KNOCA BRIEFING NO.6

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES OF CLIMATE ASSEMBLIES

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KNOCA is a European-based network that aims to improve the commissioning, design, implementation, impact and evaluation of climate assemblies, using evidence, knowledge exchange and dialogue. KNOCA documents climate assembly practice, identifies and disseminates best practice for impact and shapes future trends. You can find us and join KNOCA at https://knoca.eu/
1. Key insights

- Broadly, three approaches have been taken to structuring governance arrangements for national climate assemblies:
  1. The commissioner appoints an external practitioner or delivery organisation to design and deliver the assembly, e.g., Climate Assembly UK and Danish Climate Assembly.
  2. The commissioner sets up a secretariat, comprising seconded civil servants, to coordinate delivery of the assembly, e.g., the Scottish and Irish Climate Assemblies.
  3. The commissioner appoints a multi-stakeholder group to function as a governance committee, e.g., the French Citizens’ Convention on Climate.

- In practice, decision making works differently within these three structures, depending on how much and when commissioners relinquish power to the body they appoint to deliver the process (e.g. external practitioners, secretariat, or multi-stakeholder group). The extent roles and responsibilities are formalised also affects decision-making within the different governance arrangements.

- Regardless of the structure, governance of climate assemblies is usually supported by groups of technical experts, experts in participation, stakeholders, and assembly members.

- The perceived independence of a climate assembly from the commissioner’s influence and the assembly’s potential impact are both affected by how close commissioners remain to decision-making. Where a commissioner retains tight control, concerns can be raised about independence. Conversely, where commissioners are less directly involved, the extent to which the outcomes respond to their needs, and therefore the potential influence of a climate assembly, can be reduced.

- The quality and legitimacy of decision-making can be affected by the diversity and number of actors involved in governance. If insufficient viewpoints are represented, the perceived legitimacy of the process can be reduced. In contrast, it can be difficult to manage too many diverse viewpoints, slowing decision-making. However, early engagement of relevant interests and clearly defined roles can overcome potential conflicts, improving efficiency of decision making amongst governance actors.

- Involving selected assembly members in governance during the delivery phase can improve decision-making by providing a ‘user view’ of the process and overcoming potential conflict amongst governance actors.

- Most climate assemblies have progressed without a formalised, defined structure of governance\(^1\). Roles and responsibilities for decision-making have tended to evolve, rather than be fully defined before the process begins. This can result in inefficient decision-making and...

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\(^1\) Although contracts were implemented for the appointment of external practitioners in several cases.
concerns about the legitimacy of the process.

2. Recommendations

Different approaches to governance generate different advantages and disadvantages. Whatever the arrangements, the following issues emerge as fundamental considerations:

- The design and delivery team and major stakeholders should be brought in early to the governance arrangements to enable meaningful input into the design and operation of the assembly.

- Engaging a range of interests and perspectives within the governance arrangements, including assembly members and external stakeholders (from civil society, business and politics) can help ensure legitimacy and build trust and a sense of ownership in the process. Bringing actors who are sceptical or unsure about the process into governance arrangements will generally increase their support and advocacy for the process – as well as bringing their knowledge and expertise to bear.

- As recommended by the OECD (2021), formalising roles and responsibilities reduces potential for conflict and enhances transparency. To date governance of many climate assemblies has been informal, evolving throughout the process (despite contracts being implemented for the appointment of external practitioners in several cases). The success of the processes has relied on the goodwill and professionalism of the actors involved. This informality generates a high risk of potential conflict in the future. The practice in France of appointing independent Guarantors is an interesting development, although their role was never formalised. In Polish local assemblies, independent arbiters are appointed that can be appealed to if disagreements persist amongst governance actors.

- Regular formal meetings between the commissioners, delivery agency and other governance actors can help ensure the assembly meets the commissioner's needs and encourages its buy into the process, e.g. the Danish Planning Group and German Coordination Circle. Governance arrangements that give the commissioning body or seconded civil servants significant decision-making power may ensure that the assembly is more responsive to policy needs but may generate concerns about the independence of the process.

- Further systematic research is needed to understand the causes and consequences of adopting different governance structures.

3. Introduction

The legitimacy of deliberative mini-publics, such as climate assemblies, partly depends on the trust policymakers, stakeholders and the wider public have in the decisions made about their design and implementation (Sandover et al, 2021). Thus, the form and quality of governance arrangements of assemblies is critical. Indeed, the OECD include criteria for transparency and governance in their
guidelines for deliberative processes (2021), prescribing that governance arrangements are formalised, and that information about those arrangements is publicised. This Briefing explores the range of ways governance is arranged and structured for the first eight national level climate assemblies, providing insights into the implications of different governance design choices. The analysis draws on a desk review of assembly reports and websites, as well as interviews with key informants who were intimately involved in the governance structures of each assembly (CA1 to CA8). It sets out:

- who made decisions about assembly design, member recruitment, choice of witnesses, scope of evidence provided etc.;
- how this operated;
- its independence; and
- how it changed during the process.

Tensions that emerged in the governance of each assembly are identified, including how they were dealt with during the process.

Recommendations for robust governance of climate assemblies are offered.

4. Review of the Governance of National Climate Assemblies

The governance arrangements of eight national climate assemblies are presented below, in date order, to illustrate how some of the learnings from earlier processes influenced later events.

4.1 Ireland’s Citizens’ Assembly 2016-18 (considered climate change Sept 2017 to Nov 2017)

Key features:

- Assembly established by a Resolution of the Irish Houses of Parliament that set the scope of a citizens’ assembly on five topics.
- Delivery and governance handed over to a secretariat, comprising seconded civil servants.
- The structure of governance, led by a Chair and Secretariat, was formalised and common across the five topics.
- Decision-making supported by a steering group and expert advisory panel for each topic.

The Irish Houses of Parliament initiated a citizens’ assembly on 5 topics between 2016 and 2018. Climate change was the third topic and was held over 2 weekends in September and November 2017. The Parliamentary Resolution initiating the series of assemblies, set out a timeline for their completion, including an end date, order of topics and number of weekends to be spent on each topic.

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2 In this briefing we consider formalisation of governance to mean that decision-making roles and responsibilities were defined and agreed within a type of written agreement, e.g., a contract.

The governance of Ireland's Citizens' Assembly was led by a secretariat, comprising 5 civil servants, seconded from the Department of the Taoiseach and an independent Chair (retired Supreme Court judge), as illustrated in Figure 1. The Secretariat and Chair made decisions in consultation with a Steering Group that they participated in with ten assembly members and an Expert Advisory Group, comprising academics and practitioners associated with the topic. The composition of the Steering Group remained the same across the topics, whereas a different Expert Advisory Group was composed for each topic.

The structure, processes, and procedures of governance were formalised and established at the start of the process, partly because of the controversial nature of the first topic considered: abortion.

Figure 1: Governance structure of the Irish Citizens' Assembly on Climate

4.2 French Citizens' Climate Convention (Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat) (Oct 2019 – Feb 2020)

Key features:

- Governance of the French CCC undertaken by a Governance Committee, comprising fifteen stakeholders with diverse political views and interests
- The Governance Committee retained decision-making control throughout the process
- The Governance Committee joined by two assembly members at each of the meetings held during the CCC sessions
- Details of the roles and responsibilities of the Governance Committee were not formally set out at initiation
- Three guarantors appointed to monitor the independence of the Convention process.
The French Government initiated the French Citizens' Climate Convention (CCC)\(^4\) in response to pressure from civil society (in particular the Gilets Jaune protests) and following the 'Great National Debate' via a letter from the French Prime Minister\(^5\). The French Government assigned responsibility to organise the Convention to the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (ESEC), an advisory assembly to the French Government, comprising representatives of civil society\(^6\).

ESEC set up a Governance Committee to oversee the CCC, comprising: two co-presidents, representatives of ESEC and the Ministry of Ecological and Inclusive Transition, as well as experts in climate change, participatory democracy, society, and the economy.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the CCC was supported by three independent Guarantors and, once the Convention was established, a support group of 19 experts and a legislative committee of 6 legal experts. Two delivery bodies were appointed to lead on facilitation – Missions Publiques and Res Publica – but they had no direct responsibility for governance decisions.

Figure 2: Governance structure of the French CCC

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\(^4\) See: [https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/](https://www.conventioncitoyennepourleclimat.fr/)


\(^6\) See: [https://www.lecese.fr/](https://www.lecese.fr/)
During the operational phase, each meeting of the Governance Committee included two assembly members. Around 30 participants volunteered to attend the Governance Committee meetings and at each meeting two different volunteers (always one male and one female) were selected (by lot) to attend.

4.3 Climate Assembly UK (CAUK) (Jan 2020 – May 2020)

Key features:

- Commissioned by six parliamentary select committees, which remained actively involved in decision making throughout the process, via parliamentary officials
- A delivery organisation, Involve, commissioned to organise and run CAUK
- Decision making was iterative: parliamentary officials provided a specification to Involve which then developed proposals, which in turn were checked by the parliamentary officials, who could request changes, and so on.
- The process was supported by four expert leads, an advisory group of stakeholders, and an academic group of climate change experts
- The delivery organisation and expert leads worked collaboratively to make day-to-day decisions during the assembly’s operation

Six Parliamentary select committees, led by the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) committee, commissioned CAUK. A delivery organisation, Involve, won the tender to deliver the assembly. Parliamentary officials, representing the commissioning committees, retained decision-making power and signed off decisions made during design and implementation of the assembly.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the assembly process was supported by: four expert leads; an advisory group comprising stakeholders, including charities and business groups, and an academic group, comprising climate change specialists.

Decision making power for high level decisions, especially during the design stage, such as the scope, question, structure, and personnel involved (the advisory and academic groups and expert leads), was retained by parliamentary officials. However, the process decision making was iterative, with officials reviewing proposals from Involve in consultation with the advisory group. CA3 reflected that “it worked like that all the all the way along; so [Involve] could go and do the work and then we’d come back to them with it, at which point they could object or ask for something different”. Parliamentary officials became less active as the Assembly began its work and day-to-day decisions were made collaboratively between Involve and the expert leads.

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7 See: [https://www.climateassembly.uk/](https://www.climateassembly.uk/)
4.4 Denmark’s Climate Assembly (Borgerting på klimaområdet) (Phase 1: Oct 2020 – March 2021 and Phase 2: Oct 2021 – Dec 2021)

Key features:

- Commissioned by the Ministry of Climate, Energy and Supply
- The Danish Board of Technology (DBT) won a procurement to design and run the climate assembly, and produced a concept document that set out the governance structure
- A Planning Group comprised a representative from DBT, a lead civil servant from the Ministry and 5 assembly members
- Planning Group supported by an expert panel, of 6 academic experts on climate change and an expert in citizen participation
- The Danish climate assembly occurred in 2 phases.

The Danish Climate Assembly\(^8\) was set up by the Ministry of Climate, Energy and Supply, to provide input into the annual climate policy planning process. The Danish Board of Technology

\(^8\) See: [https://kefm.dk/klima-og-vejr/borgertinget-](https://kefm.dk/klima-og-vejr/borgertinget-)}
(DBT) won the contract to design and run the climate assembly. DBT’s concept document\(^9\) included 3 bodies to ensure transparency and oversight: an expert panel, comprising 4-6 academic experts on climate change which checked the content and quality of the evidence provided; an expert in citizen participation who checked the climate assembly method; and an external facilitator (DBT). Day-to-day decision making rested with, a Planning Group, comprising a representative from DBT, a lead civil servant from the Ministry and 5 assembly members (randomly selected).

As illustrated in Figure 4, as the external facilitator and designer of the climate assembly, DBT, held much of the decision-making power, however, decisions were made in collaboration with the rest of the Planning Group. The Planning Group also functioned as a line of communication between the participants and DBT.

Figure 4: Governance structure of Denmark’s Climate Assembly

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9 Available (in Danish) at: https://kefm.dk/Media/B/6/Koncept%20for%20borgertinget%20opdateret%20webtilg%C3%A6ngelig.pdf
4.5 Scotland’s Climate Assembly (Nov 2020 – March 2021)

Key features:

- Scottish Government commissioned the Scottish Climate Assembly and established a secretariat, comprising, seconded civil servants and experts in citizens’ assemblies, to implement the process.
- Two convenors were appointed to mediate between the delivery organisations and the participants, and represented the assembly in the media.
- Decision making power was held by the secretariat in collaboration with the stewarding group, evidence group and two delivery organisations. Roles and responsibilities were not formalised.
- Decision making was independent from the commissioners (Scottish Government), although their advice was sought for unforeseen decisions, e.g. taking the assembly online.

Scotland’s Climate Assembly was commissioned by the Scottish Government, as prescribed by the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019. The Scottish Government established a Secretariat, comprising seconded civil servants and experts in running citizens’ assemblies, to implement Scotland’s Climate Assembly.

Figure 5: Governance structure of Scotland’s Climate Assembly

To deliver the Climate Assembly, the secretariat established: a stewarding group, comprising 22 stakeholders and participation experts, including Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and

10 See: [https://www.climateassembly.scot/](https://www.climateassembly.scot/)
academics; and an evidence group, comprising of a range of experts on relevant aspects of climate. Two contractors were commissioned to deliver the assembly: Involve and DemSoc.

As illustrated in Figure 5, decision-making throughout the assembly was undertaken by the secretariat with input from the stewarding group, the evidence group and / or the delivery organisations. Scotland’s Climate Assembly was also supported by two convenors, appointed by the Secretariat and the Scottish Government. The convenors acted as an interface between the delivery organisations and the participants and represented the climate assembly in the media.

4.6 Jersey’s Citizens’ Assembly on Climate Change (March 2021 - May 2021)

Key features:

- Commissioned by Jersey’s Government via civil servants from the government’s Sustainability and Foresight team within the department of Strategic Policy Planning and Performance
- Day to day decisions made by two delivery organisations (NCP and Involve)
- A Chair Convenor – a prominent individual from Jersey – and an Expert Advisory board appointed to support the process and the assembly members

Jersey’s Citizens’ Assembly on Climate Change was commissioned by the island’s government in response to a demand, from a backbench member of the States Assembly, to bring the target date for achieving Net Zero date forward from 2050 to 2030.

Figure 6: Governance structure of Jersey’s Citizens’ Assembly on Climate Change

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11 See: [https://www.climateconversation.je/citizens-assembly/](https://www.climateconversation.je/citizens-assembly/)
Civil servants from the government's Sustainability and Foresight team within the Department of Strategic Policy Planning and Performance, were tasked with implementing the climate assembly. Following a tender process two UK-based practitioner organisations, New Citizenship Project (NCP) and Involve, were commissioned to design and run the process. The civil servants set the scope of the climate assembly, with NCP and Involve were responsible for the day-to-day decision making.

As shown in Figure 6, to support the governance and operation of Jersey's climate assembly, a Chair Convenor and an Expert Advisory Panel were appointed. The Chair Convenor oversaw the process and acted as a liaison between the advisory panel and the practitioner organisations.

### 4.7 Finland's Citizens' Jury on Climate Actions (Ilmastotoimia arvioiva kansalaisraati) (April 2021)

**Key features:**
- Initiated by researchers from the University of Turku, who were then commissioned by the Ministry of the Environment to design and implement the Finnish Climate Jury
- Jury's scope set in collaboration between the academic organisers and Ministry officials
- Design and implementation led by the organisers. Ministry officials informed of progress via regular meetings and provided ad hoc advice and support.

Finland's Climate Jury\(^\text{12}\) was initiated by researchers from the University of Turku who persuaded the Ministry of the Environment to adopt the idea and were awarded the contract to run the jury.

As illustrated in Figure 7, the Jury was designed and implemented by the research team at the University of Turku. The scope of the Jury was decided in a collaboration between these researchers and the commissioners.

After the scope was set, decision making power for the Climate Jury rested with the organisers from the University of Turku who undertook the design and operation of the process. Leading up to the jury, researchers held meetings with Ministry officials, to inform them of progress and foster their confidence in the process. During the design process, the organisers sought ad hoc advice from the Ministry officials, such as who to select as experts to present to the jurors, “but the final decision about the experts, the choice of experts, was made by the organisers” (CA\(^\text{7}\)).

The governance and operation of the Finnish Climate Jury was typical of similar deliberative processes in the country; CA\(^\text{7}\) commented that “in Finland it's mostly researchers, or it has been mostly researchers so far initiating and organizing these processes”.

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\(^{12}\) See: [https://sites.utu.fi/kansalaisraati/](https://sites.utu.fi/kansalaisraati/)
4.8 Germany’s Citizens’ Climate Assembly (Bürgerrat Klima) (April 2021 – June 2021)

Key features:

- Commissioned by a civil society organisation: BürgerBegehren Klimaschutz (BBK)
- Day-to-day decisions made by 3 delivery agencies commissioned to organise and run the assembly (ifok, the NEXUS Institute, and the Institute for Participatory Design (IPG))
- BBK and the Scientific Advisory Board monitored the process via weekly meetings with the 3 delivery agencies called ‘the coordination circle’
- Governance was collaborative but with defined roles, which were formalised by BBK early in the process

Germany’s Citizens’ Climate Assembly was sponsored, set up and supervised by a non-profit association BürgerBegehren Klimaschutz (BBK) (roughly translated as the Citizens’ Climate Protection Initiative). It was distinctive in terms of being commissioned by an organisation outside the formal political sphere. The assembly was designed to inform a specific political process; held

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13 See: [https://buergerrat-klima.de/](https://buergerrat-klima.de/)
before the general election, so that the results could feed into and inform the campaigns of the political parties and the coalition agreement that emerged from the election.

BBK commissioned 3 agencies to organise and run the assembly: ifok, the NEXUS Institute, and IPG. As shown in Figure 8, the governance and operation of the climate assembly was supported a Scientific Board, made up of 25 leading researchers from social and climate science.

Figure 8: Governance structure of Germany's Citizens' Climate Assembly

BBK, the delivery agencies, and the Scientific Advisory Board were responsible for the governance of the German climate assembly. They were supported by a Support Network of 86 organizations from a wide range of sectors, and a Civil Society Advisory Board, comprising 20 members, including selected representatives from business, social, and environmental associations, churches, foundations, activist movements, and non-governmental organizations, as well as experts in citizen participation.

Each organisation had defined roles that were set out by BBK at the start. Once commissioned, BBK handed day-to-day operation and decision-making to the 3 delivery agencies and stepped away. BBK monitored the process during regular meetings, known as a 'coordination circle', to
ensure that the assembly would answer the remit and so they could operate the publicity and communications with politicians. The Scientific Advisory Body checked, and according to CA8 "had the ultimate say", on the assembly's content, including the overarching question, selection of topics.

Decisions were informed by consultation with politicians, civil society organisations and the public throughout the process. The Civil Society Advisory Board was asked to witness the process and provide comments on its neutrality and balance, via three meetings before, during and after the climate assembly. CA8 considered that the civil society organisations could have been engaged earlier and more often to provide more opportunities for input into the design and execution.

5. Comparing Governance across National Climate Assemblies

There has been, broadly, three approaches to structuring governance of a climate assembly:

1. The commissioner appoints an external practitioner organisation to design and deliver the assembly, e.g., Climate Assembly UK and Danish Climate Assembly.
2. The commissioner sets up a secretariat, comprising seconded civil servants, to coordinate to deliver the assembly, e.g., the Scottish and Irish Climate Assemblies.
3. The commissioner appoints a multi-stakeholder group to function as a governance committee, e.g., the French Citizens’ Convention on Climate.

In practice, governance varied within these categories, partly as assemblies learnt lessons from previous processes. This practice-based variance can be characterised by the extent commissioning bodies retain or release control of decision-making to others, and how that changed throughout the process.

5.1 External Practitioners

The commissioners of the climate assemblies of Denmark, Finland, Germany, Jersey, and the UK appointed external practitioner organisations to design and implement the process (in Finland a group of researchers were appointed to this role). However, in practice, decision-making varied within this category:

- Commissioners retain an active role in decision-making
- Commissioners set the scope and supervised decision-making via regular meetings
- Commissioners provided ad hoc advice throughout the process

5.1.1 External Practitioners and Active Commissioners (CAUK)

In the case of CAUK, representatives of the commissioning select committees retained an active role in decision making to ensure the assembly delivered outputs that could be incorporated into their future work, formally, ‘signing off’ decisions made throughout the process. Despite the formal top-down governance structure, in practice, decisions were increasingly made in collaboration with the external practitioners, Involve, and the advisory groups.
According to CA3, decision-making was “deeply collaborative”, where Involve would make and submit proposals to parliament officials, who would review them in consultation with the advisory group. CA3 recalled that Involve “could go and do the work and then ..... come back to them with it, at which point they could object or ask for something different”. CA3 described how the relationship between the parliament officials and Involve changed during the process. During the design phase, parliamentary officials told Involve “that they wanted this thematic structure, so it was easy for the individual committees to pick up” and gave Involve the “number of weekends and this number of people and this thematic approach and here is some indicative questions”. However, during the operational phase, “parliament were quite hands off ..... they just let [Involve] do it” (CA3).

CA3 reflected that the increasingly collaborative relationship between the parliamentary officials, advisory groups and Involve reflected a mutual understanding and respect for their respective areas of expertise “where Involve bought “an understanding of how are citizens assembly works and how to..... step people through information ..... in a logical way ... and the expert leads bought their expertise in the topic of climate change”.

5.1.2 External Practitioners and Supervisory Commissioners (Danish Climate Assembly and German Citizens’ Assembly on Climate)

In the cases of the Danish Climate Assembly and German Citizens’ Assembly on Climate, the commissioners supervised the process via regular meetings with the appointed delivery organisations, where they were consulted on specific decisions throughout the process.

In Denmark, the Planning Group comprising a representative from DBT, a lead civil servant from the Ministry and 5 assembly members “came to be a very important element of the governance” (CA4). Generally, DBT “planned everything”, “had a talk with the ministry about it to ensure that we were on the same line”, and then “checked it with the planning group”. CA4 characterised the planning group as a “good collaboration”, where DBT made proposals and “came up with suggested solutions” which were discussed and mostly accepted by the group. According to CA4, the planning group was “treated .... like you would treat a board ..... you prepare things and you have a suggested solution or two alternatives or something like that. And .... discuss with them and...... decided together”.

In the German Citizens’ Assembly on Climate, the governance roles and responsibilities were formalised by BBK at the start of the process, with design and implementation undertaken by the appointed external delivery organisations. CA8 described the governance of the German climate assembly as “collaborative”, but with defined roles, where “you talk to each other, but, but you are aware that the ultimate say is this person or that group and not the other. You know where you are in the process where you belong to and when you should shut up!”.

The German Citizens’ Assembly on Climate engaged with stakeholders via a Civil Society Advisory Board. However, CA8 considered that “we should have involved them earlier or given more opportunity to make changes”.
5.1.3 External Practitioners and Consultant Commissioners (Finnish Citizens' Jury of Climate Action and Jersey’s Citizens’ Assembly on Climate Change)

In the cases of Finnish Citizens’ Jury of Climate Action and Jersey’s Citizens’ Assembly on Climate Change, the commissioners appointed external organisations to deliver the process and then stepped back, to provide ad hoc advice on request.

The Finnish Citizens’ Jury of Climate Action was unique among national processes, in that it was initiated by academic researchers. Like the German and Danish climate assemblies, the commissioner (Ministry officials), were kept informed of progress via regular meetings, however, in contrast to the German and Danish cases, the commissioners of the Finnish Climate Jury did not actively give instruction or guidance. CA7 reflected that although the Ministry officials “were rather eager to hear from [the organisers]", they seemed unprepared for, and reluctant to provide direction; CA7 commented “there was not so much ownership from the Ministry’s side as there maybe could have been….. they sometimes struggled in putting in the effort”. This lack of ownership from the Ministry officials is perhaps, partly connected with the initiation originating from the researchers (and not the commissioners).

Jersey’s Citizens’ Assembly on Climate Change was commissioned by a government department, who appointed two external organisations, NCP and Involve, to design and deliver the process. Like the Finnish citizens’ Jury “once the process was up and running, the policy team… stepped away”. Like the Finnish case, governance of Jersey's climate assembly was concentrated with the delivery organisations; CA6 reflected that “ultimately, the power …. sat with the external bodies” [NCP and Involve]. However, unlike the Finnish case (and the other CAs led by external practitioners), regular meetings with commissioners were not organised. CA6 considered that the near total surrender of control to the delivery organisations was down to their inexperience having “never organised a process of this nature” and showed “they had placed a lot of trust in these two UK organisations”.

5.2 Secretariats (Ireland’s Citizens’ Assembly and Scotland’s Climate Assembly)

The Irish Citizens’ Assembly 2016-18, commissioned by the Irish Parliament, considered climate change in 2017, three years before Scotland’s Climate Assembly in 2020. The commissioners of both appointed a secretariat, comprising seconded civil servants, to deliver the processes.

In both cases the commissioners (the Irish Parliament and the Scottish Government), stepped back and decision-making was delegated to the secretariat without input from the commissioners, except where the terms of either remit were changed. For example, the order of the topics and allocation of weekends in the Irish assembly were amended, which needed Parliamentary approval. Similarly, the Scottish Government was consulted by the secretariat to approve the decision to move the assembly online (due to Covid-19 restrictions). CA5 was keen to emphasise the independence of Scotland's Climate Assembly from the commissioners, stating that “the Scottish Government didn't influence any of [the secretariat’s] decisions” and CA1 stated that the Irish secretariat were “at arm's length” from the Government. Questions remain though about the extent of independence – after all, as seconded civil servants, the secretariats inevitably bring a particular professional disposition to decision-making. This may have positive implications for ensuring the
needs of government are at the forefront and enabling connections to be made with their colleagues in public administration.

Like most other national climate assemblies, decisions were made in consultation with other stakeholders and external bodies, ensuring wider perspectives are included in decision-making. However, the structure of governance around the Irish and Scottish secretariats varied; the Irish Secretariat was supported by an independent Chair, whereas the Scottish Secretariat was supported by an external practitioner organisation. Formally, decision-making responsibility in Ireland's Citizens' Assembly was held by the Chair, but in practice the Secretariat shared this responsibility; CA1 stated that "everything was in the name of the chair, but in practice the secretariat was doing a lot". In contrast, in the Scottish case "decision making, in practice, was concentrated in the secretariat" but that they "were always informed and advised by others" (CA5).

The secretariats in both cases were supported by expert advisory groups. Scotland's Climate Assembly was also supported by a Stewarding Group, comprising business and political stakeholders, including MSP's. CA1 considered that the legitimacy of Ireland's Citizens' Assembly may have been improved if there were formal mechanisms for including stakeholders (from business and NGOs) in decision making, commenting that: "[the secretariat] was talking to the NGOs ….. was talking to business, but it wasn’t formalised, and I think having a structure to show outwardly that you’re having those conversations would probably be, you know, probably be a good thing".

The formalisation of governance between the Irish and Scottish cases differed. Governance of the Irish assembly was formalised and maintained across the five topics: the governance structure and individuals' roles within those arrangements were well established when the assembly considered climate change. According to CA1, "there was a whole set of protocols and procedures in place; it was a quite well-oiled machine by the time they got to climate change". In contrast, governance of Scotland's Climate Assembly was "never really… formalised", which CA5 felt “forced [the secretariat] to be collaborative and consensual” in its approach to decision making with the other bodies. But it also meant that when there were tensions in the Stewarding Group which led to the resignation of Extinction Rebellion (XR).

5.3 Multi-stakeholder governance committee (French Citizens' Convention on the Climate)

Reflecting a particular perspective on how to ensure independence, a multi-stakeholder group that represented a diversity of perspectives and interests formed the Governance Committee of the French CCC. However, according to CA2, the representation of diverse political views and interests, as well as the number of people on the Governance Committee, hampered decision-making process; “we had too many chiefs, too many people discussing the theory of things and not enough people doing things”. According to CA2, despite being led by two co-chairs, the Governance Committee lacked someone that could have the final say: “we didn’t have a secretariat, that’s a problem”. This situation was compounded by a lack of trust between some of the organisations represented on the Governance Committee, as well as a lack of role definition. CA2 commented that "when we started there was no trust between the people from civil society and the ESEC people. Basically, everything was a negotiation."
Decision-making control was retained by the Governance Committee throughout the process. According to CA2 "the governance committee … was the centre of power [of decision-making]" and did not relinquish control to the facilitation teams during the operational phase. CA2 commented that this accumulation of power in the Governance Committee was "super challenging for them [the facilitation team]". Decision-making during the operational phase was eased by the inclusion of Convention members in the regular Governance Committee meetings. CA2 commented that they were often able to break deadlocks between Committee members.

6. Future network activities

The findings of the briefing suggest several avenues for further network activity in relation to governance:

- More research is needed to understand the effect of different governance arrangements, in particular the role of the commissioner and the extent to which this affects both the responsiveness of assemblies to policy needs and perceived independence and legitimacy.
- Further analysis is required on how different governance actors are selected, in particular membership of both expert and stakeholder advisory bodies.
- Analysis of governance can be extended by including arrangements of further national climate assemblies as they are completed (e.g. Austria, Luxembourg and Spain), along with insights from assemblies at other governance levels.

7. Research methods

This study was completed using mixed methods, comprising: a rapid desk review of assembly reports and websites to collate information about the governance structures at each climate assembly; and targeted interviews to clarify the relationship between different governance actors and bodies and assess the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Only one governance actor per assembly was interviewed – further research should extend the pool of perspective.

8. Bibliography

N.B. Reports and website pages for the national assemblies are not listed. Links to official websites can be found at https://knoca.eu/national-climate-assemblies/
