

Citizens' Assemblies PLUS

No Transformation Without Implementation

Maximizing Impact of Citizens' Assemblies' Recommendations

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Fostering Citizens' Assemblies Collaboratively

Democracy is in global competition with other political systems, and the question remains open as to how it can continue to survive and thrive. To achieve this, we start from the premise that a vibrant democracy must ensure democratic **dialogue**, **decision-making** and collective **agency**, all of which must go hand-in-hand with democratic **learning**. Democracy needs democratic innovation in order to stay lively. Stratified randomly selected Citizens' Assemblies represent a key democratic innovation that currently fuels intense debate around the world (cf. OECD 2020). Using the example of this increasingly frequently used approach, we show that classic Citizens' Assemblies still are inadequate for fostering a vibrant democracy; in order to strengthen democratic capacity to act in the face of critical societal challenges, it is necessary to specifically design and support not only the declaration of Citizens' Assemblies' recommendations but also their implementation and to incorporate actors from all major levels (politics and administration, civil society, economy etc.) from the start.

Here, we present a model that serves to adequately design participation processes such that all key players are engaged and connected. How can the different pillars of democracy (electoral, deliberative and direct) be better interconnected and combined? Which processes are best suitable for which societal challenges? Within those processes, what opportunities do which players have to make an impact? And how do we get into action? With structural and conceptual considerations as well as practiced examples, the model "Citizens' Assemblies PLUS" provides preliminary answers to these

questions. We invite all those interested in participation and experts to further advance and vitalize this model with us.

Making Citizens' Assemblies Effective

Societal challenges require societal negotiation processes. Citizens' Assemblies (CA) are an exceptional way of developing socially accepted solutions. The lottery procedure provides the most diverse composition possible, one that reflects the breadth and diversity of society better than other public participation procedures or in classic electoral democratic bodies (cf. OECD 2020, Berg, Chwallisz, Nicolaidis, Sintomer 2023). In a moderated process, participants receive well-founded information, partake in constructive discussions and develop jointly supported solutions.

The lottery procedure is a proven one and builds on the original democratic principle of Ancient Greece complemented with modern deliberation techniques (cf. Sintomer 2023). In Ireland, highly controversial issues such as abortion law and marriage for all have been successfully resolved by Citizens' Assemblies over the last decade (cf. Courant 2021). Since then, numerous CAs have been conducted throughout Europe. The format continues to experience a significant upsurge. In Germany, seven national CAs have taken place since 2019 (cf. Bürgerrat 2023), and in 2023, the German Parliament started to apply randomly selected Citizens' Assemblies on a regular base (cf. Deutscher Bundestag 2023).

However, CAs concerning complex challenges (especially climate Citizens' Assemblies) have yet to usher in major breakthroughs (cf. Tyers, Huckins,

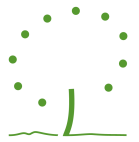
Boswell 2020). Because of this, CAs are now being criticized more frequently, or to put it differently: it is becoming very clear that it is necessary to pay more attention to and systematically approach the follow-up and implementation of citizen-assembly recommendations (cf. Langkjær & Smith 2023, Wilson & Mellier 2023).

We are at a crossroads: if the impression arises that CAs "don't make a difference," participation as a whole might be discredited. Therefore, we need to further cultivate and develop CAs if they are to contribute to strengthening the democratic capacity to act and to bolster our vibrant democracy in the global systems competition.

The Type of the Challenge Determines the Choice of Design

How can we strengthen the democratic capacity to act? Theories of individual and collective action differentiate three significant phases of successful action (vgl. Behrendt, Matz, Göritz 2017) following the initiation of the process: deepening the understanding of the situation and of available options for change; weighing, selecting and deciding on specific goals; and implementing these goals in the planning and action phase. In short, we must (1) initiate a process, (2) collectively deepen our understanding, (3) decide and (4) implement.

Of course, different societal challenges come with different qualities. The characteristics of the challenge are critically relevant for the process needed to solve it.



- Does the challenge present an **understanding problem**, i.e., is there merely a lack of knowledge, social dialogue, understanding of different perspectives and exchange? Then a well conducted dialogue process is needed (2).
- Does it present primarily a **decision problem**, e.g., a yes or no question that can be signed into law or implemented simply? Then a deliberation and negotiation process and the ensuing democratically made decision are needed (3).
- Or does it present an **implementation problem**, such as the case with the current, monumental issue of climate action? Then democratic negotiations and decisions are not sufficient: a collective implementation process must follow (4).

If process sequences and procedures are chosen that do not suit the challenges, the ability to act cannot be strengthened and the lack of success leads to frustration for all parties involved. This can happen if, for example, a randomly selected CA actually addresses decision-making or implementation issues but the democratic decision and implementation fail to take place. Therefore, *during the initiation phase* of a participation process, it is essential to ensure (i) the willingness to adequately address all necessary phases and (ii) to follow through until the end. When complex implementation problems are concerned, the decision-making and implementation phases should be designed and appropriately budgeted from the outset. In order to design these phases, a clear understanding of who the key players are is necessary.

Incorporating all Actor Levels to Solve Complex Implementation Problems

The assumption that complex societal challenges can be resolved solely through majoritarian political-institutional decisions is as flawed as the notion that implementation will naturally proceed without further effort following dialogue or decision-making.

The theory of transformativity (cf. Müller 2023) distinguishes four essential mechanisms of action for far-reaching social innovation and transformation. These run parallel and mutually reinforce one another: (A) establishing legitimation through new laws and rules, in particular by political actors, (B) empowerment, in particular of pioneers in the population, the so-called innovative "early adopters," (C) raising awareness about the challenge, its meaning, possible solutions and about individuals' potential for concrete change in behavior and (D) designing new products and services, in particular by social actors in business and science.

In order to effectively strengthen the democratic capacity to act in the face of complex societal challenges, all four essential actor levels should be addressed and engaged as much as possible: (A) politics and administration, (B) pioneers and "early adopters" in the population, (C) as many citizens as possible and (D) key social actors (business, science, civil society, media...). At every step in the process, all levels of actors have different means to make an impact. The only way to successfully achieve transformation is by interconnecting and integrating all actor levels.

Accompanying Implementation (Interim Conclusion)

Currently, classic CA models do not provide guidance for accompanying implementation. Despite generating thoughtful, broadly supported proposals, Citizens' Assemblies lack the means to ensure their recommendations are enacted. Citizens' Assemblies addressing complex societal issues only fulfill their democratic potential when their recommendations are implemented through clearly legitimized democratic processes.

Previous Citizens' Assemblies have often suffered from a design flaw: the decision-making and implementation phases are not sufficiently conceptualized from the outset. Additionally, the results of previous Citizens' Assemblies have been primarily addressed to political bodies, neglecting the unique and meaningful opportunity to engage and involve all levels of social actors. Good ideas that cannot be realized by formal political decisions fall by the wayside because key players are not addressed. Countless real-life examples have shown that complex societal challenges require a multi-layered approach.

We've developed "Citizens' Assemblies PLUS - No Transformation Without Implementation" specifically to better tap the potential of randomly selected Citizens' Assemblies. Our model builds on established approaches, such as the "Citizens' Council" model of Vorarlberg (Vorarlberg 2023). It is currently being piloted in the Freiburg region in Southwestern Germany (Freiburg Citizens' Assembly). A detailed description of the Freiburg Citizens' Assembly Model can be found on the website <https://www.buergerrat-plus.eu/en>.

Citizens' Assemblies PLUS focuses on collective support for implementation across several levels.

Essential elements of Citizens' Assemblies PLUS are:

1. **Implementation support** ensures that the results of the CA are pursued in a democratic and transparent fashion.
2. There is a far-reaching **involvement of different levels of actors** for collective implementation: politics, administration, citizenship, business, science, organized civil society and other institutions cooperate together.

After all, complex societal challenges require societal negotiation processes—and the democratically legitimized, collective implementation of jointly supported solutions.

For future Citizens' Assemblies, we recommend that:

1. The process should not end with the citizens' recommendations: the decision and implementation must be conceptually planned, actively supported and financed from the outset. To this end, new formats should be developed and tested.
2. CA recommendations should be addressed to a more diverse audience than simply political bodies: all levels of society should be involved in the implementation of transformative processes.

Introducing the Model: Weaving Together the Three Pillars of Democracy

In their forthcoming 2023 publication “A Wholistic Approach to Citizens’ Assemblies: Combining Electoral, Direct and Deliberative Democracy,” Berg and Nicolaidis (2023) propose a model in which CAs are embedded in various real or possible courses of action and in which the three pillars of democracy play equally important roles (Figure 1):

Phases Democratic Models	Initiation (1)	Deliberating & Authoring (2)	Decision (3)
Electoral Democracy (A)	A1	A2	A3
Deliberative Democracy (B)	B1	B2	B3
Direct Democracy (C)	C1	C2	C3

Figure 1: Typology of Citizens' Assemblies (cf. Berg, Nicolaidis 2023)

Classic democratic decision-making processes contain three phases: (1) initiation, (2) deliberating and authoring and (3) decision. These three phases can be connected with all three pillars of democracy: (A) electoral democracy, (B) deliberative democracy and (C) direct democracy. The model provides a quick overview and a deeper understanding of contribution opportunities and power relations in political decision-making processes.

The following are some examples of possible process sequences, with a focus on randomly selected Citizens' Assemblies (Figure 2, non-exhaustive selection):

A1-A2-A3 (red arrows): the classic and dominant decision-making procedure in today's **parliamentary-representative democracies** without Citizens' Assemblies. Political representatives initiate, negotiate and decide on parliamentary resolutions.

A1-B2-A3 (light green arrows): **model of "classic" randomly selected CAs** (e.g., the nationwide CAs in Germany): the CA is initiated and defined thematically by political actors top-down; deliberation is carried out and recommendations are formed in the CA. Decisions regarding the adoption of the recommendations are made by parliament, as is the case, for example, in Germany (cf. Deutscher Bundestag 2023) or by the government/cabinet, as in France (cf. Giraudet 2021).

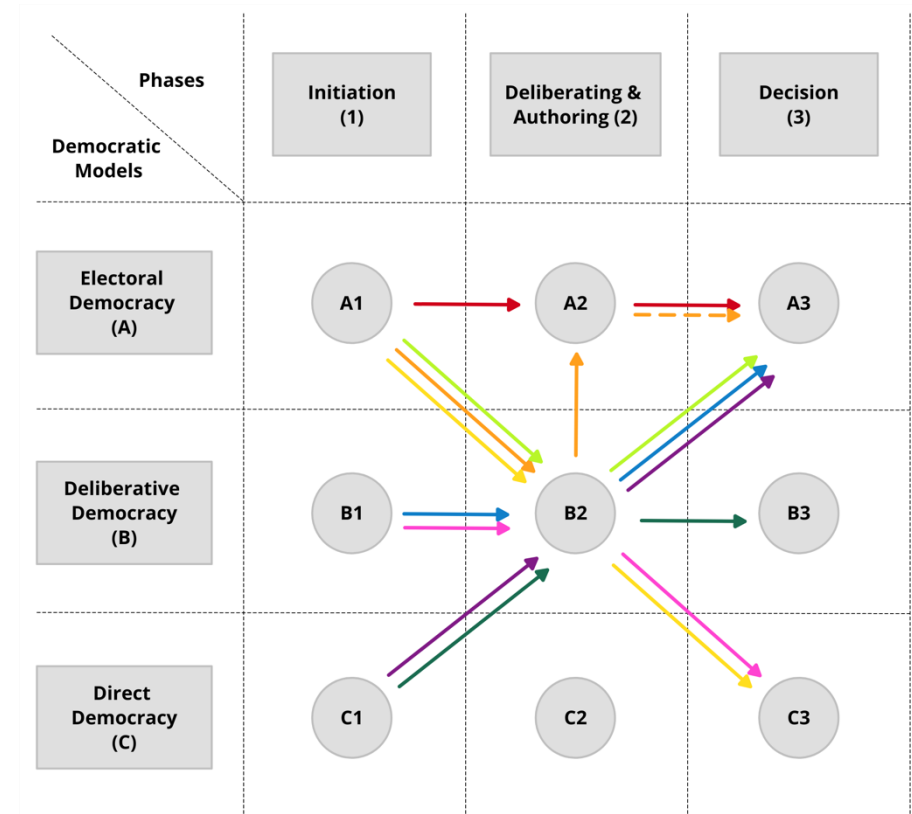


Figure 2 Possible process sequences (selection)

A1-B2-A2-(A3) (orange arrows): On closer inspection, it becomes apparent that most of the recommendations of Citizens' Assemblies are **not in fact directly decided on by public decision makers** (stage 3) but go back to the deliberation and consultation phase (stage 2) if at all. The content of the recommendations is merely given to and discussed by actors on the political level. In some cases, the process stops here and there is no explicit decision by the legislative body on the adoption of the CA recommendations, as exemplified by the CA of the EU (cf. Berg 2022).

A1-B2-C3 (yellow arrows): the **Irish CA model**. Elected authorities decide on the initiation; deliberation and negotiation take place in a CA. The recommendations are then submitted to the people in a binding referendum (cf. Farrell, Suiter 2019).

B1-B2-A3 (blue arrows): the **East Belgium model**. One Citizens' Assembly exclusively decides on the topic (B1), while another Assembly deliberates on the respective topic (B2). The ultimate decisions concerning the recommendations are made by the elected representatives (cf. Nissen, Min 2019).

B1-B2-C3 (pink arrows): the **Neo-Athenian model**. The initiation and preparation of a CA are the responsibilities of an independent CA (B1), while the recommendations are discussed and formed in a separate CA (B2). The decision on whether or not to adopt the recommendations lies with the entire citizenry in a referendum. As of now, this model has not yet been used (cf. Berg, Nicolaidis 2023).

C1-B2-A3 (purple arrows): the **Austrian model**. CAs can be initiated by the citizenry, i.e., by a citizens' initiative. Decisions on the recommendations are made by the elected representatives (cf. Vorarlberg 2023).

C1-B2-B3: (dark green arrows) the **Gdańsk model**: CAs can be initiated by the citizenry, i.e., by a citizens' initiative. The decision on whether or not to adopt the recommendations lies with the members of the CA themselves. Recommendations are adopted by the government if they are supported by 80% of the CA members (cf. Carson, Gerwin 2019).

For dialogue or decision-making problems, the CA typology presented here is very suitable for making conscious decisions about where which procedure and which form of democracy should be used and interlinked. In order to engage and empower the population, it is worth thinking outside the model box of "classic randomly selected Citizens' Assemblies" and incorporating further deliberative and direct democratic elements (Berg, Nicolaidis 2023).

However, the model has its limitations when confronted with matters of implementation. Therefore, we propose a twofold expansion of the model (Figure 3).

Model Expansion: Including all Levels of Actors and Implementation

Democratic Models	Phases	Initiation (1)	Deliberating & Authoring (2)	Decision (3)	Implementation (4)
	Actors				
Electoral Democracy (A)	Politics and Administration (A)	A1	A2	A3	A4
Deliberative Democracy (B)	Randomly Selected Citizens (B)	B1	B2	B3	B4
Direct Democracy (C)	All Citizens (C)	C1	C2	C3	C4
	Social Actors (D)	D1	D2	D3	D4

Figure 3: Model expansion with actor levels and implementation phase

In order to fully exploit the democratic capacity to act on complex challenges, the model must be supplemented by (D) major social actors and

(4) the implementation phase (Figure 3). In addition to politics and administration (focus on electoral democracy, A), randomly selected CAs or similar formats of deliberative democracy (B) and all citizens (addressed by direct democracy, C), other social actors must also have a seat at the table—in particular business, science, organized civil society (D). These actors can also initiate a negotiation process, play a significant role in providing sound advice and (co-)decide on possible solutions. Just like the other actor levels, they play a crucial role in implementation.

In terms of the transformativ theory, the role of the different actor levels during implementation can be described as follows: In the implementation phase, implementation is made binding by the political body and administration through rules, laws, etc. (A4). The process of a CA can win over CA participants as early adopters, and newly acquired knowledge as well as opportunities for effective action can encourage and empower them to change their behavior (B4). Raising awareness among the population is crucial for implementation in order to ensure that the implementation is well anchored and broadly supported by as many people as possible. All citizens can participate in implementation within their own capacity (C4). Other social actors from business, science and civil society play a significant role for sustainable implementation, e.g. through the development of new products and services that transform markets and create new opportunities (D4) (cf. Müller 2023).

Implementation support provides (participatory) formats to each actor level. These formats are embedded in a holistic process, presented below with CAs as a central building block (CA PLUS, Figure 4).

Citizens' Assemblies PLUS: From Start to Implementation

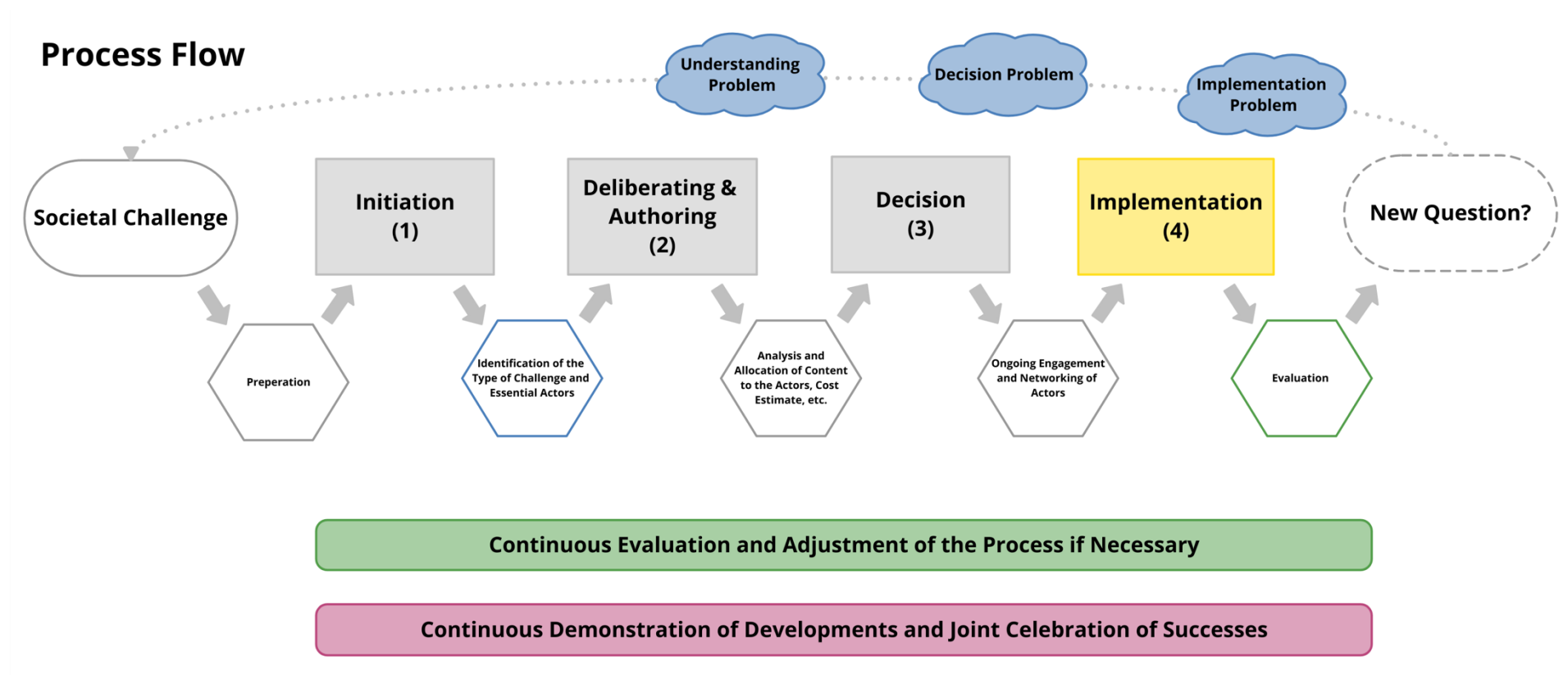


Figure 4 Diagram of a prototypical process sequence of Citizens' Assemblies PLUS. The main phases (rectangles) are supplemented by intermediate steps (hexagons).

The diagram (Figure 4) shows a prototypical process flow of Citizens' Assemblies PLUS. It illustrates clearly that the results of the deliberative or negotiation process—the citizens' report of the CA—are not the end of the process; they are an important milestone along the way. The process must be continuously evaluated and adjusted as necessary. Two essential elements for success are (i) the transparent presentation of developments and (ii) the joint celebration of successes and achievements.

Collaboratively Developing a Diverse Range of Participation Formats

Citizens' Assemblies PLUS provides the theoretical framework for conceptualizing and reflecting on a process design. The concept can then be realized by the concrete implementation of a variety of formats. Running Citizens' Assemblies PLUS means **developing and using formats for all levels of actors in every phase**. The Freiburg Citizens' Assembly exemplifies one comprehensive design variant. It was originally piloted in 2022-2023. The specific format descriptions can be found at <https://www.buergerrat-plus.eu/en>.

We invite and encourage all those interested to further cultivate and vitalize CA PLUS and to contribute examples of successful formats for all levels and phases. Our vision: a **collaborative online platform with best-practice examples of implementation** concerning the phases of dialogue, decision-making and action, a platform that can serve as a source of inspiration for

society and as a design tool for effective participation processes, open for everyone. We envision a future in which Citizens' Assemblies are no longer standalone deliberative processes, but are systematically coupled with implementation support—where initiators and implementers jointly commit, from the very beginning, to designing and planning the democratically legitimate implementation of the outcomes.

Beyond Citizens' Assemblies: Participation PLUS

The model presented here was developed on the basis of a randomly selected Citizens' Assembly. It applies analogously to all other types of participation processes. Whenever more complex implementation issues are at hand, implementation should be taken into account from the start. Participation is important. We need more Participation PLUS: participation with implementation support. Europe has gained significant expertise and experience facilitating democratic dialogue and decision-making. Now, we need new approaches that strengthen our democratic collective agency and democratic learning so that we can jointly tackle societal challenges and thus strengthen, cultivate and shape a vibrant democracy capable of action for the next generations.

More inspiration and specific examples of the approach presented here can be found at <https://www.buergerrat-plus.eu/en>.

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