

Conference

## **Citizens' assemblies for the climate : a political or technocratic response to the ecological challenge?**

**Oxford, September 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> 2022**

EU PHOENIX research project, Maison française d'Oxford, Paris-Lumières University, Paris 8 university, KNOCA, Nuffield College  
 In cooperation with Paris Est University, Oxpo (Oxford-Sciences Po Paris Programme), CRESPPA-CSU, the French Embassy in the UK  
 Conveners: Yves Sintomer (CRESPPA/Nuffield College/DPIR), Graham Smith (University of Westminster/KNOCA)  
 Scientific coordination: Selma Tilikete (Paris 8 University/CRESPPA), Eve Boulanger (CRESPPA)

### **Rational**

A growing number of citizens assemblies for the climate have been organized in recent years, at local, regional and national level. In France, the Citizens Convention for the Climate has been widely discussed in the media, the ecological movements, and the political sphere. In the UK, similar events have been organized. One of the 4 citizens panels organized by the EU in the frame of the Conference on the Future of Europe is dealing with the climate. Actors who have promoted this democratic innovation are quite diverse: local and national governments, senior public servants and opposition parties (especially on the Left and among the Greens), radical social movement organizations such as Extinction rebellion, grassroots activists and bloggers, consultants specialized in the moderation of randomly selected minipublics, foundations, public intellectuals, etc. An international network, the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA), has been created convening policy makers, NGOs and academics to develop assembly practice. The political and institutional contexts within which climate assemblies have been organized have widely differed from one place to the other. The procedures, although partly similar, also have sharp contrasts. Should we consider climate assemblies as a single or diverse phenomenon? Is this phenomenon only a fashion? Does it represent a meaningful political answer to the ecological challenge?

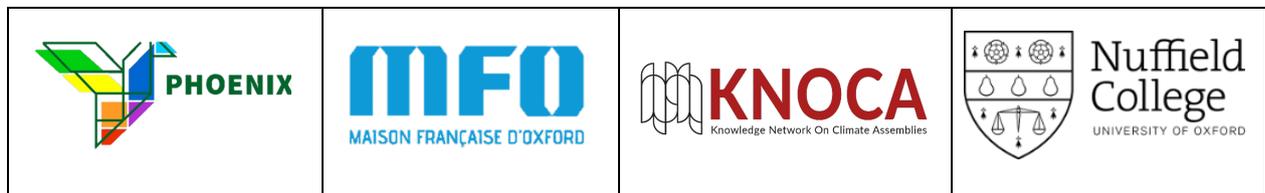
The issue of citizens assemblies for the climate is so large that it could be analyzed from a range of different perspectives, some of which have been addressed in previous events or networks. The Oxford Conference will focus on two related questions:

- **Is there an elective affinity between the ecological challenge and the randomly-selected citizens' assembly?** Citizens' assemblies have seen the convergence of actors primarily motivated by the fight against global warming and others principally concerned with democratic innovations. Is this only a contingent encounter? Or is it instead a kind of elective affinity, where the two elements have potential structural affinities revealed in specific historical circumstances, giving birth to a lasting partnership or even to a new political reality? A number of authors have argued that democracy is the best system for facing the ecological challenge. Others (sometimes the same), have added that the kind of democracy which should be developed to face this



challenge should be organized around randomly selected bodies. Electoral democracy has not delivered adequate results to date, with the competitive party system guided more by the interests of the political class and entrenched interests rather than by the common good of humanity, even less so future generations and non-humans who cannot vote. Randomly selected citizen assemblies are taken to be the best institutional way to incorporate overlooked interests and for deciding on the trajectory of an ecological transition. Are these arguments convincing? What are the counter-arguments? Is the topic of the climate one that randomly selected bodies can deal with when compared with their success with more specific policy questions related to, say, the health care system, societal questions such as abortion and same-sex marriage, or the future of the pension system?

- **What kind of citizens assemblies for the climate for what politics?** The convergence of quite different actors in defense of the creation of citizens assemblies seems paradoxical. To give only one example, in France, part of the Yellow Jackets and a number of ecological activists were responsible for persuading President Macron and his advisors to organise the Citizens Convention for the Climate, but at the same time have been sharply critical of his presidency. In order to understand this paradox, one has to analyze the interests and maneuvers of the political actors, and differentiate the processes in which bottom-up movements are active or even responsible for the launching of an assembly, and those that are convened by governments, sometimes with a clear top-down logic. One also has to scrutinize the political system which is at stake in the imaginaries of the actors. Quite different democratic imaginaries have justified such assemblies, from deliberative democracy to radical democracy and antipolitical democracy. What can be said about the imaginaries which motivate the actors involved in advocating, commissioning and organizing climate assemblies? To what extent do they influence the procedures of the assemblies and their political dynamics? The French Citizens Convention for the Climate displays a number of features which differ from, for example, the influential Irish citizens assemblies: for instance, the CCC went beyond its initially attributed role and ended with a critique of the government that had commissioned it; many of the CCC's members were active in speaking to the media and took part in events organized by radical ecological movements; strong political tensions emerged among the members. Was the CCC a defective process, or is this more political manifestation of a citizens' assembly and democratic innovation more broadly what really matters. How should we understand President Macron's apparent initial commitment that the proposals from the CCC would be binding and not only consultative? Does this point to a more politicized model which would be inescapable when citizens assemblies are empowered on decisive topics? Conversely, is the impartiality of citizen assemblies crucial for their legitimacy, which would mean that avoiding politicization would be the crucial? To what extent does the answer to this question relate to the kind of democratic imaginaries at stake? And does the topic of the climate differ in this respect from other topics



## PROGRAM

**September 7<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 p.m. Welcoming Dinner (buffet) at The All Bar One. All participants are welcome.**

### **September 8<sup>th</sup>, NUFFIELD COLLEGE**

**8:45: Welcoming participants (with coffee, tea and cakes)**

**9:00: Welcome:** Giovanni Allegretti (PHOENIX); Jamie Draper (Nuffield College); Susan Brown (Oxford City Council); Emilie Frenkiel (Paris Est University); Pascal Marty (MFO)

**9:15. Panel 1. Introduction to themes of conference.**

*Chair:* Jamie Draper (Nuffield College)

*Speakers:* Graham Smith (University of Westminster/KNOCA); Yves Sintomer (CRESPPA/Nuffield College/DPIR)

*Discussant:* Claudia Chwalisz (DemocracyNext)

**10:45 Coffee/tea**

**11:00. Panel 2. Lessons from the French Citizens Convention for the Climate**

*Chair:* Giovanni Allegretti (CES Coimbra/PHOENIX)

*Speakers:* Judith Ferrando (Missions publiques); Lise Deshautel (Consultant on climate policies and citizen participation, Advisor to the governance committee of the French Citizen's Assembly for Climate); Laurent Jeanpierre (Panthéon-Sorbonne University)

*Discussant:* Manuel Cervera-Marzal (Liège University)

**13:00. Lunch (buffet) at Nuffield college**

**14:30. Panel 3. Lessons from other climate assemblies**

*Chair:* Marie-Hélène Bacqué (Université Paris Nanterre University, LAVUE)

*Speakers:* Rebecca Willis (Lancaster University); Oliver Escobar (The University of Edinburgh); Clodagh Harris (Cork University); Eva Rovers (Bureau Burgerberaad)

*Discussant:* Naoyuki Mikami (Hokkaido University)

**16 :30 Coffe/tea**

**16:45. Panel 4. Lessons from European and transnational climate assemblies/panels**

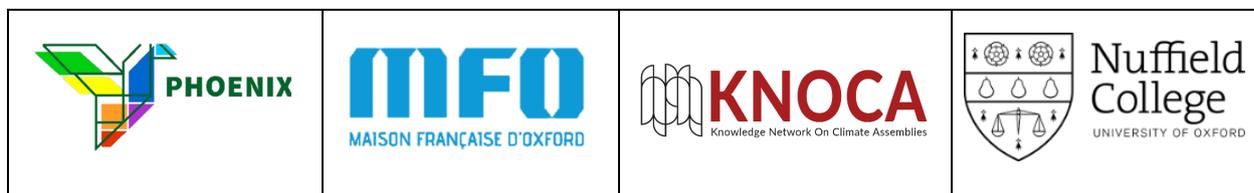
*Chair:* Kalypso Nicolaïdis (School of Transnational Governance, EUI, Professor of International Relations at the University of Oxford)

*Speakers:* Claire Mellier-Wilson (Global Climate Assembly); Ernesto Ganuza (CSIC Madrid); Gaëtane Ricard-Nihoul (Common Secretariat of The Conference On the Future of Europe at European Commission); Azucena Moran (IASS Potsdam)

*Discussant:* Amy Dahan (Centre Alexandre Koyré, Paris)

**18:45. End of first day**

**19:15. Dinner (buffet) at Nuffield College**



**September 9<sup>th</sup>, MAISON FRANÇAISE D'OXFORD**

**8:45. Welcoming participants ((with coffee, tea and croissants))**

**9:00. Panel 5. Bringing in future generations and non-humans**

*Chair:* Cécile Laborde (Nuffield College)

*Speakers:* Roman Krznaric (Long Now Foundation); Emilie Gaillard (Science Po Rennes); Mathijs van de Sande (Radboud University Nijmegen Netherland)

*Discussants:* Nabila Abbas (CRESPPA/ PHOENIX), Samuel Hayat (CNRS-affiliated Research Fellow at CEVIPOF-Sciences Po)

**11 :00. Coffee/tea**

**11:15. Panel 6. Sortition and climate: elective affinities?**

*Chair:* Florence Faucher (Science Po Paris/Oxpo)

*Speakers:* Maxime Gaborit (Saint Louis University/ Brussels-Crespo/Science Po Paris); Selma Tilikete (Paris 8 University/MFO) ; Stephen Elstub (Newcastle University)

*Discussants:* Stuart White (Jesus College, University of Oxford), Fee Helen Kirsch (European University Institute)

**13:05. Lunch (buffet) at the Maison française**

**14:00. Panel 7. Climate assemblies and politics**

*Chair:* David Miller (Nuffield College, University of Oxford)

*Speakers:* Carsten Berg (ECI (European Citizens' Initiative/European University Institute); Justin Kenrick (Grassroots2Global.org, Anthropologist, XR); Colin Scicluna (EU commission, Co-Head of the CoFE's Common Secretariat, Vice President Suica's Chief of Staff);

*Discussant:* Lionel Cordier (Paris 8 University)

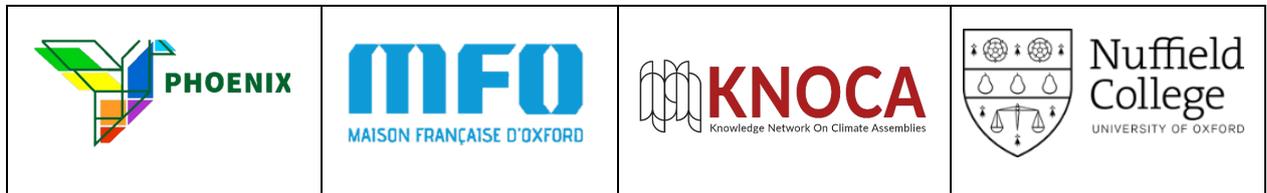
**15:30. General conclusion.**

*Chair:* Emilie Frenkiel (Paris Est University)

David Owen (University of Southampton); Zeynep Pamuk (LSE); Claudia Chwalisz (DemocracyNext)

**16:00. End of the conference**





**On-line participation:**

**Join Zoom Meeting:**

**Meeting ID: 891 0341 1056**

**Passcode: 886215**

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89103411056?pwd=aC9WMzVxdkEveHZ3SVFiYTh1UUU5QT09>

