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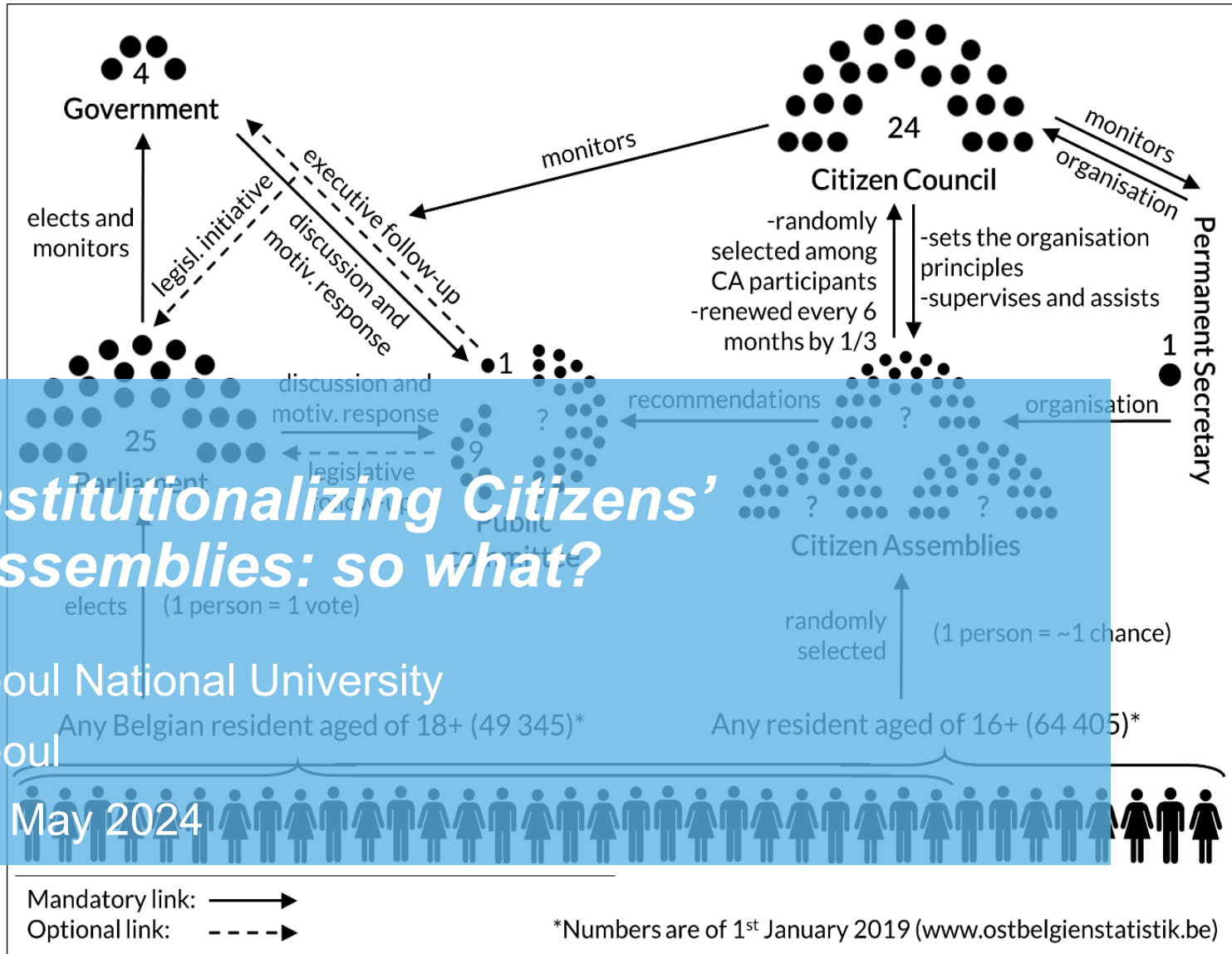
Institutionalizing Citizens' Assemblies: so what?

Seoul National University

Seoul

10 May 2024



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So what?

Evaluating citizens' assemblies in light of three dimensions:

- Input
- Throughput
- Output

Caluwaerts, D. & Reuchamps, M. (2023). Evaluating citizens' assemblies: Criteria, methods and tools. In De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies, edited by M. Reuchamps, M, J. Vrydagh & Y. Welp (Eds.). Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, pp. 239-256.

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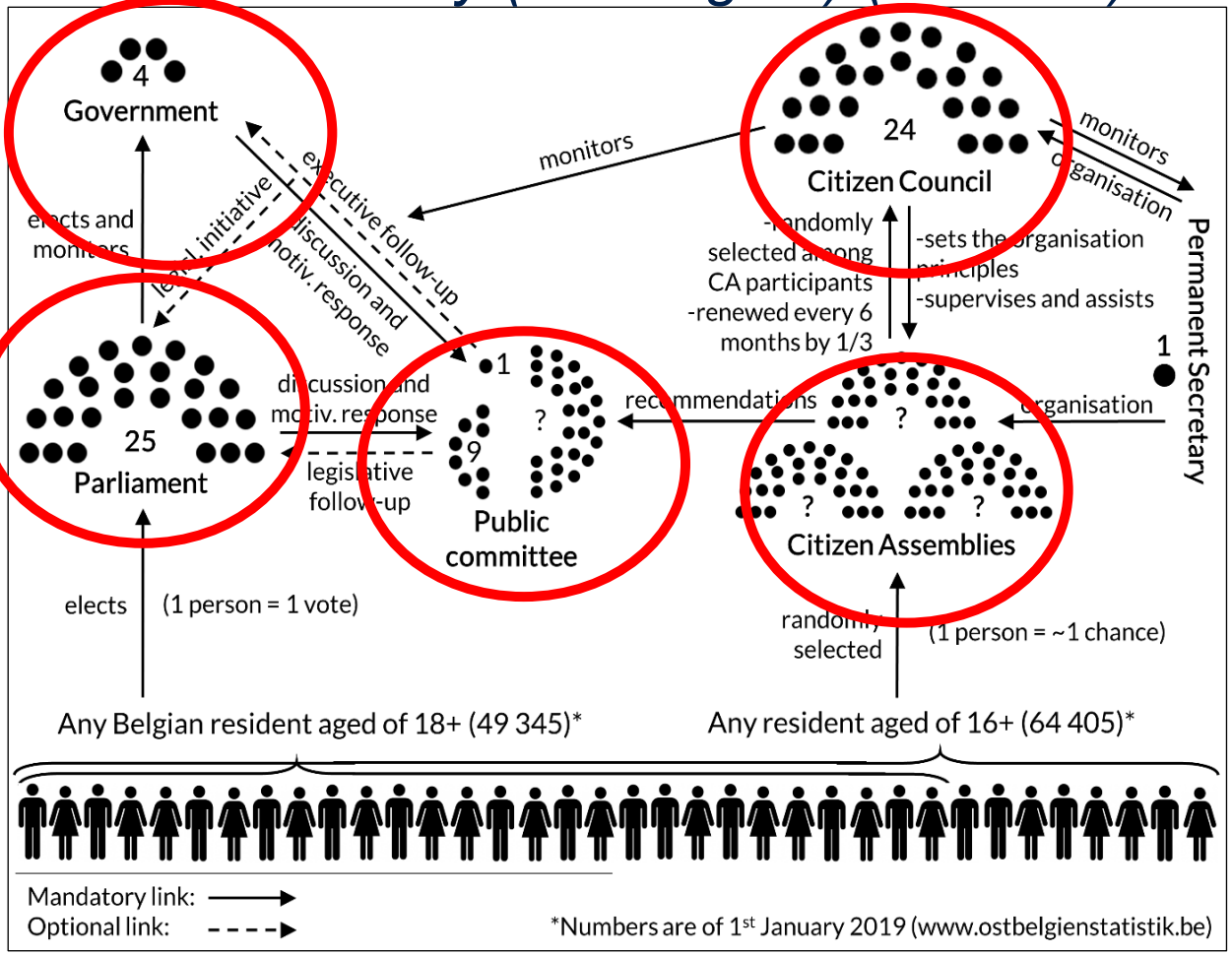
The permanent citizens' dialogue in the German-speaking Community (Ostbelgien) (2019-…)



Niessen, C., & Reuchamps, M. (2020). Institutionalising Citizen Deliberation in Parliament: The Permanent Citizens' Dialogue in the German-speaking Community of Belgium. *Parliamentary affairs*.

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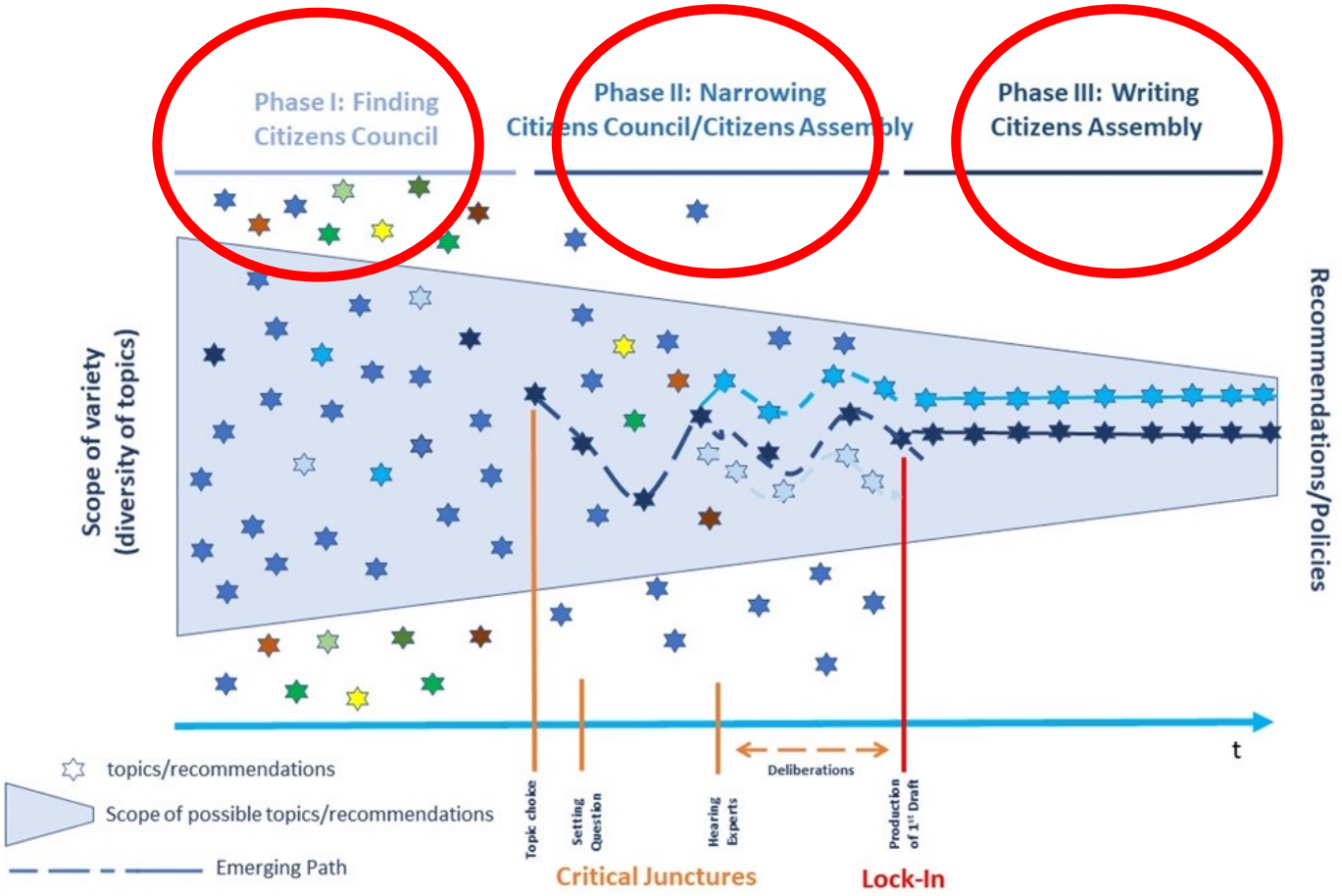
The constitution of recommendation paths in the OBM



Gebauer, R. (2024). PhD manuscript. Louvain-la-Neuve: UCLouvain.

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4 Stages of recommendation making and processing in the Permanent Citizens' Dialogue

1. **Finding Stage: Identifying a topic** (BR, citizens council), **proposals via**
   a. public appeal (suggestions need 100 signatures)
   b. suggestions from political factions in parliament
   c. suggestions from within the citizens council (at least 2 promoters)

2. **Narrowing down the chosen topic** (BR, citizens council & BV, citizens assembly)

3. **Writing recommendations** (BV, citizens assembly)

4. **Receiving and implementing recommendations** (parliament/government)

Stage I: Finding

- **23 topics submitted** in 2019 from the public from different issue areas.

  Cost of Living (3)
  Education (2)
  Environment (2)
  German Language (4)
  Health (1)
  Infrastructure (1)
  Political Reform (3)
  Refugees (1)
  Social Care (2)
  Transport (4)

- Citizens Council **identified 13** that were put out for signatures under consideration for **relevance for DG and political competence**.

Gebauer, R., Sautter A.-M. & Reuchamps M. (2024). Le Parlement de la Communauté germanophone comme laboratoire de participation citoyenne : Analyse du suivi des recommandations du Dialogue citoyen permanent en Belgique de l'Est. To appear in *Lien social et Politiques*.

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Stages 1-3 – 1st & 2nd Cycle

Topics that were progressed for signatures (1. Bürgerrat, October 2019)	
Cost of Living	Entitlement to meal vouchers
Cost of Living	Support for student housing
Cost of Living	Old age poverty
Education	Digital learning
Education	Improve lived Inclusion in the DG
German Language	Branding of the „DG“ as „Ostbelgien“
German Language	Language support and integration (of non-German speaking residents in the DG)
German Language	Preservation of “Plattdeutsch”
Infrastructure	Providing space for recreational football
Refugees	How to better help refugees in the Dg in everyday life
Social Care	How to improve conditions for care professionals
Social Care	Entry age for nurseries
Transport	Pupil transport by bus



2 topics gathered enough signatures: care & inclusion

Stage II: Narrowing down

Bürgerrat (BR, citizens council):

- for BV1 topic was set at care, later BV2 was tasked with inclusion
- Bürgerrat set questions:
  BV1: **Care concerns us all! How care conditions for care professionals and care-affected be improved?**
  BV 2: **Inclusion makes school! What changes do we need in education to make inclusion a win-win for everyone?**

Bürgerversammlung (BV, citizens assembly):

- Citizens Assembly takes over, sets priorities for engaging with the question and hears experts and practitioners.
- **Themes develop along with the expert hearing** (in BV1 in dialogue with the moderator, in BV2 in group discussions)
- **For BV1 & BV2: an editorial group is tasked to create a first draft** (this changes from BV 3 onwards)

Stage II: Narrowing down (continued)

For the 1st Bürgerversammlung (BV):

- Themes develop along with the experts heard by end of day 2 there are around **8 issue areas** that the assembly raised
- An **editorial group** made first draft of **recommendations under 4 themes** (training, IT, self-determination, overarching)
  ➔ **issues without experts were dropped** (bearing in mind that citizens can also be experts)

Stage III: Writing stage

- The full BV discusses the **first full draft**.
- BV ubmits recommendations within set themes – **no significant change between first and final draft**. (BV1 14 recommendations, BV2 31)

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Phase IV: Reception and implementation

Dealing with recommendations in Parliament : ***BV1 – Care*** *(14 recommendations), final hearing 30.03.2022*

Dealing with recommendations in Parliament : ***BV2 – Inclusion*** *(31 recommendations), final hearing 13.10.2022*

	Bürgerversammlung 1 - Care	Bürgerversammlung 2 - Inclusion
Full support	2 (14,3%)	6 (19,4%)
Partial support	7 (50,0%)	11 (35,5%)
… with minor modification	3	4
… with major modification	4	7
Exists already	4 (28,6%)	5 (16,1%)
… positive response	4	2
… negative response	0	3
Refusal	1 (7,1%)	9 (29,0%)
Total	14	31

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	Bürgerversammlung 1 - Care	Bürgerversammlung 2 - Inclusion
Full endorsement	· Context	
Partial endorsement with minor modifications	· Respect of institutional leeway · Policy not generalisable	
Partial endorsement with major modifications	· Outside scope of competences · Deontological objections	
Exists already positive response	· Improve visibility, accessibility, transparency	
Exists already negative response	/	· Existing policy suffices
Refusal	· Outside scope of competences	· Sufficiently covered by other recommendations · Lack of resource · No task of political institution · Deontological objections

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Mixed deliberative committees (2019/2020-…)

- Brussels Regional Parliament (PRB)
- Brussels Francophone Parliament (PFB)
- Walloon Regional Parliament
- The idea:
  - *Call for suggestions + choice made by Parliament*
  - *Deliberative committees: ¼ MPs + ¾ citizens*
  - *Common deliberation and recommendations*
  - *Vote*
  - *Follow-up by the same parliamentary committee*
  - *One day (maybe): regional popular consultation*

Reuchamps, M. (2020). Belgium's experiment in permanent forms of deliberative democracy. *ConstitutionNet*, 1-9.

http://constitutionnet.org/news/belgiums-experiment-permanent-forms-deliberative-democracy

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So what?

- → **Input? // mixed committees**
- → **Throughput? // deliberative committees**
- → **Output?**
  - → Policy uptake: popular consultations?
  - → Political uptake: political reforms?
  - → Media uptake: media coverage?
  - → Citizen uptake: (maxi-)public?

Thank you