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HOW TO RUN A DELIBERATIVE MINI-PUBLIC IN A HYBRID REGIME

POLICY HANDBOOK



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IRENA FIKET
VUJO ILIĆ
ČEDOMIR MARKOV
GAZELA PUDAR DRAŠKO

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AUTHORS: IRENA FIKET, VUJO ILIĆ, ČEDOMIR MARKOV, GAZELA PUDAR DRAŠKO
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DELIBERATIVE MINI-PUBLICS IN HYBRID REGIMES: INTRODUCTION

Efforts to institutionalize deliberative institutions are almost absent in Serbia and other Western Balkan countries. On the other hand, the growing lack of interest of European societies' citizens in participating in political life through traditional instruments of representative democracy has caused a renewed concern in the EU and its member states for the promotion and encouragement of deliberative institutions (Reuchamps, Suiter 2016). This has resulted in democratic engineering inspired by the principles of participatory and deliberative conceptions of democracy. Democratic experimentation along these lines, observed in many EU countries, gave rise to the promotion and institutionalization of deliberative institutions (town meetings, citizen assemblies, neighborhood councils, citizen juries, participatory budgets, etc.). However, democratizing effects of deliberation have been a matter of intense political and academic debate for over 20 years. Still, with a few exceptions, most deliberative institutions were implemented in stable democracies.

While deliberative institutions and other participatory democratic innovations are generally less known in Serbia and the region, there has been a trend of citizen mobilization in the form of social movements and local civic initiatives, which are both a symptom of unresponsive and more openly authoritarian institutions and the potential pathway to democratization (Fiket, Pudar Draško 2021). The pace and scope of these developments in the undemocratic societies of the Western Balkan region, in terms of both bottom-up and top-down democratic experimentation, call for a deeper understanding of their internal dynamics and their social and political impact as both individual cases and parts of a greater cycle of social movement mobilizations and institutional experimentation.

Responding to this need, the research team gathered within the framework of the Jean Monnet network “Active citizenship: promoting and advancing innovative democratic practices in the Western Balkans,” led by the Institute for Philosophy and social theory, University of Belgrade, organized two deliberative mini-publics (DMPs) within an hybrid institutional setting, including in the design of DMPs perspective of social movements and civic initiatives. The aim was to strengthen dialogue between different perspectives, approaches, and fields around deliberative and participatory forms of democracy in an undemocratic environment. This project was carried out in cooperation with the European Jean Monnet Network [ACT WB - Active Citizenship in the Western Balkans](#), coordinated by the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory of the University of Belgrade (IFDT), together with four more European universities and the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence. The planning and implementation of DMPs took place through the cooperation of the Scientific Committee, comprising the following members: Irena Fiket (IFDT), Ana Đorđević (IFDT), Biljana Đorđević (Faculty of Political Science), Ivana Janković (Faculty of Philosophy), Gazela Pudar Draško (IFDT), Jelena Vasiljević (IFDT), and the Executive Organization Committee (Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence and MASMI).

This handbook aims to present the findings of the research done within this JM network.

DESIGNING THE DELIBERATIVE MINI-PUBLICS IN SERBIA: ACKNOWLEDGING THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND THE STATE OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Deliberative mini-publics are citizen forums in which a sample of citizens, selected from the population affected by some public issue, deliberate on that issue. The key principles of deliberative democracy inspire the design of DMPs: inclusiveness, exposure to different opinions, reasoned opinion expression, and the production of a collective decision. The design, setting, and purpose of DMPs may vary, but they all share some standard basic features to ensure the achievement of the ideals of deliberative democracy. They involve a population sample that should be representative of a plurality of opinions and positions on the issue. Professional moderators further guarantee free and equal expression of all opinions within DMPs, ensuring a balanced participation and respectful environment in small group discussions. Further, the balanced panel of experts and politicians ensures that the participants are exposed to different opinions, preferences, policy alternatives, and values.

In an attempt to test, for the first time, the possibility of conducting DMPs in Serbian society, two citizen assemblies were organized by the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory (University of Belgrade) in Belgrade and Valjevo on 21 and 28 November 2021, held online due to the Covid-19 provoked health crisis.

To make the official names of the DMPs more familiar to citizens at first glance, the research team chose to use the term *Građanska skupština* (Citizen Assembly) since DMPs, as well as the concept of deliberation, are generally unknown to both Serbian citizens and political representatives. The citizen assemblies followed the “standard design” of DMPs, with one significant innovation: the inclusion of active citizens, representatives of local initiatives, or

organizations who publicly expressed their attitudes and proposals regarding the issues under discussion. In other words, in addition to ordinary citizens, representatives descriptive of various socio-demographic categories of citizens of relevance for deliberation around particular topics, we included representatives of the “parties who are involved in the particular conflict in need of solutions” (Westphal 2019: 201). Active citizens were included in small groups as participants and at plenary sessions as speakers.

The quality of democracy in Serbia has already been deficient in the 2010s. However, since 2012, increased democratic backsliding could be observed in eroding “political rights and civil liberties, putting pressure on independent media, the political opposition, and civil society organizations,” which was explicitly cited as the reason for downgrading Serbia’s classification from a semi-consolidated democracy to a transitional or hybrid regime (Freedom House 2020). Elections in hybrid regimes exist and are to some extent competitive, but are neither free nor fair: there is a misuse of public resources and institutions, voter blackmail (threat of job loss in both public and private sectors), and unequal access to national media, while the most powerful private news outlets serve as an outright mouthpiece of the ruling party.

Citizens' political and social mobilization is impeded by the political opportunity structure (Tarrow 2005) formed within hybrid regimes characterized by competitive authoritarianism. Serbian citizens are described as passive and apathetic, distrustful of democratic institutions and political representatives (Todosijević, Pavlović 2017), and disappointed by the difficulty of influencing political decisions (Greenberg 2010). Citizens' sense of political efficacy, the perception that their actions can affect politics, is very low in Serbia (Fiket, Pudar Draško 2021), and there is also a decline in civic engagement at the local level (Fiket et al. 2017). Nevertheless, in the last five years, there has been an increase in the use of non-institutional channels of political participation, such as protests and civic mobilization within the

framework of the new social movements (Pešić 2017; Delibašić et al. 2019; Pudar Draško et al. 2019; Fiket et al. 2019; Pešić, Petrović 2020).

We acknowledged this reality when designing our DMPs and chose to include grassroots movement representatives as participants alongside ordinary citizens. In addition, the topics we selected to be discussed by participants in DMPs have been previously put on the agenda by grassroots movements. Urban mobility and air pollution have been the topics around which these initiatives and movements have organized as groups, making public claims and formulating opinions and discourses. Finally, our design was not meant to be merely institutional empowerment of extra-institutional civic participation but instead an attempt to avoid locking deliberation at the micro level, making it especially difficult in an authoritarian setting to scale up to the macro level.

In the following pages, we will outline the design of DMPs and discuss their implementation with a specific focus on the DMPs held in Serbia. This will allow us to underline the challenges that could occur when DMPs are implemented in hybrid regimes. Besides, each phase of a DMP will be discussed, and we will outline a set of challenges and recommendations for each.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE TOPIC, HOW TO FRAME IT, AND HOW TO INFORM THE CITIZENS?

The organizing team initiates the organization of the DMP by setting up the advisory committee made of experts for deliberation. The first task of the advisory committee is to define and supervise the framing of the topic for the DMP, together with other actors involved in the organization of a specific DMP (experts, politicians, academic community, and promoters of DMP).

It is considered that an issue is appropriate for public deliberation if (Carson 2018):

- broad concern exists within a community;
- choices must be made, but there are no clear "right" answers;
- a range of people and groups must act for the community to move forward effectively;
- additional perspectives and ideas may help the community to move forward;
- citizens have not had the opportunity to consider different courses of action and their long-term consequences; and
- the decision-making of officeholders and other leaders needs to be informed by public judgment and experts' views.

An issue is not appropriate for public deliberation if it:

- is solely technical and requires a technical solution;
- needs only a "yes" or "no" answer;
- has a specific solution that has already been decided, and the public's role would only be seen as a "rubber stamp";
- requires an immediate response;
- is relevant only to a narrow interest group.

The next task of the organizing team is to prepare an information package that will enable DMP participants to obtain a complete picture of the issue and different opinions and arguments around it. The informational materials are usually printed, but they can also be presented in other attention-securing manners (infographics, videos, etc.), depending on the available resources.

The main goal of producing informational materials is to find a way to ensure the "impartiality" and inclusiveness of all relevant views on the topic. Ideally, the material will be prepared by a few engaged experts and shared for review with the committee of interested parties that can bring additional or different arguments. Their comments and suggestions should be incorporated or addressed before the info packs are distributed to the participants.

Therefore, a committee of interested parties should be established after selecting the topic and drafting informational materials. Its purpose is to guarantee a balance of positions and arguments about the topic presented to the citizens. The discussion on a certain topic largely depends on the chosen authorities who speak on the topic and the positions and values they promote with their statements. Hence, it is of utmost importance that the committee is composed of credible, competent, and, as much as possible, politically diverse experts. Usually, these are experts and politicians. However, in flawed democracies, other actors from civil society and/or social movements can bring significant insights that the last two groups can overlook.

The committee of interested parties in the Belgrade and Valjevo DMPs comprised relevant experts, civil society actors, and social movement representatives. The first version of informational materials, proposed by a representative of the academic community, was sent to all committee members for revision and comments. The comments and suggestions were integrated into the document version, which was sent out again to the committee and eventually approved as adequate to send to the sample of citizens.

Sometimes, it can be very challenging to get approval from all the subjects that are on the committee. In such cases, interviewing them can help get them to present their and map the opposing views. The deliberative theory concluded that it is impossible to understand and neutrally present a certain socio-political problem. Instead, an inclusive approach is employed to present arguments, attitudes, and values related to the topic. This is usually acceptable for representatives of interested groups and the committee.

After getting the recommendation from the committee on whom to invite to the panels, the organizing team should decide who will be the members of a panel of experts and a panel of politicians that will participate in two plenary sessions within a DMP. A panel composition should be determined in such a way as to guarantee the representation of all relevant perspectives and the most important arguments both within informative materials and within plenary sessions.

The organizing team of the first two DMPs in Serbia wanted to have the best possible representation of the interested groups and hence decided also to include representatives of the local movements and civic initiatives. When framing the topic, the size of the political community to which the topic of deliberation refers is essential for good planning. Local topics enable easier recruitment of participants due to the assumption that citizens will be more interested when they feel more politically effective and when the problems of discussion are tangible and close to them. Also, local political representatives are easier to reach and hold accountable at later stages for the decisions made through deliberation. Of course, this does not mean that DMPs can only be implemented at the local level and in relation to local policies, but their implementation has fewer challenges at the local level.

Successful DMP at the local level; Citizens' Assembly held in Mostar

In July 2021, 47 citizens of Mostar had the opportunity to be a part of the first Citizens' Assembly (CA) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through a participative and deliberative approach, members of the Mostar CA created a set of recommendations and guidelines to the relevant city authorities on how to respond to the question: "How can the City of Mostar improve the cleanliness of public space to make it more pleasant for its citizens?" With the support of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, members of the CA had the opportunity for six days to hear presentations by local and international experts and stakeholders, to learn about the best practices, and to exchange views on the current state regarding the topic with the Mostar City Councilors and representatives of the City administration. They produced 32 recommendations that the new municipal government adopted.

Successful DMP at the national level: The Irish Citizens' Assembly

The Irish Citizens' Assembly 2016–2018¹ was an exercise in deliberative democracy, placing the citizen at the heart of important legal and policy issues facing Irish society. With the benefit of expert, impartial, and factual advice the 100 citizen Members considered several topics. Their conclusions formed the basis of a number of reports and recommendations that were submitted to the National Parliament for further debate and decision-making. The first topic deliberated on was *the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution* dealing with the abortion ban in Ireland. The Assembly members made recommendations by ballot to the National Parliament about what should be included in this legislation. Specifically, what reasons, if any, for which termination of pregnancy should be lawful in Ireland, as well as any gestational limits that should apply.

After the approval of the final version, the info pack has to be checked against complex terminology to be sufficiently comprehensible to citizens who do not have expertise in relevant areas. Many experts and other interested parties believe that citizens lack the capacity or experience to deal with complex issues requiring decision-making. However, deliberation is possible only when citizens in a DMP receive impartial information and get acquainted with brief but informative materials. This means that the materials should be simplified or clarified and sent out for final approval by the committee. After that, the informative materials are sent to a sample of citizens at least two weeks before the deliberative event.

The Belgrade DMP on traffic mobility info pack has revealed the following key arguments:

FOR expanding the pedestrian zone

- Economic and functional advantages: improvements to the commercial and touristic part of the city; affirmation of the cultural and historical identity.
- Ecological arguments: displacement of vehicles from the core central city area and promotion of green solutions, expanding pedestrian and bike paths.
- Harmonization with the European regulation and practice without legal constraint of organizing a public debate.

AGAINST expanding the pedestrian zone:

- Economic and functional disadvantages: long distance from the public transportation stops, aggravated access to residential and business facilities, aggravated waste management, aggravated access to medical assistance vehicles, and lower appeal of the whole area due to these conditions.
- Ecological disadvantage: higher pollution in the central city area due to traffic congestion in the surrounding areas.
- Discrepancy with the practices of developing pedestrian zones in other European cities.
- Undemocratic and untransparent implementation of projects – citizens are not familiar with the plan, nor were they previously consulted.

Recommendations/lessons learned:

- ⇒ **The DMPs could also be misused as a possible arena for the reproduction of political power. It should not come as a surprise that some initiators and promoters of DMPs, especially in hybrid regimes, might frame the topic so as to expose citizens to one-sided information and arguments that suit their cause. The decision resulting from such "deliberation" may be presented as a decision**

of the citizens. Such actions can severely affect the trust in deliberation among citizens, preventing any further successful implementation. The existence of an impartial authority that will be in charge of framing and guiding the organization of the DMPs makes it difficult, if not impossible, to promote partisan agenda limited to specific political interests.

- ⇒ Another significant challenge within hybrid regimes is when decision-makers' non-responsiveness endangers the success of the DMPs. In such cases, it is advised to get in touch personally with the representatives of decision-making institutions and try to build trust, pointing out the citizens' satisfaction with this tool and easy-made recommendations for them. Experience in the Western Balkans has shown that DMPs are more successful in engaging politicians when the organizing team works together with academic actors and international organizations.
- ⇒ Also, the media should be approached and involved in preparing the DMPs, as visibility may induce more interest from the interested parties on all sides.
- ⇒ When institutional representatives are not interested despite the actions of the organizing team, efforts may be directed to the political parties' representatives that could take the results of the DMPs to the political arena and within institutions.

HOW TO SELECT PARTICIPANTS?

Deliberative mini-publics can be considered a form of deliberative public consultation on a specific topic. DMPs differ from other forms of soliciting public opinion, which can be classified, following Fishkin (2006), depending on who is consulted and what form of consultation takes place.

Different forms of public consultations presented in Table 1 are divided based on the method for selecting participants and the quality of attitudes expressed through them. What distinguishes DMPs from other forms of public consultation is a random sample of participants involved in deliberation.

Table 1. Forms of public consultations		Method of selection			
		Self-selection	Non-random sample	Random sample	"Everyone"
Quality of public opinion	Raw public opinion	SLOPs	Some Polls	Most Polls	Referenda
	Refined public opinion	Discussion Groups	Citizen Juries	DMPs (Deliberative Polls)	"Deliberative Days"

Source: Adapted from Fishkin, 2006.

All forms of public consultation invite the interested population to participate, but the level of inclusion varies. Participants can self-select, the organizers can select a sample, or everybody can be invited to participate. In addition, the sample can be based on probability (random sample). It also matters how much the opinion collected through such consultations is informed. Public opinion, which is a product of deliberation, exposure of participants to

alternative views, supported by arguments and accurate information, can be considered "refined," and the opposite, if public opinion is not a product of deliberation, could be considered "raw."

For example, media organizations often solicit "self-selected listener opinion polls" (SLOPs), where respondents select themselves and share their views, usually those who feel more intensely about the topic or are unusually motivated. Discussion groups also involve self-selected participants who deliberate thoroughly and sincerely. Many discussion forums on the internet share these characteristics.

Organizers can also intentionally select a non-probability sample for participation. Some public opinion polls employ quota sampling, most commonly used in online polls. While opinion polls do not involve deliberation, other forms of citizen consultation, such as "citizen's juries" or consensus conferences, deliberate for several days or weeks, and the participants are selected based on quota sampling.

Most public opinion polls select participants based on random samples, which avoids the distortions of self-selected SLOPs' opinions and usually produces more representative opinions than non-random sampling. However, opinion polls often simplify complex policy or political questions, and participants sometimes voice opinions without having enough information about the topic. Deliberative mini-publics (deliberative polls) were developed to combine random sampling with deliberation. They both have the quality of representativeness of opinions and deliberation as the basis of opinions, and they employ experimental design to identify the effects of deliberation on the collected opinion.

The last two categories, referenda, a commonly used instrument of direct democracy worldwide, and "deliberative days" proposed by James Fishkin and Bruce Ackerman, parallel the previous ones, except they propose the full inclusion of citizens instead of only a part of

them. However, these forms are much more costly while offering similar promises as random sampling forms of consultation.

Therefore, deliberative mini-publics provide a level of inclusion of citizens that can adequately represent the population without incurring high costs for the organizers of consultations. On the other hand, the process induces thoughtful opinions from participants, supporting them with balanced arguments and accurate information, which is also more viable when organized in smaller groups of dozens or hundreds, than engaging whole populations.

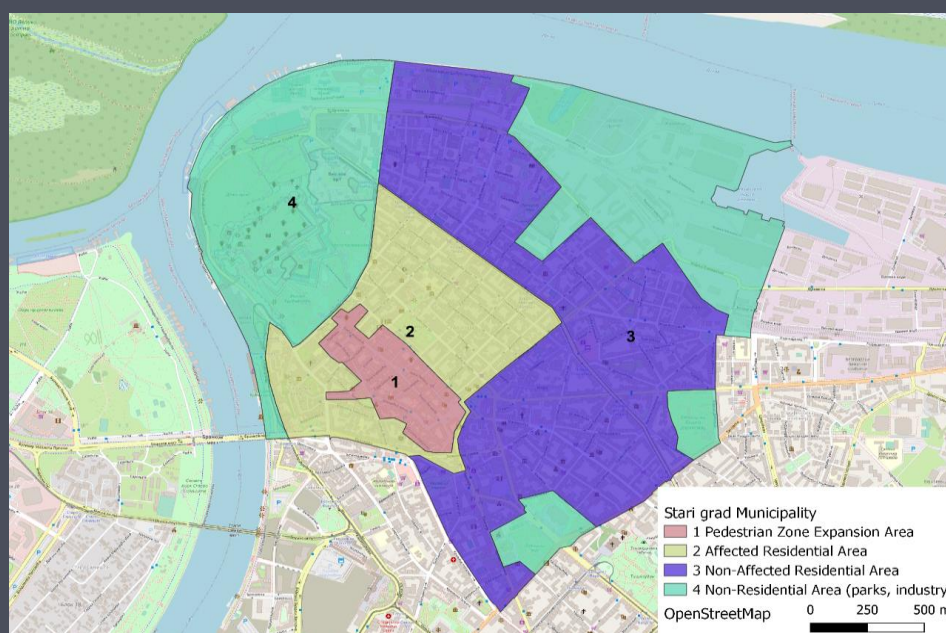
These qualities of DMPs make them a potentially valuable instrument for democracy promotion in environments adversarial to democracy. In circumstances when institutions are biased towards incumbents, political competition is polarized, and where media is lacking pluralism, genuine deliberation in DMPs and balanced representation of actors and arguments can serve as a piece of evidence that different kind of politics is not only possible but superior to "raw" types of citizen consultations, which are often procured only when the outcome is already known.

The Belgrade Deliberative Mini Public in 2020 mostly followed the standard design. It was based on a random sample of participants from the Belgrade central municipality of Stari grad. The sample was composed of 32 participants, most of whom were residents of an area of the municipality most affected by the proposed expansion of the pedestrian zone. The affected area (Graph 1) was estimated to be home to approximately a third of the municipality's population (15000 people). Even though the goal was to include 40 participants, due to the epidemiological situation and online discussion, the number was reduced to reach sufficient diversity within the sample and enough space for all the participants.

When operationalizing each DMP, the citizens affected by a possible political decision formed through deliberation should be considered. The question underlying the legitimacy of the representative logic of democracy did not completely disappear with the introduction of the DMP and the question of whom the participants of the DMP represent. This must be adequately re-answered and contextualized. A random sample cannot guarantee the representation of all existing attitudes and opinions because it is based on sampling the population based on its known characteristics. In many situations, the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample cannot be adequate predictors of certain attitudes on specific topics. In cases where the population on which the political decision being formulated would have a significant impact is a politically passive population, deliberative ideals dictate that it is necessary to find ways that would allow their views, which until then had not been heard, to be expressed.

However, it is necessary to mention that the sample participating in DMP is smaller than the random sample of public opinion polls and mainly involves several dozen to thousands of participants, considering DMPs organized to date. The smaller numbers inevitably raise questions about the limitations of such representativeness. The systematic bias of the sample of participants can be addressed similarly to the random sample opinion polls by comparing the socio-demographic characteristics of invited citizens who declined to participate. Another question along these lines could be posed, how to present future generations in the processes of making political decisions concerning the environment – decisions that undeniably impact future generations' lives.

The organizers of Belgrade DMP made sure that the sample included among the participants were those who could represent citizens whose life could be more drastically affected by expanding the pedestrian zone: parents with children from 10 to 12 years of age, people with disabilities, older adults, shop owners and workers in the facilities within the defined area, and workers and managers of cultural institutions in the area.



Graph 1: Identifying affected area in Stari grad municipality.

In addition, the idea behind the Belgrade DMP was to include the “regular” citizens to represent the population that could be affected by the expansion of the pedestrian zone in the defined area, as well as “activists.” The latter involved representatives of the civic initiatives that were either actively engaged with urban planning for a longer time, as well as those that emerged as a response to this particular issue.

The final selection of participants was based on the criteria of gender, age, level of education, and engagement in the community. Table 2 shows the distribution of participants according to the main socio-demographic categories, the percentage of these categories in the sample, and the percentages in the population of Stari grad Municipality and the City of Belgrade.

An effort was made to include all categories appropriately, but considering that the DMP was held online due to an unfavorable epidemiological situation, this was a limiting factor for people who were less versed in new technologies and did not have all the required conditions for using the online platform. This factor slightly affected the sample by underrepresenting less educated and older citizens, but the sample otherwise matched the overall socio-demographic patterns of the general population.

As part of the participant recruitment phase, those who were initially selected to participate were sent informative materials. They were also sent all the necessary information regarding the process itself, to understand the goals of the process and its dynamics. All persons from the sample were periodically invited to confirm participation to ensure interest and prevent last-minute cancellations. The participants also received monetary compensation. However, as the event was held online, there were no expenses for stay and travel, which should be factored in the case of offline DMP.

The selection of a random sample and its participation is one of the most critical items of the entire DMP, so this demanding task can be delegated to a trusted professional public opinion research agency. In Belgrade, this task was entrusted to Masmi Belgrade, a research agency founded in 2001, specializing in market research and public opinion surveys in the Western Balkans.

The Belgrade DMP did not employ a control group, but if it did, it would have involved a random sample of subjects from the municipality that would have been interviewed before and after the deliberation. However, the random sampling procedure is already adding a twofold advantage to DMP compared to other forms of citizen consultation. On the one hand, a random sample contributes scientific value to DMP, making the unit of analysis a "statistical microcosm" of the general population. Every citizen has the same opportunity to be elected, which reinforces principles of inclusiveness and equality. At the same time, it contributes to the public's sense of trust in the DMP.

Table 2: Structure of the Belgrade DMP Sample

Age	Participants	% Sample	% Municipality
16–30	11	34	15
31–60	18	56	50
60+	3	9	35

Gender	Participants	% Sample	% Municipality
Men	13	41	44
Women	19	59	56

Education	Participants	% Sample	% Municipality
Primary	1	3	9
High School	12	38	41
Faculty	19	59	50

Activism	Participants	% Sample	% City
Active	7	22	11
Not active	25	78	89

N=32, Source: Age, Gender, Education: SORS 2020, Activism: CRTA 2021.

Recommendations/lessons learned:

- ⇒ **When organizing deliberative mini-publics in challenging democratic environments, their qualities – genuine deliberation and representativeness – can be presented as a clear contrast to the prevailing political practices.**
- ⇒ **If resources, time, and external factors are constraining, DMP can be scaled down reasonably well while still maintaining its core qualities.**
- ⇒ **Participants should be sampled randomly to ensure a satisfactory level of representativeness. However, measures should be taken to ensure the sample includes citizens particularly affected by the issue.**
- ⇒ **Sample selection is a demanding task and is sometimes best delegated to a trusted professional public opinion research agency.**

DELIBERATIVE DISCUSSIONS

Selected participants should be randomly assigned to moderated small groups to discuss the topics with other citizens. Each group should have a maximum of ten participants, one professional moderator, and one facilitator. Facilitator is there to assist the moderator and communicate any urgent issues between moderator and organizing team. As part of their small group discussions, participants will develop questions to ask a balanced panel of policy experts and politicians in plenary sessions. Besides in small groups, the participants should, therefore, exchange views with politicians in plenary sessions moderated by experienced moderators.

Usually, the polling organization is contracted to select and train individuals with experience in managing and leading group discussions to serve as the DMPs moderators. The advisory committee defines the moderation approach. The most recommended is a minimalist approach to moderation, where the moderators are in charge of enforcing the strictly formal rules of discussion regarding time constraints, sequence of topics, etc. The moderators are usually instructed to intervene when the principle of equality of participation was violated, but are not allowed to contribute their comments, opinions, and new arguments to the discussion.

Organizing team should have in mind the key principles of discussion¹ that are useful for training moderators for DMPs as specific format compared to other moderated discussions. We present some of them here in an adjusted format for the undemocratic environment:

- *Openness*: The DMP will operate with complete transparency with all documentation freely available on website. Irish assembly has been also broadcasted on the portal, but such level of transparency is not convenient for the societies with hybrid institutional setting where there is low trust into institutions and especially fear from speaking openly in front of cameras.
- *Equality of voice*: Each participant will be given an opportunity to voice their opinions, and no one should have more time and weight than others. This can be often a challenge, especially if someone try to impose him/herself as more knowledgeable on the discussed issue.
- *Efficiency*: Deliberation within DMP should be led to make best use of limited time together and ensure that all documentation is circulated in advance so participants can come prepared. The goal of discussion should be clearly defined by moderators in the beginning, and they should lead discussion paying attention to the time and objectives.
- *Respect*: It is important that participants can freely and confidently make contributions and express their views without fear of personal attacks or unjustified criticism. Moderators should reassure them that their voice matters.

¹ Irish Citizens Assembly was managed with six principles that are generally recognized and applied in DMPs: <https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/About-the-Citizens-Assembly/Background/Key-Principles-for-the-Assembly/>, Accessed 20 December 2022

- *Collegiality*: Moderators need to assure that the discussion is led in bona fide manner, where participants work together in a spirit of friendship jointly embarking on the task. Any person who violates these principles should be removed from the group.

DMPs in Belgrade and Valjevo took place online due to the unfavorable epidemiological situation caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. The DMPs gathered 32 participants in Belgrade and 33 in Valjevo, following the same structure: 1) the first round of moderated small-group discussions, 2) a plenary session with experts, 3) the second round of moderated small-group discussions, 4) a plenary session with decision-makers, and 5) a closing session for formulating final proposals and voting.

In both DMPs, participants were divided into four small groups comprising approximately eight citizens and a trained moderator. Each group included six–seven “regular” (i.e., diverse citizens who are particularly affected by the issue under consideration) and one or two “active” citizens (i.e., representatives of the initiatives who already publicly declared their stance on the issue).

During the first round of small-group discussions, the task was to engage in an open and informed discussion on the relevant topic (i.e., expansion of the pedestrian zone for the Belgrade DMP and air pollution for the Valjevo DMP) and to develop questions for the panel of experts. Each group selected a representative who presented these questions to a panel of independent experts at the following plenary session. In the second round of small-group discussions, the participants reflected on the feedback they received from the experts and developed a set of policy proposals and solutions. The participants presented their proposals and discussed relevant issues with decision-makers in the next plenary session. Finally, each group had an opportunity to modify their proposals based on reflections from the plenary session with decision-makers. The final list of proposals was put to the vote in the end.

Overall, both participants and the advisory committee positively evaluated the quality of discussion within the two DMPs. According to the results of the evaluation questionnaire, most participants

reported that the whole process significantly deepened their understanding of the problem (80%), that the experts' comments helped them gain a better understanding of the problem (85%), and that they considerably improved their understanding of those they do not agree with (77%).

Participants used arguments and reasoning to express their opinions and conclusions rather than short and unsubstantiated statements. They supported their positions with reasons rather than personal anecdotes, appealing to general rather than particular interests. During the discussion, participants also showed high respect and empathy for various groups (e.g., older people, people with disabilities, people with small children, etc.). Analyzing the questions developed during the small-group discussions, the advisory committee concluded that the quality of these questions indicates that citizens were motivated to better understand various aspects of the problem in question and that a nuanced comprehension of the issue at stake emerges after deliberative discussion.

In contrast, participants were considerably less satisfied with the contribution of decision-makers. According to 50% of the participants, the comments given by the decision-makers' representatives were of little help in understanding the problem. Among other things, this was affected by the representatives' lack of authority in those aspects in which citizens were particularly interested, the time limit, or inappropriate attendance rates. The participants' disappointment with politicians after the plenary sessions—either with their arrogant stance in disregarding citizen questions and proposals (Belgrade), or with the fact they did not attend (Valjevo)—was, in fact, articulated in the group discussions that followed the plenary with politicians. The poor response rate of the decision-makers discouraged the citizens of Valjevo, reaffirming the citizens' view of the decision-makers lack of initiative or responsiveness to solving the air pollution problem.

Recommendations/lessons learned:

- ⇒ **Find ways to include and engage relevant decision-makers. Most participants in the described case expressed disappointment with decision-makers' lack of willingness to engage in a meaningful deliberation process with citizens. Organizers of deliberation events in political systems with low responsiveness should motivate decision-makers to attend and commit to deliberation exercises with citizens. These efforts may include education and advocacy campaigns to increase politicians' understanding of the benefits of incorporating public deliberation into decision-making processes. Similar efforts should target the general population—by familiarizing the public with the legacy and potentials of democratic innovations—to increase public demand for public deliberation.**
- ⇒ **Empower citizens whose voices are frequently neglected. In societies with widespread political apathy and low political efficacy, it may be challenging to motivate citizens to participate in deliberation events. This challenge is even greater when it comes to marginalized communities that may feel continuously underrepresented and ignored. Our exercises showed that with adequate training, moderators could help create a stimulating environment that promotes a respectful exchange of diverse individuals on equal grounds. Considering the topic of deliberation, organizers should consider the possibility of incorporating enclave deliberation (groups comprising underprivileged people with shared perspectives) into the selected design to enhance inclusion further.**
- ⇒ **Carefully plan and conduct a systematic evaluation of the quality of the discussion. To establish the extent to which a group discussion was consistent with deliberation principles, it is important to assess the quality of the discussion**

that took place. Post-events questionnaires are a helpful tool, but they are limited to participants' self-reports. Organizers of deliberation events should also consider relying on unobtrusive—both qualitative (e.g., discourse analysis) and quantitative (e.g., content analysis)—methods to explore characteristics of discussion against some objective evaluation standards.

⇒ **Publicize the process and outcomes to a diverse public.** In societies with little or no experience with deliberative democratic innovations, transparently communicating the process and outcomes of a deliberative event can serve multiple purposes. It can make citizens more familiar with alternative forms of political participation and motivate them to engage. It can also provide support and legitimacy for policy recommendations developed by a citizens' assembly. It can also pressure political actors and motivate them to reconsider the role of public deliberation in policy-making.

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