


RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The minipublic bubble: how the contributions of minipublics are conceived in Belgium (2001–2021)

Julien Vrydagh 

Vrije Universiteit Brussel - Departement Politieke Wetenschappen, Brussels, Belgium and UCLouvain, Institute of Political Science Louvain-Europe (ISPOLE), Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium

E-mail: [julien.vrydagh@vub.be](mailto:julien.vrydagh@vub.be)

(Received 03 July 2022; revised 20 October 2022; accepted 24 November 2022; first published online 04 January 2023)

## Abstract

Deliberative minipublics—participatory processes combining civic lottery with structured deliberation—are increasingly presented as a solution to address a series of problems. Whereas political theory has been prolific in conceiving their contributions, it remains unclear how the people organizing minipublics in practice view their purposes, and how these conceptions align with the theory. This paper conducts a thematic analysis of the reports of all the minipublics convened in Belgium between 2001 and 2021 ( $n = 51$ ) to map whether and how justifications coincide with the theory. The analysis reveals an important gap: minipublics are in practice predominantly presented as contributions to policymaking, while more deliberative functions remain peripheral. Some common practical purposes also remain under-theorized, in particular their capacity to bridge the gap between citizens and politics. This desynchronization, combined with a plethora of desired outcomes associated with minipublics, indicates the creation of a minipublic bubble which inflates their capacity to solve problems.

**Keywords:** deliberative minipublic; deliberative democracy; theory; practice; citizen participation

## Introduction

Western democracies are confronted with a crisis of legitimacy, whose symptoms can be observed in the decline of traditional forms of political participation, the growing public discontent with the political system and its elected representatives and the rise of populism (Dalton, 2013; Inglehart and Norris, 2017). Many actors—ranging from policymakers and civil society to citizens—are trying to solve these structural problems through various processes of public engagement and are advancing deliberative minipublics as one of the most promising solutions. A deliberative minipublic is a participatory process in which lay citizens are selected with (stratified) random sampling to engage in a structured deliberation after receiving information on the matter at hand (Setälä and Smith, 2018). It remains unclear, however, how the people initiating and organizing minipublics conceive their purposes. Which problems do they want to solve with minipublics? And how do they conceive minipublics' contributions to society's challenges? While the literature has been prolific in theorizing the functions of minipublics, we do not know to what extent these are taken up by the people initiating minipublics on the field. Much uncertainty still exists about the degree of synchronization between the organizers' conceptions and the recent theoretical developments, such as, considering minipublics as a deliberative stimulant (Niemeyer, 2014) or an institution redistributing power (Curato *et al.*, 2019). Previous studies indicate a gap between theory and practice, as organizers have different expectations and conceptions than theorists

(Bächtiger *et al.*, 2014; Lee, 2014; Hisschemöller and Cuppen, 2015). Yet, the treatment of the (de)synchronization between theory and practice relies on some interviews or field observation, meaning that we have not yet systematically investigated both how organizers conceive minipublics' contributions and the extent to which these contributions coincide with the theory.

This study fills this gap by analyzing the first comprehensive national database of minipublics, the Belgian Minipublics' Project (Vrydagh *et al.*, 2020), which has listed all cases implemented between 2001 and 2021 ( $n = 51$ ), including the inconspicuous minipublics organized at the local level or the failed experiments that pass under the public and scientific radar. The research objectives are twofold. The paper first conducts an inductive thematic analysis of the minipublics' reports to map how organizers conceive their minipublics' contributions. To do so, it relies on a taxonomy that distinguishes the way organizers approach a contribution (either goal- or problem-oriented) and conceive its scope (endemic or structural). The paper next compares these findings to the theoretical literature, which reveals important discrepancies between theory and practice. The recent popular theoretical function of improving public deliberation remains strikingly peripheral among organizers, who still predominantly see in minipublics a way to contribute to policymaking or to solve the broader crisis of democracy. The analysis also shows that common functions in practice are still under-theorized by scholars, in particular the rationale of using minipublics to bridge the gap between citizens and politics. Considering this desynchronization, the paper argues that both scholars and practitioners spur the creation of a *minipublic bubble*. Associating minipublics with so many ambitious desired outcomes leads to the inflation of their capacity to actually contribute to solving problems or to realize certain democratic functions.

## Literature review

The literature has devoted increasingly more attention to the public perceptions of minipublics. For instance, several empirical studies investigate the support of the broader population for the concept of minipublics in general (e.g., Pilet *et al.*, 2020; Germann *et al.*, 2021) and for specific instances (e.g., Devillers *et al.*, 2021; Pow, 2021). Scholars also survey how decision- and policy-makers conceive the functions of minipublics (Beswick and Elstub, 2019; Bobbio, 2019; Rangoni *et al.*, 2021) and participatory processes (Dean, 2019; Hendriks and Lees-Marshment, 2019), their support for minipublics (Jacquet *et al.*, 2020; Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2020) and their motivations to institutionalize them (Macq and Jacquet, 2021). Some of these studies analyze decision-makers' attitudes regarding a specific case, such as the Belgian *Ostbelgien-model* (Macq and Jacquet, 2021) or a minipublic in a parliamentary committee in the UK (Beswick and Elstub, 2019), while the others surveyed the perceptions about more general and abstract conceptions of minipublics—in particular the authority they should have—(Jacquet *et al.*, 2020; Koskimaa and Rapeli, 2020; Rangoni *et al.*, 2021) and broader processes of participatory governance and public engagement (Dean, 2019; Hendriks and Lees-Marshment, 2019). We also find a couple of studies about practitioners' posture towards minipublics. These show that practitioners hold different discourses about the purpose of minipublics, either conceiving them as a part of a broader strategy to revitalize democracy or as symbolic tools for decision-makers whose interests subvert genuine citizen participation (Cooper and Smith, 2012: 19, 21; Lee, 2014). Moreover, other works highlight a discrepancy between how particular tools and methods are applied in practice and how they are prescribed by theory (Hisschemöller and Cuppen, 2015: 42; see also Bächtiger *et al.*, 2014). Considering the rapid development of the literature on minipublics for two decades (Jacquet and van der Does, 2020), differences between the practice and the theory are likely to emerge because practitioners and, as a matter of fact, other policy and decision-makers, are unlikely to stay updated with the extensive and rapidly growing scientific literature on minipublics. These actors who are involved with the use of minipublics in practice must thus seemingly engage,

as Dean put it, in an “act of everyday philosophy. They must make sense of the diversity of conceptions of participation and what it means for their practice” (2019: 171).

This paper seeks to make an innovative contribution to this research agenda. Instead of looking at how different publics perceive a specific instance of a minipublic or the general concept of a minipublic, it investigates the projected image of the purposes of minipublics. Scholars have so far focused on the *recipients* of various images of minipublics, for example, the opinions of the public and elected representatives about an authoritative minipublic (Jacquet *et al.*, 2020; Pilet *et al.*, 2020). Yet, we do not know how actors involved with the practical organization of minipublics want to depict the image of their deliberative forums. The projected image matters because minipublics only gather a minuscule proportion of the population while the broader public has a very limited access—if one at all—to them. Their isolation implies that public attitudes are likely to be shaped by the image of minipublics that is constructed by multiple contributions from different actors, such as the media, the people initiating and implementing them, politicians or academic researchers. This paper focuses on the image that the actors involved with the initiation and organization of minipublics want to project to the broader public. It relies predominantly on the official reports that these actors published after a minipublic, in which organizers describe the process and its purposes. Minipublics’ reports are written and edited by different field actors, such as elected officials, policymakers, practitioners, or civil society, who commission, design, or implement a minipublic. These actors—which are hereafter referred to as organizers—occupy a central role in the development of minipublics because they are the ones in the field, forging these deliberative fora and shaping the democratic transformation of the policy process (Dean, 2019: 171; see also Warren, 2009). A minipublic’s report fulfills an important communicative function because its power of abstraction and its capacity to stand for absent things (see Sedlačko, 2018) make it one of the main mechanisms through which the minipublic becomes concrete and real for the outside world. Although texts are polysemic by nature and it is complex to know how a reader ultimately gives meaning to them, minipublics’ reports constitute a vehicle of discourse with a force to act itself (Prior, 2008) and which shapes public attitudes to some extent.

Focusing on the reports also makes it possible to broaden the scope of analysis and examine a comprehensive population of cases. This study relies on a database that has listed all minipublics taking place in Belgium between 2001 and 2021, including the low-profile cases at the local level and the failed cases that tend to remain under the radar (Spada and Ryan, 2017). The diversity of the 51 cases enables the examination of the evolution of the projected image of minipublics’ purposes since 2001 and to find out whether these conceptions correlate with the type of organizers (executive, legislative, public administration, civil society) and the level of authority (supra-national, federal, regional, and local). This database makes it possible to give a complete picture of how the purposes of minipublics are conceived in practice and how these relate to the theory. Building on the aforementioned studies (Bächtiger *et al.*, 2014; Hisschemöller and Cuppen, 2015), this paper analyzes the extent to which the purposes of minipublics in practice, as described by the organizers, align with the main theoretical functions that we can find in the literature. This paper does not conduct a systematic and exhaustive literature review of the theories on the functions of minipublics, but it relies instead on the works of important scholars whose theories have shaped the field for the last two decades. These theorists conceive minipublics as a process to integrate citizens in policymaking and, thanks to the diversity of its participants, improve descriptive representation and generate better policies (Fung, 2006; Smith, 2009; Fishkin, 2011; Mercier and Landemore, 2012). They, moreover, argue that minipublics can augment the legitimacy of public decisions (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006; Papadopoulos and Warin, 2007; Setälä and Smith, 2018) and improve the quality of deliberation not only in policymaking processes (Chambers, 2003; Setälä, 2017) but also in the broader public sphere (Niemeyer, 2014; Curato and Böker, 2016; Lafont, 2019). While we could expect that organizers share, to a large extent, these general theoretical conceptions of minipublics’ functions, the analysis reveals that the

purposes in practice only partially align with the theory because organizers tend to marginally refer to important theoretical functions or advance contributions that have not yet been theorized.

## Methodology and data

The analysis relies on the database ‘Belgian Minipublics Project’ which has collected data on all minipublics taking place in Belgium from 2001 until 2019 (Vrydagh *et al.*, 2021). The selection criteria for the minipublics are the use of (stratified) random selection of citizens, the deliberative character of the participatory process, and the fact that participants are citizens based in Belgium. I collected additional data for minipublics between 2020 and 2021,<sup>1</sup> which results in an inventory of 51 cases (for an overview, see Table A1 in the online Appendix). Each instance comprises of at least one report. For a couple of cases, the public report was missing, or it did not contain sufficient data. I thus relied on new articles reporting on the minipublic, in which I analyzed quotes from organizers (see Table A2 in the online Appendix for an overview of the data source for each case). The reports show a great diversity, but they generally start with a general description of the minipublics’ objectives, before presenting its results and, in some cases explicating the methodology in an appendix. The description of the objectives varies greatly: in a couple of cases, organizers do not present them at all, but the majority tends to explain them in one or a couple of pages. Likewise, the format and editorial style show a great variety: some are more engaged while others are more distant and descriptive, and some follow the format of a parliamentary resolution while others consist of a PowerPoint Presentation or can be read as a magazine.

Belgium offers an excellent case for investigating the projected image of minipublics because it has a long history with these deliberative processes and it features a diversity of organizers. Its federal structure creates a multilevel and decentralized political system wherein subnational levels enjoy considerable autonomy. All these authorities have convened their own minipublics, which have taken many different forms. In the light of their evolution, design, and the topics, minipublics in Belgium constitute a typical case in comparison with OECD countries (Vrydagh *et al.*, 2021).<sup>2</sup> However, Belgium departs from these countries due to the recent institutionalization of minipublics at the regional and local levels (Niessen and Reuchamps, 2019; Reuchamps, 2020), which puts it at the forefront of the so-called *deliberative wave* (OECD, 2020). Its historical and political context also makes it a particular case: whereas this country was described as a copy-book example of a consociational state wherein political decisions are made by elites of all segments of society without any citizen participation (Deschouwer, 2012; Caluwaerts and Reuchamps, 2020), it is now one of the leading forces behind the rise of minipublics in Western democracies (see Vrydagh *et al.*, 2021). Its history also explains why all Belgian minipublics must be consultative, as the Article 33 in the constitution forbids citizens to exercise any decision-making authority. A final particularity about minipublics in Belgium is the role of academic researchers who are often consulted for or involved in the development and implementation of minipublics (Vrydagh *et al.*, 2021). For instance, several researchers belonged to the organizing committee of the iconic G1000 and are now members of the G1000 platform, which lobbies for the use of minipublics in Belgium and cooperates with other important groups of practitioners such as the King Baudouin Foundation and the Foundation for the Future Generations. Belgium could therefore feature a closer alignment between practice and the theory than in Britain, Germany and the USA where researchers and organizers seem less interwoven (Cooper and Smith, 2012; Lee, 2014).

<sup>1</sup>The database includes minipublics completed by 1 August 2021.

<sup>2</sup>We observe in both Belgium and OECD countries a steady increase in the number of minipublics between 2001 and 2016, that followed a substantial augmentation; a widespread use of citizens’ panels and consensus conferences; and also with the main topics addressed by the minipublics relating to territory, health, and the environment (OECD, 2020; Vrydagh *et al.*, 2021).

I conducted an inductive thematic analysis to map how organizers conceive the minipublics' functions. A thematic analysis can be used to study the perceptions and understandings of political actors by examining a large variety of qualitative data, including policy documents or any other type of text (Herzog *et al.*, 2019). I relied on a six-step approach to it (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I first went through the data to identify themes that emerge from the report 'without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 83), which resulted in approximately 1,100 raw coded items. This first reading revealed a considerable diversity in the minipublics' contributions. I thus needed to develop 'conceptual containers' to distribute and categorize the bulk of data and theory (Sartori, 1970: 1039). To do so, I first rely on a holistic theoretical framework to group the justifications into main categories. Warren's (2017) problem-based approach to democracy provides a solid framework to group the contributions of minipublics and other participatory processes (see for instance Beauvais and Warren, 2019; Jäske and Setälä, 2020). The framework posits that a political system needs to realize three functions in order to be democratic. *Empowered inclusion* (hereafter inclusion) is about providing an equal opportunity for citizens to have a say about a public decision that affects them. *Collective will and agenda formation* (hereafter will formation) refers to the transformation of individual values, preferences and interests into a collective will and agenda. Finally, the *collective decision-making capacity* (hereafter decision-making) consists of the capability of a democratic system to 'to make and impose binding decisions upon themselves' (Warren, 2017: 44).

In addition to these functions, I needed to capture the degree of ambition of minipublics' contributions. Some organizers indeed present minipublics as a solution to the whole democratic crisis, while others advanced them as a tailored corrective to a particular problem. I therefore distinguish the scope of a minipublic's contribution. On the one hand, the scope is *endemic* when a minipublic seeks to address particular and contingent elements, such as a political deadlock on a particular public issue or a lack of inclusion in a specific policymaking process. On the other hand, the scope is *structural* when the contribution relates to the broader system, like the crisis of democracy, climate change, or the idea that implementing a minipublic generates systemic effects on its own, like making a political system more deliberative or participatory. Finally, I capture how organizers approach a minipublic's contribution by distinguishing the *problem- or goal-oriented perspective*. The former explicitly states the problem that a minipublic is expected to solve, whereas the latter consists of the contributions that a minipublic is expected to make, without an emphatic reference to a problematic situation. Relying on this three-level taxonomy, I reviewed all the coded items and categorized them into the three democratic functions, before identifying whether they contain structural or endemic contributions and whether they are problem- or goal-driven (for an illustration of the coding, see Table A3 in the online Appendix). The result amounts to 755 coded items for 511 thematic justifications<sup>3</sup>. These justifications were finally categorized into 93 subthemes, which I summarized around 20 general themes. I used the software MAXQDA throughout this analytical process to code items and categorize them into different themes.

## Analysis

The analytical section is divided into four subsections based on the functions of inclusion, will formation, decision-making, and an overview of the findings. For the first three, I present the main results of the thematic analysis and I compare them to the literature. The final subsection concludes with an overview of the findings which offers a general comparison of the theory and practice and discusses whether the evolution, level of authority, and the kind of organizers reveal a pattern of justifications. The online Appendix also features a detailed table with the codes for each democratic function.

<sup>3</sup>In some cases, multiple meaning units were coded for a single thematic justification.



### **Inclusion**

There are three main thematic functions regarding inclusion (see Table A4 in the online Appendix). First, a homonymous theme which presents minipublics as a way to include citizens. This theme varies depending on the problem- and goal-oriented perspective, as well as the endemic or structural nature of the contribution. Endemic problems of inclusion mainly entail the necessity of including citizens because a policymaking process should not only listen to traditional experts but also to citizens. Organizers, furthermore, refer to the fact that citizens are affected by a public decision and should thus be included in the decision-making process. Structural problems of inclusion entail larger deficiencies, like a deficit of inclusion affecting the whole political system, the citizens' feelings of disempowerment, or the limits of elections to realize inclusion. A goal-oriented approach to citizen inclusion is more prevalent. When organizers associate their minipublics with an endemic goal, it mainly entails giving them a voice and, more marginally, involving them in a policy debate. Minipublics are also depicted as a mechanism to realize more structural and ambitious objectives of inclusion. In doing so, organizers entwine the implementation of a minipublic with the participation of the whole citizenry or a structural improvement of citizen inclusion. For instance, organizers depict minipublics as a mechanism to include and give a voice to the entire citizenry—even if their deliberative forum only includes a miniscule proportion of the population; or to institutionalize citizen participation or make it sustainable at a systemic level.

A second important theme consists of citizen consultation. Organizers predominantly rely on this justification for endemic objectives such as their willingness to hear what the citizens think about a specific issue. The themes of citizen inclusion and consultation closely align with the theory, which conceives minipublics (1)<sup>4</sup> as a way to integrate ordinary citizens into policymaking, giving them a voice to express their views, opinions, and interests (Fung, 2006; Warren and Pearse, 2008; Smith, 2009). Organizers occasionally refer to (2) the diversity of minipublics' participants and their *local knowledge* (Drury *et al.*, 2021: 32), which offers them a comparative advantage over traditional expert-based input (Fung, 2006; Mercier and Landemore, 2012). A final important theme relates to the experimentation with citizen participation: organizers implement a minipublic because they want to try out and learn from citizen participation or minipublics. They experiment with minipublics—sometimes associating them with the broader concepts of citizen participation or democratic innovations—mainly in a specific context, such as a test for a municipality for the G100 Zoet Water or for a specific policy sector, such as research with the Burgerlabo or the CIVISTI. As one may expect, this more practical justification has not received significant attention from theorists.

We can also mention three more secondary themes. First, organizers state that their minipublics can fulfill an opening function, that is to open either a policymaking sector, like the reimbursement of health care, or the global climate policy; or a public institution, namely regional Parliaments. A couple of minipublics are also presented as a way to open decision-making for the entire political system. In a similar vein, organizers associate their minipublics with the realization of a participatory or deliberative democracy, or with the activation of the broader citizenry. Behind these themes lies an assumption that minipublics are sufficient to fulfill these systemic functions, which departs from the theory as scholars have pointed out the limits—if not the incapacity—of minipublics to make long-lasting contributions or solve structural problems on their own (Curato *et al.*, 2019: 65; Lafont, 2019, see chapter 4; Newton and Geissel, 2012).

Another disconnection between theory and practice emerges from the absence of two important theoretical functions. Scholars commonly claim that minipublics (3) improve descriptive representation by inviting and giving a voice to traditionally marginalized groups, thanks to the (stratified) random selection (Fung, 2006; Fishkin, 2011; Curato *et al.*, 2019). In doing so,

<sup>4</sup>These numbers refer to the theoretical functions presented in Table A8 in the online Appendix, which offers an overview of the comparison of minipublics' functions in the theory and in practice.

(4) minipublics more broadly contribute to redistributing power, curbing the “uneven distribution of voices in the public sphere” by equalizing the opportunities to speak and be heard (Curato *et al.*, 2019: 65). These two functions, however, remain peripheral: organizers rarely refer to the inclusion of traditionally marginalized groups. Instead, they define citizens homogeneously: people should participate because they are *all* voiceless, disempowered, affected by the issue at hand, or entitled to participate. Only one minipublic—a deliberative poll on an urban question<sup>5</sup>—explicitly seeks to integrate the voices of citizens that are excluded from the public debate preceding a local referendum. Another minipublic—the bottom-up *Assemblée citoyenne d’Agora*—seeks to address the structural lack of descriptive representation in political institutions and to realize “political equality”. Except for these two examples, the reports do not present minipublics as a way to redistribute power and equalize the opportunities to participate (Curato *et al.*, 2019: 65), nor do they describe the added value of (stratified) random selection, although the literature puts the latter forward as a key comparative advantage of minipublics versus other participatory processes (Smith, 2009; Ryan and Smith, 2014).

The inclusion-related themes have also evolved during the two decades. Organizers first depicted minipublics as a process to fulfill endemic purposes, such as consulting citizens on a specific policy issue or to experiment with citizen participation. More recently (especially after 2016 and 2017), they have increased their ambition: minipublics aim to realize a structural inclusion or to stimulate the participation of the whole citizenry. Interestingly, the idea that minipublics realize a deliberative or participatory democracy has remained constant for two decades. We do not find many variations for the kind of organizers and the level of authority, except for minipublics at the local level which rarely rely on themes of inclusion except for systemic contributions such as equating minipublics with the participation of the entire local population, which has, however, not taken part or been involved in the process.

### **Will formation**

There are two prevalent general themes for will formation (see Table A5 in the online Appendix). First, a vast majority of minipublics aims to contribute to policymaking. Organizers essentially present their deliberative fora as processes wherein citizens deliberate on an issue to form a collective judgement and recommendations, which are, in turn, transmitted to decision-makers in order to influence the formulation of policies. In addition to the omnipresent idea of an *influence on policy formulation*, other subthemes entail feeding the reflection of decision-makers and stakeholders, bringing in new ideas to policymaking, contributing to a debate within a policymaking sector, or increasing the responsiveness of public decisions. Another interesting subtheme consists of the necessity for minipublics to have an impact on public decision, which is mainly mentioned by regional parliaments. Some organizers also delineate a structural component to minipublics’ contributions to policymaking, which are expected to improve the systemic capacity to produce better decisions and policies. Except for the structural dimension, the literature has extensively theorized about the benefits of minipublics for policymaking and governance. Scholars argue that (5) minipublics can inform decision-makers, generating new knowledge and framing that can improve decision-makers’ understanding of the problems and solutions (Fung, 2003, 2006; Papadopoulos and Warin, 2007; Curato *et al.*, 2019). As consultative participatory processes (Warren, 2009), minipublics transmit considered recommendations to decision-makers so as to help them adopt better and more responsive public decisions (Chambers, 2003; Fung, 2006; Goodin and Dryzek, 2006; Grönlund *et al.*, 2014; Estlund and Landemore, 2018; Papadopoulos and Warin, 2007; Setälä, 2017; Setälä and Smith, 2018). Within that governance-driven narrative, scholars also claim

<sup>5</sup>The citizen panel on the expansion of a mall in Louvain-La-Neuve sought to include the voices of students who were not registered as inhabitants of the city and could therefore not participate in the local consultation.

that minipublics can increase the accountability of decision-making (Brown, 2006; Beauvais and Warren, 2019), but this function has not emerged in the analysis.

The second general theme is about the structural gap between citizens and *politics*. From a problem-driven perspective, organizers point out the problematic relation between citizens and decision-makers, public institutions, and the more abstract and generic concept of *politics*. Minipublics are expected to generate systemic benefits to bridge this gap by stimulating interactions between citizens and elected representatives, improving the relationship between citizens and policymaking actors (such as stakeholders and public servants) and with the state. It is interesting to observe that the gap between citizens and politics is only approached through its structural dimension and organizers never pinpoint the particular causes or contributions that minipublics could make, implying that organizers lack an endemic view on this structural issue. This theme reveals an important desynchronization with the theory. Except for two empirical studies reporting that policymakers see minipublics as a way to reconnect citizens with politics (Hendriks, 2016; Macq and Jacquet, 2021),<sup>6</sup> the theory lags behind: it still remains theoretically unclear whether minipublics are an appropriate participatory institution to bring the whole citizenry closer to political elites and institutions; or whether they just temporarily create an artificial connection with the few participating citizens.

There are three additional secondary themes. First, several organizers see in minipublics a mechanism to generate social cohesion among the whole citizenry, a theme which has recently become popular, especially among local organizers<sup>7</sup>. The theory has, however, not covered this function and it is unclear whether and how a micro deliberative forum may realize, on its own, such an ambitious function. Second, several minipublics seek to educate their participating citizens so that they learn about a public issue or the complexities of policymaking. This occasional theme seems less prevalent than in the literature, in which theorists commonly assert that (6) minipublics can act as educative, as they help participants to refine and clarify their opinions, enrich their understanding of policy issues, and acquire citizenship skills (Fung, 2003; Papadopoulos and Warin, 2007; Knobloch and Gastil, 2015; Curato *et al.*, 2019: 456). In a similar vein, scholars assert that (7) minipublics aim to demonstrate to decision-makers that citizens are capable of deliberating and making sound judgments (Dryzek, 2010; Bächtiger and Parkinson, 2019: 158), but this argument remains mostly absent in the practice.

The theory has shifted the focus from the internal to the external dimension of minipublics. For a decade, a prolific reflection on a systemic approach to deliberation (Dryzek, 2010; Mansbridge *et al.*, 2012) has generated a raft of new functions that emphasize the contributions of minipublics to the broader public debate. Many scholars are increasingly arguing that minipublics should primarily aim to improve the quality of public deliberation (Curato and Böker, 2016; Dryzek, 2017; Lafont, 2019). They can provide trusted information and considered arguments to the broader population so that it can gain a better understanding of the issue and make decisions or voice opinions that are more considered (MacKenzie and Warren, 2012; Niemeyer, 2014; Felicetti *et al.*, 2016; Lafont, 2019). Likewise, Setälä (2017) argues that (9) minipublics can remedy the deficient deliberation among decision-makers, while Chambers (2003) suggests that they can promote mutual respect among parties. Whereas the literature on a systemic approach is booming, themes about improving public and political deliberation occasionally emerge in practice, with, respectively, 17 and 8 minipublics (19 in total). Only several minipublics are implemented to stimulate and feed a public debate or to improve the quality of the debate in the public sphere, and only a couple are convened to solve problems related to deliberation.

<sup>6</sup>We can also mention Mansbridge (2019) and her concept of recursive representation which is “based on an aspiration for iterative, ongoing communication between constituents and their representatives” (p. 299). It is however not specifically developed for minipublics.

<sup>7</sup>Eight minipublics mention this theme and seven out of these are local minipublics (there are fifteen minipublics at the local level).



Strikingly, the majority of minipublics aiming at public deliberation happened before the theoretical inception of a deliberative system in the early 2010s: out of the seventeen instances, ten took place before 2012. This finding reveals an important gap between theory and practice: while a scientific consensus has emerged about the need to advocate for minipublics due to their deliberative macro-effects, only 1 instance of out 5 since 2012 alluded to this narrative.

### **Decision-making**

Decision-making is the least common democratic function within which the purpose of minipublics is justified. The main theme related to decision-making consists of legitimacy (see Table A6 in the online Appendix). While only a couple of cases invoke the legitimacy crisis as a problem, organizers rely more on this theme to justify goal-driven contributions, presenting minipublics as a process that generates legitimacy endemically for a specific public decision. Structural contributions generalize this objective—claiming that minipublics generate legitimacy for all public decisions or for the whole political system. The literature abounds of theoretical arguments to support the idea that minipublics can generate legitimacy for decision-making and public decisions (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006; Papadopoulos and Warin, 2007; Hendriks, 2009; Warren and Gastil, 2015; Setälä and Smith, 2018). As Beauvais and Warren argue, decision-makers “borrow democratic legitimacy from citizens’ assembly proposals, making it both easier for them to act and more likely that they will act” (2019: 908). In a similar vein, referring to Fung (2011: 192–193), Curato *et al.* assert that minipublics can enhance the public “support for and compliance with difficult policy decisions” (2019: 74). These benefits mainly stem from minipublics’ qualities to involve a representative group of ordinary citizens and to engage them in a deliberative process which results in better public decisions—i.e., more public-spirited and responsive (Hendriks, 2009; Estlund and Landemore, 2018). Although extensively developed in the literature, it remains a fringe theme: less than a quarter of Belgian minipublics aim to legitimize public decisions and only seven cases mention generating legitimacy for the political system.

There are still a couple of occasional themes on decision-making. Problem-oriented justifications mainly include a political deadlock that minipublics are supposed to end and resolve. This function has been highlighted by some scholars who argued that (11) minipublics can help decision-makers facing political deadlock (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006; Beauvais and Warren, 2019). The other problem-oriented theme consists of the crisis of democracy, which includes a series of disparate symptoms such as the legitimacy crisis, the disillusionment with representative democracy or the structural incapacity of representative democracy. The last theme is about improving democracy as a whole: organizers present minipublics as a mechanism to reinforce and renew democracy (albeit without elaborating further on what and how), developing a new governance system or building a sustainable community. Again, the literature is careful about associating minipublics with the renewal of the entire system or as the solution to the crisis of democracy. Theorists have also conceived minipublics as a way to (12) help policymaking to deal with complex policy issues (Hoppe, 2011) or create a new constituency and decision-making arena to deal with global problems whose scope expands beyond national state boundaries (Dahl, 1989; Bächtiger *et al.*, 2014). Whereas the former function does not come up explicitly in practice, the latter is mentioned in two cases at the international and European level. Finally, we also observe a shift in the evolution of the themes: problems of decision-making are first more endemic in nature, referring to specific political deadlock or the scale of a policy problem, but, since 2017, organizers tend to present minipublics as a solution to the broader crisis of democracy.

### **Overview of the findings**

The final section of this paper first presents an overview of the distribution of thematic justifications for the 51 cases, before discussing how the justifications have evolved and how they

correlate with the level of authority of their initiators. Organizers predominantly conceive minipublics as a process to help form a collective will and to include citizens, while decision-making remains more peripheral (see Figure A1 in the online Appendix). This finding partially aligns with the theory on minipublics, which has emphasized that minipublics should not make decisions and should instead help form the collective agenda and will (Warren, 2017). The relation with inclusion is more ambiguous. Several scholars have pointed out that minipublics are more representative bodies rather than actual participatory processes since they only include a minuscule proportion of the population (Pateman, 2012; Lafont, 2019). Most organizers tend to neglect this argument, as they portray minipublics as an institution meant to include the whole citizenry. We also observe that they mainly rely on goal-oriented justifications, and these are more endemic than structural (except for decision-making). As for the problem-oriented approach, organizers present more structural issues for citizen inclusion and decision-making, whereas problems of will formation predominantly deal with endemic problems.

On the whole, the analysis reveals a couple of broad trends about the evolution of the minipublics' image. Organizers initially depict minipublics as an innovative process to involve and consult ordinary citizens on a specific policy issue so that their recommendations could help policymakers adopt better and more legitimate decisions, and, in some cases, also resolve political deadlock. After 2017, they tend to construct a more ambitious image of minipublics, presenting them as a way to tackle the gap between citizens and politics or the broader democracy crisis. They also describe minipublics as a solution to the structural lack of citizen inclusion and to stimulate the participation of the citizenry. Although this paper does not aim to explain this evolution in detail, we can rely on Vrydagh *et al.* (2021) to formulate a hypothesis about the role that the iconic G1000 may have played in this shift of narrative. The gigantic citizens' summit has had a profound impact on the development of minipublics in Belgium since it took place in 2011 and it seems to have inspired the next generations of minipublics' organizers. Before, the narrative revolves around a governance-driven approach which depicts minipublics as an innovation to improve policymaking. After the G1000, especially after and right before the local and regional elections in 2018 and 2019 respectively, local and regional organizers seem to rely on the narrative developed in the G1000 manifesto, which describes minipublics as a tool of democratization. The new majorities emerging from these elections are responsible for the implementation of numerous minipublics, whose justifications mainly tap into the *democratic crisis narrative*, which presents minipublics as a solution to tackle the democratic crisis and its multiple symptoms, like the gap between citizens and politics or the deficient democratic legitimacy.

The level of authority and the kind of organizers also reveal a couple of patterns (see Table A7, Figures A2 and A3 in the online Appendix). Organizers at the supranational level, mainly the European Commission, present minipublics as a way to stimulate a public debate and to include citizens who are affected by their decisions but cannot influence them because of the insulation of the European Union's decision-making. The justifications for minipublics at the federal level tend to be more pragmatic: organizers present them as a consultation mechanism to adopt better and more responsive policies. The federal level also entails a diversity of organizers with different conceptions: the public administration wants to open itself to citizens and consult them, but it rarely conceives the functions of minipublics for will formation and decision-making. The government seeks to consult citizens on technical issues (GMOs, the use of DNA, consumption) and diversify policy inputs. Finally, civil society does not show any clear pattern of justifications. Minipublics at the regional level differ depending on whether the government or the parliament initiate them. For the former, minipublics are mainly seen as a process to improve governance and stimulate a debate on a particular issue, while the latter conceives them as a way to open itself, bridge the gap between citizens and politics, educate participants and to reinforce democracy so that it can tackle the crisis of democracy. Minipublics at the local level are mainly initiated by the government and their justifications predominantly rely on goal-oriented perspectives whose scope are, in comparison with the other levels of authority, significantly more structural. This seems

somehow paradoxical that the lowest level of authority, with its limited capacity, tends to have the biggest ambition. It is also intriguing to observe that almost half of local minipublics are expected to improve social cohesion in the broader population, a herculean objective for minipublics that the literature has not theorized. Finally, one of Belgium's particularities is the institutionalization of minipublics at the local and regional levels. These cases slightly differ from ad hoc processes as they seek to make more problem- and goal-oriented structural contributions. It is also interesting to observe that these purposes principally consist of abstract and very ambitious functions, like addressing citizens' disempowerment and the ineffectiveness of elections, stimulate the participation of the whole citizenry, or rebuild a participatory and deliberative democracy; or functions that have not yet been theorized, such as the gap between citizens and politics or to generate social cohesion.

When we look at the alignment between the organizers' justifications and the most common theoretical functions developed in the literature (for an overview, see Table A8 in the online Appendix), we find that both diverge more than they coincide. Except for the inclusion of ordinary citizens and improving policymaking, the organizers' justifications tend to partially rely on the literature. For instance, the theoretical functions of diversifying inputs, improving public deliberation or generating legitimacy for public decisions remain occasional in the thematic analysis, whilst several prevalent theoretical functions, like improving descriptive representation, redistributing power, or dealing with complex problems, are either rarely or never mentioned by organizers. Moreover, the literature has not theorized several functions that are common in practice, such as the use of minipublics to bridge the gap between citizens and politics, open an institution to the public, or improve the social cohesion. We also witness an increasing ambition for minipublics which are presented as a solution to large-scale and complex problems, which contradict the consensus in the literature about the incapacity of minipublics to solve structural problems on their own (e.g., Curato *et al.*, 2019; Lafont, 2019). More research is needed to check whether the desynchronization also applies in other countries. The findings are likely to differ in countries which have convened few but high-profile minipublics, like Ireland, because organizers there may arguably have an easier access to scientific inputs when conceiving the purposes of their processes than an organizer at the local level in Belgium. Similar results may, however, be found in other decentralized states, such as Austria, Australia, Germany, Canada or France (OECD, 2020), which are also characterized by a rise in the number of minipublics and their implementation at the local and regional levels. Since Belgium is at the forefront of the so-called 'deliberative wave' thanks to the series of institutionalized cases, one could think about relying on the results of this study to predict how the functions of minipublics may be conceived in the future. We should nonetheless remain careful about making predictions based on these findings because there is no evidence that the development of minipublics in a country is a linear process, as recently exemplified by the revocation of the 'permanent' observatory of citizen participation in Madrid (Ganuza and Menendez-Blanco, 2020).

## Discussion

Before discussing the implications of the analysis for the theory and practice of minipublics, we must first discuss a series of caveats. First, I singlehandedly coded the corpus which may result in a lower inter-coder reliability. While one may thus wonder whether the results would have been different with another coder, I am convinced that the three-level taxonomy used in the analysis helped structure and systematize the coding process and would therefore prevent the findings from varying significantly. Second, the analysis focuses on the image of minipublics that organizers project, but we do not know the extent to which these reports contribute to shaping the opinions of the broader public. Regarding public opinion, we neither know the extent to which the public read these reports, nor the public attitudes regarding the numerous purposes of

minipublics, since surveys have hitherto investigated the support for the general use of minipublics (e.g., consultative or authoritative). More research is needed to analyze how these reports shape the perceptions of the broader public (for an example on voters, see Broghammer and Gastil, 2021). As for the organizers, the report only gives access to the ‘front stage’, that is the official document from which all uncertainties, ambiguities, and contestation are removed (Sedlačko, 2018). It hence lacks insights on their ‘backstage’, that is the non-transparent process through which multiple writers and editors with different conceptions produced the document (Callon, 2002; Michels, 2016). Nonetheless, the results from this ‘front-stage’ analysis are analogous to the empirical results of interviews of organizers conducted in Belgium (Schiffino *et al.*, 2019; Macq and Jacquet, 2021; Rangoni *et al.*, 2021) and abroad (Beswick and Elstub, 2019; Bobbio, 2019; Dean, 2019; Hendriks and Lees-Marshment, 2019), suggesting that examining reports can provide a reliable resource to analyze organizers’ conceptions of minipublics.

The analysis revealed an important desynchronization between the theoretical and practical functions of minipublics, which has important implications for organizers and the broader scientific community working on minipublics. First, the analysis indicates that many organizers do not conceive the functions of their minipublics *in media res*, that is ‘with the social circumstances and especially the governance problems of particular societies as they are’ (Fung, 2012: 610). Several purposes not only seem to mismatch the actual potential and capacity of minipublics, but also, some overly ambitious functions, like bridging the gap between citizens and politics, even hint at a romanticized construct of minipublics among organizers. The context in which minipublics operate also tend to be neglected, as some organizers associate minipublics with numerous issues and functions, suggesting that they conceive minipublics as *a solution seeking problems* rather than *a solution to particular problems*. Researchers—including myself—should not neglect this idealized and free-standing approach to minipublics and be mindful of the following in order to not contribute to this trend. First, researchers working on minipublics are often activists who tend to believe that minipublics are intrinsically propitious. One likely corollary is the intermingling of evaluation and promotion, conflating hypothesis and normative assumptions. However, as Mutz explained, ‘Hypotheses often turn out to be wrong, but assumptions, by their very nature, cannot be’ (2008: 524). It is therefore important for researchers to clearly distinguish their activism from their research. Second, we should avoid just focusing on high-profile minipublics and not only monitor cases that take place at the lower levels but also engage with their organizers, as they are the ones deviating the most from the theory.

Third, scholars should also clarify the extent to which minipublics’ endemic contributions help solve structural problems or fulfill democratic functions. The taxonomy developed for the thematic analysis can make an interesting theoretical and analytical contribution. Theorists commonly argue that minipublics cannot make long-lasting structural contributions on their own. Instead, the strategy with minipublics amounts to a functional compensation for the low global legitimacy of electoral democracy by generating legitimacy ‘locally—issue by issue, policy by policy, and constituency by constituency’ (Warren, 2009: 8). Repairing structural problems will definitely require more than one (if any) minipublic and will likely need additional resources in the form of both non- and institutionalized democratic practices (Warren, 2017; Curato *et al.*, 2020; Saward, 2021). By explicitly distinguishing endemic from structural contributions, the taxonomy provides a clearer and more honest idea of the extent to which minipublics contribute endemically to solving structural problems. Analytically, it captures the scope of contributions and can help grasp the causal relationship between endemic and structural outcomes. For instance, when we add the taxonomy to Beauvais and Warren’s case study (2019), we get an even more insightful picture of the contributions of a citizens’ panel in Vancouver. The urban policy plan suffered from a lack of inclusion in two ways: a structural element with the electoral system hindering the accountability between constituents and their elected representatives, and a contingent problem due to the ineffective participation plan meant to launch the urban policy plan. Whereas the former is a structural deficit which the citizen panel cannot solve on its own—it can only provisionally alleviate its negative effects on inclusion—, the latter is an

endemic problem resulting from a failed ad hoc participation plan, which the citizen panel helped repair its damages (Beauvais and Warren, 2019: 8–9). The taxonomy can thus enable a more explicit assessment of minipublics' contributions: while the citizens' panel has fixed endemic problems, it has mitigated the effects of a systemic deficient inclusion, albeit without solving it.

Finally, we should be prudent when we theorize new functions for minipublics, because these tend to add up and constitute what Diana Mutz would call a 'laundry list' of desired outcomes (2008: 530). The profusion of purposes for minipublics both in the theory and in practice ensues a trade-off among them since it is impossible for any minipublic to realize all these functions. Yet, very few studies have theorized and analyzed empirically these trade-offs (for exceptions, see Caluwaerts and Reuchamps, 2016; Felicetti *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, the logical and causal relationships between a minipublic and the intended functions tend to remain fuzzy, and minipublics therefore become some sort of 'black box'—to re-use Mutz' expression (2008: 530)—which prevents us from knowing accurately why a minipublic produced specific desired outcomes. Not only do we know very little about the conditions under which minipublics can realize specific functions, but the combination of the 'laundry list' and the 'black box' also enables activist researchers and practitioners to always find a positive outcome to minipublics, even if these were not the initial intended objectives. This combination becomes pernicious when we consider the fact that organizers have recently increased the ambitions for minipublics, advancing them as solutions to systemic problems. The synthesis of these three factors is the creation of a *minipublics bubble* which inflates their actual potential to solve both endemic and structural problems. Organizers' increased ambitions, coupled with the lack of genuine scientific understanding of minipublics' contributions, results in the projection of a romanticized image of minipublics, presented as a panacea to large-scale problems or as the way to en flesh a deliberative democracy. This minipublic bubble is greatly problematic because it is destined to burst and lead to the discredit of minipublics, as people will witness that society's problems persist and worsen in parallel to and despite the proliferation of minipublics.

## Conclusion

This paper examined how organizers conceived the contributions of their minipublics. Examining the public reports of all minipublics that have taken place in Belgium between 2001 and 2021, the thematic analysis reveals that organizers mainly depict them as a mechanism to include ordinary citizens, improve policymaking, and close the gap between citizens and politics. These findings were then compared to the theoretical literature and showed a series of discrepancies between theory and practice. The theory lags behind on several purposes that are common in the discourses, in particular implementing minipublics to bridge the gap between citizens and politics. Accordingly, some widespread theoretical functions do not find a broad echo in practice. Organizers tend not to conceive minipublics for deliberative purposes or according to a problem-based approach. Instead, their discourses mainly follow a governance-driven approach and depict minipublics as a way to make systemic contributions and tackle structural problems. The paper finally discussed the implications of the gap between theory and practice and the plethora of desired outcomes associated with minipublics, which contributes to the creation of a *minipublic bubble* that inflates their potential to actually solve problems.

**Supplementary material.** To view supplementary material for this article, please visit <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773922000595>.

**Acknowledgments.** The author would like to thank Rikki Dean, Min Reuchamps, Didier Caluwaerts, Ank Michels and Vincent Jacquet for their precious feedback. Earlier versions of this work were presented at the ECPR online general conference in 2021, the State of the Federation in 2021 at the UNamur, and the Colloquium on democratic theory at the Department of Political Sciences of the University of British Columbia in September 2021. My thanks to the participants for their insightful comments.



**Financial support.** This research was funded by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

**Conflict of interests.** No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Bibliography

- Bächtiger, A., M. Setälä and K. Grönlund** (2014), 'Towards a new era of deliberative mini-publics', in K. Grönlund, A. Bächtiger and M. Setälä (eds.), *Deliberative Mini-Publics: Involving Citizens in the Democratic Process*, Colchester: ECPR Press, pp. 225–246.
- Bächtiger, A. and J. Parkinson** (2019), *Mapping and Measuring Deliberation: Towards a New Deliberative Quality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Beauvais, E. and M.E. Warren** (2019) 'What can deliberative mini-publics contribute to democratic systems?', *European Journal of Political Research* 58(3): 893–914.
- Beswick, D. and S. Elstub** (2019), 'Between diversity, representation and "best evidence": rethinking select committee evidence-gathering practices', *Parliamentary Affairs* 72(4): 945–964.
- Bobbio, L.** (2019) 'Designing effective public participation', *Policy and Society* 38(1): 41–57.
- Braun, V. and V. Clarke** (2006), 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77–101.
- Broghammer, M. and J. Gastil** (2021), 'Do hostile media perceptions constrain minipublics? A study of how Oregon voters perceive citizens' statements', *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 17(2): 86–101.
- Brown, M.B.** (2006) "'Survey article: citizen panels and the concept of representation', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 14(2): 203.
- Callon, M.** (2002), 'Writing and (re) writing devices as tools for managing complexity', in J. Law and A. Mol (eds.), *Complexities: Social Studies of Knowledge Practices*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 191–218.
- Caluwaerts, D. and M. Reuchamps** (2016), 'Generating democratic legitimacy through deliberative innovations: the role of embeddedness and disruptiveness', *Representation* 52(1): 13–27. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*. doi: [10.1080/00344893.2016.1244111](https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2016.1244111).
- Caluwaerts, D. and M. Reuchamps** (2020), 'Still consociational? Belgian democracy, 50 years after "The Politics of Accommodation"', *Politics of the Low Countries* 2: 28.
- Chambers, S.** (2003), 'Deliberative democratic theory', *Annual Review of Political Science* 6(1): 307–326.
- Cooper, E. and G. Smith** (2012), 'Organizing deliberation: the perspectives of professional participation practitioners in Britain and Germany', *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 8(1), Article 3.
- Curato, N. and M. Böker** (2016), 'Linking mini-publics to the deliberative system: a research agenda', *Policy Sciences* 49(2): 173–190. *Crossref*. doi: [10.1007/s11077-015-9238-5](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-015-9238-5).
- Curato, N., M. Hammond and J. B. Min** (2019), *Power in Deliberative Democracy*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Curato, N., J. Vrydagh and A. Bächtiger** (2020), 'Democracy without shortcut: introduction to the special issue', *Journal of Deliberative Democracy*.
- Dahl, R.A.** (1989), *Democracy and Its Critics*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dalton, R.J.** (2013), *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, Thousand Oaks: CQ Press.
- Dean, R.** (2019), 'Control or influence? Conflict or solidarity? Understanding diversity in preferences for public participation in social policy decision making', *Social Policy & Administration* 53(1): 170–187.
- Deschouwer, K.** (2012), *The Politics of Belgium: Governing a Divided Society*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Devillers, S., J. Vrydagh, D. Caluwaerts and M. Reuchamps** (2021), 'Looking in from the outside: how do invited but not selected citizens perceive the legitimacy of a minipublic?', *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 17(1): 149–159.
- Drury, S. A. M., S. Elstub, O. Escobar and J. J. Roberts** (2021), 'Deliberative quality and expertise: uses of evidence in citizens' juries on wind farms', *Journal of Public Deliberation* 17(2): 31–44.
- Dryzek, J.S.** (2010), *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dryzek, J.S.** (2017), 'The forum, the system, and the polity: three varieties of democratic theory', *Political Theory* 45(5): 610–636.
- Estlund, D. and H. Landemore** (2018), 'The epistemic value of democratic deliberation', in Andre Bächtiger and others (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford Handbooks, pp. 113–131.
- Felicetti, A. et al.** (2016), 'Improving deliberative participation: connecting mini-publics to deliberative systems', *European Political Science Review* 8(03): 427–448. *Crossref*. doi: [10.1017/S1755773915000119](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773915000119).
- Fishkin, J.S.** (2011), *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fung, A.** (2003), 'Survey article: recipes for public spheres: eight institutional design choices and their consequences: survey article the role of institutional design', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 11(3): 338–367. *Crossref*. doi: [10.1111/1467-9760.00181](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9760.00181).

- Fung, A.** (2006), 'Varieties of participation in complex governance', *Public Administration Review* **66**(s1): 66–75. Crossref. doi: [10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00667.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00667.x).
- Fung, A.** (2011), 'Minipublics: designing institutions for effective deliberation and accountability', in S. Odugbemi and T. Lee (eds.), *Accountability through Public Opinion: From Inertia to Public Action*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, pp. 183–202.
- Fung, A.** (2012), 'Continuous institutional innovation and the pragmatic conception of democracy', *Polity* **44**(4): 609–624.
- Ganuza, E. and M. Menendez-Blanco** (2020), '¿Te Ha Tocado? El Sorteo Llega a La Política de Madrid', *Recerca. Revista de Pensament i Anàlisi* **25**(1): 95–110.
- Germann, M., S. Marien and L. Muradova** (2021), 'Scaling up? Unpacking the effect of deliberative mini-publics on legitimacy perceptions', *Unpacking the Effect of Deliberative Mini-Publics on Legitimacy Perceptions* (November 1, 2021).
- Goodin, R.E. and J.S. Dryzek** (2006), 'Deliberative impacts: the macro-political uptake of mini-publics', *Politics & Society* **34**(2): 219–244. Crossref. doi: [10.1177/0032329206288152](https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329206288152).
- Grönlund, K., A. Bächtiger and M. Setälä** (2014), 'Introduction', in K. Grönlund, A. Bächtiger and M. Setälä (eds.), *Deliberative Mini-Publics: Involving Citizens in the Democratic Process*, Colchester: ECPR Press, pp. 1–8.
- Hendriks, C.M.** (2009), 'The democratic soup: mixed meanings of political representation in governance networks', *Governance* **22**(4): 689–715.
- Hendriks, C.M.** (2016), 'Coupling citizens and elites in deliberative systems: the role of institutional design: the role of institutional design', *European Journal of Political Research* **55**(1): 43–60. Crossref. doi: [10.1111/1475-6765.12123](https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12123).
- Hendriks, C.M. and J. Lees-Marshment** (2019), 'Political leaders and public engagement: the hidden world of informal elite–citizen interaction', *Political Studies* **67**(3): 597–617.
- Herzog, C., C. Handke and E. Hitters** (2019), 'Analyzing talk and text II: thematic analysis', in H. Van den Bulck, M. Puppis, K. Donders and L. Van Audenhove (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Methods for Media Policy Research*, Cham: Springer, pp. 385–401.
- Hisschemöller, M. and E. Cuppen** (2015), 'Participatory assessment: tools for empowering, learning and legitimating?', in J. R. Turnpenny and A. J. Jordan (eds.), *The Tools of Policy Formulation*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 33–51.
- Hoppe, R.** (2011), *The Governance of Problems: Puzzling, Powering, Participation*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Inglehart, R. and P. Norris** (2017), 'Trump and the populist authoritarian parties: the silent revolution in reverse', *Perspectives on Politics* **15**(2): 443–454.
- Jacquet, V. et al.** (2020) 'Sortition, its advocates and its critics: an empirical analysis of citizens' and MPs' support for random selection as a democratic reform proposal', *International Political Science Review*. doi: [10.1177/0192512120949958](https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512120949958).
- Jacquet, V. and R. van der Does** (2020), 'The consequences of deliberative minipublics: systematic overview, conceptual gaps, and new directions', *Representation* **57**(1): 1–11.
- Jäske, M. and M. Setälä** (2020), 'A functionalist approach to democratic innovations', *Representation* **56**(4): 467–483.
- Knobloch, K.R. and J. Gastil** (2015), 'Civic (re) socialisation: the educative effects of deliberative participation', *Politics* **35**(2): 183–200.
- Koskimaa, V. and L. Rapeli** (2020), 'Fit to govern? Comparing citizen and policymaker perceptions of deliberative democratic innovations', *Policy & Politics* **48**(4): 637–652.
- Lafont, C.** (2019), *Democracy without Shortcuts: A Participatory Conception of Deliberative Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lee, C.W.** (2014), *Do-It-Yourself Democracy: The Rise of the Public Engagement Industry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- MacKenzie, M.K. and M.E. Warren** (2012), 'Two trust-based uses of minipublics in democratic systems', in J. Parkinson and J. Mansbridge (eds.), *Deliberative Systems: Deliberative Democracy at the Large Scale*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 95–124.
- Macq, H. and V. Jacquet** (2021), 'Institutionalising participatory and deliberative procedures: the origins of the first permanent citizens' assembly', *European Journal of Political Research*, online first.
- Mansbridge, J.** (2019), 'Recursive representation', in Castiglione and J. Pollak (eds.), *Creating Political Presence: The New Politics of Democratic Representation*, London: University of Chicago Press, pp. 298–338.
- Mansbridge, J., J. Bohman, S. Chambers, T. Christiano, A. Fung, J. Parkinson, D. F. Thomps and M. E. Warren** (2012), 'A systemic approach to deliberative democracy', in J. Parkinson and J. Mansbridge (eds.), *Deliberative Systems: Deliberative Democracy at the Large Scale*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–26.
- Mercier, H. and H. Landemore** (2012), 'Reasoning is for arguing: understanding the successes and failures of deliberation', *Political Psychology* **33**(2): 243–258.
- Michels, A.** (2016), 'Arguments for involving the public in water management: evidence from local and regional water plans in the Netherlands', *Water Policy* **18**(4): 918–931.
- Mutz, D.C.** (2008), 'Is deliberative democracy a falsifiable theory?', *Annual Review of Political Science* **11**: 521–538.
- Newton, K. and B. Geissel** (2012), *Evaluating Democratic Innovations: Curing the Democratic Malaise?* Abingdon: Routledge.
- Niemeyer, S.** (2014), 'Scaling up deliberation to mass publics: harnessing mini-publics in a deliberative system', in K. Grönlund, A. Bächtiger and M. Setälä (eds.), *Deliberative Mini-Publics: Involving Citizens in the Democratic Process*, Colchester: ECPR Press, pp. 177–202.

- Niessen, C. and M. Reuchamps (2019), 'Designing a permanent deliberative citizens' assembly', *Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance Working Paper Series* 6: 1–30.
- OECD. (2020), *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*, Paris: OECD.
- Papadopoulos, Y. and P. Warin (2007), 'Are innovative, participatory and deliberative procedures in policy making democratic and effective?', *European Journal of Political Research* 46(4): 445–472. Crossref. doi: [10.1111/j.1475-6765.2007.00696.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2007.00696.x).
- Pateman, C. (2012), 'Participatory democracy revisited', *Perspectives on Politics* 10(01): 7–19. Crossref. doi: [10.1017/S1537592711004877](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592711004877).
- Pilet, J. B., D. Bol, D. Vittori and E. Paulis (2020), *Public Support for Citizens' Assemblies Selected Through Sortition: Survey and Experimental Evidence from 15 Countries*. *European Journal of Political Research* (Online first).
- Pow, J. (2021), 'Mini-publics and the wider public: the perceived legitimacy of randomly selecting citizen representatives', *Representation* 57: 1–20.
- Prior, L. (2008), 'Repositioning documents in social research', *Sociology* 42(5): 821–836.
- Rangoni, S., C. Bedock and D. Talukder (2021), 'More competent thus more legitimate? MPs' discourses on deliberative mini-publics', *Acta Politica*: 1–21.
- Reuchamps, M. (2020), 'Belgium's experiment in permanent forms of deliberative democracy', *ConstitutionNet* 1: 1–9.
- Ryan, M. and G. Smith (2014), 'Defining mini-publics', in K. Grönlund, A. Bächtiger and M. Setälä (eds.), *Deliberative Mini-Publics: Involving Citizens in the Democratic Process*, Colchester: ECPR Press, pp. 9–26.
- Sartori, G. (1970), 'Concept misformation in comparative politics', *American Political Science Review* 64(4): 1033–1053.
- Saward, M. (2021), *Democratic Design*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schiffino, N. et al. (2019), 'Les Gouvernants Face Aux Transformations de La Démocratie', *Gouvernement et Action Publique* 8(2): 57–80.
- Sedlačko, M. (2018), '3. Policy as ordering through documents', in H. K. Colebatch and R. Hoppe (eds.), *Handbook on Policy, Process and Governing*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 32–52.
- Setälä, M. (2017), 'Connecting deliberative mini-publics to representative decision making', *European Journal of Political Research* 56(4): 846–863.
- Setälä, M. and G. Smith (2018), 'Mini-publics and deliberative democracy', in Andre Bächtiger and others (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford Handbooks, pp. 300–314.
- Smith, G. (2009), *Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spada, P. and M. Ryan (2017), 'The failure to examine failures in democratic innovation', *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50(03): 772–778. Crossref. doi: [10.1017/S1049096517000579](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517000579).
- Vrydagh, J., S. Devillers, V. Jacquet, D. Talukder and J. Bottin (2021), 'Thriving in an unfriendly territory: the peculiar rise of minipublics in consociational Belgium', in D. Caluwaerts and M. Reuchamps (eds.), *Belgian Exceptionalism. Belgian Politics between Realism and Surrealism*, Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 59–78.
- Vrydagh, J., S. Devillers, D. Talukder, V. Jacquet and J. Bottin (2020), 'Les mini-publics En Belgique (2001–2018): expériences de Panels Citoyens Délibératifs', *Courrier Hebdomadaire Du CRISP* 32: 5–72.
- Warren, M.E. (2009), 'Governance-driven democratization', *Critical Policy Studies* 3(1): 3–13.
- Warren, M.E. (2017), 'A problem-based approach to democratic theory', *American Political Science Review* 111(01): 39–53. Crossref. doi: [10.1017/S0003055416000605](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000605).
- Warren, M.E. and J. Gastil (2015), 'Can deliberative minipublics address the cognitive challenges of democratic citizenship?', *The Journal of Politics* 77(2): 562–574.
- Warren, M.E. and H. Pearse (2008), *Designing Deliberative Democracy: The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.