

# Impact evaluation framework for climate assemblies

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This draft impact evaluation framework has been prepared for the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA) with funding from the European Climate Foundation. It is currently being applied in a number of settings, from which lessons will be drawn to improve the framework. A KNOCA workshop will be organised in early 2023 to consider revisions in light of this evidence and ideas from the broader KNOCA community.

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## 1. Introduction

Climate assemblies have a wide range of potential impacts on policy, public engagement and civil society. Indeed, without meaningful impact arising from climate assemblies, there is little value in them beyond being a tick-box exercise. Despite recent enthusiasm for instigating climate deliberation, there has however been little consistency or clarity on what they are supposed to accomplish, or the processes by which this takes place. There is need to understand the different types of impacts and how they may come about (i.e., pathways to impact), so that climate assemblies can reach their full potential.

Work as part of KNOCA and elsewhere is starting to describe the different facets of impact for climate assemblies. For example, previous analysis has mapped different climate impact pathways for assemblies including those relating to policy and legislative outcomes, political engagement and the democratic process, as well as media coverage and wider public discourse and engagement<sup>1</sup>. Other projects have examined policy actors' perception of climate assemblies or analysed key drivers of impact<sup>2</sup>. Together these projects are starting to build a picture of what impacts can be achieved and how they are related to decisions and actors involved in organising and running a climate assembly process.

The evaluation of climate deliberation processes – including how well assembly members are engaged and the quality of deliberation – has been able to build on wider work in deliberative democracy and established best practice guidelines<sup>3</sup>. This work is important, but tends to focus on process, with only limited consideration of impacts<sup>4</sup>. Where impacts are considered, they may be based on generic or topic-neutral criteria (e.g. change in assembly member attitudes). In order for climate assemblies to be valuable with respect to *climate change*, there is a need to understand whether and how they can exert influence across climate governance, citizen engagement with the climate crisis, and civil society's capacity to advance climate action. As part of this, it is necessary to

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<sup>1</sup> Thorman, D. and Capstick, S. (2022) Planning and assessing the impact and legacy of climate assemblies? KNOCA Briefing No.4. <https://knoca.eu/the-legacy-and-impact-of-climate-assemblies/>

<sup>2</sup> See KNOCA Guidance <https://knoca.eu/guidance/> and Briefings <https://knoca.eu/knoca-briefings/>

<sup>3</sup> Elstub, S., Farrell, D. M., Carrick, J., and Mockler, P. (2021) Evaluation of Climate Assembly UK, Newcastle: Newcastle University. This detailed evaluation of the UK Climate Assembly focussed primarily on process, with some consideration of its impacts on Parliament, policy, the public and media.

<sup>4</sup> OECD (2021). Evaluation guidelines for representative deliberative processes. [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/evaluation-guidelines-for-representative-deliberative-processes\\_10ccbcb-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/evaluation-guidelines-for-representative-deliberative-processes_10ccbcb-en)

be alert to collecting appropriate data that can enable the tracing of impacts and impact pathways in the climate domain.

We present an impact evaluation framework for climate assemblies, which is designed to help those commissioning and designing climate assemblies – as well as parties independent of and external to them – to evaluate potential impacts before, during and after an assembly process. The framework is intended to provide a level of standardization for the purposes of collection and application of data in order to better understand how impacts unfold over time, and how impacts relate to the design and broader context of climate assemblies.

### 1.1 Overall approach

In an ideal scenario, a climate assembly has the potential to have far-reaching impacts in many aspects of climate action. There is the opportunity for such a process to influence laws and policies, to help shape public discourse and discussion, and even to reshape the nature of the involvement of citizens in securing a fairer and low-carbon society. It is important for those evaluating climate assemblies to be aware of the breadth of impacts that can be achieved.

Just as there are a diversity of impacts that can arise from climate assemblies, there are a variety of methods and approaches applicable to tracking and attributing impact. At the same time, one of the main challenges for any evaluation of impact will be the detection of specific impacts arising from the process, in a way that connects these directly to climate assembly processes and recommendations.

There are limits to any attempt to disentangle the threads of cause and effect from the many other influences on climate action. For example, while there is a legitimate role for deliberative processes in helping to inform and shape public debate, there are known to be numerous influences upon how climate action is understood and acted upon<sup>5</sup>. Drawing out the precise influence of a climate assembly, and separating this from the myriad other influences, will inevitably entail a degree of uncertainty and estimation. This is particularly the case for the detection of longer-term and wider-ranging impacts, as compared to more immediate and discrete outcomes.

The evaluation of a climate assembly may choose to emphasise or exclude certain types of impact. It is likely that particular attention will be directed towards assessing whether the original aims and objectives of a deliberative process have been met – typically, in terms of an intention to influence policymaking. At the same time, it is important to be alert to the broad range of possible impacts that can emerge from any climate assembly. In particular, there is growing interest in how climate assemblies can influence the ways in which climate change is treated in the media and among civil society groups, such as increasing the recognition of citizen views in climate action. Even with a principal focus on policy responses, the wider societal contexts for climate action are important for providing impetus or impediments to certain courses of action.

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<sup>5</sup> Capstick, S., Whitmarsh, L., Poortinga, W., Pidgeon, N., & Upham, P. (2015). International trends in public perceptions of climate change over the past quarter century. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 6(1), 35-61.

## 2. Conceptualising and categorising impacts

This section proposes a framework for categorizing potential impacts from climate assemblies, which can then be used as a basis for any evaluation of those impacts. The proposed categories are interconnected and overlapping, but attempt to structure possible impacts so they can be more systematically evaluated.

### 2.1 Dimensions of impact

The framework includes two dimensions of impact, which are briefly described below, followed by a more detailed description of possible impacts. Table 1 summarises the categories of impact that arise from combining these two dimensions.

#### Dimension 1 (areas of impact): Policy, social and systemic

The first dimension relates to different areas in which climate assemblies may have impact, as identified in previous KNOCA work. This dimension is made up of three categories. Policy impacts cover effects of climate assemblies on policy and political discourse. Social impacts cover effects on public discourse and broader societal engagement with climate change. These policy and social impacts category are predominantly separated by each focusing on the effects on a particular set of key actors, namely policy-makers and other societal actors with roles and responsibilities to address climate change. A third category captures more systemic impacts. These been included as a separate category to highlight impacts of climate assemblies at the system level.

There are two areas of systemic change relevant to an evaluation of the impacts of climate assemblies. First, there is the potential for change to be brought about in democratic and decision-making structures; this could incorporate a shift in the ways in which decisions are taken, with an increased emphasis and capacity for deliberative approaches and public engagement. Even in parts of the world which have seen substantial investment of time and resources in climate assemblies, these remain largely an exception to mainstream responses to the climate crisis, but over time it is possible that there may be a more enduring move towards such approaches in policy and civil society. Where a climate assembly contributes to this broad-based change, it may be considered a ‘systemic’ impact.

In addition, systemic change might also relate to more foundational aspects of society – including for example challenges to current economic paradigms (including consumer capitalism), national constitutions, or the relationship between citizens and the state. Clearly, all of these are deep-rooted aspects of society which are slow to change – and are highly unlikely to shift only on the basis of a climate assembly. There may however be instances where there may be impacts of climate assemblies upon thinking and practices in relation to these topic areas.

#### Dimension 2 (type of impact): Instrumental, conceptual and capacity-building

The second dimension includes different types of impact, adapted from impact evaluation frameworks in research<sup>6</sup> and public engagement<sup>7</sup>. This dimension also includes three categories of impact: instrumental, conceptual and capacity-building. *Instrumental impacts* are changes to how things work or what happens. This encompasses effects on policy, behaviour and practices of key organisations, institutions and actors. *Conceptual impacts* are changes to how something is thought about. This encompasses changes to knowledge, understanding and attitudes of key actors. *Capacity-building impacts* are changes to the skills, ability and confidence of key actors within climate

<sup>6</sup> E.g., <https://www.ukri.org/councils/esrc/impact-toolkit-for-economic-and-social-sciences/defining-impact/>

<sup>7</sup> E.g., [https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/evaluating\\_your\\_public\\_engagement\\_work.pdf](https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/publication/evaluating_your_public_engagement_work.pdf)

governance. Each of these impact categories will be examined in more depth in the following sections.

### Assumptions

The impact evaluation framework assumes that climate deliberation processes are not held as purely hypothetical exercises, but that commissioning bodies have (or should have) particular aims in mind. This framework does not make assumptions about which aims are more or less desirable, but it seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of possible impacts that could be aimed for, and provides guidance on how to evaluate whether the impacts are being achieved.

Furthermore, a main argument for climate deliberation is that it is able to raise ambition and lead to more effective policy measures and climate action in line with internationally agreed emission reduction target. The impact evaluation framework has been developed in the context of this argument, focusing on impacts relating to the advancement of climate policy and action (rather than, for example, debate the existence of climate change and whether something should be done about it at all). However, the framework does not make assumptions about particular types of action being preferable over others. Higher-level impacts are also presented in terms of effects or changes, rather than specifying the direction of a change to account for both positive effects (e.g., increased trust) and negative effects (e.g. decreased trust) on climate action.

**Table 1.** Potential impacts of climate assemblies

<p style="text-align: right;">Type of impact →</p> <p style="text-align: left;">Area of impact ↓</p>	<p><b>Instrumental impacts:</b> <i>Changes to how things work and what happens: policies, behaviour, practice</i></p>	<p><b>Conceptual impacts:</b> <i>Changes to how people think: knowledge, understanding, attitudes</i></p>	<p><b>Capacity-building impacts:</b> <i>Changes to what people do: skills development, ability, confidence</i></p>
<p><b>Policy: Effects on public policy and political decision-making</b> Key actors: policy-makers, politicians, parliamentarians, civil servants, advisory bodies</p>	<p>Changes to climate policy and legislation, and resulting climate action</p> <p>Changes to political debate/positions on climate change and climate action</p>	<p>Changes to policy-makers knowledge and understanding of diverse public perspectives on climate policy issues</p> <p>Changes to policy-makers understanding of and attitudes towards climate change and climate action</p> <p>Clarification of roles and responsibilities for climate action</p>	<p>Capacity-building focused on specific climate recommendations and policy areas</p> <p>Capacity-building to improve understanding of and integrating public perspectives into climate policy</p> <p>Changes to (or new) political coalitions, networks, or cross-party collaborations</p>
<p><b>Social: Effects on public discourse and public, business and civil society engagement</b> Key actors: public, media, businesses and third-sector organisations</p>	<p>Changes to public climate action/behaviour change</p> <p>Changes to media practices and coverage on climate issues and action</p> <p>Changes to climate policies and practices in businesses and organisations</p>	<p>Changes to key actors’ knowledge and understanding of diverse perspectives on climate policy issues</p> <p>Changes to key actors understanding of and attitudes towards climate change and climate action</p> <p>Clarification of roles and responsibilities for climate action</p>	<p>Capacity-building in the media to support new formats and ways of communicating about climate change (and public perspectives)</p> <p>Capacity-building within business and third-sector organisations to support new climate action initiatives</p> <p>Capacity-building focused on enabling key groups in society to participate in decision-making</p>
<p><b>Systemic: Effects on democratic systems and systems-thinking</b></p>	<p>Changes to democratic systems/forms of governance</p> <p>Systems-thinking embedded in decision-making and governance</p>	<p>Changes to understanding of and attitudes towards the use of deliberative processes</p> <p>Changes to understanding of climate change as challenging more foundational aspects of society</p> <p>Increased trust and sense of empowerment among public</p>	<p>Capacity-building focused on the use of deliberative processes and new forms of governance</p> <p>Capacity-building focused on addressing climate change from a systems perspective</p>

## 2.2 Descriptions of impact categories

The following sections provide more detailed descriptions of the impact dimensions and categorised outlined in section 2.1. These descriptions are organised by type of impact (dimension 2) but cover impacts across policy, social and systemic areas (dimension 1).

### 2.2.1 Instrumental impacts

Instrumental impacts encompass effects on policies, practices and behaviours within the broad impact categories of policy, social and systemic change. Changes to policy and legislation encompass a wide-variety of potential effects on the entire policy cycle from agenda setting to implementation and evaluation. Also captured within this category are changes to political debate, strategies, and positions. The type of changes will depend, in part, on the topic and focus of the particular assembly process, and the resulting recommendations. This may involve policy change to what should be done (e.g., ban petrol cars by 2035) or how something is done (e.g., considering vulnerable groups in climate policy-making).

Instrumental impacts within the broad category of social impacts capture effects on public discourse and wider societal engagement across a number of actors. Changes in media policies and practice may include changes to practices that result in changes to the amount and type of coverage; examples that have been discussed in relation to climate assemblies include using more expert advice, utilising new narratives and formats of communication, enabling more voices to be represented or more actively countering disinformation

Businesses and third-sector organisations may also change their policies and practice in response to recommendations from a climate assembly. The specific change will depend on the type of organisation, but changes may relate to specific climate actions (e.g., a business trials the use of eco-labelling as a result of an assemblies recommendation) or more generally affect an organisation's approaches for communicating, campaigning or advocacy.

This category also captures effects on assembly members and the wider general public, who might alter their behaviour in response to the climate assembly and its outputs. For example, assembly members may go on to change private sphere behaviour (e.g., changing travel modes for work) or public sphere behaviour (e.g., joining climate protests, setting up a new NGO for climate communication). There may also be similar direct changes to the behaviour of the wider public, especially if climate assemblies are accompanied by engagement and communication strategies that are designed to reach out beyond assembly members.

Instrumental impacts in the area of systemic change may involve changes to the decision-making systems and governance structures. These changes may go beyond climate policy specifically to affect democratic systems more widely. The first type of change relates to using more deliberative and participatory forms of climate governance, thus increasing participation in democratic processes and enabling diverse groups to engage with and inform (climate) decision-making. For example, government or civil society organisations may emulate the assembly or set up similar deliberative or other engagement processes to feed into their decision making. In the longer-term, this may result in deliberative processes being used more routinely, becoming institutionalised, and potentially shifting power dynamics away from existing lobby influences.

A second type of change to climate governance and decision-making structures relates to embedding of systems-thinking, therefore enabling transformative solutions to emerge that do not only address emission reduction but also a number of related and interconnected social challenges.

### 2.2.2 Conceptual impacts

Conceptual impacts encompass changes to thinking by key actors including changes to knowledge, understanding and attitudes. Key actors in policy include those involved in policy-making such as civil servants, politicians, or councillors, etc. In the social impact category key societal actors include journalists and editors, and those working with and for relevant businesses and third-sector organisations.

The type of change in thinking by key actors may differ across assembly processes and context, and also depends on existing knowledge, understanding and attitudes. However, there are four general effects that evaluators of assembly processes may look out for:

First, there may be changes to understanding of, and attitudes towards, public perspectives and experiences. The nature of the change can be wide-ranging, but may include for example better understanding of what people want to see happen, or greater awareness of different groups in society and how their experiences and beliefs differ. It may also lead to correcting of misperceptions of about public perspectives on climate issues, for example that people are not willing to change their behaviours in response to the climate emergency.

Second, climate assembly process and their recommendations may also clarify existing or new roles and responsibilities, including strengthening existing roles but also creating new perspectives on what action government, business and other organisations can take (e.g., providing vision and leadership, coordinating societal action, etc.). As such, climate assembly process may result in a stronger social mandate for action, and affecting confidence levels (e.g., among politicians) to act on climate change.

Third, conceptual thinking may arise in views about climate policy and possible solutions. Climate assembly discussions and recommendations may provide policy-makers or other actors with a change in perspectives on what climate policy is suitable and desirable, or it may provide new and creative solutions for difficult trade-offs. This may also include a better understanding of how climate systems and solutions are interconnected with other societal challenges to enable a more systems approach to finding solutions, potentially challenging more foundational aspects of society, e.g., economic structures (systemic impacts).

Finally, changes to knowledge, understanding, and attitudes towards the use of deliberative and participatory processes and how they may be useful for including diverse perspectives in decision-making, may also arise. Observing or even participating in climate assembly processes has the potential to influence key stakeholders to improve their understanding of the opportunities (and limitations) of deliberative approaches such as climate assemblies, and how they may relate to other forms of evidence gathering and decision-making.

Conceptual impacts among assembly members and the wider general public are also relevant within this dimension of impacts. This may include changes to awareness, knowledge, perceptions or attitudes towards climate change, the assembly or specific policies and recommendations discussed within the assembly. Changes in understanding and perceptions may also relate to political decision-making and their own role in mitigating and adapting to climate change. In terms of systemic impacts, it has been suggested that climate assemblies can lead to changes in trust in the wider democratic system, and climate decision-making more specifically; and it may instil a sense of (dis)empowerment among different groups in society that they can influence the decision-making process.

### 2.2.3 Capacity-building impacts

Capacity-building impacts capture a number of changes that improve skills, confidence and resources to enable key actors and organisations/institutions to help address the recommendations from the assembly and delivery climate action.

Capacity-building may relate to any of the changes discussed under conceptual and instrumental impacts – for example they may relate to improving understanding of deliberative processes and how to use them, driving forward specific recommendations, or supporting key actors across political and social spheres to better understand public perspectives on climate policy.

Generally, speaking capacity-building can take many forms but the most often cited examples include training and mentorships that focus on skill development, setting up networks and partnerships to exchange knowledge and pool resources, and creating new roles and positions to enable more effective working.

For example, in government or related organisations, this might include setting up a series of workshops for supporting the use of policy recommendations from a climate assembly, setting up new training programmes in the use of deliberative methods, or creating new positions that address specific policy recommendations (e.g., on social justice and climate change). In the political sphere, new political coalitions, networks or cross-party collaborations may be set-up in response to a climate assembly.

In media circles, examples may include new networks or training that facilitate the development of new formats for communicating public perspectives on climate action. Business and organisations may set up similar training, mentorships, networks or positions to support new policies and practices that they want to take forward as a result of assembly recommendations. This may include setting up new coalitions, groups or partnerships to exchange knowledge and resources on a particular issue, or to hold government account thus increasing advocacy around climate action.

Capacity-building may also focus on members of the public, or specific groups in society (e.g. young people, marginalised communities) to gain skills, knowledge and confidence to participate in decision-making more widely. These initiatives may be set up by members of the public themselves (e.g. former assembly members organise community engagement initiatives) or by government or civil society organisations which aim to empower civil society to participate in social and political initiatives (e.g. by providing advice, resources, training and other forms of support). Capacity-building may also be achieved through changes in education programmes or initiatives that reach wider population groups over a longer time frame.

### 3. Evaluating impacts

The previous section has broadly outlined the breadth of potential impacts of climate assemblies. In addition to understanding what impact is possible, it is also important to understand the nature of that impact. This section raises a number of important considerations for impact evaluations of climate assemblies, briefly discusses data collection methods, and proposes a systematic approach for evaluating climate assembly impacts.

#### 3.1 Important considerations for evaluating impacts

##### 3.1.1 Evaluating change over time

Any effects of climate assemblies are likely to evolve over time, starting with more immediate, short-term outcomes that are often directly linked to assembly processes and their outputs, which then might lead to longer-term impacts and enduring changes over time (e.g., legacies). It is therefore important to evaluate whether short-term impacts are leading to more longer-term significant change (see next section 3.1.2), but also whether any identified changes in short term are sustained over the longer term.

For instrumental impacts, this means evaluating whether short-term outcomes (e.g., amended policy proposals) actually lead to longer-term impacts (e.g., actual change in policy), and whether these policies are further amended or change over time (e.g. watered down or revoked). Similarly, short-term media coverage is likely to focus on the climate assembly and its recommendations, but long-term media coverage may not change substantially. Assembly members may change behaviours as a result of taking part in the assembly process, but this change may not last or it may actually lead to further behaviour change in the long-term (e.g., behavioural spillover).

For conceptual impacts, short-term outcomes are likely to focus on specific individuals who may make statements (e.g., in speeches, editorials, interviews) that reference their change in thinking. Attitudes of key actors may also be detected in surveys pre and post the assembly. Demonstrable change in emphasis in political or parliamentary speeches and debates may also be a sign that a climate assembly has changed thinking among policy-makers. In the longer-term, there may be further shifts in thinking (or people may revert back to their original positions) or any impact becomes more far-reaching (e.g., a senior civil servant influences departmental wide thinking, assembly members influence their communities, editors influence journalists in their organisations).

For capacity-building impacts, it is also important to examine to what extent any new capacity that was created in the short-term is maintained, weakened or strengthened and/or expanded or contracted. For example, new networks or partnerships may be created to improve an organisation's ability to address specific recommendations from the assembly, but then dissolved a few months later. In contrast, new training programmes may be rolled out to wider groups within institutions, and funding may be increased to account for continued training needs.

Given the importance of assessing how outcomes and impacts of climate assemblies change over time, it is important to collect data at multiple time points to enable tracking over time. At the very least, evaluations should reflect on the time point(s) when they are carried out. This allows for reflection of what impacts are likely to have (or have not) occurred and whether any long-term changes can be detected. If there are not enough resources for an evaluation to go beyond assessing short-term outcomes of a climate assembly, evaluations should be as transparent as possible to enable further tracking of impacts over time by other parties.

Ideally, evaluations collect data before, during and after a climate assembly process. Collecting data prior to the process is particularly important for making claims about 'changes' and attributing influence. While it is possible to rely on self-reported perceptions and recollection of change, these

are less reliable and should be corroborated by other data sources. There may also be challenges in collecting information from other sources post-hoc, for example if previous policy documents or mission statements have been removed from websites and replaced with newer versions.

### **3.1.2 Significance and reach**

Significance and reach are two evaluative criteria currently being used by UK Research and Innovation to assess impacts arising out of research activities. These criteria are also useful for evaluating impacts from climate assemblies.

Significance relates to how important the impact is. In the context of climate assemblies, this might include evaluating to what extent any impacts are actually having effects on climate action. This might include evaluating whether short-term outcomes do in fact lead to long-term changes – it could be argued that if impacts do not go beyond short-term outcomes, impacts of climate assemblies are relatively limited in terms of its effect on climate action. Evaluating significance may also mean that the effectiveness of any changes is assessed – for example a government may introduce a new policy that responds to a recommendation from a climate assembly, but the policy is ineffective in changing actual practices and behaviour.

Reach is about how far reaching an impact is. What is considered ‘far reaching’ will, to some extent, depend on the remit of the climate assembly and its sphere of influence. For example, an assembly that focuses on a specific region’s climate policies and action, would expect to have impact predominantly within that geographic region, whereas a national assembly might be evaluated in terms of its impact on national policy or public discourse. Important here is to consider the potential reach of the assembly and evaluate impacts against this. For example, an evaluation might consider whether one politician’s attitudes towards public perspectives have changed, or whether it’s lead to a change in thinking of an entire governing council. Similarly, one assembly member may have changed their behaviour as a result of taking part in a climate assembly, but this would be an example of limited reach unless there is evidence to show many other assembly members have been impacted in similar ways. Reach may also be considered in terms of policy remit. It is possible that significant changes are detected for a specific policy area (e.g., a new law banning petrol cars in a city centre which leads to detectable reduction in car use among the local population), but others are completely ignored. Alternatively, the assembly may have impacts beyond the specific remit it has been given.

It might be argued that the most significant and far-reaching impact of climate assemblies would include changes to practices and behaviours of people and organisations that result in reduced carbon emissions, changes to social norms and culture that emphasise low-carbon living, and changes to structures and systems that support the emergence of sustainable societies. While perhaps desirable to achieve these long-term impacts, they are also very hard to demonstrate in practice.

### **3.1.3 Direct vs indirect effects and contextual factors**

A further consideration when evaluating impacts from climate assembly, and tracing their influence, is the recognition of direct and indirect effects on climate policy and societal engagement. This also highlights the interconnected nature of the impact categories in the framework. For example, specific recommendations from an assembly process may lead to policy change directly, and/or climate assemblies may change the thinking of third-sector organisations that go on to form new coalitions that apply pressure to government, which then leads to policy change. In the latter example, conceptual and capacity-building (social) impacts came prior to instrumental (policy) impacts. The reverse may also occur, for example a policy recommendation from a climate assembly may lead to policy change, which in turn leads to changes in social norms.

It is also important to recognise and account for contextual factors that may influence the extent to which climate assemblies can have impact. Changes to policies, behaviours or systems are complex

and multi-faceted phenomena to which whole disciplines are devoted and it is unlikely that climate assemblies alone are going to lead to such changes. Therefore, it is important to understand and capture the context in which impacts are (or are not) occurring, especially when evaluating longer-term impacts rather than just short-term outcomes. The aim is not to understand the full set of influences, but to better trace the specific impact of climate assemblies in addition to other factors that may make impacts more or less likely.

Contextual information is particularly important for understanding pathways to impact; for example, some policy impacts may be more or less likely depending on the political context at the time. Similarly, broader societal engagement is more likely to occur if climate assemblies are able to link up with existing engagement activities<sup>8</sup>.

### 3.1.4 Tracing influence from short-term outcomes to long-term impacts

Linking short-term outcomes to the climate assembly process is likely to be easier than tracing this influence in the longer-term and potentially more significant and far-reaching impacts. This is because any short-term outcomes are much more likely to make direct reference to the climate assembly and its outputs<sup>9</sup>. Tracing references to outputs and mentions of the climate assembly (e.g. through google analytics) is likely to be a useful technique for capturing any short-term outcomes, but may become less so for tracing influence on longer-term impacts.

Examples of short-term outcomes relating to potential instrumental impacts may include official responses from governmental departments and advisory bodies, or other civil society organisations, mention in debates, speeches or press releases, or announcement of new inquiries, or planned changes to policies, strategies or missions. Assembly members might also participate in interviews referring to behaviour change, and the media is likely to report directly on the assembly process and its outputs. Short-term outcomes relating to potential conceptual impacts are likely to focus on specific individuals who may make statements (e.g., in speeches, editorials, interviews) that reference their change in thinking. Demonstrable change in emphasis in political or parliamentary speeches and debates may also be a sign that a climate assembly has changed thinking among policy-makers.

Tracing references to the climate assembly and its outputs is, however, limited because it likely misses out key stakeholders that are not vocal about the influence the assembly has had on them and their organisations. There may also be less obvious effects on communities, media, businesses or organisations in the form of internal conversations that trigger reflection on their visions, strategies, policies or practices in light of the climate assembly. These will be harder to capture with tracing outputs; thus it is important to supplement with additional data collection methods. Section 3.2 presents a number of standard data collection methods that may be useful for this purpose.

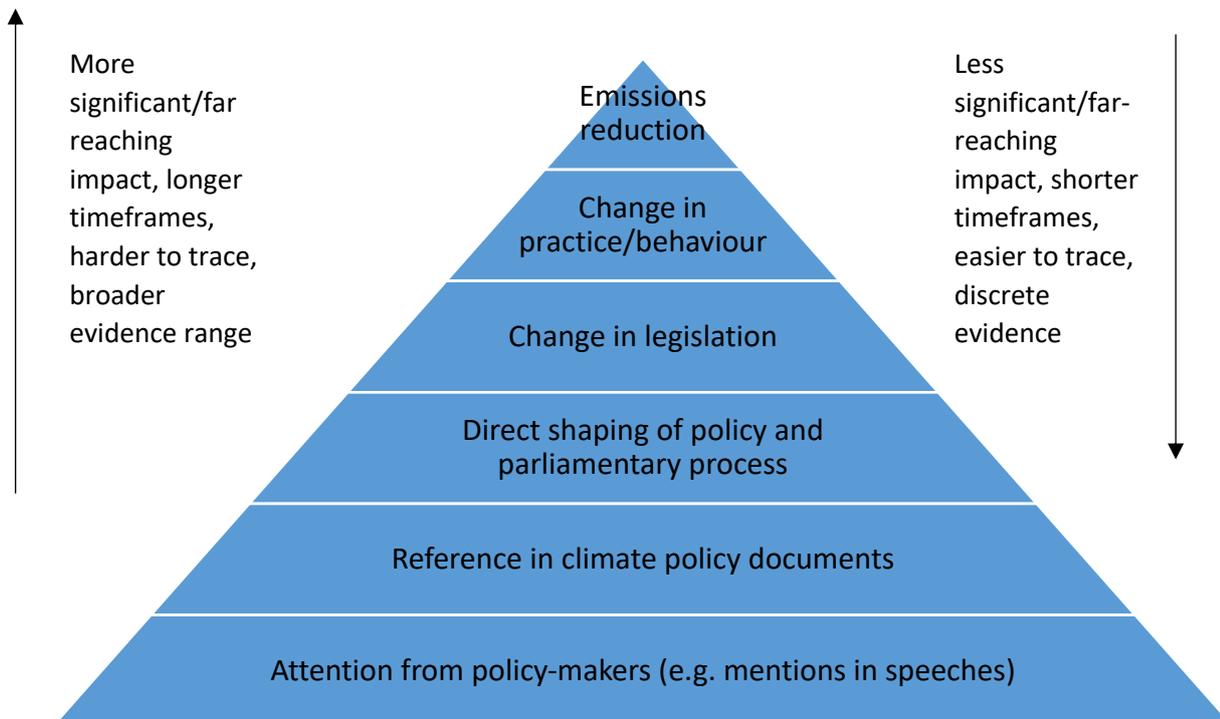
Figure 1 illustrates an example of instrumental policy impact from short-term outcomes (at the bottom) to long-term significant and far-reaching impacts (at the top). Towards the top of the pyramid, it becomes much harder to trace the influence of climate assembly because there are a very large number of other influences unfolding over long time periods. It may be possible in some cases to follow threads of logic to track a process of influence over time – but any such evaluation of impact will inevitably heavily caveated and uncertain.

For particular cases, if a climate assembly can be shown to have led directly to changes such as new law or novel types of citizen engagement – and this in turn has brought about emissions reduction in a sector such as transport or diet – then there may be some careful justification for attributing impact

<sup>8</sup> Cite Eva’s report when published and include further details if appropriate.

<sup>9</sup> What is considered an output of an assembly process may be subject to debate, but this is likely to include at the very least the assemblies’ recommendations, associated reports, press releases, and materials and resources published on accompanying websites.

at this level. Given the complexities of detecting such a change, however, multiple sources of evidence and interrogation of data would be required to make even a cautious claim in this regard.



**Figure 1.** Example of tracing influence of a climate assembly from initial attention to emission reduction.

When tracing influence of climate assemblies on long-term impacts, evaluators should also be mindful of bias that may attenuate or exaggerate any influence, i.e., instances of wishful thinking, creative accounting and post hoc story telling. This might occur because people have vested interests (e.g. interviewees want to paint the assembly in a positive/negative light) but may also occur unconsciously because people seek to make sense of what caused a particular change. Being aware of such biases is particularly important when there is missing data (e.g., no pre-assembly data) or evaluations are relying on self-reported/perceived changes. To counteract these possible biases, it is recommended that evaluators look for corroborating evidence, triangulating across a number of data sources, while also examining alternative explanations (e.g., by asking if a particular change would have happened even without the assembly, looking for negative as well as positive examples), and capturing as much contextual data as possible to ascertain what other external factors made the impact in question more or less likely.

### 3.1.5 Independence in evaluation

Because of the subtleties involved in detecting and attributing impact to climate assemblies, it is advisable that those carrying out an evaluation have no real or perceived conflict of interest. Ideally, any evaluation process should be fully independent from those organisations and individuals commissioning, designing, carrying out, or affected by the outcomes of a climate assembly.

Assessing the impact of a climate assembly should be alert to the beneficial outcomes of the process for climate action. At the same time, evaluation should also be mindful of any unintended adverse consequences. There exists the potential in some cases for raised expectations to be unfulfilled or for a backlash to be prompted as a result of certain recommendations, or simply due to a reaction against the nature of the process.

For these reasons, evaluators who are separate from other aspects of a climate assembly are in a better position to assert their findings, than are those who are intimately invested in the success of process.

### **3.1.6 Relevant expertise**

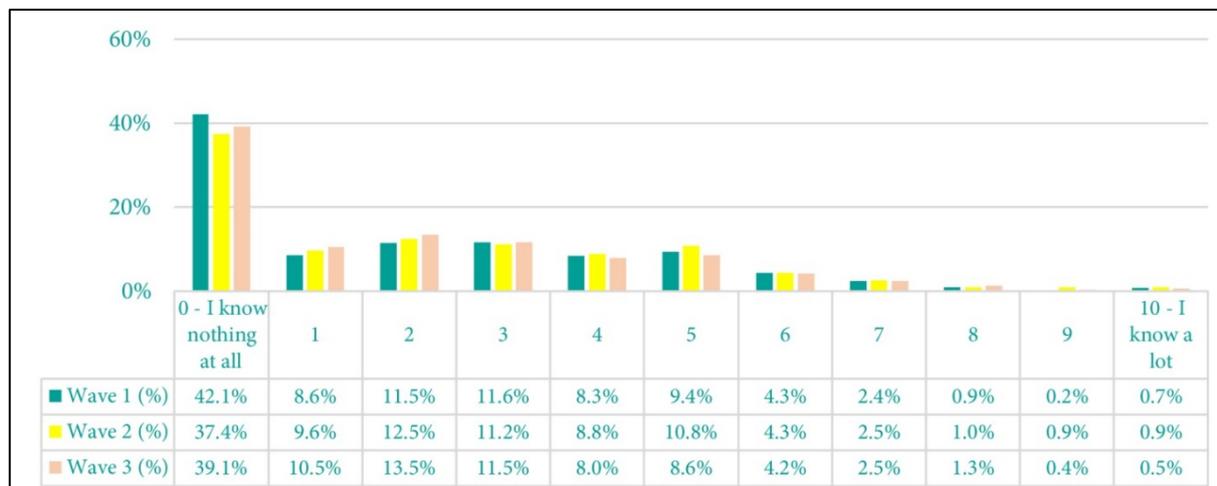
A comprehensive evaluation is a project that involves collecting and analysing evidence using a range of methods to ascertain potential influences of climate assemblies across society. Thus, any evaluation should include or consult subject expertise not only on the methodological aspects, but also in relevant disciplines that seek to understand policy, behaviour and organisational change, as well as public engagement and deliberative democracy. Such experts will be able to advise more precisely on what impacts might be expected and how to assess them (e.g. environmental psychologist can help decide what psychological constructs to include on a public attitudes survey; policy analyst can help decide who to interview in government and what questions to include in an interview protocol).

### 3.2 Methods for data collection and analysis

Previous attempts to track the impact of climate assemblies – and citizen assemblies more broadly – have drawn on a range of evidence sources to do so. Some of the evidence and methods that can be used are outlined below. These are intended to reflect some of the more commonly used and useful techniques, rather than to be an exhaustive set of approaches.

#### 3.2.1 Survey questionnaires

Survey questionnaires are widely used for gauging attitudes and perceptions of relevance to climate action. Representative surveys of the general public can be used to assess basic awareness of a climate assembly and the means by which people have encountered information about it. In order to assess any change in awareness, baseline data survey data should be collected wherever possible in advance of an assembly, with a comparable survey run again after an assembly has taken place. This was done by the team evaluating the UK Climate Assembly (Elstub et al., 2021); Figure 2 is reproduced from their report, showing the extent of knowledge among the wider UK public of the UK Climate Assembly over three waves.



**Figure 2.** UK public awareness of the Climate Assembly

In principle, it should be possible also to gauge any changes in attitudes among the general population over the time period of a climate assembly – including with respect to specific policy proposals or perceptions of climate change. In addition to assessing basic awareness of an assembly over time, such an approach has previously been adopted for both the French and UK climate assemblies<sup>10</sup>; however, it is likely to be extremely difficult to attribute any change in views pre/post a climate assembly to the process itself, rather than to other factors or chance variation. More indirect measures, such as changes in behaviour, are practically not possible to assess as a result of a climate assembly due to large numbers of confounding factors.

Survey questionnaires have also been widely used to assess changes in attitudes of assembly members themselves, including whether they have become more or less supportive of action on

<sup>10</sup> Adrien Fabre, Bénédicte Apouey, Thomas Douenne, Jean-Michel Fourniau, Louis-Gaëtan Giraudet, et al.. Who Are the Citizens of the French Convention for Climate?. 2021. ffhshs-03265053f  
 Elstub, S., Farrell, D. M., Carrick, J., and Mockler, P. (2021) Evaluation of Climate Assembly UK, Newcastle: Newcastle University.

climate change. These types of measures are typically included in evaluations of assemblies themselves (i.e., the assembly process) but can also be useful where there is an interest in assessing the impact of a climate assembly on those participating in it.

A further potential use of surveys is in the assessment of stakeholder views in relation to a climate assembly. Depending upon the focus of an impact evaluation, there may be interest in gauging views among policy-makers or other actors in civil society, for example concerning their awareness of a process or on the perceived value of an assembly. Substantial caution should be exercised in the use of any measures relying on post-hoc self-reporting of views, however, unless this can be validated or supported by other data such as interviews or document analysis.

Survey questionnaires are most often applied to obtain quantitative measures (e.g., a percentage of people holding a certain view). In cases where percentages are compared over time or between measures, it is necessary to be confident that these are outside specified margin of error in order to be meaningful. Questionnaires can also be used to obtain short open-ended perceptions, where survey participants enter text to a simple question.

In addition to the use of bespoke surveys to assess attitudes, evaluation may in some cases be supplemented by pre-existing surveys of public perceptions, such as the European Social Survey<sup>11</sup> or research carried out by agencies such as Eurobarometer<sup>12</sup>.

### 3.2.2 Interviews and focus groups

While questionnaires can be useful for assessing the extent to which certain views are held, qualitative approaches are more appropriate for appraising specialist and stakeholder perspectives on the impacts of climate assemblies. Previous research has considered the viewpoints of assembly organisers, expert practitioners, civil servants, assembly members themselves, and among academic researchers in the fields of climate change and deliberative democracy.

Previous evaluations of climate assemblies have spoken directly to individuals from each of these groups. In cases where there is an interest in assessing potential impact across wider civil society, it may also be advantageous to arrange interviews with those working in the third sector, media and industry, in order to identify levels of awareness and any potential influences of a climate assembly upon practitioners’ understanding and practices.

As part of previous work for the KNOCA climate assembly network, interviews with practitioners have identified a range of impacts attributed to these processes; an example is given (on the right) of a deliberative democracy practitioner’s view of politicians’ reaction to attending sessions at Germany’s climate assembly.

For an assessment of impact on policy and political processes, it is likely to be particularly useful to engage in discussion with civil servants involved in commissioning and implementation of a process, as well as those involved in committees and other specialist groups

#### Change in mindset through the German climate assembly

“The participants and the politicians who were part of it [the German climate assembly], attending some sessions at least, they were really impressed. So, if people learn to know about the process it has the potential to change the mindset of the people and change the idea of how politics can work.”

– *Steffen Krenzer, Mehr Demokratie.*

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/>

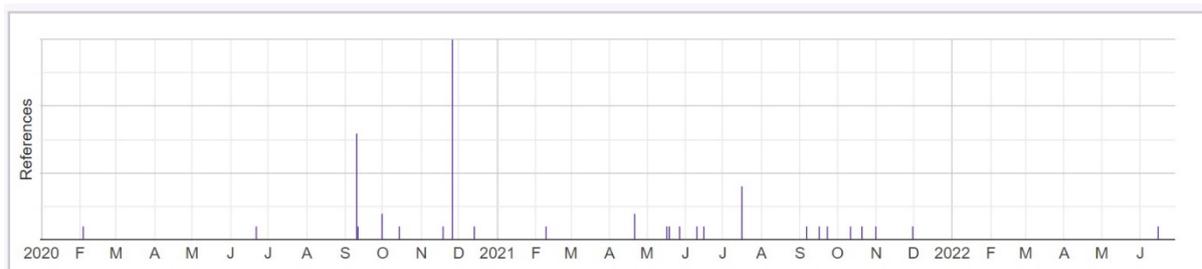
connected to an assembly. Again, it is important to exercise caution in attributing impact even on the basis of expert perspectives; interviews should where possible request specific examples and cases in order to support more general claims. Even where policy or law has emerged following a climate assembly, this may not necessarily be due to the assembly itself. As the evaluation of the UK Climate Assembly noted, even where a (parliamentary) commissioning body may appear to have responded to an assembly’s recommendations, it may already have been inclined in this direction. (Indeed, policy options may be offered for assembly appraisal on the basis that these are plausible proposals for implementation.)

### 3.2.3 Document analysis

The extent to which a climate assembly has impacted upon policy and law can be gauged to some extent through interviews with key informants, as we outline above. Attention to formal documentation arising from parliamentary and government processes is also likely to provide pointers about the extent to which a climate assembly has been referenced and the ways in which this is done. In some cases, key informants such as civil servants may offer advice as to the most appropriate documentation to consider, such as government white papers (policy proposals) or material arising from inquiries and review processes. Again, extricating a precise influence of a climate assembly or its recommendations is likely to be challenging; more likely are indications that the process has formed part of a range of influences on a policy process.

Document analysis may also be useful for a range of other impact areas, for example examining key mission statements or resources on websites of key organisation and businesses.

In addition to selected documentary sources, national archives and records offer the potential to identify instances in which mention is made of climate assemblies. In the case of the UK, for example, the official record of parliamentary business, *Hansard*, indicates the prevalence of mentions of the climate assembly over time, with this concentrated at the time of the launch of the citizen assembly report in late 2021 (see Figure 3). The content of elected representatives’ remarks and speeches making reference to the climate assembly is available through this same archive.



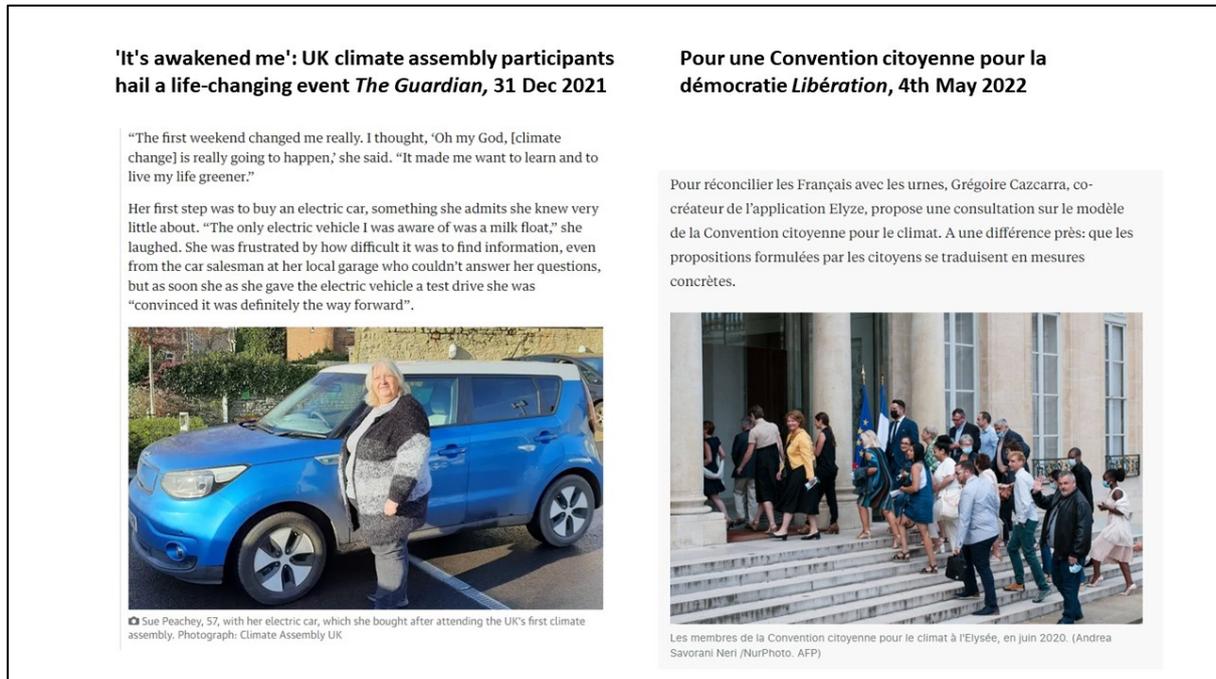
**Figure 3.** Mentions over time in the Houses of Parliament (UK) of the climate assembly

### 3.2.4 Media analysis

A key area of interest for climate assemblies has been the extent to which this has been covered across legacy and social media, as well as the nature of that coverage. While the main objectives of climate assemblies are not to generate publicity per se, typically there is a concern that the wider public is aware of these processes and that they are able to prompt a broader discussion of climate action across society.

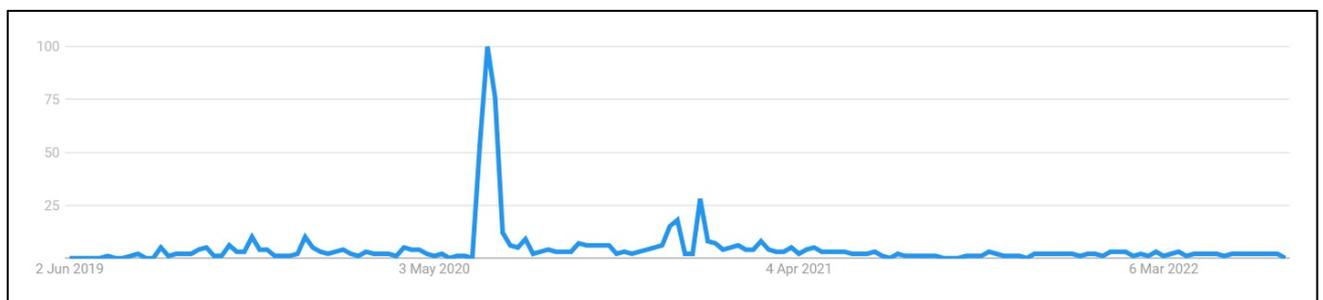
A basic count of media articles covering a climate assembly can give a rough indication of the breadth of coverage obtained. Content analysis can also be used to assess the ways in which a climate

assembly has impacted upon the nature of media reporting. While automated processes are available to perform this, for the purposes of a short-run analysis of media around an assembly, a more practical option is likely to entail a thematic analysis by hand of the main themes in reporting. Figure 4 shows two examples, from *The Guardian* (UK) and *Libération* (France). The two stories address quite different impacts of climate assemblies: in the former case, the influence that participation had on assembly members; in the latter, the intention to apply approaches used in the French climate assembly in a further model of deliberative democracy.



**Figure 4.** Media reporting of climate assemblies in UK and French news sites

Databases such as *Nexis* provide searchable and detailed archives of media articles that can be narrowed to particular time periods – though this requires a paid subscription. Alternatively, news articles can be obtained via *Google* and also sorted by date. In terms of wider interest among the public, Google trends provides basic (normalised) search data over time. Figure 5 shows how a search for “Convention Citoyenne” developed over time – with key spikes in searches occurring at the end of June 2020 and again (though smaller) in the early part of 2021.



**Figure 5.** Google search trends over time for the *Convention Citoyenne*

### 3.3 A systematic approach to impact evaluation

As we highlight above, there is a range of evidence and sources that can be used to assess the impacts of climate assemblies. In order to reorient any evaluation towards particular types of impact, it is helpful at this stage to systematically outline an approach to evaluation. Ideally, this should be considered in advance of any attempt to trace any specific impacts of a climate assembly.

We recommend the use of a four-stage process, that moves from higher-level or abstract notions of impact (areas and categories) towards more specific and detectable types of evidence (indicators and evidence).

Bringing these considerations together, a systematic process for assessing impact can proceed as follows:

- i. Identify each of the areas and category of impact that are of interest (e.g. ‘policy’ + ‘conceptual’)
- ii. Determine specific and discrete indicators of impact
- iii. Select evidence source(s) appropriate to each impact indicator
- iv. Decide content of evidence (data) required to demonstrate impact

In the first instance, an evaluation should consider which of the three potential *areas* of impact (e.g. policy, social and systemic) and *categories* of impact (instrumental, conceptual, capacity) are of interest. This has the potential to give rise to a complete set of nine impact types, corresponding to each of the cells in Table 1.

Having decided upon which types of impact are of interest for evaluation, for each case the *criteria* for detecting impact should be determined alongside the *evidence* required to support any claim that impact has occurred. These can then be carefully mapped onto the impact area (e.g. policy) and category of impact (e.g. instrumental). We put forward this systematic approach to evaluation in order to consider a broad range of possible outcomes from climate assemblies, as well as to reduce the potential for adopting post-hoc accounts of how impact has occurred. This said, climate assemblies can have unpredictable effects, and these also warrant attention as part of a broader assessment of impact.

In order for impact to be demonstrated, there should be evidence of a clear connection to the conduct of a climate assembly. This could include instances where a course of action occurs as a direct result of assembly’s findings or methods (e.g., a specific policy proposed by citizens is adopted) or where a change in practice or approach is demonstrably informed by an assembly’s findings or methods.

Table 2 provides two illustrative examples of this approach for making claims of instrumental policy impacts and capacity-building systemic impacts.

**Table 2.** Examples of impact indicators, evidence sources and content for two types of impact categories.

Impact area	Impact category	Impact indicators	Evidence source	Evidence content	Example cases for impact claim
Policy	Instrumental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New law and/or policy</li> <li>- Proposals for law and policy</li> <li>- New or amended targets and objectives</li> <li>- Formal advisory body recommendations</li> <li>- Departmental strategy (e.g., transport, food and agriculture)</li> <li>- Use of findings in parliamentary debates and committee processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parliamentary bills and advanced policy proposals (white papers)</li> <li>- National or sectoral emissions reduction strategy</li> <li>- Advisory reports and documentation</li> <li>- Departmental documents, press releases</li> <li>- Questions and statements in official records of proceedings</li> <li>- Civil servant / policy-maker attribution of changes to climate assembly in evaluation interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Text in documentation that makes direct or indirect connection to outcomes of climate assembly</li> <li>- Spoken reference to climate assembly in formal government proceedings</li> <li>- Language that attributes change to climate assembly (e.g., ‘because of’, ‘led directly to’)</li> </ul>	<p>Legislation for ban on some short-haul flights in France traceable to climate assembly through policy documents and senior politician statements</p> <p>Elected representatives reference climate assembly to press for more ambitious policy in parliamentary debates</p>
Systemic	Capacity-building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New funding or resources to support citizen deliberation</li> <li>- Training or skills development for designing and running deliberative processes</li> <li>- Introduction of mechanisms through which</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Funding type and organisation information</li> <li>- Training programs and materials</li> <li>- Frameworks at national or regional level to respond to citizen views</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Aims and objectives of funds; names and types of organisation</li> <li>- Training materials focus on systemic change in addition to practical/ process concerns</li> </ul>	<p>Academic work arising from the Irish (climate) assembly<sup>13</sup></p> <p>Climatecitizens.org.uk initiative at Lancaster University</p>

<sup>13</sup> Farrell DM, Suiter J, Harris C (2019) ‘Systematizing’ constitutional deliberation: the 2016–18 citizens’ assembly in Ireland. Irish Polit Stud 34:113–123.

		<p>public views can be incorporated into decision-making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Repeated or follow-up processes to climate assemblies</li> <li>- Academic or civil society initiatives to develop and embed climate assemblies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Projects or initiatives to track and maintain climate assembly insights</li> <li>- Research or thought pieces on ways to maintain climate assembly influence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ongoing consultations building in deliberative approaches</li> <li>- Written (e.g., web-based) outputs highlighting systemic insights</li> </ul>	
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