MAV & McArthur Local Government Fellowship
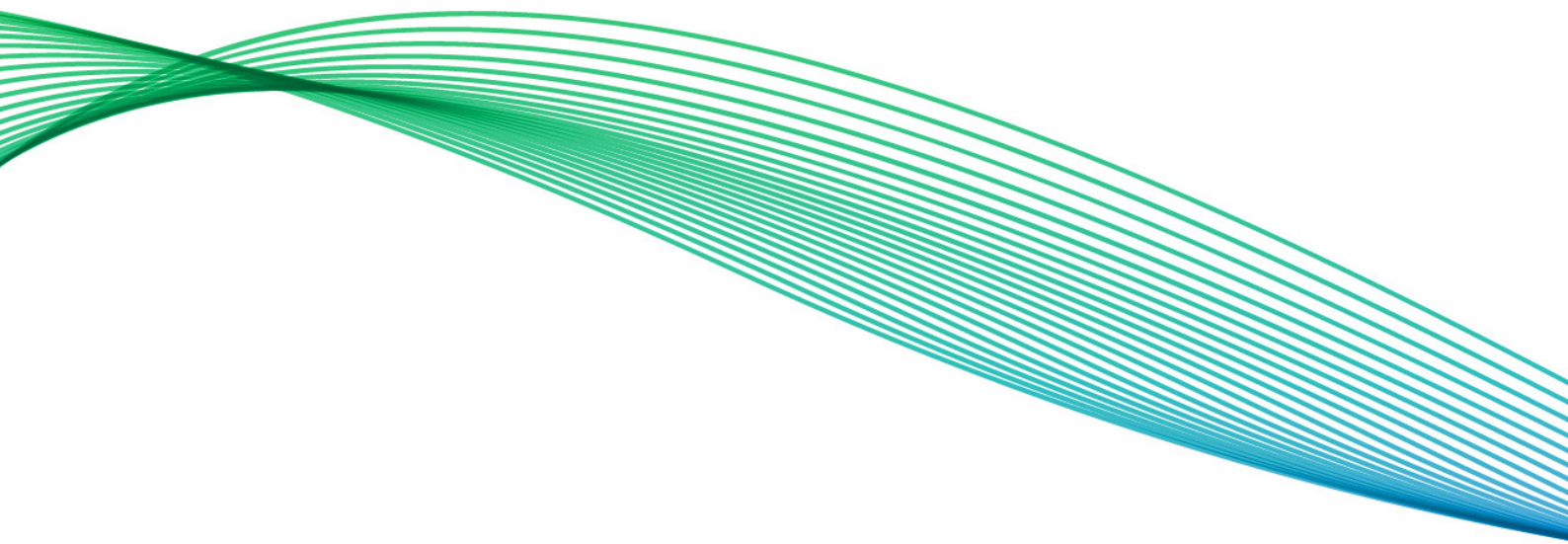
Enhancing Local Government Through Deliberative Democracy

Final Report
by Amanda Stone

MAV
MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

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We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we live.
We recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. We support local government's capacity and knowledge to strengthen relationships with Victoria's Aboriginal communities and for it to encourage greater unity, knowledge, cultural awareness and respect for the first occupants of our land — through its strong community links and local representation.

Executive Summary

The MAV McArthur Fellowship was awarded in 2019 for an investigation into the use of deliberative democracy in Australia, the UK, Germany, Canada and Portland, Oregon.

It was awarded in the context of declining public confidence in elected representatives and the decisions they make, as well as a proposed requirement in a new Local Government Act for the use of deliberative processes by Victorian Councils.

The aim was to identify best practice in deliberative processes and develop a guidebook for local governments in Victoria. The broader aim was to identify whether deliberative processes made a difference, whether they could help restore confidence in elected representatives and democracy.

Due to the global pandemic and travel restrictions, the project was conducted over 3 years and included some additional case studies.

It found that:

- COVID combined with concerns about local democracy led to an explosion of innovation in democracy in the UK.

- While Deliberative Democracy was designed to address contentious issues which present as a problem, where there are pressure points and trade-offs, deliberative processes were also being used for visioning exercises with communities and whole nations.

- Deliberative Democracy was mostly used in the form of citizens assemblies or citizens juries, with councils not distinguishing between them

- Some councils had been experimenting with deliberative processes for some time and were taking the investment in these processes further – with citizens panels or permanent citizens assemblies.

- Success of deliberative processes can be measured in terms of the process itself and achieving its intended outcomes; but also in terms of the longer term benefit to the community through the relationships between community and council. There was little evidence of measurement of the latter.

- In Victoria, there was significant variation in how deliberative processes were interpreted and the extent of the process undertaken.

- There were 3 cases of deliberative approaches undertaken over time which did not meet the usual criteria for deliberative processes, but which provided examples of engaging citizens more deeply in decision-making. Independent evaluation of these had been largely positive although political environments change, and the politics of the day influenced how successful these approaches were.

- These case studies confirm the power of deliberative democracy and provide valuable insights into how to run successful deliberative engagement processes. They also show that other forms of deep engagement with citizens can broaden the impact of deliberative processes.

- To establish whether deliberative processes make a difference to citizens' confidence in politicians and democracy, further longitudinal study is needed.

Introduction

This Fellowship was awarded in 2019, amid concerns at the turn some democracies have taken over the past decade with the rise of authoritarian leaders, populism replacing good judgement and a post-truth environment making the actual practice of democratic governance ever more challenging.

Closer to home, there had been a steady decline in public confidence in our elected representatives and in their making decisions in their citizen's best interests.

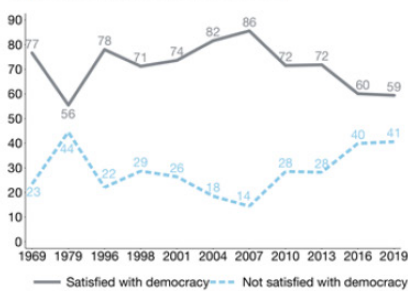The Australian Election Study[1] illustrated this after the 2019 Federal Election.
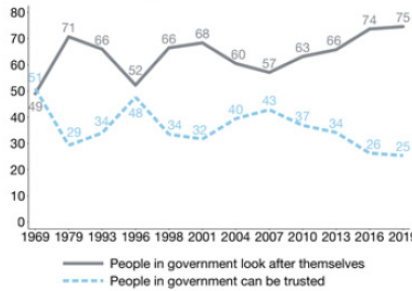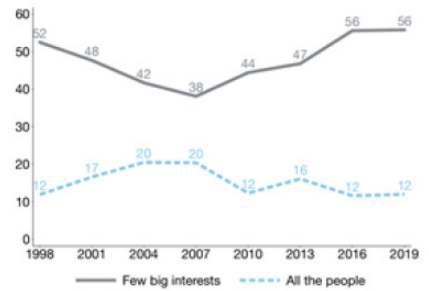
from Australian Election Study 2019[1]

In my own city, one with a strong history of citizen engagement, and activism by both councillors and citizens, the claims of not being heard were increasing.

We are also entering a period where we will face big challenges: rapid population growth, housing shortages, climate change and allocation of scarcer resources. Some of the decisions governments at all levels will have to make will be critical to our surviving and thriving - yet could fail if we can't bring populations along with us.

In other words, the success of democracy has never been more important.

Yet there remains plenty of evidence of confidence in the democratic process itself: attendance at elections at all levels of government in Australia remains high, including at local government. And in the more recent Australian Election Study, following the 2022 federal election, those long-term trends had started to turn around.
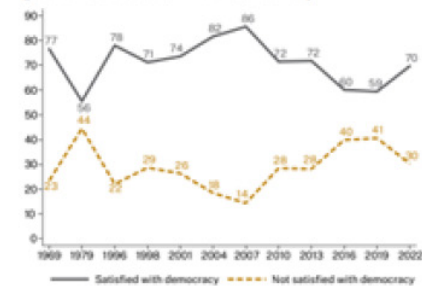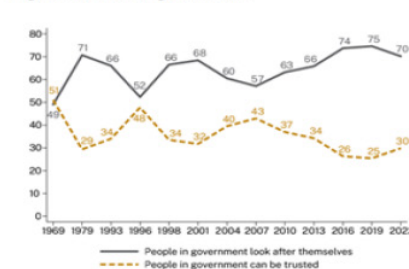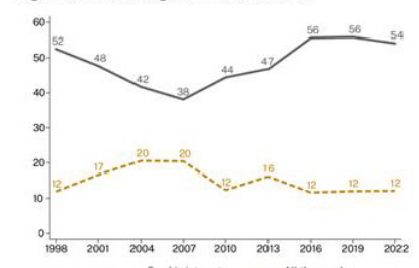
from Australian Election Study 2019[1]

Further, a **Parliamentary Enquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy** (2020)[2] found that despite the lack of confidence and trust in political representatives, citizens are highly engaged in civic activity, in volunteering, supporting causes, activism of different kinds, and social and faith organisations. They are not apathetic. But they are not engaged in the work of their governments. They feel disconnected from the decisions they make. And that is a problem.

1. Australian Election Study | *australianelectionstudy.org*

2. Nationhood, national identity and democracy | *www.aph.gov.au*Local Government Act 2020 | *www.legislation.vic.gov.au/lo*

Enhancing Local Government Through Deliberative Democracy

Because democracy depends on good government which depends on truly representing the multiple voices of citizens. On listening, responding, showing how what citizens say has been responded to, on being open and transparent. These things build the relationship and in turn build trust.

Many of the interviewees for this project spoke of trust. Whether they were using deliberative processes or other forms of deep citizen engagement, they placed trust at the base of their endeavours.

And so to the question for this project: How can we do democracy better? How can it be bolstered it at a local level? How can we bring communities closer to their councils, involve them more meaningfully in our work and the decisions made, and develop greater confidence in the decisions we make? That is after all the bottom line for democracy.

My research, conducted over a 3 year period due to the disruption by the global pandemic, showed that deliberative processes have a vital role to play in deepening engagement with our citizens, in sharing decision making on difficult issues which could divide communities, and on building relationships and trust.

"Trust between governments and citizens is fragile.
It's hard won and very easily destroyed."

City planner, Heidelberg

But they are not the only way to do this and there was much to learn from other models of deeper citizen engagement too. Deliberative democracy alongside other innovative forms of meaningful engagement with citizens has the potential to bolster democracy to meet the challenges ahead.

PROJECT GOALS (2019)

1. Identify these aspects of deliberative democracy at local government level:

   - Plans and decisions which are enhanced by deliberative processes

   - Pre-conditions for effective deliberative democracy processes

   - The most effective models and structures for different purposes

   - Outcomes which can be expected in term of increasing trust and confidence in local government decision making

   - Ways in which these processes can become embedded in a council's engagement policy and practised over time to achieve lasting benefits for a community.

2. Identify the conditions under which the use of deliberative techniques will be successful.

3. Provide a practical handbook for councils interested in using deliberative techniques in their Community Engagement Plans.

PROJECT PLAN (2019)

The plan was to examine deliberative practices used:

a) Embedded Deliberative Democracy

Municipalities where deliberative processes have been embedded in practice for many years – Portland (Oregon) and Heidelberg (Germany)

b) Learning from a Deliberative Process over time

Vancouver, a city which has used deliberative processes over a period of 20 years, notably the Downtown Eastside project which undertook a successful Citizens' Panel in 2014 and is now working through challenges emerging to those decisions made 5 years ago.

c) Citizen's Assemblies and Juries gathering momentum

Three municipalities in the United Kingdom: Oxford and Lambeth holding citizen's assemblies on climate change in September 2019; and Greater Cambridge, holding a citizen's assembly on congestion and public transport, also in September 2019.

Two contrasting municipalities in Australia: the City of Sydney, using a citizen's jury as part of the development of its Sydney 2050 Plan; and the Shire of Eurobodalla, a rural municipality in NSW, which used a citizen's jury to guide their 4 year strategic plan review and budget in 2016.
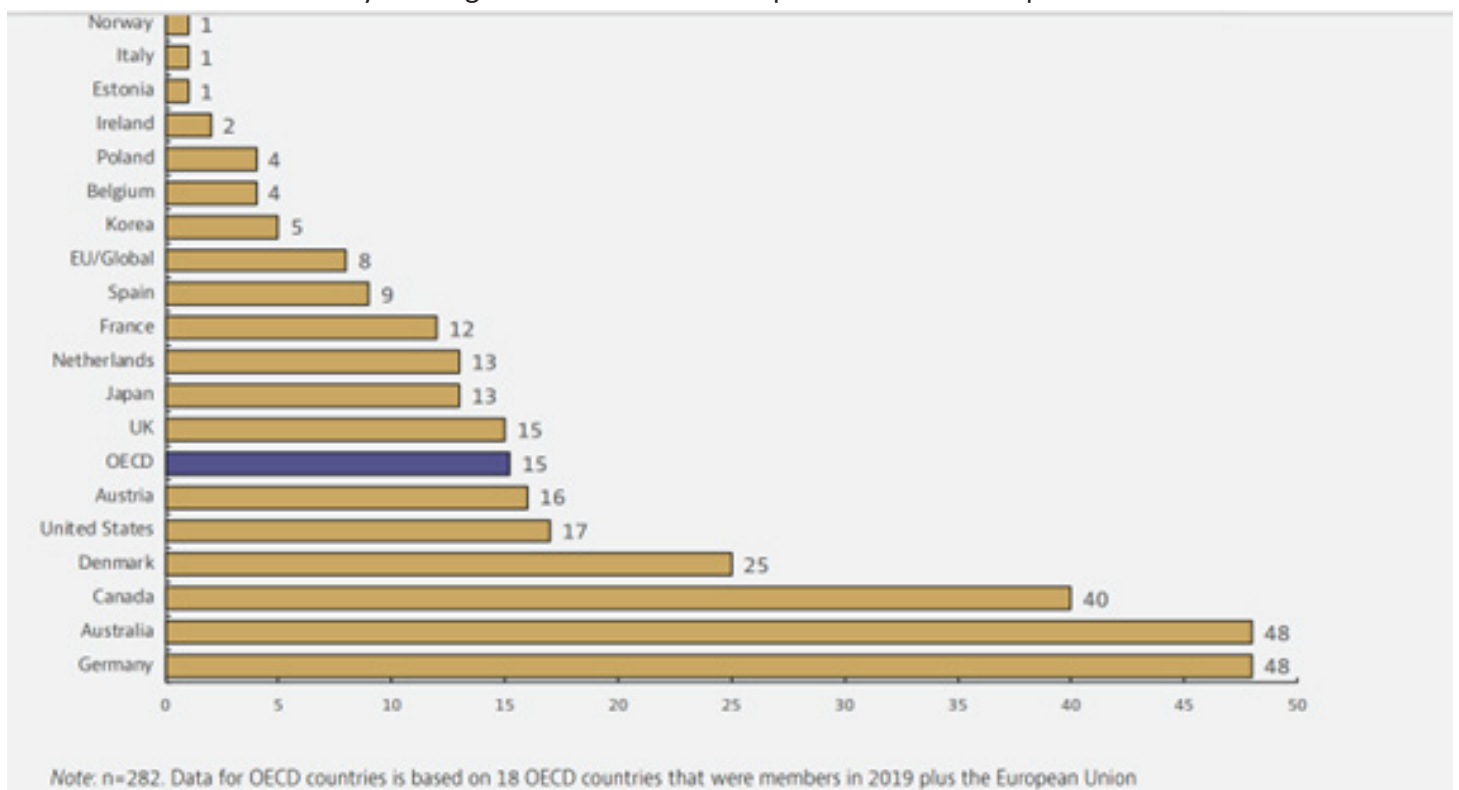
Then a global pandemic and extended lockdowns intervened.

In that time of course the world had changed. And it had changed in relation to democratic practices. This was especially the case in the UK.

Where there had been a handful of citizens assemblies in 2019, mostly on climate change, there had been an explosion of innovation in democracy with the involvement of numerous not-for-profit organisations dedicated to the cause, many local councils experimenting with new forms of deliberative engagement and whole nations using citizens assemblies to address some of their long-standing complex and contested issues.

The new Victorian Local Government Act (2020)[3] was gazetted and included a requirement for councils to develop their key strategic documents "in accordance with (its) deliberative engagement practices". Council elections were held in 2020 and in 2021, new councils developed their key strategic documents using deliberative processes as best they could. Guides to assist them were developed by organisations like Mosaic Lab[4] and new Democracy[5].

Further, the OECD completed a global study of deliberative practices in 20206 - based on 300 case studies - with further excellent guidance. With the existence now of good guidance to councils, the need for a Handbook was obsolete and the focus of my investigations turned to the impact of deliberative processes.

Note: n=282. Data for OECD countries is based on 18 OECD countries that were members in 2019 plus the European Union

OECD (2020) Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave Report p.19[6]

Through interviews with Councillors, council officers, citizen participants, researchers, facilitators, project designers and participant selectors, I sought firstly to understand if they made a difference. Did they increase citizens' confidence in their councils and the decisions they made?

Secondly, through their lived experience of these processes, how to make them better?

Finally, I sought to understand how other models of deeper citizen engagement could complement deliberative processes to strengthen local democracy.

I looked at 8 councils who had used deliberative processes in a structured way and interviewed 2 Victorian councils.

I also visited 3 cities which had used deliberative engagement in some other way. They are listed in the following table.

3. Local Government Act 2020 | *www.legislation.vic.gov.au*
4. Facilitating Deliberation | *www.mosaiclab.com.au*
5. New-Democracy-Handbook | *www.newdemocracy.com.au*
6. Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions | *www.oecd.org*

CASE STUDIES

Deliberative Processes in Councils

Municipality	Process	Topic	Participants	Reference or Advisory group	Time	External Practitioners	Outcome	Evaluation	Communication Plan
Sydney	Citizens Jury 2019	What will Sydney look like in 2050?	50 randomly selected	Expert presenters chosen by participants	6 days	Design: new Democracy Facilitator: Independent	Sydney 2050 Plan	Community engagement evaluated by Astrolabe	Dedicated pages on website
Eurobodalla	Citizens Jury 2016	Is Council spending your money on the right things? If not, what should we change?'	28 randomly selected	Expert presenters, 22	7 meetings (36.5 hours)	Design: new Democracy Facilitator: Independent	Panel Report to council to inform Delivery program	NA	Wide range of methods including interactive engagement hub
Oxford	Citizens Assembly 2019	Should Oxford be more proactive and seek to achieve 'net zero' sooner than 2050 and what trade-offs are we prepared to make?	50 randomly selected	Advisory Group (included councillors)	4 days	Ipso Mori	Informed Council's Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan	NA	Dedicated page on website
Lambeth	Citizens Assembly 2020 -21	We are facing a climate crisis: how can we work together in Lambeth to address climate change and its causes fairly, effectively and clearly?	50 randomly selected	Steering Group, Expert Advisory Board	10 workshops (zoom)	Selection: Sortition Facilitator: Traverse	Recommendations to council for Climate Action Plan	NA	Some sessions live-streamed; dedicated page on website
Camden	Citizens Assembly	How can the council and the people of Camden help limit the impact of climate change while protecting and enhancing	50 randomly selected from 150	3 person Advisory Board	3 meetings (12 hours)	Led by council officers, supported	Recommendations to council for Climate Emergency Plan	Independent evaluation by University	Deliberative engagement promoted by council

	"our natural environment? – What do we need to do in our homes, neighbourhoods, council and country?"	recruited by community researchers			by Involve and Dem Soc		College of London	leadership regularly
Newham	Citizens Assembly (2020): "How can the Council and residents work together to reach the aspiration of being carbon zero by 2050 at the latest?"	36 randomly selected	Stakeholder Oversight Group	4 sessions (25.5 hours)	Mutual Gain	Recommendations to council for inclusion in Climate Emergency Action Plan	Independent academic evaluation Patricia Mockler (Queens University)	Mayor's charter, Page on website
	Standing Citizens Assembly (from 2022): Topics chosen by vote of citizens	50 randomly selected	Advisory Board	6 sessions	Dem Soc, Involve, Sortition	Recommendations to Council who will respond		
Waltham Forest	Citizens Assembly (2020): How can we work together to stop hate and ensure everyone can feel equally welcome and safe in our borough?	34 randomly selected	Independent Advisory Group	3 weekends (6 days)	Involve, Dem Soc, Sortition	Recommendations to council for actions to address hate crime. Most implemented and ongoing	NA	Dedicated page on website
Vancouver	Citizens Assembly /Community Panel 2019: identify an alignment for an arterial street through the False Creek Flats	42 randomly selected citizens	No	8 days	Jefferson Centre	Recommendations to council for DTES Plan	NA	

In addition, I spoke with councillors, officers and participants from three other councils during 2022: Strathbogie Shire (Vic), Colac Otway Shire (Vic), Greater Bendigo (Vic) and Redbridge (UK).

Public Participation using Deliberation

Municipality	Process	Topic	Participants	Time	Practitioners	Outcome	Evaluation
Vancouver	Down Town East Side Plan Development	Future development of Downtown East Side	LAPP Committee- representatives from community groups, business, non-profit housing and social service organizations	Plan development 2 years	In-house council officers	DTES Plan, reviewed regularly	Plan evaluated every 3 years
Portland	95 Neighbourhood Associations established 1972. Work with local government to influence decision making.	Local issues considered by NAs. Funded by council to take action.	Members, volunteers	Ongoing	In-house council officers	Local decision making and local action on local issues	Charter reform process in 2020-2022 review of structure
Heidelberg	Public Participation	Projects listed by council each year	All citizens can participate	Ongoing	In-house council officers	Proposing which projects (infrastructure and social) use public participation each year.	Third external evaluation in 2022 by The Berlin Institute for Participation

Interviews were also held (in person and online) with practitioners, members of organisations which design, facilitate and evaluate deliberative processes in the above case studies:

new Democracy Foundation – Iain Walker

Involve Foundation – Lizzie Adams

Sortition Foundation - Brett Hennig, Hannah Shield, Sonia Randhawa

Democratic Society – Pandora Ellis

Young Foundation – Isabel Young

University of Portland – Dr. Paul Leistner

What is Deliberative Democracy?

Deliberative processes, which may take the form of a citizens assembly, citizens jury, citizens panel or any of the 12 models identified by the OECD, are characterised by randomly selected citizens, making up a microcosm of a community, spending significant time learning and collaborating through facilitated deliberation to develop informed collective recommendations for public authorities.

The key features of a deliberative process are the representativeness of participants, the time and support provided for facilitation, and the commitment to act on the recommendations

Citizens Assembly – a deliberative process using a large number of citizens (av 90), meeting over an extended period of time, to deliver detailed, collective recommendations. Used more for electoral reforms, constitutional questions

Citizens Jury – a deliberative process involving a smaller number of citizens (30-40), meeting over a number of weeks to deliver collective recommendations. Used for a broad range of topics including infrastructure, health, urban planning, environment

Ongoing Citizens Panel – a standing deliberative panel, comprising 30-40 citizens, rotating over a 1-2 year period, Ongoing processes mandated to provide input on various questions when public authority is in need

Sortition – a process of random selection; each member of a population has an equal chance of being selected

"It's the difference between going to the public with a proposal and asking: 'What do you think of this?' versus a deliberative process which says 'What do you think the solution to this problem is?' or 'What do you think of the options being proposed by y our fellow citizens?

Brett Hennig. Sortition Foundation

Deliberative processes deliver a judgement by citizens based on information and deep consideration. This contrasts with the opinion and "gut reaction" which a typical consultation delivers.

They have generally been used to help solve issues which are highly contested, where there are multiple stakeholders and opinions, which are values driven, and where trade-offs may be required for a resolution. They are often issues which governments have been unable to resolve over time. The many citizens assemblies on climate change are one such example. Local governments seem to use the terms citizens assemblies and citizens juries interchangeably.

They have also been used for more strategic visioning exercises – city planning, future scenarios. These have been largely successful in that they deliver an end-product – a plan. They have been mandated for use in developing strategic documents in Victoria. However, the lack of guidance and rationale for their inclusion in the Local Government Act is stark. It has been left to local councils to figure it out and do their best.

Deliberative democracy is essentially about a form of power sharing. By asking citizens to share the decision making on complex or contentious issues, elected representatives are indicating that they don't have the answers, they want to hear what citizens have to say and to hear their informed recommendations. What's more, they are investing considerable time and resources into the process.

Consequently, there are many times during a deliberative process where confidence and trust in this process can and must be built, and where it can be lost too. The stakes are high. I also examined what made these processes a success, how success was in fact defined, and where in the process some of the main risks lay.

"Growing efforts to embed public deliberation into public decision making could be seen as the start of a period of transformation to adapt the architecture of representative democracy"

OECD Report p9

OBSERVATIONS

1. WHO DECIDES?

In Victoria, where local governments exist as a function of an act of state parliament and where deliberative processes were mandated by the state through that Act, an imbalance is immediately present. Deliberative processes are not a voluntary act of an elected council who genuinely wants to share decision making with its community. Rather it risks becoming a box ticking exercise for many, especially given the cost involved in such processes, and the lack of guidance from the state on what was intended with this direction.

I found a wide variation in how Victorian councils responded to this mandate. But there were some, such as Strathbogie Shire and Mornington Peninsula Shire (and there will be others) who grasped this opportunity to really explore the potential of deliberative processes, who built on the work through the mandatory community visioning process and initiated further ongoing deliberative processes as a trial.

I was interested to know whether it mattered who initiates a deliberative process.

Whilst Victoria mandates it, for tricky, wicked problems the decision makers need to demonstrate they want to hear people's views

Camden and Newham in the UK both had strong political leaders who ran on platforms about wanting to share decision making with their communities. They had made strong statements of intent which let communities know decision makers are serious.

Camden Cabinet Leader Georgia Gould spoke about a "shared endeavour" which was a framing for their deliberative engagement work.

In Newham, similarly strong political leadership came from a directly elected mayor who committed to "extend and expand democratic engagement with residents across the borough……to restore and build trust between residents and the council". Newham established a Democracy and Civic Participation Commission[7] to review and make recommendations on civic participation. One outcome of this was an increase in the use of citizens and community assemblies.

In Heidelberg, a citizen-initiated petition which overturned a major council decision was the origin of a whole new approach to citizen engagement and decision making.

In Eurobodalla it was a brave CEO who was trying to balance citizens' aspirations with a fixed budget and all those demands of a rural shire. This may have been successful but for a council election which occurred during the deliberative process and a new council which did not necessarily feel ownership of the process.

In the UK, the large number of Citizens Assemblies on Climate Change were influenced in part by the climate action movement and "demands" from Extinction Rebellion. But in all cases there were other factors driving the decision.

In Oxford, the citizens assembly on climate change was initiated following their declaration of a climate emergency. One councillor amended the motion to provide for a citizens' assembly in a unanimous vote, which subsequently energised the council organisation. In most cases, there was political support for the use of deliberative processes, and this was important

7.   Democracy-commission-report | *www.newham.gov.uk*

> **It is really critical that those who are making the decisions are seen to be seeking citizen judgements and advice. Ideally they initiate the process.**

2.WHY USE DELIBERATIVE PROCESSES?

Deliberative processes are not quick and easy. They seek judgement from citizens rather than the opinion which other forms of consultation deliver. They take time, effort, and resources. And commitment from all involved.

So choosing to use a deliberative process needs to be well considered.

Best practice suggests that deliberative processes, especially citizens' juries, citizens assemblies and citizens panel are most effective when used to tackle difficult issues, where there are multiple stakeholders, many different perspectives, no clear outcome and where trade-offs will be needed. The many citizens assemblies on climate change have their origins in these criteria.

A planner in Vancouver stated on citizens assemblies: "Citizens assemblies which are ring fenced, have a timeline, a specific objective, are consultant facilitated, budgeted, when it's done it's done. This works."

He knew. A citizen's assembly in Vancouver to determine the future location of an overpass involved multiple stakeholders with different views choosing between 2 options. The citizens assembly after informed deliberation proposed a third option, an underpass, and this was accepted by all.

It worked and it was done!

But deliberative approaches have also been used for visioning exercises such as future planning in cities and, in Victoria, community visioning and council plans. Whilst both are valid and valuable, the outcomes and measures of success in each can be different.

In Lambeth, where the council had committed to being carbon neutral by 2030, an officer said because of the amount of change that would be asked of the community, they felt it wasn't "in the council manifesto" and they needed to check in with citizens. A citizens' assembly was seen as a good method to do so.

The Borough of Waltham Forest had a long standing and seemingly intractable problem with hate crime. It was hard to know what to do; The council felt it was a shared responsibility with the community and aimed to get citizens' perspectives on what else could they do. This was one of the more successful citizens assemblies studied.

Colac Otway Shire had to plan for growth but weren't sure about their approach. A citizens' assembly was one way to check in with an informed, representative group of citizens about the direction they should be taking.

Citizens' assemblies have the potential to open up a new political space and forge new forms of decision-making,involving a shift in the balance of power between policy makers and residents. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that citizens' assemblies, like all participatory processes, are 'messy'.
All those involved – from assembly members to speakers, and facilitators to organisers – bring a multitude of perspectives, interpretations and agendas, so are unlikely to share the same values, expectations and goals. Opening up decision-making in this way requires supportive structures to aid consensus-building, such as small group deliberation and voting exercises

University College of London Evaluation

The Shire of Eurobodalla chose a citizens' jury to inform their mandated Delivery Program for the Community Strategic Plan. Where resources should be directed had been the subject of ongoing contested views in the community and the council sought a more in-depth and informed input from the community through a deliberative process.

Most citizens assemblies or juries were initiated to share a problem with the community and seek advice from a representative group.

Councillors were more focused on the experience for their communities.

In Camden, a deliberative process was, for one councillor, a way to give a voice to people, to help them see the process of how decisions are made.

An Oxford councillor wanted a citizens' assembly to lead to "a more rounded understanding of the society we all live in" by bringing together different voices and perspectives on one issue. He wanted participants "to come into contact with people they may not usually encounter and to hear their views on the subject under discussion."

It was clear in all case studies that those initiating deliberative processes were looking for much more than an outcome, a set of recommendations. They wanted the process to deliver value for their citizens and enhance their relationship with their councils.

The non-council organisations I interviewed described the challenges they were experiencing with the growing interest in deliberative processes. They were being approached by councils to run citizens' assemblies on a wide range of topics. Councils had heard about citizens assemblies and they seemed like a good idea!

Many did not fully understand the deliberative approach. And often it was not the best approach for their needs.

Organisations were finding that councils are recognising the need to take action on contested issues but struggling to work out their own role in bringing actors together, ensuring equity in outcomes and hearing from everyone. Many of these facilitating organisations like Involve (UK) and Mosaic Lab (Victoria) are turning to providing training and guides to assist councils navigate their way through the different deliberative approaches and how to choose the right tool for purpose.

"Only deliberative engagement provides the opportunity to build the knowledge and understanding of citizens in their council. There's a place for different kinds of engagement. But when a real problem to solve, so beneficial."

Officer, Strathbogie.

3. THE PROCESS

Since 2019, excellent guides on good practice for deliberative processes have been prepared by Mosaic Lab, new Democracy, the OECD and others.

Through my extensive interviews, reviews of reports on deliberative processes conducted, and independent evaluations, some universal understandings and words of wisdom born from experience did emerge, which both validate those excellent guides and add further insights and words of caution.

"The most important issue is understanding the question for which an answer is sought. This starts right at the beginning, with proper discussion of the actual challenge and how people define and discuss that challenge".

Democracy Commission, Newham

3.1 PREPARATION

Knowing what is being asked of citizens in a deliberative process is the most important first step. It can determine whether in fact a citizens assembly or jury is the most appropriate tool. It also sets expectations for the panel and allows the whole process to conclude with a closed loop.

To maintain their confidence in the process it's essential that everyone knows why they are there. What decisions can they influence? What council goals they are contributing to. Participants need to see in the end that they have made a difference, had an impact.

The importance of clear intent was illustrated in Eurobodalla. Here I met with officers, councillors and participants.

All expressed some dissatisfaction with the outcome. It didn't deliver what they were wanting from the process.

Reading the extensive material and speaking with officers and participants, it was a thorough process, a lot of resources were invested. It was a gutsy voluntary exercise by this rural shire to address a long running issue of citizen dissatisfaction with council priorities. But at the end it seemed there was not a shared understanding of what success would look like, even though there may have been at the beginning.

An open-ended question may lead to this occurring more, but it did highlight the need to have that shared understanding very clear to begin with.

The evaluation of Camden's citizens assembly too revealed that the pathway between generation of ideas, their incorporation into the deliberations and the eventual action by council was not always clear to participants. This too created confusion. Planning out that pathway in advance seemed to matter.

Most councils prepared for a deliberative process by gathering data and input from the broader community first.

Lambeth spent a year gathering data and information, a deep dive into where carbon emission sources lay.

Sydney started with many community engagement reports about community aspirations, a Youth and Childrens' summit with ideas for action and a First Nations session.

Strathbogie started with values establishment to help drive the strategic planning and canvassed the municipality widely on what mattered to people.

I have followed the Vancouver process over many years just because the preparation was so thorough. The deliberative panel established to consider the very complex issue of the future of the Downtown Eastside precinct took 12 months to agree on a Terms of Reference. Part of this was about establishing expectations, defining terms, agreeing on the scope and defining roles. One group walked away from the panel but in time they returned and TORs were finally agreed to.

> *"Plan, plan, plan, and make sure that the people who are presenting have a really good understanding of what they are doing .*
>
> **Officer, Strathbogie**

In addition to being clear about what you seek from participants, and agreeing ahead on what success will look like, several of those I spoke to reflected on the need to clearly define roles and responsibilities at the beginning.

3.2 TIME

Deliberative processes are not quick and shallow according to one interviewee. Where shallow engagement generates wishlists, deliberation sees people confront tradeoffs.

A considered informed judgement from a diverse group of citizens is sought. You are also building trust with that group and with a wider community observing the process. Getting a group to find common ground takes time. They also need to develop a rationale for their recommendations so others can understand them. Time is not negotiable.

Many councillors and council officers stated they would have liked more time, and in one case where the process was rushed, participants left confused about the outcome.

> *"Sufficient time matters more than any element in a process design."*
>
> **Iain Walker, new Democracy**

If these processes are rushed, those walls can come up and the trust can be broken.

3.3 SELECTION

A fundamental premise of a deliberative process is the random selection of participants. All the formal deliberative processes - assemblies, juries and panels - selected participants using a third party and a form of sortition. In many cases, Sortition Foundation itself conducted this process.

However most also supplemented the selection with an additional process based on their individual circumstances.

Many acknowledged that there were limits to the typical sortition process. The random selection is usually by letter, so you need an address. One councillor pointed out that those who volunteer are more likely to feel positively towards the council.

Time is a resource that not everyone can afford. Some won't be able to participate for many reasons despite wanting to. It is necessarily biased in some way. Many councils worked to remove the barriers to participation that they could. Most paid participants.
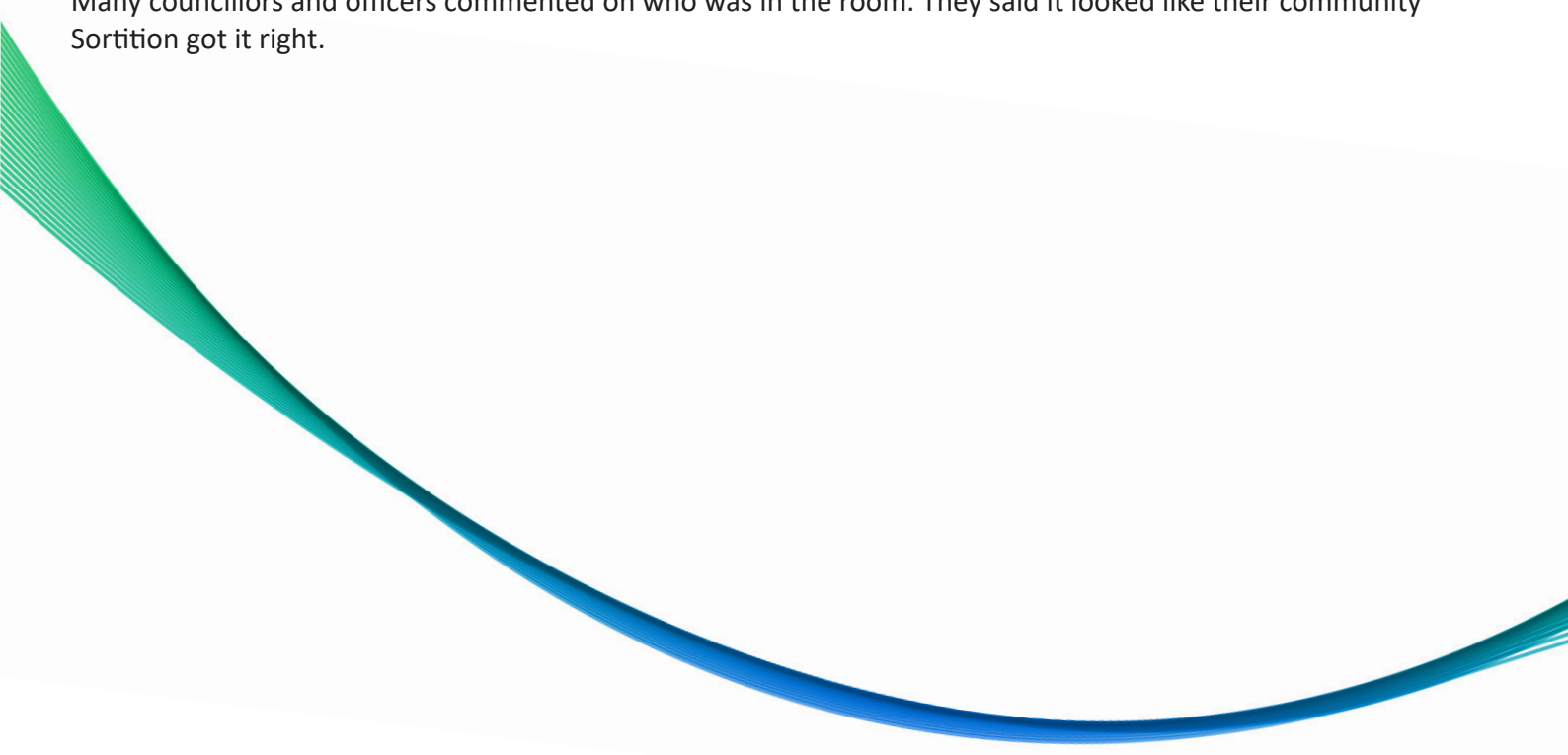
"The value of citizen's assemblies come from bringing people from different backgrounds together around issues which affect them all, enabling greater consideration of how the impacts may be experienced differently by different groups"

University College of London Evaluation

The exception was Camden who used trained community researchers to identify a pool of participants "from the streets" from which a random sample was selected. This selection was criticised by some of the climate activists. However, it was suggested that community

researchers were selecting from a large pool which was then stratified, unlike sortition which selects from a selfselected pool following an EOI. There were merits in both approaches.

Many councillors and officers commented on who was in the room. They said it looked like their community Sortition got it right.

3.4 DESIGN

The success of a project will lie largely in its design.

The majority of councils used a third-party consultant to design the project based on their purpose and their community. This was to enhance confidence in the process as being managed independent of council and not subject to undue influence.

They also separated design from process: with so many organisations now able to support councils runningdeliberative processes, that was possible.

"There's feeling of being "told" a lot in politics and what has really been lacking is being listened to."

Officer Strathbogie

Lambeth Council began organising a citizens assembly themselves in collaboration with community. They subsequently employed a consultant organisation so they could be stakeholders instead.

The majority also convened an Independent Reference Group and/or Advisory Committee/ Steering Committee to provide oversight to the process. In one case, the Reference Group included several councillors. There were no concerns raised at the time but there was also no evaluation of this process which may have examined whether that compromised the process.

The design needed to ensure participants were at the heart of the process and were heard from.

3.5 FACILITATION

Investing in good, strong facilitation was essential.

Participants expressed how confident they felt in the process based on how well the facilitator handled difficulties such as "loud voices" or conflict.

Sydney participants described a halfway point where they had generated ideas but then "hit a wall" where they lost motivation and felt hopeless. The facilitator set aside the program and developed a day of activities which recalibrated the group and got them back on track. They said she was "brilliant".

They also described a Whats App group among participants which started to feel like a parallel process and this reached an uneasy climax which the facilitator handled skilfully, they felt.

"Facilitating genuinely equal participation within any form of deliberative engagement is complex, balancing the voices of the more confident with those who are less comfortable speaking."

University College of London Evaluation

Participants in another citizens assembly were uncomfortable with the "loud voices" of some members and wished the facilitator would take more steps to ensure they didn't dominate.

Trust is a theme running through these cases and trust in the facilitator was critical to a successful process. It also highlighted the importance of focusing on the relationships, being flexible and not blindly adhering to the process regardless.

3.6 COMMUNICATION

Deliberative processes, by definition, work with one small segment of the population. Their experience is almost

universally positive for that small sample. But that experience needs to be conveyed somehow to the wider citizenry otherwise its benefits are not shared.

Victorian councils did this brilliantly.

Information to the wider community before during and after the panel or process is essential. It also enhances transparency of the process.

Much of the preparatory information collected from the community as input can be shared widely, and citizens can see how their voices have influenced decisions made and be part of an ongoing conversation on the topic.

They can also be brought more directly into the process via livestreaming of sessions. A number of councils, which ran citizens assemblies during the pandemic lockdowns, livestreamed their expert panel sessions. Some practitioners advised against livestreaming the actual panel deliberations as it could act as a brake on participants.

3.7 ROLE OF COUNCILLORS:

Deliberative panels are providing advice to decision makers (councillors). Participants wanted to know that their elected representatives took them and the process seriously. They did not want councillors to participate in the deliberations but they wanted them to hear the outcomes and to take them seriously.

Some expressed disappointment that not all councillors were at the session where they presented their findings.

They also felt some councillors were not engaged when they didn't ask questions or make any comment. In some cases, it was not clear whether councillors were involved or not. Some attended sessions, many didn't.

Some made comments; at one point in one citizens' assembly, a mayor attended one session to speak to a topic.

Participants were confused.

> **It was important that the role of councillors – like all roles in the process – be made clear and that councillors were seen to follow through on their commitments.**

The language used by councillors was also important. In one case, a casual comment by a mayor in the first session led to 2 participants not returning. On the other hand, the language of inclusion and shared endeavour and the repeated strong commitment from the cabinet leader in Camden, led to high levels of participation and ongoing engagement by participants.

3.8 SQUEAKY WHEELS, USUAL SUSPECTS AND RADICAL CAMPAIGNERS

This topic arose in every case study.

One of the reasons cited for using deliberative processes was a desire to hear from citizens other than the already engaged. Every municipality has citizens who are informed about council processes, who participate in consultation and engagement activities and who use their voice to influence council decisions. Described as "usual suspects" or "squeaky wheels", these citizens are clearly highly motivated and put effort into becoming informed.

Campaigners on dedicated issues like climate change are viewed similarly. Councillors and officers across the globe expressed concern at the apparent inequity and access to power that these groups seem to have. Citizens juries and assemblies with their randomly selected participants were seen as one way to hear from other voices.

However, it was also recognised that highly engaged citizens had a lot to offer in terms of local experience, local history, and knowledge. They were also very committed.

One councillor felt the climate campaigners were exciting and energising. To address this dilemma, one council included members of Extinction Rebellion on their Expert Panel; another council asked some experienced long-term residents to make a presentation to the citizens assembly on one topic.

My own council reserved 10% places on a deliberative panel on the planning scheme for those planning activists who had a long and valuable history in our city.

Portland has trained up long term activists as facilitators, and community leaders who in turn can mentor others in leadership roles through the Neighbourhood Associations.

> **It was important to find a role for the highly engaged citizens so the benefits of their experience could be shared.**

3.9 WHAT ABOUT DISSENT?

During a meeting of a District Board in Portland, I listened to an intense discussion amongst the citizen members about whether or not dissenting views could be tabled as part of decision-making, which of course aimed to be through consensus.

This was a robust discussion, among citizens of quite different backgrounds, facilitated by a resident volunteer chair. Despite diverse views, the group did come to agreement on how this would be handled, a testament to the skill of the facilitator and the training of the whole group in decision making processes.

"(Deliberative processes) help elected decision-makers to recognize diverse perspectives and concerns, toground their debates and decisions. Therefore, it is not necessary, or even desirable, to have a consensus document at the end of a citizens' council. It is the diversity of arguments and counterarguments, the quality of the debate, the weighting of facts, and the ethical reflection that is important. "

Jörg Sommer, Director, Berlin Institute for Participation

Dissent was also managed carefully through the Vancouver DTES Plan process. The final recommendation to Vancouver Council was not, according to one participant, agreed to by everyone, but was what everyone could live with according to an officer. The officer pointed out that it was important that all voices were reflected in the final report.

In deliberative processes, where the goal is to provide a set of informed recommendations to an elected body, the process is aimed at finding a consensus position that reflects the range of views in the community. In only one of the citizens assemblies or juries studied was a dissenting report produced. That was by a few participants, outside the formal process and not ratified by the whole group.

4. THE OUTCOME

4.1 WHAT HAPPENS TO RECOMMENDATIONS?

There was a lot of variation in how councils planned to used recommendations from citizen panels.

This has also been the case in Victoria where some councils have accepted the community prepared vision in its entirety and others have modified it.

Regardless, it was seen as vital that councils state up front how they will treat the recommendations. This is the point where that hard won trust can be lost again.

Strathbogie Shire Council set the Community Vision at "empower" on the IAP2 spectrum. They told the panel they would adopt what the community proposed. And they did. My own council did too.

Camden stated it would implement the recommendations of a citizens assembly on climate change. Fortunately those recommendations were achievable.

Oxford and Lambeth both committed to incorporating the recommendations into a climate emergency plan and did.

Waltham Forest immediately committed funds to implementing the recommendations. The actions to address hate crime were and continue to be highly visible and valued by the community.

Some deliberative process designers in the UK have a principle that if a proposal has 80% agreement it becomes a mandate. Others are more focused on simply requiring councils to be up front with how they will treat recommendations, to make a public commitment that they will explain their response, to be completely transparent.

It is important to complete the loop for citizens.

Recommendations are very often so positive.

Many panels encourage their councils to be bold and to aim high.

Those I spoke to said that citizens in these processes could suggest things and imagine things that officers couldn't.

They could give a council licence to do things they may not otherwise do.

Given these are trust building exercises, what mattered was what the panel expected to begin with. Expectations and commitments needed to be clear at the start of the process. And the outcome followed through on, closing the loop.

4.2 FOLLOW UP

I was struck by what a positive experience these processes were for participants. Sydney participants talked about a 10 year reunion – to hold the council to account!

They were strong relationship building exercises – between participants themselves but importantly between citizens and their council. The process may end but the relationships can continue.

One councillor would have liked more time because he realised that the "people in the room were better at communicating the messages …….than the council". More time would have cemented the interpersonal links to take the messaging forward. People who wouldn't ordinarily have met each other could form a strong enough link to sustain it outside of the assembly.

A Camden officer spoke about the increased workload from the additional relationships which developed and had to be maintained. This was positive but resource heavy and needed to be planned for.

Given these are trust building exercises, what mattered was what the panel expected to begin with. Expectations and commitments needed to be clear at the start of the process. And the outcome followed through on, closing the loop.

There is a difficult question about the role of a selected group of citizens who have had a "seat at the table" of decision making. How to keep them engaged?

Some interviewees felt that keeping a group on for further decision making would be inappropriate, they would become the decision makers not the advisors.

"We also know that for some individuals taking part in this assembly brought about personal change – increasing confidence to speak in public, meeting people they wouldn't normally meet, feeling challenged, inspired and included in discussions that they wouldn't normally be part of."

To address this issue, Newham moved on to establish a permanent citizens assembly, with rotating membership, to follow up on both the issues they had deliberated on but also new and emerging issues.

Camden also established a representative panel who monitor progress on an action plan, meet quarterly, share updates, who might do a deep dive into a project, provide feedback into the organisation and serve a two-year term only.

Other councils are forming taskforces to follow up on recommendations and hold councils to account.

A single-issue citizens assembly may end then and there (as in Vancouver) but if the issues are ongoing -such as climate change, hate crime – the need for visibility remains. Progress reports and updates will be needed.

It was important to plan for that follow up and ongoing relationship building from the start of the process.

5.THE BENEFITS

5.1 TO PARTICIPANTS

For citizen participants it was an almost universally positive experience. They reported learning more about their council and being more appreciative of its work as a result, valuing the opportunity to learn and contribute to decisions. They felt their input was valued and that they had made an impact. Even those who had criticisms of the process confirmed they would participate again. The experience of being involved was, in itself, of value.

For non-participants, if they were informed about the process, they could a see a representative group,

> *"Participating in Camden's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis was a positive experience for almost everyone involved, resulting in improved knowledge and confidence, changed behaviour and a stronger sense of connection to Camden. However, this is not the point of a citizens' assembly – they are deliberative processes aiming to build consensus and legitimacy around responses to contested policy issues.*

University College of London Evaluation

"someone like me" taking part directly in decision-making on matters that would affect them.

All citizens can potentially have more confidence that their council wants to listen to what they have to say and will act on informed considered advice.

For some participants it was transformational. In one citizens assembly on climate change, some XR participants who were initially critical of the process, could see that while it didn't deliver all the outcomes they would have liked, it was a fair process and were so energised, they became involved in a think tank exploring models for deliberative engagement.

> *"You don't feel good if you don't trust the process, if you don't feel you're being listened to, if you don't think you've had input. Feeling good must mean that you've experienced all that."*

Councillor, Strathbogie

It was pointed out in an evaluation that the "feel good" experience of participants was not in itself success.

In response to this observation a Strathbogie councillor stated that feeling good about the process was part of the confidence building in the decision making.

It was hard to argue with that. The positive experience of participants is not in itself the only outcome of deliberative processes, but if communicated and shared, it will add to the overall community benefit. Building trust too is an incremental process.

5.2 TO THE COUNCIL ORGANISATION

Council officers commonly found the recommendations of citizens juries and panels empowering too.

One officer noted that in providing a community perspective on an issue, the panel could say things that officers, who are so invested in delivering what they can do, can't say.

Another said the panel gave the organisation courage. He felt they can be more confident and aspirational because of the input of citizens.

For Strathbogie, the success of the experience led to the adoption of a Community Panel Model for community engagement.

The Camden Citizens Assembly was run largely by Camden officers themselves. This raised some questions around impartiality for some participants, but for those staff it built capacity and motivation for their job.

And for most council officers, even where the selection, design and facilitation was outsourced, the learning experience was profound, and the skills learned are able to be used in deliberative approaches to other community engagement activities.

5.3 TO COUNCILLORS

Two councillors interviewed had previously been citizen participants in deliberative processes, and this was a factor in their standing for council - a testament to the influence of the process!

For one councillor "At its most fundamental level, a deliberative process can confirm the direction a council is planning to take or already taking".

He noted that it gives politicians confidence in the recommendations, knowing that it was a rigorous process "not just who shouted the loudest".

Another councillor found one of the benefits of the process (citizens assembly on climate change) was that he could start looking not just at trade-offs but at co-benefits. Opening up the council's thinking on the benefits of climate action for other areas of council work was a bonus.

All councillors had critiques of the process in their councils, not surprisingly, but all valued the informed, considered input from a randomly selected group of citizens to some of their most complex policy challenges.

5.4 TO THE WIDER COMMUNITY

The benefits of these deliberative processes to the wider community were harder to define. Rather, it was a council's overall approach to community engagement, including the use of deliberative processes, which had the greatest impact.

This was confirmed by German research into 300 deliberative case studies which found that their effectiveness required "the institutionalized, comprehensive financial and structural commitments of a government for participatory procedures and participatory decision-making...In short, political efficacy increases if governments make real efforts."[8]

8. Geissel, B (2009) 'How to Improve the Quality of Democracy: Experiences with Participatory Innovations at the Local Level in Germany' German Politics and Society, Issue 93 Vol. 27, No. 4 Winter 2009

6. EVALUATION AND LEARNING

Of all the deliberative processes studied, only one conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the process and its impacts. Camden commissioned the University College of London to evaluate their citizens assembly on climate change and make recommendations. It is thorough and valuable. (And widely quoted here.)

Other citizens assemblies and juries incorporated an evaluation of the process itself with most not being publicly available. There was little evidence of wider impact. That does not mean it doesn't exist.

On the other hand, the City of Heidelberg has arranged regular, independent evaluation of its public participation program, the City of Portland is in the process of reviewing its Neighbourhood Association structure, and Vancouver's DTES Plan is reviewed regularly.

In all 3 cases, the impact on communities is a focus.

Deliberative processes are huge investments – it is in a council's interests to know if it is worth it.

UCL CULTURE

▲UCL

Evaluation of Camden Council's Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis

December 2019

Lizzie Cain and Dr. Gemma Moore

Evaluation Team (UCL Culture, Engagement)

Whilst it is important to reflect on the actual process and whether it was accessible, inclusive, manageable and achieved its purpose, it's also important to know whether a process is contributing to longer term improvements in trust and confidence in the elected government.

This lack of follow up investigation or evaluation was surprising.
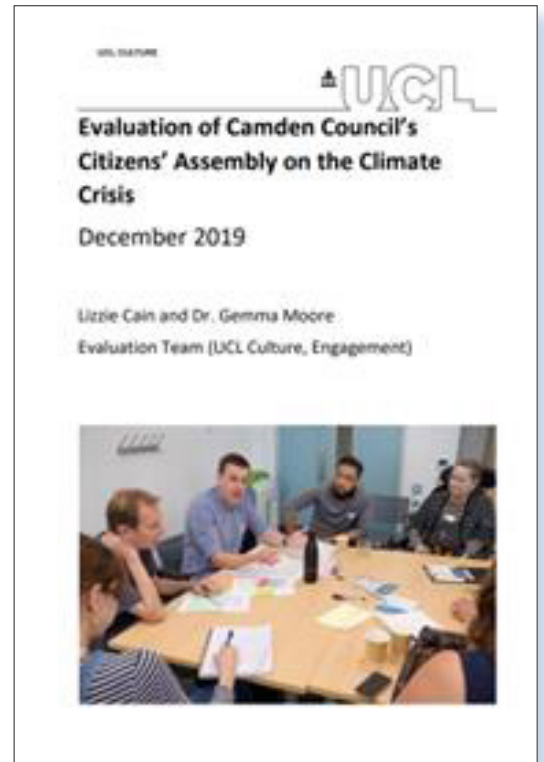
DELIBERATIVE PROCESSES IN THE BROADER CONTEXT

Deliberative processes have been used so far largely to address complex and contested issues or to obtain priorities on strategic direction from citizens. They have been time-limited, focused and outcome driven.

I wanted to know what we can learn from other forms of deeper citizen engagement which don't follow the strict deliberative model of citizens assemblies and juries.

Deliberation as a process can be incorporated into collaborative decision making by local government in other ways. I visited 3 examples:

CASE STUDY 1. CITY OF VANCOUVER

Vancouver pioneered the use of a citizens assembly in 2004 with a Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform. They have continued to use deliberative processes, formally and less formally to engage their citizens deeply in more complex issues.

I have followed the development of the Downtown Eastside Plan for many years because of the way in which stakeholders were engaged. Downtown Eastside (DTES) comprises several different precincts including ex-industrial, historic precincts, residential suburbs and is home to a significant number of people experiencing multiple disadvantages.

The plan for its future needed to include the voices and perspectives of a wide number of disparate groups. It was run entirely by the council. The Terms of Reference for the Reference Group took nearly 12 months to agree on. The plan itself had to establish clear role boundaries, and there was not always consensus on the outcome. But what was presented to the council was "what everyone could live with" and was adopted with dissenting voices captured in the report.

Deliberation was critical to this process, and time even more so.

Street life: Down Town East Side, Vancouver

CASE STUDY 2. CITY OF HEIDELBERG

The City of Heidelberg is in the state of Baden Württemberg which has a legislative requirement that each municipality convene a residents assembly each year[9].

> ### Residents' Assembly
>
> (1)Important municipal matters shall be discussed with the inhabitants. For this purpose, the municipalcouncil should usually convene a residents' meeting once a year, otherwise as required. Residents'assemblies can be limited to districts, municipal districts and localities in larger municipalities and inmunicipalities with district constitution or locality constitution. Participation in the residents' assembly maybe restricted to residents.
>
> *Municipal Code Baden Wurttemberg, Article 20a*

It became clear during my meeting with councillors that there was a different interpretation of "residents' assembly".

Heidelberg's system of public participation was developed following an experience of a citizens petition 12 years ago against a council decision made about the future of a conference centre. The petition required the council to re-consider their decision and reflect on how they were engaging with their communities. How they had so misjudged community sentiment?

The decision was overturned. The result was a new approach to public participation which included a Charter of Public Participation, and an annual process where all citizens can have a say about which projects the council will prioritise for implementation that year.

The participation process is co-designed: the public officers in charge of the project and the department in charge of participation usually agree with citizen volunteers on the participation plan for each public participation project.

This is seen to be a leading approach in Germany and has been adopted by other councils. The approach has been independently evaluated 3 times, the most recent concluding in March 2023. The evaluations have been positive and independent surveys have demonstrated increased levels of valuing the importance of public participation.

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9.   Landesrecht BW Inhaltsverzeichnis GemO | State standard Baden-Württemberg | www.landesrecht-bw.de

CASE STUDY 3. CITY OF PORTLAND

The City of Portland, with just 5 elected representatives for a population of 160,000, introduced a system of localised decision-making with Neighbourhood Associations in 1975. There are 94 City-recognized neighbourhood associations within the City of Portland. Each neighbourhood association is connected to a geographic neighbourhood boundary. Neighbourhood associations are one way that neighbours can organize to address important issues within their neighbourhood and create a sense of community and belonging.

Portland City Council has invested significantly in capacity building of citizens involved in both neighbourhood associations and at the district board level. Two meetings that I attended were extremely well run, dealing with dissent, complexity and decision making with skill and respect.

Despite their differences each case demonstrated a different way of involving citizens in the work of local government in an informed and impactful way. Deliberation, time and clear roles and responsibilities were all features of these processes, features essential for the success of any deliberative process.

"Whilst a citizens' assembly model is suited to achieving some of these aims – namely understanding residents' views, producing recommendations for policy, and involvement in decision making – it is not necessarily the best choice as an engagement and education exercise, and is certainly not the only participation method which gives citizens' a voice and brings people together."

University College of London Evaluation

Portland Council Offices

DO DELIBERATIVE PROCESSES IMPROVE DEMOCRACY?

AND HOW DO WE KNOW?

Through this project I had hoped to find evidence of the difference that deliberative processes make.

Apart from evaluations of individual projects, and that conducted by the City of Heidelberg, there is very little longer term evaluation of the impact they make on citizens confidence in their governments and in democracy in general.

I am completing this report listening to former NZ Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's farewell speech to parliament. On reflecting on her legacy, she stated there are very few things in politics that have a natural end point (citing poverty, inequality, ending environmental degradation). Politics has never been a tick list (for her). "It's always been about progress. Sometimes you can measure it and sometimes you can't."

Perhaps this applies to deliberative processes.

One councillor said they knew they were making progress through their deliberative engagement practices when the number of submissions decreased. She felt that meant they were meeting more citizen's needs and expectations.

And so it may be with the impact of deliberative practices on democracy. There may never been an end point where it can be demonstrated that it has achieved its goal.

But there does need to be some measure of what the investment of time, resources and relationships has achieved for local governments and their citizens. There are high expectations at present. Yet such a measure does not exist, in Victoria at least, at this time.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The Victorian Local Government Act (2020) provides an opportunity for local governments to not only meet the mandatory requirements to use deliberative processes, but to build the skills and capacity of organisations and councillors and to extend this into thinking about other ways of listening to our communities, engaging more deeply, beyond just opinion seeking. But Local Governments will need support to do so. The current requirement to use deliberative processes for all 4 strategic documents with minimal guidance is onerous. And expensive.

Can we build in Victoria on the conclusions of the Parliamentary enquiry?

"Elected representatives cannot afford to disregard the many ways Australians are engaging. Governments must find new channels and new ways of communicating thatreally speak to citizens. We must find a way to reach out and meet citizens where they are, or risk being stuck in an echo chamber, which is where citizens are telling us we are now.

Critically, we must listen and respond. Whether through deliberative exercises, or other forms of consultation, governments must seek input from citizens, andmeaningfully engage with that input."

Parliamentary Enquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy, Final Report

Can we learn from the Camden example of citizen researchers and distributed dialogues to extend the reach?

Can we learn from councils like Newham on how to create more localised means of engagement and sharing decisions, through local citizens assemblies. Or like Portland, where some decision-making about local issues is devolved to local groups like Neighbourhood Associations, with investment in building citizen capacity to do this?

Can we focus on young people who don't yet vote, like the City of Sydney who ran a parallel process for young people with their citizen's jury?

And can we give our citizens confidence that when we do listen, they know how we will act, with something like the Citizen Participation Charter developed in Heidelberg which has enjoyed such success?

Finally, can we learn from those bold and courageous endeavours in Camden and Eurobodalla, where things didn't go exactly to plan but where the lessons learned can be shared?

The answer of course is YES. But local governments in Victoria will need more support than they have received.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1. Excellent guides on best practice are available and validated by this project. Their use is strongly recommended to ensure a successful outcome.

2. Choose deliberative processes carefully, use when needed and seek good guidance on their application.

3. Be clear at the beginning how the recommendations will be used and follow through.

4. Ensure there is a shared understanding from the start about what success will look like.

5. Prepare for the relationships that will be built and how to maintain these.

6. Find ways to include the squeaky wheels, the highly engaged citizens.

7. Ensure that the process is accessible to the wider community. Share the benefits that participants receive.

8. Find ways to embed deliberative processes into broader community engagement. Innovate, take risks.

9. Find additional (less resource intensive) ways to engage more deeply with communities beyond - and to complement - deliberative processes: ongoing citizens panels, localised decision making.

FOR STATE GOVERNMENT

1. Provide more support to local government in both understanding and practising deliberative processes as required under the Act.

2. Given the resource requirements of deliberative processes and wide scope of their expected use under the Act, provide further guidance to the sector for where they can be prioritized, especially for smaller councils.

3. Resource peak bodies to provide training and guides for the sector, and to ensure consistency of practice.

4. Conduct a systematic review of how Deliberative Democracy has been practised under the Act and what additional guidance might be needed.

5. Conduct a long-term evaluation of how deliberative practices have benefitted local communities, councils and democracy.

CONCLUSION

Concerns about the state of democracy are universal, as this project confirmed.

How to reach diverse voices, mechanisms for bringing citizens into decision making, how to ensure decisions command acceptance of the broader community, how to respond to those frequently heard, how to address increasingly complex challenges which cut across multiple facets of local government work: these all featured in the conversations I had across the globe.

> **Deliberative democracy is a powerful tool to address the challenge of citizens feeling disconnected from the decisions of government,**

By engaging a representative sample of the population in an in-depth, prolonged and facilitated deliberation on an issue of importance to the community, local government can benefit from informed, considered recommendations on some of the most difficult issues to resolve and be confident that this advice represents the range of perspectives that exist in the community.

The more immediate benefits of deliberative processes are to the participants who report a positive, powerful experience: of learning about the work their council undertakes, of feeling more connected to their council and fellow citizens, and of having had a voice, made a difference. For many it is the impetus to remain more engaged in local government decisions.

However these benefits can be short lived and limited to a small group unless a council builds on the exercise. It's important to communicate the deliberative process, live stream parts if possible, to share the benefits with the wider community. Follow up is crucial, demonstrating how these representative views have been acted on.

Extending the deliberative structure to include more citizens is a logical next step. Strathbogie has replaced their Advisory Groups with a Community Panel based on deliberative processes.

Newham has expanded the use of deliberative panels to the whole municipality with citizen assemblies in each ward of the municipality. And now a standing citizens assembly which will deliberate on topics which are voted on by the wider community.

These are positive examples of extending the deliberative endeavour.

Whilst deliberative processes follow a generally accepted format, deliberation in itself can be used in other ways to help inform council decisions. Vancouver's DTES LAPP Reference Group was not formed through sortition but the work it did was informed, in-depth deliberation and its recommendations were acted on. My own council, Yarra, used a representative panel of consumers, carers and organisations to deliberate and inform the council's response to the National Aged Care Reforms. A sortition process was not used but the act of facilitated and informed deliberation provided invaluable advice to us which has remained relevant.

Deliberative processes may be powerful in the right circumstances but they are not the only tool. If the problem to be addressed is citizens feeling disconnected from their governments and the decisions they make, there are many ways to build bridges between citizens and councils, to draw citizens more deeply into decision making and to share problems and their solutions.

Globally this concern has been responded to in recent years by embracing deliberative democracy, especially citizens assemblies. But they cannot be the only tool in addressing the challenges to local democracy

I undertook this project to learn from other municipalities how deliberative processes can be effective and whether they can help to address the declining confidence in elected governments. These case studies confirm the power of deliberative democracy and provide valuable insights and direction on how to run successful deliberative engagement processes. They also show that other forms of deep engagement with citizens can broaden the impact of deliberative processes. The Victorian Local Government Act (2020) provides an opportunity to rise to the challenge posited by the Parliamentary Enquiry into Nationhood, National Identity and Democracy (2020). But Victorian Councils will need support. The State Government has a key role to play in enhancing local democracy too. We will ultimately all benefit.

FURTHER READING

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City of Vancouver Van, British Colombia
https://vancouver.ca/news-calendar/downtown-eastside.aspx

City of Portland, Oregon
https://vancouver.ca/news-calendar/downtown-eastside.aspx Appendix's

APPENDIX

1. Australian Election Study | https://australianelectionstudy.org/

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ORGANISATIONS SUPPORTING DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY (CITED)
(THROUGH SELECTION, DESIGN, FACILITATION, EVALUATION)

New Democracy Foundation | https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/

Mosaic Lab | https://www.mosaiclab.com.au/

Sortition Foundation| https://www.sortitionfoundation.org/

Involve Foundation involve | https://involve.org.uk/

The Democratic Society| https://www.demsoc.org/

The Young Foundation | https://www.youngfoundation.org/

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