s “School Strikes for Climate” movement, as noted by Torney (2021). Indeed, **Section 5.1** – which process-traced and utilised a SIM analysis to assess the degree of policy “*congruence*” and impact of ICA recommendations – illustrated that despite the perceivably high “uptake” of proposals, the majority of the assembly’s policy suggestions exerted only a “continuous influence” (and to a lesser extent an “enriching influence”) on pre-existing policy and/or political commitments within the given domain (Vrydagh and Caluwaerts 2023, 119). The empirical evidence also mirrors critique of Carolan’s (2020, 6) regarding the “appealingly homespun air to the argument that “99 strangers in a Dublin hotel broke Ireland’s abortion deadlock” over “a lot of cups of tea and coffee”. Specifically, the author argues that the seminal constitutional change attributed to the Irish CA on Abortion was in fact “more significantly influenced by incidents that occurred prior to those processes”, furthermore citing the “obvious limitations to accounts of constitutional change as the product of either an institutional process (even one with a “deliberative” element) or as a linear narrative”. Moreover, the findings of the ICA case also adds weight to Elstub and Khoban (2023, 118) assertion that “authorities select recommendations they already planned to implement and ignore the others that they do not support”, with “innovative” citizen-led proposals (Vrydagh and Caluwaerts 2023) which diverged from institutional prerogatives routinely ignored by the PCCA (in addition to the obstruction of some innovative citizen proposals by the ICA apparatus itself). However, an important caveat therein is that the PCCA (which had a broader political representation than the elite political sponsors, particularly during this specific period of “minority” Government in Ireland) played a crucial role as a counterweight to representational, expert (e.g. providing space for an alternative viewpoint from agricultural experts and stakeholders) and framing biases (e.g. successfully pushing for the inclusion of a “just transition” in contrast to the ICA’s narrow eco-technocratic and “leadership” frame). Overall, a key finding of this research is that the total uptake of recommendations should not be conflated with its substantive influence.

Indeed, to further prove this point (with a countervailing example), **Section 5.3** of the analysis illuminated that the ICA – despite the limited “continuous influence” of *most* recommendations – still served as a *major* catalyst (predominantly for the GP) to extract significant “structural changes” (Jacquet and Van der Does 2021) within the policy domain. Specifically, the seminal “Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Bill (2021)” – enacted by the GP leader who initially proposed the ICA, sat on the PCCA and subsequently became Minister for the

Environment, Climate and Transport after leading the GP into a coalition Government after securing core climate commitments in the PfG – put Ireland on the path to net zero emissions by 2050. Additionally, accompanying measures to strengthen the CCAC, introduce carbon budgeting, and a new permanent standing parliamentary committee on climate action (all emanating **from Rec. 1: see Appendix A**) have radically altered the course of climate policymaking in Ireland. Nevertheless, the analysis (**Section 4.2** and **Section 5.2**, respectively) also revealed that the narrow "leadership" frame and subsequent "top-down" agenda-setting processes, wherein participants felt "led", arguably contributed to a failure to address other important and interrelated issues. For example, the call of ICA members (as revealed by primary and secondary sources) for further information and deliberations on the subject of aviation, the marine industry (e.g. cruise liners) and linking subsidies for "agriculture and farming businesses...to greenhouse gas emissions" (ICA 2018c, 572) were impeded by organisers, with time limitations, the lack of expert contribution on such matters or the narrow scope of the assembly (e.g., EU rules) cited by the Chair as a justification for these obstructions. On the contrary, these were all procedural concerns that could have been (mostly) addressed via enhanced citizenry control, which would have improved the validity and legitimacy of the ICA. Herein, organisers and proponents may well point to the inclusion of a "steering group" (SG) which included ICA members "who were charged with providing feedback and guidance on meeting plans"; however, **Section 4.2** of the analysis illuminated the disconnect between the SG citizen members and broader ICA membership, while also suggesting that voluntary participation, the city-centre meeting location and additional time-commitments may have further exacerbated pre-existing inequalities (e.g., self-selection, socio-economic class and urban-centric biases). Hence, overall, the findings (at least partially) support Elstub et al. (2021, 4) view that "that mini-publics with pre-determined agendas 'will tell us little of value about the popular will' (Richardson 2010) as policy makers will remain uninformed about the issues that matter to the public most". Why partially – because the data also showed that when citizens were genuinely empowered within the ICA, they made significant contributions that were in tune with the majority of the public's views, as evidenced by their "qualifications" for CT increases and their strong desire (against expert advice and Government priorities) for a ringfencing of such revenues¹⁵⁶.

Nevertheless, overall the findings add empirical weight to Elstub et al.'s (2021, 4) assumption that the framing and agenda-setting are ultimately shaped by the 'value choices and the

¹⁵⁶ The strong push for specific "rural incentives" for EVs is another example of where (mainly rural) ICA members have arguably been proved right; however, as discussed, this recommendation was rejected by the majority of members who did not feel a tailored approach to rural concerns was justified or appropriate.

political power of the players' involved' (Dietz 2008, 35)...(and) typically reflects the priorities of the commissioning body". This is an important contribution to the field given that "much of the research on the agenda of mini-publics has been {solely} theoretical" (Ibid) and "in practice, the complexity and consequences of choices about framing are often left unexamined" (Blue and Dale 2016, 16). Specifically, the analysis of the ICA demonstrated "these choices have implications for how people engage with the topics, and ultimately the choices they make" (Shaw et al. 2021, 4). Indeed, there was a notable "path dependency" within the ICA *from process to outcomes*, as the Irish case illuminated how "the scope of a citizens' assembly will determine many of the design features and the interest of policy-makers and the public in the process and its outcomes". For example, unlike other prominent CCAs, the ICA did not embed "themes such as fairness, justice and balancing multiple interests" (Shaw et al. 2021, 3). In contrast, the evidence concurred with the official ICA evaluation that "cost-orientated framings" dominated (Devaney et al. (2021, 15-20), something which conforms to Wong's (2016) conception of eco-technocracy. Herein, the present author also concurs with Suiter et al's (2021, 6) assertion that the approach used to establish assemblies in Ireland "is relatively unusual". Specifically, the academics note that in contrast to other countries' utilisation of (C)CAs, in Ireland, "the terms of reference are shaped in the political sphere and without consultation or prior discussion with the potential chairperson or chairpersons". Hence, Suiter et al. (2021) ultimately question whether this "(r)esolution mechanism, as utilised at present, is the most effective mechanism to determine the topics and scope of citizens' assemblies", something they note "warrants further consideration, especially as there are a number of deliberative mini-publics planned". Herein, the present empirical research has elucidated the potential pitfalls of this approach, particularly within the context of a CCA (where power imbalances between knowledge gatekeepers and citizens may be amplified). In short, the analysis illuminated an "*underlying feeling...that {organisers} knew the destination before we even took off*" (P5) – something which undoubtedly calls into question the internal legitimacy of the ICA. However notably, the analysis (**Section 5.2**) also illustrated how actors within the representative system were not only cognizant of these biases (which undermined the internal legitimacy of the ICA), but that the PCCA ultimately provided a space to explore more "pluralistic values" (Wong 2016) beyond mere "technical questions" (Shaw et al. 2021, 2). Hence, a key finding of this research is that representational democracy can serve as a crucial institutional "safety valve" to guard against the (potentially intentionally designed – see Lacelle-Webster and Warren 2023) limitations and excesses of (C)CAs. Nevertheless, the uncommon parliamentary arithmetic (i.e., minority government and strong opposition presence on committees) may have enhanced this counterbalancing effect within the specific ICA case. Hence, these findings contradict the opinion of Torney (2021), who

questions the relevance of "design" with respect to outcomes and consequently argues that fundamental process flaws must also be addressed (at the input stage) via stronger oversight, transparency and contextual independence from the outset of any future (C)CA,

For example, with regard to contextual independence and the degree of expert influence, P5 – in addition to the “underlying feeling” of the agenda “*being led*” – also felt that ICA members “*were going to get the draft (i.e. recommendations) that the experts were going to give us anyway*”. Indeed, Section 4.3 also illuminated (via cross-triangulated sources) that the EAG – in addition to political sponsors – had an overarching role in shaping the agenda. This occurred not only directly, but also indirectly via speaker selection and the initial drafting of recommendations. Indeed, the empirical evidence herein strongly concurred with Carolan's (2015, 743-746) prior analysis of the ICC, wherein no guidance was issued on expert involvement. However, similar to the aforementioned representational issues, procedural failings within the ICC were not addressed for the subsequent ICA (and the broader Irish CA 2016-2018 series). Specifically, SE1 – an EAG member – confided that “*(h)ow you get identified...it is a total black box, I have no factual evidence to how it works*”. Consequently, this present author shares Carolan's concern that this is “normatively troubling...especially in light of the evidence from previous mini-publics about the potentially decisive influence of expert input”. Moreover, whether there has been “deliberate concealing of these dynamics” or not remains unclear; however, what is beyond doubt is that such ambiguity “cannot but impugn the legitimacy” of these respective Irish CAs (Ibid). Indeed, Carolan (2015, 746- 748) notes, “the way in which the {ICC} 'agenda items or narrative . . . sometimes reflected the interests of the academics' highlights similar risks with the influence of an assembly's experts”. Although such an expert-led approach may be justifiable and legitimate when citizens' opinions on expert policies are transparently being sought (as was the case with the CAUK), van Beek et al. (2024, 12) propound that “it becomes problematic...if policy recommendations are presented as citizens own identified ideas whereas in reality these reflected experts' proposals”. This is particularly the case given Blue's (2015, 152) postulation that “rather than opening up public issues to diverse meanings, mini-publics can inadvertently close down public debate where only expert issue framings are considered valid, reasonable, and credible” – with evidence of such dynamics found within the prior analysis pertaining to the ICA case. Indeed, the importance of this point for the ongoing legitimacy of (C)CAs (in Ireland and abroad) should not be understated, as Fournier et al. (2011, 91) aptly warn that “if the assembly members were to fall under the sway of some external actors - the chair or staff of the assembly, interest groups, or some other powerful political actor - they no longer can be said to represent the public”.

Moreover, the findings suggest that the lack of citizens control over speaker selection may have replicated existing power structures among experts (Roberts et al. 2020, 7), with the influential CCAC's priorities – in addition to Government prerogatives – seemingly prioritised, perhaps at the expense of members other desired inputs or concerns (e.g. aviation emissions). These findings also support Dr. O'Malley's views that “assembly chairs, who were civil servants, could shape outcomes through selection of experts” (Carroll 2024). Indeed, the very first recommendation of the ICA (see Rec. 1, Appendix A) – that sought to significantly strengthen the power of the CCAC (something which was explicitly clarified by the ICA Chair when the reference to “*new or existing body*” was questioned) – which was drafted by the EAG attests to this, with some ICA members interviewed raising significant doubts about this unelected technocratic body (and potentially giving it the power to sue the State), their intentions and the fact that “*it's a slippery slope giving power to people who aren't politicians...it's just not a great idea*” (P11). Furthermore, this undoubtedly shaped the final recommendations and ultimately coloured the PCCA members' views regarding the (perceived) expert bias within the ICA. Specifically, the failure to invite an “*ordinary farmer*” to discuss the potential impact of a CTAE (in addition to other agricultural issues) or to provide a counter-expert perspective on the controversial CT proposal are two primary examples of expert bias within the ICA. With regard to the latter point, the analytical findings (within Sections 4.3 and 5.2 respectively) strongly concurred with van Beek et al. (2024, 9; also see Muradova et al. (2020, 22) who observed that some ICA expert contributors – such as the “prominent economist” who strongly spoke in favour of CT increases – “sometimes stepped out of this role and acted as ‘issue advocates’, strongly advocating for specific policy options (cf. Pielke, 2007)”. Indeed, this empirical research has made an important contribution to the field given that Muradova et al. (2021, 1323) noted how “it is surprising that no one has analysed why these specific {ICA} recommendations were forwarded to the government and how expert information played a role in these processes”. Furthermore, the present study went beyond van Beek et al.'s (2024, 9) analysis in highlighting how “eco-technocratic” (Wong 2016) ICA proposals were “considered” (Jacquet and Van der Does 2021) and robustly challenged within the PCCA.

Specifically, another key finding of this research is that the PCCA allowed for more “pluralistic views” (Wong 2016) to emerge during deliberations on climate action than the more “eco-technocratic” and top-down ICA process. For example, A1 believed that “*for the first time, instead of experts talking down, political parties were able to hire experts {to the PCCA} who they thought were in line with their political view, which {they} thought was brilliant, because it led to a much richer debate on climate change and action*”. Hence, the research findings regarding the ICA case add weight to concerns of critics who “feel sortition initiatives treat politics as an exercise in problem-solving guided toward

objectively good, supposedly win-win outcomes”, with proponents and guiding organisations such as the OECD stressing that “there must be no major political disagreements on the issues and no politics involved in judging how well the participative forums function” (Young 2022, 6-7). On the contrary, drawing on the outlined findings, this author shares Young’s (2022, 6-7) conclusion that “combating democratic erosion arguably requires more political contestation in political debate and a wider, not narrower, spectrum of policy options”. The elephant in the room herein may be that many climate experts – including proponents of and participators in CCAs – may ultimately prioritise perceived environmentally “good” ends over democratic means by exerting direct or indirect control over “*citizens assemblies*” (emphasis added), as to paraphrase Goodin’s (1992; also see Wong 2016) classical green dilemma, there is no guarantee that genuinely deliberative processes will produce substantively green outcomes. Indeed, as Lövbrand and Khan (2010, 51) have noted, “political scholars are often faced with the pressing question concerning whether deliberative practices can legitimately be *steered* towards environmentally sustainable ends (*emphasis added*)”.

However, the “systematic approach” (Ecran et al. 2017; 2022) to this interpretive analysis (outlined in “**Analysis Part 2**”) illuminated how (C)CAs could instead be viewed as a first stage in a larger deliberative process (Dryzek 2001; Parkinson 2003). Herein, the findings add weight to Rountree and Curato’s (2023, 73 - 74) assertion that “rather than consider CAs as authoritative forums...CAs should be viewed as conduits of public deliberation that are influenced by public discourse and have the potential to reshape public sphere deliberations”. Indeed, the authors propound that “(t)he outcomes of {CAs}, as well as the reasons that support these outcomes, should be communicated to those who were not part of the forum as another input to on-going public deliberations”. Nevertheless, as outlined in Section 4.4 of the analysis – which explored “*Process-Related Outcomes of the ICA*” – the decision was taken not to publicise the ICA’s findings (despite members believing this should be done). Indeed, the final ICA report (2018a, 99) alluded to the fact that “(t)here was a divergence in opinion on whether the general public would benefit from the availability of the expert evidence”. This divergence (amongst ICA organisers – seemingly not participants based on data herein) came despite ICA members firmly believing their work should have been more proactively publicised to counteract criticism, improve legitimacy, and to ensure the general public also benefited from the assembly’s “learning stage”. For instance, regarding the latter point, **Section 4.4** illuminated that ICA participants (notwithstanding aforementioned selection biases) increased their political efficacy and specific topical knowledge regarding climate complexities in line with prior empirical evidence (e.g. Stasiak et al. 2021, 8). However, instead of publishing these learnings alongside the (nuanced) opinions of citizens on various recommendations (i.e., including the underlying concerns, disagreements, and limitations), the ICA organisers choose instead to only

provide a crude voting metric to signal members' aggregate preferences on given (expert-led) proposals. Herein, the author concurs with Felicetti et al. (2016, 440-441) that this may have constrained (ongoing) deliberation "by imposing an oppositional and aggregative logic...(wherein) the focus in conveying the outcome was supposed to involve the justificatory arguments". Indeed, despite the perception of consensus given by the high percentage tallies in favour of most recommendations (See Appendix A), the in-depth primary interview data – cross-triangulated with secondary transcript and survey data – revealed that deep divisions remained, most notably between urban and rural assembly members, with the latter cohort in particular feeling aggrieved that their concerns *"were acknowledged but not really taken into account"* (P7).

Moreover, this perceptible city-country divide subsequently played out in the PCCA, thus indicating that the ICA process did not appear to promote a more systematic (cross-party, urban-rural) consensus-building (i.e. "structural change" – Jacquet and Van der Does 2021), but on the contrary, may have further exacerbated existing divisions. Indeed, both ICA participants hailing from the countryside and ERs representing regional constituencies alike expressed (during interviews and also corroborated by secondary sources) that rural communities were *"demonised"* (P11) and were *"treated as the villains of the piece"* (ER2), with ER2 also expressing their frustration that the assembly ultimately failed to find consensual *"win-win solutions"*. Indeed, even the ICA Chair remarked they *"were very conscious of the fact after discussions there is a distinction between urban areas and rural areas, and we didn't want to ignore the difficult situation that rural areas may be in, but we have left it {i.e., {recommendations}} in a very very general way"* (ICA 2018c, 573). Moreover, when challenged on this perceivable bias in the very first PCCA session, the Chair confided that: *"(i)n truth, if we had time we could have had more information on the agricultural sphere and, in particular, on how various parts of the sector are and would be affected"*¹⁵⁷. Consequently, this decision not to adequately account for minority¹⁵⁸ rural and farming views (due to aforementioned representative, framing and expert bias) – despite the fact that such groups would be immensely affected by proposed climate measures – may have contributed to the subsequent backlash against the ICA's recommendations by relevant community, political and stakeholder representatives (e.g., CTAE – outlined in **Section 5.2**). For a practical example of the latter point, EV uptake in Ireland has significantly slowed of late, with industry leaders arguing that *"it is safe to say that infrastructure has been lagging behind electric vehicle adoption in rural areas"*¹⁵⁹, with the lack of EV charging points and specific incentives for rural areas routinely cited. However, perhaps this problem could have been avoided if the voice of "affected

157 Joint Committee on Climate Action debate - Wednesday, 5 Sep 2018 (oireachtas.ie)

158 "minority" in a numerical sense, not in terms of potential impact

159 Lack of EV network in rural areas 'putting the brakes on green motoring' (irishexaminer.com)

communities” was included within the EV recommendation (see **Rec. 9, Appendix A**); yet, as previously alluded to in the Chair’s above comment, a tailored response to rural realities was neglected given the majority of (urban) ICA members felt that *“just giving particular attention to rural areas was...unfair”* (Facilitator, table 2; CA 2018c, 573).

Additionally, the empirical findings suggest that this noted polarisation may have paradoxically increased the difficulty of implementing contentious proposals requiring “buy-in” from affected communities, as perhaps epitomised by one rural member of the ICA who described being in the “minority” and consequently *“stuck to {their} guns and didn’t change {their} mind”* (P8). Similarly, rural ERs and farming stakeholders have (since) been scathing of the Government’s seminal Climate Action Bill, with the leading farmers lobby – the Irish Farmers Association (IFA) – believing that “policies and targets are being pursued at the...national level without any assessment of the economic and social impact they will have on farmers and rural Ireland” – a perhaps legitimate point given the aforementioned framing bias (also see Shaw et al. 2021). More pointedly, the IFA stated that proposed 5-yearly carbon budgets, set by the CCAC, “would cause nothing short of an uprising in rural Ireland”. Interestingly, this polarised rhetoric perhaps contrasts with that of involved stakeholders (e.g., trade unions) under the former Irish social partnership agreements outlined in **Section 2.3**. Indeed, Teague (2006, 421) propounds that the Irish social partnership model, which included a broad range of stakeholders, was “considered distinctive as it (was) based on the principles of deliberative democracy more than adversarial bargaining”. Although such a comparison is beyond the limits of this current thesis, future research may find it fruitful to explore how the current deliberative model in Ireland compares with the former corporatist “tripartite” arrangement (running from 1987 to 2008) which set the broad socio-economic trajectory of the State. This is particularly important to assess given that cross-sectoral and systematic “buy-in” will be required to *meet* climate targets, and more so due to the noted danger that (C)CAs may “crowd out” stakeholders and other more “radical” protest movements (Courant 2021). For instance, the analysis revealed that organisers were fully aware that farming groups and rural communities felt sidelined during the ICA, with SE2 noting an explicit effort to engage all farming groups during the subsequent CA on Biodiversity as *“they had been warned”*. Herein, it appears that some lessons regarding the potential fallout of biased (C)CAs may have been learnt, with the Chair of the latter assembly – Dr Ní Shúilleabháin – remarking during the first parliamentary committee session considering its recommendations that she was *“delighted to note that over 60% of the assembly membership were from rural Ireland, and while we hear much rhetoric on the*

*urban-rural divide in terms of care for the environment, no such divide was apparent in the room*¹⁶⁰). However, given the "claim-making framework" (Gül 2019) employed by ICA organisers, it is imperative that future research critically assesses whether this rhetoric of inclusiveness matches the reality in this case.

Herein, like the ICA case before, such an assessment of the CA on Biodiversity can only be achieved through transparent, contextually independent processes. From the current author's perspective, the initial signs in this regard have not been positive. As outlined in the analysis (**Section 4.2**), the official public inquiry email repeatedly refused to answer this present researcher's basic questions regarding the identity of the chosen EAG members during the assembly process. Additionally, the founding Oireachtas resolution and final CA report on Biodiversity provide little clarity on how the framing question was chosen, how the agenda was set or the criteria for selecting experts. Similar to the ICA case, this (perceivable) lack of transparency and clarity regarding the degree of contextual independence is deeply concerning given that "(a) legitimate political order rests on the approval and consent of the community" (Kronsell and Bäckstrand (2010, 38-41). Indeed, according to Smith (2009, 12), "the openness of proceedings both to participants and the wider public" is a prerequisite for transparency and robust independent evaluation. Indeed, returning to the specific ICA case, "**Analysis Part 1**" has clearly illustrated a lack of transparency and contextual independence regarding representational issues, procedural rules (e.g., framing and agenda setting) and expert influence, all of which have influenced the process-related outcomes (i.e., recommendations) and subsequent PCCA consideration of citizens proposals (i.e., input and output legitimacy, and their interlinkages). This opaque operation of the ICA is somewhat more remarkable given the prior commitment to "openness" and "to operate with complete transparency" according to the ICA's publicly stated "Key Principles for the Assembly"¹⁶¹. Ironically, it would even appear that the ICA was non-transparent regarding its claimed transparency, with the final report claiming that "*the Assembly has at all times operated on the principle of maximum openness and transparency*" (ICA 2018a, 101). Moreover, the Chair – who's good faith and impeccable character are not in question, but rather the overall structural processes – further remarked that "*this level of transparency was not required by the Oireachtas resolution but was rather a decision which I took at an early stage to ensure that the legitimate questions and concerns raised by onlookers about the process could be immediately answered and addressed*" (ICA 2018a, 101). However, this "claim making" by the official ICA apparatus strongly contrasts with the perceptions of members and other actors interviewed as part of this research, with P8's comment aptly encapsulating their views: "*one of the things they pride themselves on is being so*

160 Biodiversity Action: Statements – Dáil Éireann (33rd Dáil) – Thursday, 25 May 2023 – Houses of the Oireachtas
161 Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action debate - Tuesday, 19 Sep 2023 (oireachtas.ie)

bloody transparent, they record it live and this, that and the other...but before you walk in the door nothing is transparent" (P8). In short, as Smith and Wales (2000, 58) propounded over two decades ago, "the very integrity of the whole process is dependent on decisions made at this {beginning} point".

In sum, Carolan's (2015, 747) conclusions regarding the prior ICC remain entirely relevant to the subsequent ICA. Specifically, the author noted that "in many respects...{the ICC} operated as a consciously public-facing institution which made a substantial effort to engage with and bring its work to the attention of the general populace. That is not the same, however, as opening up the relevant workings of the Convention to public scrutiny". Indeed, this present researcher, in following the work of Carolan (2015, 2020), Courant (2021) and others, has made an important contribution to the field by subjecting the breakthrough Irish Climate Assembly – and the uncritical narrative of success emanating from organisers, deliberative proponents and academic evaluators with "involved positions" (Courant 2021; also see Carolan 2015) – to such independent empirical scrutiny. Moreover, it has elucidated the ICA "from process to outcomes" – a rare feat within the literature given the pre-existing empirical focus on discrete (C)CA cases without examining their subsequent outcomes within the traditional political domain. In doing so, the research has more accurately appraised the real influence of the ICA (both specific recommendations and structural changes), while also illuminating the perceptions of key political actors towards utilisation of (C)CAs – both before and after the process. This contribution to the field should not be understated, given that the future of (C)CAs and their recommendations broadly rests upon the perception of political sponsors. Indeed, the findings add weight to Averchenkova and Ghilan (2023, 5) recent postulation that: "two mechanisms of opinion formation emerge: (1) an a priori mechanism, through which opinions about {(C)CAs} are largely shaped by the actor's views of the process and the role that citizen participation should have in decision-making, and (2) an a posteriori mechanism, through which opinions are shaped by the results of the {(C)CAs} and the degree to which they satisfy the actors' interests".

However, therein lies the concern raised by Moore (2016, 22) – and alluded to throughout the present analysis – that (C)CAs "might in practice be captured by elite interests...(while) the deeper concern, then, is not just that minipublics might in practice be captured by elite interests, but that they are essentially elitist, that the better they work, the more they undermine democracy". Indeed, the empirical results herein strongly support the recent work of Carolan (2020, 6) on Ireland's CAs. Specifically, the author propounds that "the design, composition and agenda of both deliberative mini-publics were largely controlled by Ireland's governing parties. This means that the assemblies were organised in a manner which is unlikely to produce politically radical or contentious results". Indeed, this present author shares Carolan's conclusion that "any potential

for radical dissent was also arguably tempered by the fact that the assemblies were overseen by figures drawn from the legal and academic elites; and that the voluntary and unpaid nature of the commitment might have been expected to mean an over-representation of certain classes and interests in both bodies”. Consequently, beyond the questions of specific climate policy, perhaps greater questions of democratic legitimacy paradoxically arise from the ICA case. Herein, Lafont has surmised that “giving decision-making authority to the few who are well-informed and who have access to good-quality deliberation while simply expecting the rest of the citizenry to blindly defer to their decisions would predictably increase the disconnect between citizens' actual beliefs or attitudes and the political decisions to which they are subject”. Consequently, this research adds weight to her conclusion that “far from having a positive democratic impact, it could make the problem which CAs are meant to solve even worse; citizen's alienation from the political process would grow rather than shrink”. Further case study and comparative research on the emerging wave of (climate) assemblies is therefore required to assess their true potential in the wake of twin democratic and climate crises.

Overall, this thesis has sought to add to this growing field of critical empirical research on (C)CAs – not with the aim of delegitimising the process, but in the hope that a more transparent and independent appraisal may better inform future deliberative theory and practice. As Suiter et al. (2021, 40) note in the most recent Irish CA evaluation, “now that there have been three mini-publics in Ireland – the Convention on the Constitution of 2012-14, the Citizens’ Assembly of 2016-18, and the Citizens’ Assembly of 2020-21 – we can begin to see certain patterns in how these have been organised and how they have operated”. Herein, this in-depth case study on the seminal ICA has further illuminated patterns, problems (i.e., regarding representation, procedural rules and expertise) and indeed, the potential of (C)CAs to produce seminal recommendations that lead to long-term structural changes within a given policy domain. However, as Vandamme (2023, 35) propounds, “as CAs become more and more empowered and achieve genuine influence on policymaking... this question of accountability matters increasingly”. Consequently, the findings of this present research strongly support the recent concluding recommendation by Suiter et al. (2021, 40) that “(b)efore the establishment of a future citizens’ assembly, there should be a review of international good practice, notably on agenda setting, the recruitment process and the evaluation process”. Indeed, given the concerns illuminated within this thesis pertaining to the oversight, transparency and contextual independence of CAs in Ireland thus far, this present author strongly concurs with Demski and Capstick (2022, 12) that any future evaluation process should also “be fully independent from those organisations and individuals commissioning, designing, carrying out, or affected by the outcomes of a climate assembly”. Herein, the words of Parkinson

(2003, 189) relating to citizens' assemblies appear apt: "researchers and bureaucrats are legitimately the agents of the people, not vice versa." Moreover, based on the serious procedural anomalies uncovered within this present research and the non-insignificant investment of public monies to date, this review should arguably also be accompanied by a full independent audit of all State-sponsored Irish CAs (perhaps by the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of Ireland). Failure to have a full and transparent reflection on the institutionalisation of the "Irish model" at this stage – particularly after the seismic result of the recent "family" and "care" referendums which emanated from another CA process¹⁶² and which raised serious questions regarding the assumed strong link between mini and maxi public in Ireland – will only serve to undermine both future processes and the underpinning legitimacy of (C)CAs both in Ireland. Indeed, as Mansbridge (2019, 119) notes, "the more embedded these institutions are in the state, the greater must be their normative and perceived legitimacy". Hence, in closing, Vandamme's (2023, 35) words appear most apt; namely:

"the very democratic legitimacy of CAs is at stake, as it is often considered that an unaccountable political power is undemocratic".

162 Family and care referendums comprehensively defeated – The Irish Times

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8 APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

ICA recommendations on climate change as stated in the Third Report {CA, 2018a, 5-6}

“A total of 13 questions appeared on the ballot and the recommendations were reached by majority vote. The following recommendations were made by the Assembly;

1. **97% of the Members recommended** that to ensure climate change is at the centre of policy-making in Ireland, as a matter of urgency a new or existing independent body should be resourced appropriately, operate in an open and transparent manner, and be given a broad range of new functions and powers in legislation to urgently address climate change. *
2. **100% of the Members recommended** that the State should take a leadership role in addressing climate change through mitigation measures, including, for example, retrofitting public buildings, having low carbon public vehicles, renewable generation on public buildings and through adaptation measures including, for example, increasing the resilience of public land and infrastructure
3. **80% of the Members said** they would be willing to pay higher taxes on carbon intensive activities
4. ****96% of the Members recommended** that the State should undertake a comprehensive assessment of the vulnerability of all critical infrastructure (including energy, transport, built environment, water and communications) with a view to building resilience to ongoing climate change and extreme weather events. The outcome of this assessment should be implemented. Recognising the significant costs that the State would bear in the event of failure of critical infrastructure, spending on infrastructure should be prioritised to take account of this.
5. **99% of the Members recommended** that the State should enable, through legislation, the selling back into the grid of electricity from micro-generation by private citizens (for example energy from solar panels or wind turbines on people’s homes or land) at a price which is at least equivalent to the wholesale price.
6. **100% of the Members recommended** that the State should act to ensure the greatest possible levels of community ownership in all future renewable energy projects by encouraging communities to develop their own projects and by requiring that developer-led projects make share offers to communities to encourage greater local involvement and ownership.
7. **97% of the Members recommended** that the State should end all subsidies for peat extraction and instead spend that money on peat bog restoration and making proper provision for the protection of the rights of the workers impacted with the majority 61% recommending that the State should end all subsidies on a phased basis over 5 years.
8. **93% of the Members recommended** that the number of bus lanes, cycling lanes and park and ride facilities should be greatly increased in the next five years, and much greater priority should be given to these modes over private car use.
9. **96% of the Members recommended** that the State should immediately take many steps to support the transition to electric vehicles. ***
10. **92% of the Members recommended** that the State should prioritise the expansion of public transport spending over new road infrastructure spending at a ratio of no less than 2-to-1 to

facilitate the broader availability and uptake of public transport options with attention to rural areas.

11. **89% of the Members recommended** that there should be a tax on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture. There should be rewards for the farmer for land management that sequesters carbon. Any resulting revenue should be reinvested to support climate friendly agricultural practices.
12. **93% of the Members recommended** the State should introduce a standard form of mandatory measurement and reporting of food waste at every level of the food distribution and supply chain, with the objective of reducing food waste in the future.
13. **99 % of the Members recommended** that the State should review, and revise supports for land use diversification with attention to supports for planting forests and encouraging organic farming.

Question 1* Such functions and powers should include, but not be limited to those outlined below.

- To examine any legislative proposals, it considers relevant to its functions and to report publicly its views on any implications in relation to climate change; the relevant Minister must respond publicly to the views expressed in a report prior to the progress of the legislative proposal;
- To propose ambitious 5 year national and sectoral targets for emissions reductions to be implemented by the State, with regular review and reporting cycles;
- To pursue the State in legal proceedings to ensure that the State lives up to its legal obligations relating to climate change.

Question 3** Subject to the following qualifications:

- *Qualification 1:* Any increase in revenue would be only spent on measures that directly aid the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient Ireland: including, for example, making solar panels more cheaply and easily available, retrofitting homes and businesses, flood defenses, developing infrastructure for electric vehicles.
- *Qualification 2:* An increase in the taxation does not have to be paid by the poorest households (the 400,000 households currently in receipt of fuel allowance).
- *Qualification 3:* It is envisaged that these taxes build year-on-year.

Question 9*** Electric Vehicles: Develop an expanded national network of charging points;

- Introduce a range of additional incentives, particularly aimed at rural communities, to encourage motorists towards electric vehicle ownership in the short term. Such measures should include, but not be limited to, targeted help-to-buy schemes, reductions in motor tax for electric vehicles and lower or free motorway tolls.
- Measures should then be introduced to progressively disincentives the purchase of new carbon intensive vehicles such as year-on-year increases in taxes on petrol and diesel, motor tax and purchase taxes for petrol and diesel vehicles.”

APPENDIX B

Table 23: Methods utilised to assess input legitimacy research objectives.

Methods utilised	Observation	Interviews	Secondary Data (feedback surveys; documental analysis)
Input Legitimacy: Objectives			
<i>Evaluate ICA design</i>	X	X	X
<i>Explore the perceptions of ICA participants</i>	X	X	X
<i>Perceptions & Role of ICA actors (organisers; experts)</i>	X	X	X

Table 24: Methods utilised to assess output legitimacy research objectives.

Methods Utilised	Observation	Interviews	Process Tracing (policy analysis; SIM analysis)	Documentary analysis (of political transcripts; policy papers)
Output Legitimacy: Objectives				
<i>Uptake of ICA recommendations by the PCCA</i>		X	X	X
<i>Influence of Recommendations</i>			X	X
<i>Consideration of ICA recommendations by the PCCA</i>	X	X	X	X
<i>Evidence of structural changes</i>		X	X	X

Table 25: Methods utilised to assess interlinkages (input-output legitimacy) research objectives.

Methods Utilised	Interviews	Secondary Sources (documental analysis; PCCA transcript)
Interlinkages: Objectives		
<i>Mini-comparison with other Irish Cases</i>	X	X
<i>PCCA's members perceptions & response to ICA</i>	X	X
<i>Key Actors perceptions & motives for (C)CA's</i>	X	

APPENDIX C

Outline of ICA process related Interviewees according to Roles & Secondary characteristic

Interview Categories	No.
Citizen Participants of ICA (P)	12
Members of EAG (SE1)	1
External Deliberative Experts	2
Presenters at ICA (SE2; SE3)	2
Members of Secretariat of ICA & CA on Biodiversity: – (SEC 1 & SEC2)	2
Observers of ICA (ENGO 1)	1
Total ICA Process Interview	20

Gender	Male	Female
Number of Participants	6	6

Geographical Spread (by Region)	Number of Participants
Leinster	4
Munster	4
Connaught	3
Ulster	1
Age Category	Number of Participants
18-24	1
25-39	4
40-54	4
55+	3
Social Class	Number of Participants
ABC1	6
C2DE	5
F	1

Duration of CA Series (including ICA).	Start to Finish	Replacement	Dropout
No. of Participants	7	3	2

Outline of PCCA & Outcome Related Interviewees

Category	Number
Elected Representatives (ER)	7
Advisors (A)	4
Total	11

Political Affiliation	(Centre) Left	(Centre) Right	Non-aligned
ER's	3	3	1
A's	2	2	

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH INTERVIEW

I agree to participate in this present academic research on the Irish Citizens' Assembly led by Daragh John Hamilton from the Department of Environmental Science and Policy at the Central European University (CEU), Budapest.

The purpose of this document is to specify prior consent regarding the following terms of participation in the interview:

1. You have been informed that anything you say during the interview today will remain **completely confidential: your name will not appear nor any other information that could be used to identify you.**

☐

2. The purpose of your participation as an interviewee in this project has been explained to you.

☐☐

3. You allow the researcher to take written notes and record the interview.

☐

4. You can refrain from answering any question. If you feel uncomfortable during the interview, you may withdraw at any time.

☐

5. You have read and understood the points and statements of this form. You have had all questions answered to your satisfaction, and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Date

Name

Interviewer's name

Signature

Interviewer's signature

APPENDIX E

Sample: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for ICA Participants:

1. **General Information:** Consent; Age; Gender; Social-Economic Status; Geography
2. **Recruitment:**
 - Can you describe your entry into the assembly and how you became involved?
3. **Motivation:**
 - What prompted your participation in the assembly? Would you describe yourself as politically or civically engaged?
4. **Financial Incentives:** **Category added on basis of feedback*
 - What are your thoughts on the potential impact of financial incentives for participants? Do you think they would have influenced your perspective or the dynamics of the group?
5. **Observations of Other Participants:**
 - Can you share your observations of the other participants? Did any demographic groups stand out to you? In your opinion, were any groups under-represented?
6. **Dropouts:**
 - The assembly experienced a significant number of dropouts. What do you believe contributed to this? Did you sense any dissatisfaction or frustration among participants?
7. **Deliberations:**
 - How would you characterize the level of engagement in the deliberative process?
8. **Handling of Deliberations by Facilitators:**
 - What is your assessment of the facilitators' role in guiding the deliberations? Do you feel they were adequately trained?
9. **Climate Change Reflection:**
 - Have your concerns about climate change changed since participating in the assembly?
10. **Expert Influence:**
 - How did the expert presentations/information provided affect your views on the issue under discussion?
11. **Government Response:**
 - What are your expectations regarding the government's response to the assembly's recommendations? Do you believe the government is adequately addressing its responsibilities in this regard?
12. **Other Observations?**

Sample: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for PCCA Actors:

1. **Speaker Selection:**
 - How were speakers selected for PCCA sessions? Was speaker selection balanced?
2. **General Views on ICA:**

- What is your overall assessment of the ICA process and the motivations behind its establishment?

3. Inclusivity:

- Do you believe that the current form of ICA adequately represents the voices of under-represented groups communities?

4. Views on Framing, Agenda-setting and Expert Selection of ICA:

- Can you elaborate on your knowledge of the process of framing, agenda-setting and expert selection within the ICA?

5. Parliamentary Interaction:

- As an elected representative, what are your reflections on how the ICA interacts with the traditional parliamentary process?
- In your opinion, should ICA remain advisory or should they be explicitly linked to the traditional political process?

6. Climate Action Committee – Evidence of Deliberation:

- How did your experience on the PCCA differ from other parliamentary committees in terms of consensus-building and deliberation?

7. Adoption of Recommendations:

- To what extent have the recommendations put forth by citizens been adopted?
- How do you perceive the balance between the assembly's views and the committee's decisions? Should parliamentary or governmental entities have the authority to push back on citizens' recommendations?

8. Impact on Climate Policy:

- What impact do you believe the Citizens' Assembly and the committee's report have had on climate policy in Ireland? Do you view this change as inevitable or catalyzed by the process?

9. Carbon Tax Issue: **Category added on basis of feedback*

- Regarding the carbon tax issue, there appears to be a discrepancy between the ICA's majority support and the PCCA's split opinion. Why do you think this disconnect exists? Was the Citizens' Assembly's stance adequately considered?

10. Evolution of Views:

- Did your perspectives or opinions undergo any changes during your tenure on the PCCA?

11. Overall Outcome Assessment:

- What is your assessment of the overall impact of the assembly and committee on climate policy formulation in terms of its positivity or negativity?