Coupling mini-publics to collaborative governance: the case of the Education Reform in the Belgian French Speaking Community

Julien Vrydagh (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), Sophie Devillers (Université de Namur & Université catholique de Louvain), Min Reuchamps (Université catholique de Louvain)

Introduction[1]

Mini-publics are increasingly used as a way to cure the malaise of representative democracy (Newton & Geissel, 2012). Such mini-publics are small scale face-to-face deliberative forums gathering lay citizens to provide decision makers with recommendations on a particular topic. In order to maximize the potential of mini-publics, scholars have explored ways to incorporate these deliberative forums into the policy-making process (Gastil, Ryan, & Smith, 2017). Hitherto, they have, however, overlooked the shift from government to governance (Papadopoulos, 2012a). This new paradigm puts forward a more horizontal and cooperative form of the policy-making process in which various stakeholders are involved through a variety of cooperative schemes. Therein, mini-publics become one additional site of deliberation among others, implying that it interacts with and reports to a variety of new institutional actors. Very few studies have tried to understand how the stakeholders and the participants of these mini-publics perceive the mini-public newcomer in the cooperative schemes and how they deem its contribution to the policy-making process.

This research questions how participants and stakeholders perceive the empowerment of deliberative forums in a policy-making process. Do stakeholders regard mini-publics as detrimental to their influence? Are participants willing to take over some power of the stakeholders? In order to answer these questions, we focus on a major Education Reform in the Belgian French-speaking Community, "Le Pacte pour un Enseignement d'Excellence" (2015–2018). This case features three mini-publics and the characteristics of collaborative governance, that is a substantial collaboration between the State and organized stakeholders in a policy-making process. Based on original data collected through surveys of stakeholders and mini-publics' participants, this research aims to shed new light on how these two groups perceive each other so as to understand how they can achieve a better coupling.

Coupling mini-publics to collaborative governance

Western European countries face a widespread democratic turmoil. The decline in political trust and participation, the widening gap between political elites and citizens, deficient legitimacy, and the competition from "meritocratic authoritarianism" are but a few of the symptoms of a representative democracy under threat (Fishkin & Mansbridge, 2017). In recent years, democratic innovations have come up as a potential answer to this perceived crisis of democracy, and deliberative mini-publics in particular have become increasingly popular among deliberative practitioners and policy-makers (Gastil et al., 2017). Such *mini-publics* feature an inclusive and representative group of lay citizens that engages in a

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structured deliberation under an independent facilitation, so as to influence public policy and public opinion (Elstub, 2014; Lafont, 2017; MacKenzie & Warren, 2012; Ryan & Smith, 2014).

Many scholars advocate for the integration of mini-public in policy-making processes of representative democracies. For instance, Setälä (2017) and Warren & Gastil (2015) investigate the combination between mechanisms of direct democracy and deliberative forums. In the same vein, Gastil & Wright (2018) have edited a special issue of the journal *Politics and society* that examines modes of legislatures by lot. Other studies also explore the mini-public's potential to improve the capacity of deliberative systems (Curato & Böker, 2016; Dryzek, 2015; Felicetti, Niemeyer, & Curato, 2016; Niemeyer, 2014). When studying the linkage of mini-public with institutions, scholars tend to focus on elected representatives and the rest of the population who did not take part in the deliberation (Grönlund, Bächtiger, & Setälä, 2014).

In so doing, they tend to disregard the *paradigm shift from government to governance.* They convey a conception of government in which the power lies exclusively in formal institutions of the State (Stoker, 1998, p. 19). When referring to institutions where decisions are made, they omit "the proliferation of political influence outside government's circles"(Kettl, 2002, p. 159). This approach faces criticisms for not taking into account the larger context of changes in our democracies and how the State and its agents react thereto (Papadopoulos, 2012a). Globalization, the fragmentation of social and political life, marketizing societies, tentacular policy-issue, all these problems cannot be single-handedly managed by the sole State (Torfing, 2012; Warren, 2009). The way the State deals with this new plexiform reality is what the perspective of governance aims to capture.

Governance emphasizes the complex architecture of systems of government. Power is disseminated across different agents and institutions that belong to public and private actors (Stoker, 1998). As a consequence, the State collaborates with a wide range of actors in networks that cut across the public and private sectors, and operate across different levels of decision-making (Newman et al. 2004, p. 204). In addition to the State, these actors form a policy network in which they exchange policy-relevant information and expertise, and negotiate together on political decisions (Rhodes & Marsh, 1992). In this fragmented horizontal decision-making, the State performs a steering function, balancing and arbitrating the different interests of each actor (Mayntz, 1997; Papadopoulos, 2012b). There are different governance schemes (see Knill & Lehmkuhl, 2002 and Knill & Tosun, 2012 for an overview), but one among them is particularly problematic for the use of mini-publics, namely the collaborative governance. We first define what this governance model entails, before presenting its implication for the use of mini-publics.

A governance model is determined by two factors: the degree of collaboration with public and private actors and the extent of control the State wants to retain on the decision-making (Knill & Tosun, 2012). The *collaborative governance* implies that the State devolves power so that public and private actors elaborate together the rules of their substantial cooperation. More precisely, it is "a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets" (Ansell & Gash, 2008, p. 544). The collaborative

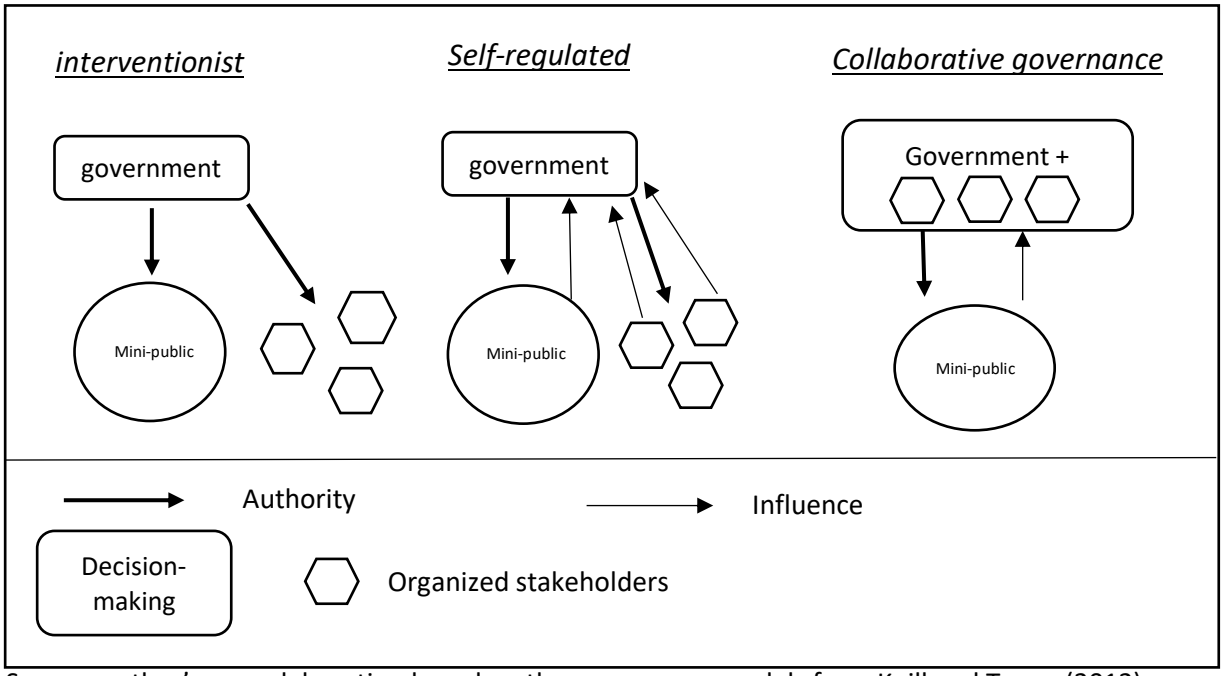
governance engages non-state stakeholders, that is both organized and lay stakeholders (Ansell, 2012; Fung, 2006). It involves collaboration and accountability because the State does not merely consult non-state stakeholders, but confer them a concrete influence or authority on decision-making (Ansell, 2012; Papadopoulos & Warin, 2007, p. 460). As a consequence, both the State and stakeholders bear responsibility for the policy-decisions (Ansell & Gash, 2008, p. 546). Also essential is the quality of deliberation. Collaborative governance comes into the shape of a forum of mutual deliberation which aims to determine policy through negotiation, bargaining and participation (Weale, 2011). The force of justification and reason-giving are expected to steer the decision-making (Papadopoulos, 2012a, pp. 131–132).

The collaborative governance has several implications for the use of mini-publics. We focus in this paper on what it means for the *organized stakeholders and the mini-publics' participants*. Our interest for these two groups is motivated by the crucial role they play. Both are the ones "rowing" and constitute the engine of respectively collaborative governance and the democratic innovation.

On the one hand, stakeholders augment the State resources in terms of knowledge, organization and authority (Papadopoulos & Warin, 2007). They also provide people with information on a certain policy issue and they help to legitimize the policy-making and its outcomes (Hajer, Hajer, & Wagenaar, 2003; C. Hendriks, 2002). Finally, stakeholders constitute a new agent at the table of decision-making, as figure 1 shows in a schematic way. Let us compare three modes of governance as developed by Knill and Tosun (2012, pp. 209–215). In an interventionist mode, where the State retains all of its power and does not collaborate, both mini-public and organized stakeholders are not involved. In self-regulated scheme, the State consults them but still retains all of its authority. This setting already alters the way these three actors interact, because mini-publics have to "compete" with stakeholders in order to gain influence on policy-makers. However, in a collaborative governance, organized stakeholders sit at the table with State policy-makers. As a consequence, a mini-public must not only compete with stakeholders but also convince them. It has to interact with and report to organized stakeholders. Therefore, they become as crucial as State actors when we think about the use of mini-public in collaborative governance.

On the other hand, we should consider the participating citizens because they are the ones engaging in lasting deliberation in order to provide policy-makers with non-partisan and reasoned recommendations. Neither are we – political theorists – nor policy-makers in a better position than these citizens to evaluate their own participation. As we will see hereafter, citizens may not find their participation in collaborative governance meaningful contrary to the widespread belief that all citizens want more participation. The citizens' perception of the mini-public helps us to design better mini-publics and avoids that participation is misused and backfires. In such a case, not only the legitimacy of the whole political system but also the credibility of democratic innovation deteriorate (Fung & Wright, 2003; Gundelach, Buser, & Kübler, 2017; Wampler, 2008).

Figure 1. The interactions between the government, organized stakeholders and mini-publics



Source: author's own elaboration based on the governance models from Knill and Tosun (2012).

We assume that both participants and stakeholders would tend not to support the use of mini-publics within collaborative governance. First, since this model of governance already features various stakeholders, citizens may question the meaningfulness of their participation. Following a rationalist perspective such as sketched by Downs (1957), citizens have representatives because they do not want to or cannot acquire the immense knowledge required to make a policy. Therefore, there are specialists – the representatives – who carry out this task in their names according to a division of labour. This seems to be the case in collaborative governance, which is portrayed as "advocacy democracy" (Dalton, 2015). Professional representatives are supposed to contribute to decision-making and not lay citizens (Papadopoulos, 2012a). Empirical research corroborates this 'Downsian approach' as citizens do not always want to participate more in general (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002) or in mini-publics in particular (Jacquet, 2017). Saward (2010) argues that an actor can make a representative claim in the name of a constituency based on the stakes or expertise he or she has. Citizens may indeed find legitimate to be represented through different channels that are not only based on State elections because they have different interests depending on the perspective they adopt (Young, 2002). Therefore, the representation through stakeholders can improve a holistic representation of citizens (J. Dryzek, 2010, pp. 119–134). Organized stakeholders offer a broader panel to represent their segmental interest as parents, union members, or as a member of a minority,… Hence, a citizen can be better represented through different channels of elective and non-elective representation. If we follow this argument, citizens may not be willing to participate in collaborative governance because they are already represented via their elected and non-elected representatives. This research wants to investigate whether participants do find their participation in mini-publics meaningful in such governance setting. Do they think that being involved as ordinary and lay citizens is complementary with the participation of organized stakeholders and elected policy-makers or do they find it redundant? Do they perceive the use of mini-public legitimate to influence policy-makers?

Second, organized stakeholders also tend to adopt a negative stance towards mini-publics. They see themselves as the legitimate problem owners and as better representatives than lay citizens (Hoppe, 2011). When citizens are asked to give an input, they are expected to do so as "customers" or "clients" of a public service (C. Hendriks, 2006a, p. 589; Papadopoulos & Warin, 2007). Furthermore, once stakeholders enjoy an insider status and a privileged seat at the table, they tend to oppose any newcomer (C. Hendriks, 2006a; Papadopoulos, 2012a). They perceive the collaborative scheme as a zero-sum game in which the addition of a new agent challenges existing role and alters power relationship (C. Hendriks, 2002).

In the case of the mini-public, the suspicion grows even more because of its alleged connivance with the State. The State and mini-public follow a pursue similar interest that diverge from organized stakeholders. On the one hand, stakeholders want "to bring public policies more in line with the interests of their members" (Knill & Tosun, 2012, p. 62). On the other hand, the State is the legitimate specialist of the general interest and aims to arbitrate the various particular interests (Hunold, 2001; Lehmbruch & Schmitter, 1979; Mayntz, 1997). Similarly, a mini-public seeks "to orientate citizens towards considerations of the public interest, rather than their own self-interest" (Smith, 2009, p. 94). Hence, public policy-makers and mini-publics focus on a common objective of defining the general interest. Deliberative forums are valuable to public officials to fulfil this function since they increase the legitimacy through accountability and participation, foster a public-spirited perspective, and enhance the quality of decisions (Chambers, 2003, p. 316). Its participants do not commit to a constituency, so they can consider all arguments and change more easily their opinions (C. M. Hendriks, Dryzek, & Hunold, 2007). Conversely, organized stakeholders are resistant to engage in a discussion which confronts their particular interests to the general interest shaped by the force of the better argument (Young, 2001). As a consequence organized stakeholders tend to believe that there is a connivance between the State and the lay citizens. They see it as a public relation machine, an instrument for depoliticization and agenda control (Hoppe, 2011).

Despite our pessimist assumption on the perception of mini-publics, we argue that these democratic innovations could contribute to reducing the democratic deficit and improve the quality of deliberation of collaborative governance. Because it forms an enclosed network system, it lacks the diversity and openness of a healthy deliberative system (C. M. Hendriks & Boswell, 2018, p. 410). In such a setting, professional stakeholders tend to approach the issue technically rather than politically (C. M. Hendriks, 2008) and are prone to group-thinking (Papadopoulos, 1995, 2012a). These arguments subsequently constitute the norms for excluding other sources of knowledge such as personal experience or local customs (Fischer, 2009). A mini-public can contribute to injecting such alternative expertise into the policy-making. Thanks to the high diversity of its participants (Smith, 2009), it can increase the range of discourses and perspectives present in decision-making (J. Dryzek, 2010, p. 10). A higher inclusivity in collaborative governance not only increases the rationality of the deliberation but also its democratic character (J. Dryzek, 2009; Mansbridge et al., 2012, p. 12).

Also, collaborative governance lacks visibility which hinders any accountability between the non-elected representatives and their constituents. The link between the organized stakeholders and the constituencies they claim to represent is too weak (Koenig-Archibugi,

2004). This affects the legitimacy of the representative claims. To be legitimate, the people for whom they stand and speak for should be able to react to the claim (Saward, 2010). This implies that the decision-making process where claims are made should be open and transparent for citizens and that they should have the opportunity to react to the claims made in their names (Saward, 2010). A mini-public could allow a sample of the constituency to react to the claims made by organized stakeholders, so that they could adapt their claims. In this conception of "representation as a process", a mini-public could perform a 'check function' for representatives.

However, in order to be effective, we argue that an enabling mechanism is necessary. We define it as "coupling" and it refers to the ways in which the mini-public is connected to the other sites of deliberation (C. Hendriks, 2016). Coupling should allow the cross-fertilisation of ideas between sites of deliberation and avoid their isolation in like-minded enclaves (Mansbridge et al., 2012). In other words, mini-publics should be coupled with decision-making arenas of governance in a way that they both mutually take up their ideas and reasons (Curato & Böker, 2016). Coupling concretely refers to the way they relate to each other. Do mini-publics' participants know which organized stakeholders are represented? Do they meet them during the participatory process? Inversely, do stakeholders know about the mini-public? How do they receive their policy recommendations? Coupling entails many forms of relationships like linkages, interactions, independence or networking (C. Hendriks, 2016, pp. 44–46). This research intends to understand how the coupling affects the perception of organized stakeholders and mini-publics' participants.

The integration of mini-publics in collaborative governance: a case study

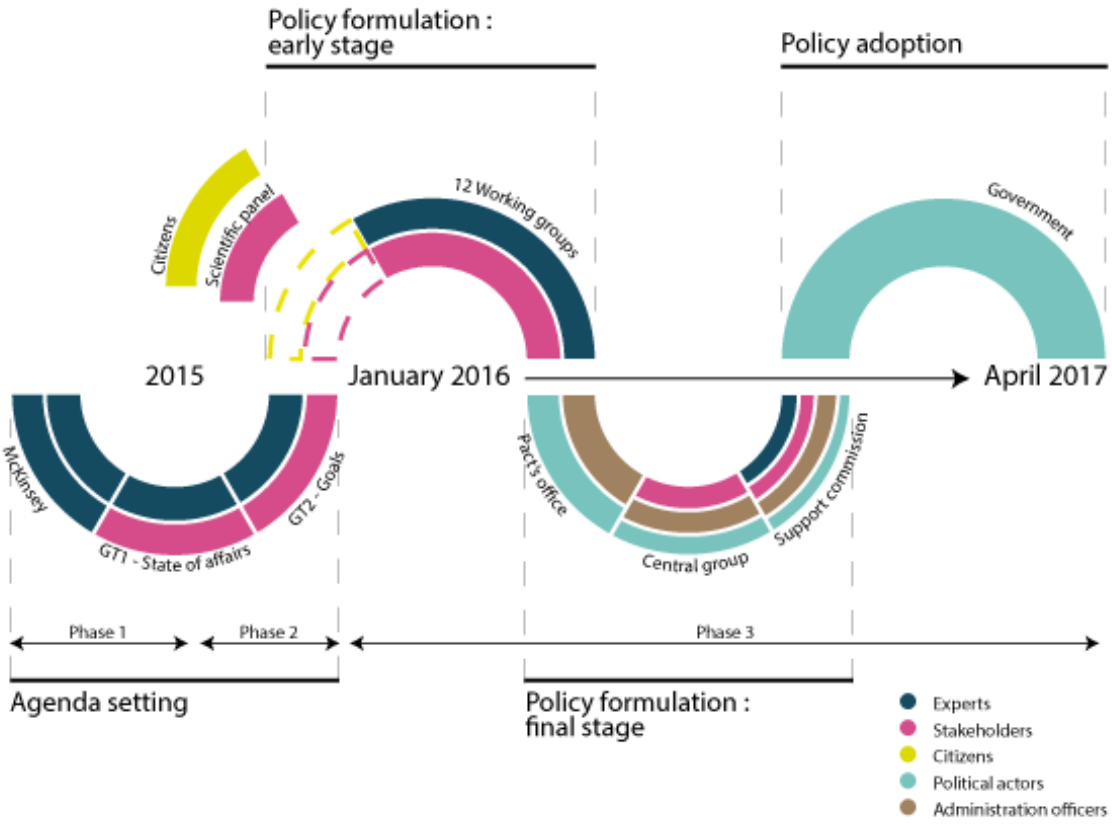
In order to understand how citizens and stakeholders perceive the use of mini-publics in collaborative governance, we adopt a case study of a large-scale education reform in the Belgian French-speaking Community, entitled "Le Pacte pour un Enseignement d'excellence" (*English translation*). This policy reform features three mini-publics in a collaborative governance scheme that involves several stakeholders in multiple working groups in different stages.

The idea of such a *Pacte* comes from the coalition agreement between socialists and Christian democrats following the 2014 elections. The two government partners agreed: "in order to identify the means to reach the objectives of improving the performances of our education system and of reducing the inequalities that influence the perfomances, the Government will propose 'Le Pacte pour un Enseignement d'Excellence' that will be enacted for the next ten years"[2]. Hence, the full process is intended to last longer than the current legislature. To this end, it is deemed key that all stakeholders support this large-scale policy reform. In order to reach such large adhesion to the *Pacte*, the whole policy-making process rests on a

[2] « Afin d'identifier les moyens d'atteindre les objectifs d'amélioration des performances de notre système éducatif et de réduction des inégalités qui influencent la réussite, le Gouvernement proposera un 'Pacte pour un Enseignement d'excellence' qui portera sur les 10 prochaines années », Déclaration de Politique Communautaire, juillet 2014.

collaborative governance scheme. This means the implication of both stakeholders and citizens. The former are representatives from unions of teachers and of parents, but also experts from different schools networks. Together with the administration and the cabinet of the Minister of Education, they have formed transversal groups throughout the whole policy-making as well as 12 working groups during the policy formulation stage. In the agenda-setting stage, an external consultancy group, McKinsey, was mandated to collect and analyse large amounts of data in order to identify the problems and challenges facing the education system in French-speaking Belgium.

Figure 1



It is also during the policy formulation stage that lay citizens have been involved in three mini-publics. For each of them, participants received briefing material explaining both the process and the content of the issues at stake. The deliberations took place in small groups that were facilitated by trained moderators who ensured the quality of the deliberations and helped all the participants to contribute to the recommendations that were then presented and voted upon in plenary session. These recommendations were then sent to the transversal working groups. On the basis of the propositions from the working groups and the citizens, the Minister formulated the texts enacting the *Pacte*.

First, from February to April 2016, 24 randomly selected citizens gathered in a *Citizen panel* that met for three weekends to discuss and decide on what they believe to be the priorities for a 21st century education system. Second, on 11 November 2016, 81 people gathered in a *Citizen conference* to discuss the specific – albeit fundamental – issue of *redoublement*, that is the fact of having to do again a school year. In French-speaking Belgium, one pupil out of

two has had to re-do at least one school year when she ends her compulsory education at the age of 18. To deliberate on this issue, participants were made more or less equally of students, parents and actors of the education system (teachers, directors and other professionals). Participants could volunteer to participate but there was a random selection to choose among candidates with the same profile in order to reach a diverse mini-public. Third, on 20 January 2018, a *Consensus conference* was organized to reflect on several scenarios for the content of the curriculum and decide which of these scenarios they would like to see implemented with the reform. There was thus a clear agenda behind the process: participants had to first deliberate, weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each scenario, and second to vote for the one they preferred. Based on 356 people who registered after an open call, 156 were randomly drawn in order to have 2/3 of teachers and 1/3 of citizens. 116 of them showed up on the day and made propositions for the school curriculum. Compared to the two other events, the mini-public was thus composed of a majority of participants who are directly impacted by the education reform. Besides, the media attention was higher than for the two other events, before and after the mini-public took place. These three elements (composition with 2/3 of teachers, high media attention and clear agenda) might have led the participants to feel that their participation mattered to a greater extent. Indeed, their final recommendation was a clear position that could be used directly by the Minister, and this decision could impact not only them directly in their work as teachers, but also the public opinion through its greater media coverage. As we will see in the following sections, the participants of this mini-public indeed share significantly different perceptions and opinions about their participation in the *Pacte* than the participants of the two other mini-publics.

Data, methods & analysis

Our empirical analysis draws on surveys of 105 mini-publics' participants (out of the 221 who actually participated in the three events) and 82 organized stakeholders (out of the 251 stakeholders involved in the Pacte pour un Enseignement d'excellence) as well as on 11 in-depth interviews of key stakeholders. In addition, we also rely on our own observation of the mini-publics. Finally, we also make use of secondary materials such as policy and official documents. We begin with a short description of our respondents. We then present our results in two sections. On the one hand, we expose how participants perceive the mini-publics' processes. On the other hand, we look at their perception of the mini-publics' outcome.

Table 1

	Men	**Women**	**Total**	
	Respondents in the survey	Respondents in the survey	Participants in the mini-publics	Respondents in the survey
Citizen panel	6	4	24	10 (41.7%)
Citizen conference	10	25	81	35 (43.2%)
Consensus conference	21	39	116	60 (51.7%)
Total	37	68	221	105 (47.5%)
Stakeholders	43	39	251	82 (32.6%)

In the following tables, only the respondents in the survey are considered, as they accurately represent the broader population of stakeholders and participants in terms of professional occupation, gender and education and can therefore be used to represent the opinions and perception of the whole group of participants or stakeholders. The participants of the three mini-publics who answered the survey and on which our analysis relies are labelled as "participants". The organized stakeholders who answered our survey are labelled "stakeholders".

The response rate of the survey reached 32.6% for the stakeholders and 47.5% for the participants of the participatory processes. On the participants' side, we see that more women than men have participated in the events and answered the survey. We witness the exact reverse trend for the stakeholders. In addition, our respondents seem to be majoritarily middle-aged people both among stakeholders and participants. The youngest category, between 18 and 24 years old, along with the oldest one (over 65) are the less well-represented. When it comes to the educational background of our respondents, we see that the highly educated category is over-represented. Despite the efforts made by the organizers to compose the most diverse mini-public possible, we see that those people with a higher education are still over-represented. This is mainly due to the fact that these forums dealt with the education. These have attracted citizens working in this sector who hold a higher education diploma. It is less the case for the composition of the citizen panel, because the recruitment of its participants involved a random sampling with quotas accounting for gender, education or geographical location. Thanks to this method, the overall diversity of the mini-public was higher than the two other events, which relied first on self-selection and then on a stratified random selection among the ones who already agreed to participate. Because higher educated people are generally more likely to accept to participate in such participatory processes (Marien, Hooghe & Quintelier, 2010), it is normal to witness an over-representation of the last two categories.

We also asked them about their internal and external political efficacy. Stakeholders show a slightly stronger feeling of internal political efficacy than the participants. That is, they are convinced that they are more able to participate in political matters than the participants[3]. This corroborates the idea that collaborative governance features professional representatives who have more self-confidence and feel legitimate to take part in politics.

Table 2

Internal political efficacy				
	Citizen panel	**Citizen conference**	**Consensus conference**	**Stakeholders**
Mean	3.6	3.5	3.7	3.8
N	10	34	53	50
Standard deviation	0.65828	0.8504475	0.69403	0.16672

[3] This "internal efficacy" dimension is composed of the scores of the participants and the stakeholders on four items, each measured on a five points scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree: "I consider myself able to take part in political matters"; "I think I would be able to work as well as the majority of the elected politicians"; "I think I understand pretty well the important issues our society in confronted with"; "I think I am better informed about the government and actions taken by public authorities than other citizens".

Finally, contrary to participants, stakeholders do not support the idea of making non-traditional actors participate in politics. Indeed, they do not think that citizens or experts should have a bigger role to play in political decisions[4], maybe because they are not convinced that citizens are able to participate in political matters.

Table 3

Democratic preferences				
	Citizen panel	**Citizen conference**	**Consensus conference**	**Stakeholders**
Mean	3.9	3.2	3.1	2.8
N	10	34	53	50
Standard deviation	0.5164	0.44055	0.5636225	0.5856275

To sum up, we can here briefly point out several interesting facts. First, there is an over-representation of highly educated respondents. This can be explained by the policy issue and the selection procedures of two mini-publics. Second, stakeholders have a stronger feeling of political efficacy than participants. They seem convinced that they are more capable of participating in political matters, or at least that participants are less capable of doing so. This confirms the idea that stakeholders feel legitimate and capable of collaborating in the policy-making process. Third, stakeholders show a more traditionalist view of how the political system should work compared to the participants, and they apparently do not perceive the necessity to change the way it functions. In the following sections, we will further elaborate on how these factors play a role in their perception of mini-publics.

Stakeholders' and participants' perceptions of the participatory processes

The perceptions of the participants and stakeholders vary significantly depending on the kind of process they participated in and the status they hold. Stakeholders, from the outside of the processes, do not seem to hold negative views towards the participatory processes they were confronted with. Rather, they seem not to have enough knowledge about them to be able to evaluate them accurately. Indeed, the trend towards 'non-positioning' on the stakeholders' side is striking. This might come from the fact that not many stakeholders are aware of the precise functioning of the mini-publics. As we will see in the next section, the majority may indeed have heard of it, but are not completely aware of their exact purpose, composition or design.

On the participants' side, people involved in the citizen panel seem to hold more positive views while the participants of the consensus conference are more pessimistic. As we can see

[4] This "political preferences dimension" is composed of the scores of the participants and the stakeholders on three items, each measured on a five points scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree: "Citizens have to participate directly in political decisions instead of letting politicians decide by themselves"; "It would be better if experts ruled the country instead of politicians"; "The average citizen is capable of taking part in political decisions".

in the table below, the participants of the citizen panel and of the citizen conference indeed show warmer feelings about the process they participated in than the ones of the consensus conference and even more so when compared to the stakeholders. On the consensus conference side, these mitigated scores seem to be linked to the design of the event they participated in. As shown in the table below, the scores of the participants of the consensus conference are indeed significantly lower than the ones of the other participants (with the participants of the citizen panel showing the highest scores)[5].

Table 4

Satisfaction with the process

	Citizen panel	Citizen conference	Consensus conference	Stakeholders
Mean	4.0	3.5	2.7	3.3
N	10	34	56	45
Standard deviation	0.3583	0.62353	0.7257	0.525365

When we dig deeper in the respondents' perceptions of the process, we can see that there are indeed significant differences between the participants of the different events, the participants of the citizen panel being the most optimistic regarding the openness and the transparency of the process, and the participants of the consensus conference being the most critical. Several factors can explain these different perceptions.

First, the differences in terms of *composition* (with either only lay citizens, an equal mix of lay citizens and professionals of the education sector or a majority of teachers) might have played a role. A group of teachers might indeed be more eager to defend strongly his or her positions in the deliberations than a lay citizen who will be less impacted by the outcomes of the mini-publics. This is especially the case if these outcomes ever reach the decision-making system and influence the decision makers in their drafting of the reform. This might lead to a stronger polarization of the debates a weaker tendency to try to reach common good solutions, as each teacher has different personal interests to defend. However, a group of lay citizens might be more willing to try to reach a consensus advancing the common good, as they have no particular interest to defend because of their greater distance with the topic of the reform.

Moreover, the effect of the composition (in majority citizens or teachers) was increased by the stakes raised by the event. By stakes we mean that the recommendations of the mini-public have an impact on the content of the reform or on the broader public debate. This refers to what Fung (2003, p. 345) calls 'hot and 'cold' issues, ie. with low or high stakes. He argues that deliberation on a hot issue makes better deliberation because it attracts more

[5] This "Satisfaction with the process" dimension is composed of the scores of the participants on six items, each measured on a five points scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree: "My feelings towards the participatory processes are"; "My participation in the participatory processes was"; "I am satisfied with the process of the participatory processes"; "All important topics were discussed during the process"; "I could bring up topics that were initially not on the agenda", "The whole process was transparent for me : I understood well what was expected and why". For the stakeholders, only the items "I am satisfied with the process of the participatory processes" and "My feelings towards the participatory processes are" were measured and merged into this dimension.

participants who engage with more energy and resources in the process, making it through and creative. Also, the results of deliberation are more likely to be supported and implemented. In the case of the consensus conference, the stakes were quite high, which lead the teachers to more vigorously defend their positions as they perceived that their participation was going to weigh on the content of the reform and on the public debate, and therefore impact their situation. In this particular case, the stakes of the event were raised by an increased mediatisation before and after the event (compared to the two other events) and a greater involvement of the Minister of Education, who was there the day of the event, along with members of her cabinet.

Besides, the outcome of the consensus conference was meant to be directly implemented in the policy-reform. According to Thompson (2008, p. 513), giving decision-making authority to a mini-public damages the quality of deliberation because it fosters polarization and positional politics. Dryzek (2005) also points out the negative effects of high stakes deliberation. Each participant wants to see her or his opinion triumph rather than seeking a common good. Moreover, this echoes the argument of Simone Chambers (2004) on public deliberation. She asserts that deliberation tends to lead to irrationality and plebiscitary reasons. Also, participants had a clear agenda: they had to position themselves on one of the three scenarios proposed by the Minister when it comes to reforming the school curriculum. These three elements combined lead the participants to perceive that their participation was intended to have a clear impact on the reform and on the public debate through the media. Consequently, the participants focused more on advancing their interests in order to see them more represented in the public debate and in the content of the reform.

Second, the perception's differences can be explained by the *agenda's openness*. Indeed, if all three events were organized as deliberative mini publics, involving discussions in small groups and in plenary sessions, their deliberative quality varied significantly. The citizen panel lasted for several days and involved a small number of people, who received an input from experts of different fields of the broader education sector. Also, they had no particular agenda for their deliberation: the idea was simply to ask citizens to consensually draft a list of their priorities for tomorrow's education system, based on a diverse information they received from the experts and with the help of professional facilitators. These elements (diversified information and the presence of professional facilitators) were also present in the two other events. What changed was the openness of the agenda. If it was quite open for the first process, it was less open for the second and even less open for the third. The participants of the citizen conference were indeed asked to deliberate on a particular topic (the *redoublement*), with, however, the freedom to find creative solutions to build an education system without *redoublement*, by focusing on other sub-topics of the broader education topic. When it comes to the consensus conference, the agenda was much more restraining: the topic was strictly determined in advance and the decisions were subject to a vote rather than to a consensus (as said above, the participants had to vote for the scenario they preferred regarding the composition of the school curriculum). They might have had the feeling that they were being constrained in their freedom to deliver the message they wanted. Our observation of the forum corroborates this explanation. Many participants felt that their participation came too late in the process and that they only had to decide on the last crumbs of the policy reform. This might have led them to hold more negative views about the process they participated in. Consequently, the participants of the citizen panel, involved

in an open and deeply deliberative process, were the ones who evaluated the most positively their event. On the contrary, the participants of the consensus conference, involved in a less open debate, were more pessimistic.

Table 5

	Citizen panel		Citizen conference		Consensus conference		Stakeholders	
	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree
The decisions were made by consensus	88.9%	0.0%	67.6%	17.6%	48.2%	23.2%	/	/
The participants were driven by the common good	90.0%	10.0%	64.7%	26.5%	50.0%	20.7%	/	/
I had enough opportunities to express my opinion	80.0%	10.0%	82.4%	8.08%	65.5%	15.5%	/	/
The others listened carefully to what I said	100.0%	0.0%	85.3%	8.8%	77.6%	13.8%	/	/

Perception of the outcomes of the participatory processes

If all participants (except the ones of the consensus conference) seem to hold positive views of the event they were involved in, how do they evaluate its outcomes? To what extent have they followed them? Do they think they will be part of the future Education reform?

Support for the results

For the participants, it is not only crucial to perceive the process as fair and transparent but also to endorse its results. Interestingly, we observe that both these dimensions are somehow linked, as the overall perception of the quality of the process they participated in seems to play a role in the participants' satisfaction with the results of the process[6]. As we can see on the table below, the satisfaction with the process varies according to the event, as well as the satisfaction with the results. The highest levels of satisfaction on both dimensions are therefore to be found among the participants of the citizen panel, followed by the participants of the citizen conference and finally the participants of the consensus conference. For the latter, the participants seem significantly less supportive of the results.

Stakeholders' support is also essential for the mini-publics' influence. Without, there is little chance they will have any influence on policy-makers (C. Hendriks, 2002, 2006b; Newton & Geissel, 2012; Parkinson, 2012). However, what we see is quite a mitigated picture for

[6] This "Satisfaction with the results" dimension is composed of the scores of the participants and the stakeholders on four items, each measured on a five points scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree: "I totally agree with the recommendations made in the final reports"; "A great deal of the population will recognize itself in the content of the final reports"; "The participatory processes have led to good decisions"; "I am satisfied with the results of the participatory processes".

stakeholders. Whereas a minority are satisfied with the results, a majority avoids positioning itself. 67 out of 82 did not answer the question.

Table 6

Satisfaction with the results

	Citizen panel	Citizen conference	Consensus conference	Stakeholders
Mean	3.8	3.3	2.6	3.5
N	9	24	51	15
Standard deviation	0.5120075	0.705825	0.78162	0.464835

Pearson correlation between both dimensions : 0,000
Anova between the event and both dimensions : 0,000

Awareness of the outcome

Participants' awareness of the outcome depends on the participatory process. The highest awareness is to be found among the participants of the consensus conference. This can be explained by their low satisfaction with the process and its outcomes. Indeed, our results show that the less the participants are satisfied with the process and its outcomes, the more they are inclined to follow its media coverage or other follow-up. (Pearson 0.05)

The lack of positioning of the stakeholders, as it was the case for the perception of the process, might be due to their lack of knowledge of the participatory processes. Indeed, if a large majority of the participants happens to have followed the outcomes of the process they were involved in, the picture is quite different when it comes to the stakeholders. This low awareness rate comes from a combination of several factors. First, they might not have heard of these processes because of the rather weak communication around them. As one interviewee noticed, "There was not much advertising around these round tables and other participatory processes: only for the last one about the curriculum, everyone seized it all of a sudden. It was curious, because for the other events, except for a small column in one newspaper there was nothing". Second, the low awareness rate might also come from the fact that they were involved neither in the decision to create this process nor in their execution. As a stakeholder remarked: "I don't know what was the point… You know everyone… we were not let's say… for us the participatory process was a decision of the Minister, she didn't… this decision wasn't ours to make". Third, the timing imposed on the stakeholders to draft their reports was too tight to allow them to pay close attention to the outcomes of the participatory processes. Indeed, as one of the stakeholders noticed: "it came too late, there were too many files, so we ended up with 350 pages to read in one week".

Table 7

	Citizen panel	Citizen conference	Consensus conference	Stakeholders
Have you heard of the participatory processes organized at the margins of the Pacte?	/	/	/	80.0%

I followed the outcomes of the participatory process with attention (press releases, etc)	70.0%	76.5%	96.4%	13.0%
Have you read the final report?	90.0%	72.7%	92.7%	25.9%

Authority of the outcome

As we have seen with participants, the support for the results varies along with the evaluation of the process. More importantly, what we see on the table below is that a positive evaluation of the process and its outcomes leads the participants to also support a greater empowerment of the participatory processes organized around the *Pacte*. When asked what impact the participatory processes should have, the participants of the citizen panel are the ones who are the most in favor of giving a constraining power to their recommendations. They are then followed by the participants of the citizen conference and of the consensus conference. In general, they seem overall convinced that gathering citizens to discuss political issues is a good idea and should be done again in the future. When it comes to giving it a constraining power, the strongest support for this proposal is to find among the participants of the citizen panel. This could be explained by their strong support for the results and positive perception of the process but also by their overall stronger support for citizen participation. Indeed, what we see is indeed that there is a correlation between these two items: the more a person (stakeholder or participant) is in favor of including citizens directly in political decisions, the more he is likely to support the attribution of a constraining power to these processes.

Stakeholders are again in majority not positioning themselves on this item and do not believe that the recommendations issued by the participatory processes should be turned into binding laws, and when they position themselves, it is against any constraining power of these recommendations. As one of the interviewees said: “I will read what comes out of this conference as a source of inspiration, or maybe a questioning regarding what we think, but knowing that this is not necessarily representative”. As we have seen, stakeholders do not believe that citizens, even when participating in professionally designed mini-publics, are able to participate in crucial decisions in terms of education. Therefore, instead of seeing these mini-publics as tools allowing citizens to fuel the stakeholders’ debates with their ideas, they envision these mini-publics the other way around. According to them, these processes should rather aim at allowing the decision makers to change the mentalities and practices of the citizens involved in these processes when it comes to the education policy. In other words, they share a more top-down vision of mini-publics than the more bottom-up one we usually attribute to them in the literature. As one of the stakeholders notices: “The idea was also to work with the citizens to deeply change some cultural elements such as grade repetition, which is an institution (in the sociological sense), it is a norm, a value and it is difficult to change the perception of grade repetition people have”.

Table 8

	Citizen panel	**Citizen conference**	**Consensus conference**	**Stakeholders**

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree
The recommendations made by the participatory processes should have the same power as laws	80.0%	10.0%	50.0%	26.5%	29.3%	34.5%	9.6%	65.4%
In the future, citizens should gather again to discuss political subjects as they did during the participatory processes	100.0%	0.0%	88.2%	8.8%	86.2%	8.6%	53.9%	25.0%

Trust in the political uptake

However, when it comes to predicting to what extent the Minister of Education will implement the recommendations produced by the citizens during these events, what we can see on the table below is that both stakeholders and participants are convinced that she will take the recommendations of the participatory processes into account. In fact, participants and stakeholders seem to share the idea that citizens cannot influence politics in general but rather through such scheme of governance. Indeed, if the majority of the participants and 40% of the stakeholders perceive that citizens are not really being listened to by politicians, their opinion changes when they are asked to assess the impact citizens might have on the Education reform, especially for the respondents coming from the citizen panel. Indeed, if these respondents were the most pessimistic when it comes to assessing the extent to which politicians are taking the citizens' opinions into account, they paradoxically seem to be the most optimistic when it comes to evaluating the extent to which the Minister of Education will implement their recommendations. We are witnessing quite the same trend when it comes to other participants' results: the respondents coming from the citizen conference and from the consensus conference seem more optimistic when assessing the impact of the participatory processes in the context of the *Pacte* than when asked about the more general influence of citizens in political decisions. When it comes to the stakeholders, the difference is quite striking, such as for the participants of the citizen panel, in the sense that they are also significantly more confident about the follow-up of citizens opinions in the context of the *Pacte* than in general.

Table 9

	Citizen panel		**Citizen conference**		**Consensus conference**		**Stakeholders**	
	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree
The Minister of Education will	60.0%	10.0%	23.5%	35.3%	25.0%	30.4%	63.6%	25.5%

integrate the recommendations made by the participatory processes in the reform

Discussion

We assumed that participants would have a negative perception of mini-publics within collaborative governance. Since they are already many representatives taking part in the decision-making, they would perceive their participation as redundant. However, our results show that participants in majority hold positive perceptions on the mini-publics. The reasons for their positive perception do not lie in our hypothetical explanation on representation. Instead, we found out that the positive attitudes depend on the design features, such as the agenda and the composition, the stakes, and the media coverage. What do these findings on participants tell us about the use of mini-public in collaborative governance?

We want here to highlight two points. First, our findings demonstrate that mini-publics with non-organized stakeholders are less well perceived. This implies that there is a distinction between lay citizens and non-organized stakeholders, and that this difference affects the mini-public's legitimacy. Our case study highlights the importance of exploring the question of whom a non-organized stakeholder is and of how to include them in mini-publics. On the one hand, the question "who" is very challenging because the distinction between groups of citizens based on the stakes they have it very blurry. On the other, we may question the inclusion of such group in mini-public. As we previously explained, mini-publics are meant to gather lay citizens that consider the public interest rather than their own interest (Smith, 2009). The Citizens and Consensus Conferences demonstrate that non-organized groups tend to pursue their personal interest, in the same vein as other interest groups. Should these two groups be associated into a single deliberative forum? Our second point addresses this issue.

The second point refers to the importance of the participatory plan's coherency. The coherency of the participatory plan refers to the purpose and sequence of the mini-publics, and how these two relate to its institutional design. Let us return to the mini-public with the lowest perception - the Consensus Conference - to exemplify what a lack of coherency is. This participatory mechanism happened at the end of the process and was meant to decide on a concrete policy issue. It was composed of a few lay citizens and a majority of non-organized stakeholders, principally teachers. The problem was that the latter had high stakes in the issue and they became frustrated to be included only at the end of the policy-making process, when the core of the policy was already decided. This points out the role of sequencing mini-public and its importance for the coherency of the public consultation. This participatory plan featured a citizen panel so as to deliberate on the priorities for the education reform. Yet, this mini-public did not seem to contribute to the legitimacy of following participatory processes. The frustration of the Consensus Conference's participants illustrates the shortcoming of the participatory plan.

Instead, a larger consultation with both lay citizens and non-organized interests with large media coverage would have been more coherent. The choice to include them in order to

decide on how to decide on the implementation of one aspect of the reform. Hence, its function was to decide on a policy implementation at the end of the process. We can therefore ask whether the inclusion of non-organized stakeholders should not have occurred sooner in the process. For instance, instead of having a small mini-public of lay citizens without any media coverage, the consultation process could have been perceived more legitimate if non-organized stakeholders were included. The design of mini-public in collaborative governance should be elaborated "with the end in mind" (Carcasson, 2009). This brings us to the importance of design features. The selection procedure of the consensus conference – random selection based on a pool of volunteers – was likely to increase the presence of participants with high stakes. Also, the high media coverage of this mini-public further exacerbates the citizens' perception of the stakes.

We also assumed that stakeholders would adopt a negative stance against the use of mini-publics in collaborative governance. They would oppose this newcomer constituted by non-professional representatives and likely to be a public relation machine guided by the State. Although stakeholders often abstain from taking position in our survey, the interviews allow us to better understand their perception of mini-publics. We found out that they do not *per se* oppose citizen participation.

First, mini-publics can help representatives to check whether their claims still correspond to what their constituent's interest. Stakeholders use the mini-publics' recommendations to verify whether the policy does align with the citizens' preferences, as one interviewee explained: "it was reassuring to know that we weren't on the wrong track and that we rather did a good job overall". Another also points out this positive purpose: "It [the mini-public's outcome] confirms, reassures, makes sure that we are not completely disconnected, we tell ourselves that we are not completely disconnected from the field". Yet, a mini-public on its own could not solve the lack of accountability between organized stakeholders and their constituents. It could partially help representatives to check their positioning, but it does not empower citizens to react to the claims made in their names. Even the participants of a mini-public cannot react to the claims of organized stakeholders. One way to give this opportunity lies in the coupling between the mini-public and the policy-makers. Before addressing our reflections on the idea of coupling, we return to our assumption that a mini-public could enhance deliberation within collaborative governance.

Based on our analysis, we argue that the perception of stakeholders makes it difficult for mini-publics to improve the quality of deliberation within collaborative governance. For organized stakeholders do not perceive participants as legitimate interlocutors to make policy. They believe that they are the legitimate representatives of citizens. Their idea of legitimacy is based on representativeness and (segmental) expertise. On the former, one interview remarks that "citizens would maybe have been questioned by the unions, but maybe that a panel of teachers or a panel of adults instructor [would have been more legitimate]". Hence, stakeholders seem not to grasp that mini-publics' strength lie in its diversity rather than it representative. Concerning the expertise, stakeholders tend to believe that ordinary lay citizens are not enough qualified to understand the complexity and have an overview of the issue. One interviewee explained: "We have to be aware of the limits of the system. For issues that are relatively simple, this could work, but for issues as complex as the Pacte with its field agents and where each field agent has his opinion… It is like football fans that remake the

game [between them] after the game, they all have their own opinions and re-construct the world. I think that this kind of participatory process, when dealing with education, quickly becomes this kind of discussion". Two other interviewees refer to the individual perspective of citizens which make them unable to get the bigger picture: "with these participatory processes, you have these points of view but these are points of view of actors, particular points of view that are difficult to articulate with an overview of the problems", and another notes: "I am not very optimist because when you have this kind of meetings [participatory processes], often, the person talking focuses on her personal case, very often. And you know well that everyone has an experience about school, everyone went to school, so everyone has an experience at school". The possibility for a mini-public to enhance deliberation seems limited, because organized stakeholders consider its recommendations rather as a way to check their representative claims than as an enlightened expression of the general interest.

The idea of coupling becomes here essential for mini-publics to produce an added-value in collaborative governance. Our case study highlights a decoupling between the mini-publics and the stakeholders and a too-tight coupling between the mini-publics and the State. On the one hand, stakeholders were not involved in the decision to convene mini-publics. They see this alternative consultation mechanism that bypasses their own representative channel, as a communication tool of the minister. One member of the minister cabinet explained the difficulty of justifying the use of mini-public: "there are power relations involved, we still had difficulties to assert the necessity of making surveys [through mini-publics] because the unions and the PO [organizing body of a school] said 'we are the representatives' and 'why are you doing another survey on the side?'". A union member also mentions that "The participatory dimension [of the reform] is a decision of the minister, this decision did not belong to us" and further adds that the minister "has set up a large participatory process, me, I do not hide that I have the feeling this is [about] communication". Moreover, the stakeholders received the mini-publics' recommendations too late, making it impossible for them to consider. One member of the minister cabinet explained the huge number of reports written by several stakeholders: "It is true that they [the stakeholders] have been submerged with information (…). There were the discussion groups, I think between 12 and 15, twice. Each time two [reports] (…). Parents sent one rapport (…) so that's why, it makes a lot of reports". One union representative also describes the lack of time to consider all information: "It came too late, too much together and so we were with 350 pages within a week. That's why". Another stakeholder even explained that that the report from the citizens' conference was sent after the policy-makers had decided on the policy.

Conclusion

This paper aimed at exploring how the participants and the stakeholders perceive the empowerment of mini-publics in a collaborative governance scheme involving State and non-State actors (among which we find organized stakeholders and lay citizens). The idea behind this research was to discover how these perceptions can or can't participate in achieving a loose coupling of the mini-publics with the other sites (here namely the stakeholders' groups). Achieving such a loose coupling is crucial to reach a cross-fertilization of ideas between the sites: that is, that the mini-public and the stakeholders' groups see their ideas circulate and fuel each other's debates. This in turn allows the mini-public to occupy a significant role in

the policy-making process, which prevents it from leading to frustration among its participants.

The survey we carried on 105 participants and 82 organized stakeholders shows how weak this coupling actually is in the context of the "Pacte pour un Enseignement d'excellence", which undermines the potential of the mini-public to improve the broader deliberative quality of the collaborative governance scheme in which it develops. Contrary to what we often find in the literature (Hendriks, 2002), this situation is not due to the fact that stakeholders somehow feel threatened by the mini-publics as a new player entering the supposedly zero-sum game of negotiations (Hendriks, 2002). Neither is this decoupling due to an overall negative perception of the mini-publics among the stakeholders. Instead, both sites seem to be unable to feed each other with their arguments, ideas and recommendations because of three elements.

First, there is apparently a lack of communication between the two sites, which leads to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the mini-publics' processes and outcomes among the stakeholders. This in turn might lead the mini-public to backfire and generate frustration on the participants' side, which is why solutions have to be found to connect both sites, make them communicate in order to allow them to fuel each other. As one of our interviewees puts it: "if people from the mini-publics came to present their work, maybe their recommendations would have been more likely to be implemented, I think".

Second, the stakeholders do not envision the mini-publics' role as a top-down process aiming at penetrating their own debates. Rather, they see them as top-down ventures they can use to inform or even educate, change the mentalities of the citizens about the future shape of the education system. This perception of a dominant position of the stakeholders is also probably they do not feel threatened, do not hold negative views of these processes.

Third, the stakeholders are not likely to envision mini-publics as legitimate equal partners in a collaborative governance scheme. Indeed, their rather traditional vision of who should and shouldn't participate in politics doesn't include lay citizens. Moreover, they do not believe that citizens are able to participate in politics, and even more so on a complex topic such as the Education reform.

On the participants' side, if all of them feel able to participate in politics, they do not believe that they are being listened to by decision makers or that they have a significant influence on public policies. However, this perception is more optimistic when it comes to their influence in the collaborative governance scheme they are involved in through the mini-publics. Indeed, all the participants seem more convinced that their recommendations will be followed up by the Minister.

When it comes to their experience in the mini-publics, they vary greatly depending on several elements. First, the composition of the mini-public - mainly citizens, a mix of citizens, pupils and teachers or mainly teachers – raises or lowers the stakes depending on who participates, which in turn affects the way the participants perceived the process and supported its outcomes. Second, the media attention – low or high – also enhances the stakes and therewith affected the participants' perceptions. Third, the open or closed character of the

agenda, accompanied by ready-to use recommendations or not might also have played a role in shaping the stakes of the event and thereby the perceptions of the participants. All these elements – composition with 2/3 of teachers, closed agenda, ready-to use recommendations and media coverage – participated in raising the stakes of the event. In turn, this led to a polarization of the debates created a fertile ground for the development of negative feelings toward the process of the consensus conference. As we have seen, a negative perception of the process, if it leads to a greater follow-up of its results by the participants, does not seem to lead to a stronger support for these same results.

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