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Stakeholder Involvement in Climate Assemblies

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

1. Key Insights

- Stakeholders are defined as ‘the representatives of a formally constituted group or organization that has or is thought to have a collective interest’ (Kahane 2013). They have been involved in climate assemblies in quite different ways, with different effects.
- Involving stakeholders can have a range of positive effects on climate assemblies: knowledge and understanding of the political and social context; legitimisation; amplification of the process and its results; and support in implementation.
- Stakeholders can undermine democratic process, either because their involvement is seen as illegitimate if stakeholder participation is unbalanced or they actively engage in strategic action, using their power and influence to destabilise deliberation.
- It is commonly accepted practice to involve stakeholders in the provision of evidence and governance arrangements. Increasingly assemblies are inviting stakeholders to review draft recommendations and give feedback to citizens before they are finalised, as well as including stakeholders in follow-up processes.
- Experimentation with deeper stakeholder engagement is taking place, where they have a more direct involvement in the deliberative process, either working with citizens at some point in the process or even participating alongside citizens throughout.

2. Recommendations

- Commissioners and organisers need to be clear what they want from stakeholder engagement and design engagement accordingly.
- Stakeholder mapping before an assembly begins clarifies key actors and the balance of power and influence.
- Stakeholder engagement should be designed in ways that mitigate power imbalances and strategic action.
- Transparency about the roles of stakeholders at different points in the process is critical.
- Decision power over the content of the final recommendations from an assembly should rest with the citizen members.

3. Introduction

The main actors and main focus of citizens' assemblies are the citizens themselves, the body that has commissioned the assembly – usually a public authority – and the design and delivery organisation. But other actors are often involved, including stakeholders that can link the assembly to the world 'outside' the protected space of citizen deliberation.



What is a stakeholder?

Stakeholders are typically defined as ‘the representatives of a formally constituted group or organization that has or is thought to have a collective interest’ (Kahane 2013). This typically includes NGOs, unions, businesses, political parties, professional organisations, etc. (Kahane 2023, Gerwin 2018, Oppold and Renn 2023).

Organisers of citizens’ assemblies typically distinguish between stakeholders as societal interests and the public authority (or other body) that commissions an assembly (thus excluding politicians and civil servants), technical experts and the wider body of citizens from whom the assembly is drawn.

Where we find ongoing debate is, for example, whether stakeholders are always formally constituted or should include more informal groups; whether public authorities at other levels from the commissioning body should be considered as stakeholders; and whether stakeholders should be seen as experts when they are advocating particular solutions to problems.

Stakeholders can be powerful actors with resources that can influence public opinion, decision makers and potentially the delivery of assemblies and the response to their recommendations. They can range from actors who have significant financial resources or can mobilise large numbers of people through to those who represent minority communities whose voice and interests are often overlooked. They can play an important role in ensuring that assemblies hear a diversity of perspectives and the more effective implementation of assembly proposals.

Assemblies vary widely in the ways that they integrate different stakeholders. As we will discuss in this Briefing, some organisers are suspicious of the power they can wield and worry that they may undermine the integrity of assembly deliberations. Others see them as critical to the running of assemblies in terms of the knowledge and experience they can bring to the process and the ways that they can facilitate impact. As Carson and Reitman argue: ‘mini-publics are not a solution if stakeholders are not reasonably integrated into their design from the outset’ (Carson and Reitman, 2020, p. 1).

The central question guiding the Briefing is in what ways are different stakeholders best integrated into climate assemblies to enhance their impact on climate policy outcomes?

Little systematic research has been undertaken so far on the role and nature of stakeholder involvement. Most of the literature on climate assemblies tends to focus on their *internal design characteristics* (e.g. democratic lottery, facilitation methods). Stakeholder involvement is part of the less studied *integrative design characteristics* of assemblies – how they integrate with broader social actors and systems (Boswell et al., 2023). This Briefing is thus an exploratory investigation drawing on the limited available literature, relevant KNOCA research and a range of interviews with

experienced practitioners and organisers across Europe. It also draws on insights from the [KNOCA Workshop on Engaging Stakeholders](#) where aspects of the Briefing were presented.

The Briefing begins with an analysis of the value that stakeholders can bring to assemblies before turning to consideration of the different roles they can play. The standard approach to stakeholder engagement is through participation on advisory boards and the provision of evidence to assemblies. Increasingly assemblies are creating space for stakeholders to review draft recommendations, to be part of the oversight of government action and to act as implementers of recommendations themselves. The Briefing ends with consideration of the risks associated with engaging stakeholders – and how they can be mitigated.

4. Why Stakeholders and Climate Assemblies?

Under the right conditions, integrating stakeholders can deliver a number of benefits for climate assemblies: enriching the knowledge base, supporting implementation and improving process design.

4.1 Enrich the knowledge base

Lay citizens who make up an assembly typically lack sufficient knowledge to make informed decisions. The experts who are most often relied upon to provide evidence in assemblies are often academics. But their knowledge is limited. Stakeholders are in a better position to convey more practical and political expertise (Oppold and Renn, 2023).

Stakeholders often possess a detailed and sometimes also exclusive knowledge of the (local) history of an issue. This often includes knowledge of how the issue has been previously addressed (e.g., which policy measures have been discussed and implemented). They can help to align the public interest orientation of climate assemblies with the interest logic of policymaking: stakeholders can provide guidance on how measures can be strategically, realistically, efficiently, and effectively implemented. Importantly the process is not only in one direction – stakeholders informing citizens – but can also be a process whereby stakeholders learn about the perspectives of citizens.

Stakeholders will often bring contradictory perspectives, in particular in their analysis of problems and potential solutions. It is important for assembly members to understand and respond to these conflicts rather than pretend they do not exist. Stakeholders are frequently affected parties or witnesses (e.g., representing those living in areas heavily affected by climate change or occupational groups affected by a transformation). By incorporating diverse perspectives into the process, from the beginning, attention can be drawn to possible (side) effects, and obstacles can be identified early (Kahane, 2013). Solutions developed through stakeholder input are likely to be closer to relevant realities. It is critical though to ensure that members are aware that perspectives of stakeholders will often be interest driven, not only based on scientific evidence.

4.2 Support implementation

The literature emphasizes the efficiency and effectiveness gains that can be achieved through the involvement of stakeholders (Kahane, 2013; Merkel et al., 2021; OECD, 2020; Oppold and Renn, 2023). Stakeholders can act as a bridge between citizens, decision makers and the broader public and can facilitate the implementation of recommendations. Stakeholders can act as multiplier, mobiliser, accelerator or ambassadors for assemblies and their recommendations.

Stakeholders can often be the subject of recommendations – not all proposals will be related to government action. In such cases, having relevant stakeholders already involved and committed to the process means that they are more likely to respond positively to assembly recommendations.

Stakeholders will often have good contacts to decision makers or themselves be decision-makers and responsible actors that need to act on assembly recommendations for the problems in the specific field (e.g., in agriculture, freight transport or buildings).

A significant challenge of climate assemblies is to unfold their impact beyond the ‘ad hoc moments’ and ‘one-shot injection’ of their delivery (Boswell et al., 2023). Stakeholders are around before and after the assembly.

Stakeholders can frame the messages of a climate assembly in ways that resonate with the interests of the constituencies they represent, ‘translating’ them into group-specific discourse. They might also have good contacts in the media or be able to influence public discourse as opinion formers. This bridging function is particularly crucial when it comes to recommendations that require collective action by citizens – certain stakeholders can hold significant mobilization potential in such cases.

4.3 Improve process integration

Under the right conditions, stakeholders can help ensure the fair conduct of a climate assembly. Bringing in different stakeholder perspectives can help ensure that a process is balanced and inclusive, for example, overseeing the selection of evidence and witnesses so that they are not biased towards one set of interests (Carson and Reitman, 2020; Merkel et al., 2021; newDemocracy Foundation and United Nations Democracy Fund, 2019; OECD, 2020). They can be important voices in confirming the integrity of an assembly before the media and the public.

4.4 Risks of stakeholder engagement

These potential benefits can come with risks. Powerful societal interests can delegitimise a process, distort the process through the exercise of their power and diminish the quality of deliberation. We will consider these risks and how to mitigate them in Section 4 after having presented some examples of the different approaches that have been taken to stakeholder involvement across different climate assemblies.

5. Different Approaches to Stakeholder Involvement

Assemblies can integrate stakeholders into their design in a number of different ways to achieve different purposes (see Table 1 for a summary). Assemblies can integrate stakeholders through participation on advisory boards to ensure process integrity and help select evidence and witnesses, enabling them to provide evidence to assemblies, as reviewers of draft recommendations or as implementers – either directly themselves or as part of oversight of the action of government and others. We have also seen assemblies bring stakeholders into direct dialogue with citizens, although this more interactive approach remains relatively unusual. In the following sections, we provide more detailed descriptions of some of these different approaches.

Role	Function	Purpose
Knowledge Committee, expert group	Provide input (expertise, knowledge, experiences), suggest experts	Enriching the knowledge base of citizens
Steering group	Observing, ensuring process quality, overseeing	Guarantee fairness, transparency, and integrity
Witness	Bringing different (valued) perspectives	Showing the whole spectrum of interests and ideas to the citizens
Reviewer	Reviewing draft recommendations and assessing their feasibility	Increase the quality/feasibility of recommendations
Multiplier/ambassador	Use their networks, relationships, power for stronger climate policy and awareness raising	Creating buy-in, get allies, increase chance of implementation
Implementer	Elaborating concrete actions, measures; influencing government; acting themselves	Ensuring implementation

Table 1. The roles, functions and purposes of stakeholders in climate assemblies

5.1 Stakeholders as witness and advisors: the standard approach

Stakeholders are commonly involved in climate assemblies in two ways (Langkjær 2021; Carrick 2022). First, as ‘evidence givers’ or ‘witnesses’ when they are invited to provide input either in the learning phase or in response to the request of members for further information. They can also take it on their own initiative to provide evidence if the assembly has an open consultation phase (Merkel et al. 2021; Oppold and Renn 2023).

Second, assemblies often create a ‘steering group’, or ‘advisory board’ which helps ensure balance and integrity of the process and will often provide advice on the evidence base and potential speakers.

More recently assemblies have involved stakeholders in giving feedback to the assembly on the quality and feasibility of draft recommendations and some have integrated stakeholders into mechanisms to oversee the implementation of recommendations.

Ireland's Citizens Assembly (2016-2018): Stakeholders as witnesses and evidence givers

Commissioner: Irish Government

The assembly addressed five areas over 18 months, one of which was climate change. The 99 members met two weekends in 2017 to deliberate on the question: "How can the State make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change?"

In Irish citizens' assemblies, stakeholders do not have a formal role in their governance. They may be invited as witnesses to present to the assembly and can submit evidence at the beginning of the process. 1,185 submissions of which 153 were submissions for stakeholders (including NGOs and interest groups) were fed into the assembly. The Assembly Secretariat grouped them into broad thematic areas and presented a selection of the perspectives to members. Stakeholders from different organisations were invited to present evidence and be questioned by assembly members on a panel on agriculture, food and land use.

Further information: <https://citizensassembly.ie/overview-previous-assemblies/2016-2018-citizens-assembly/>

Scotland's Climate Assembly (2020-2022): Stakeholders as advisors

Commissioners: Scottish Government

In Scotland around 100 citizens met over seven weekends between November 2020 and February 2022 to deliberate on the question "How should Scotland change to tackle the climate emergency in an effective and fair way?" They reassembled to review the government's response.

A Stewarding Group was created that deciding on the final question for the assembly through a facilitated deliberation process and provided advice on the structure and content of the assembly. The Group consisted of 22 members, including representatives of the main political parties and major social economic and environmental interests. The variety of interests ensured balance and increased the legitimacy of the Assembly. Unusually, the Stakeholder Group stayed in place for 9 months after the assembly reported to raise awareness among other stakeholders through their networks and to put pressure on government to take action.

Further information: <https://webarchive.nrscotland.gov.uk/20220321133037/https://www.climateassembly.scot/>

5.2 Stakeholders as implementers

Many of the recommendations that emerge from climate assemblies require the involvement of stakeholders for their implementation. Too often the follow-up process is overlooked – when it is considered, the focus is typically on the commissioning authority. Scotland’s Climate Assembly (see above) is a rare example where stakeholders were actively involved after the assembly finished its work. In this case, the Stewarding Group was kept in place for 9 months after the assembly’s report to promote its recommendations through its various networks. But it is the climate assemblies in Austrian municipalities that have adopted the Vorarlberg Model of ‘Bürger:innenräte’ that has arguably taken stakeholder involvement in implementation the furthest.

Climate Assemblies in Upper Austria (2022-2023)

Commissioners: Municipalities and Austrian Climate Alliance (Klimabündnis)

The remit of these climate assemblies has been to develop recommendations for regional climate policies. The assemblies were part of a larger participatory process for developing municipal climate and energy strategies.

Stakeholders meet alongside policy makers and experts as a group before the assembly takes place to discuss the remit. They meet again after the assembly at a public meeting where the results are presented to discuss the feasibility of the implementation of the recommendations together with selected participants, along with other groups or decision makers that have been invited because of their capacity to affect the implementation of recommendations. A working group is formed to elaborate concrete actions and measures, influence decision makers and also to act themselves. The close contact of stakeholders in the process helps in estimating the chances of implementation and how this could be increased.

Further information: https://www.voecklabruck.at/Klimastrategie_2040 and <https://gmunden.ooevp.at/start/artikel/klimastrategie-gmunden-2030-und-gmundner-klimarat/>



Inter-municipal Citizens' Assemblies PLUS in the region of Freiburg Germany

Commissioners: 16 municipalities in the region of Freiburg, based on a citizens' initiative

Over five meetings in 2022, 91 citizens considered how the region can achieve 100 percent renewable energy supply. The presentation of the citizens' report including 48 recommendations did not represent the end of the process. The organisers developed a model for collective implementation called 'Citizens' Assembly PLUS – no transformation without implementation'. Stakeholders from business, media, NGOS and academia are integrated into the planning, financing and delivery of recommendations alongside policymakers (politicians and administration) from relevant levels of governance, frontrunner and early adopters and citizens).

Further information: <https://www.buergerrat-plus.eu/en>

5.3 Citizens and stakeholders working in parallel

The examples so far are of the involvement of stakeholders in (1) enhancing deliberation amongst assembly members by providing evidence or ensuring integrity in the process, or (2) enhancing the impact of assembly recommendations. In both cases, stakeholders remain outside the deliberations of citizens.

Experimentation is taking place with integrating stakeholders directly into assembly deliberations. This first set of examples involve formalised interaction between stakeholder forums and climate assemblies. The creation of specific forums for stakeholders to work alongside an assembly is one way of both enhancing stakeholder input into the assembly process and their buy-in and commitment to the process.

The nationwide Austrian Citizens' Climate Assembly created a Stakeholder Forum whose members were able to provide evidence to the assembly and met with assembly members on one of its weekends to exchange ideas. In the German city of Erlangen, a more extensive process was developed, where a Stakeholder Forum was more explicitly integrated into the engagement process. Ideas moved between the Forum and the Assembly. Such formats are a response to the feeling of disconnection that many stakeholders express – that they are too often divorced from the work carried out by civil society and social actors on the ground (Rui 2016; Rui et Villechaise-Dupont 2006).

The Austrian Citizens' Climate Assembly (Klimarat) (January to June 2022)

Commissioner: Federal Ministry for Climate Action, on behalf of the Austrian Parliament

The Klimarat was organized in response to one of the demands of a citizens' initiated petition on climate protection (Klimavolksbegehren). The task of the 90 citizens, who met face to face on six weekends, was to develop and measures to reach climate neutrality in Austria by 2040.

A stakeholder forum was established consisting of representatives from ten organisations: unions, chambers, federal youth organisation, social and environmental NGOs, Klimavolksbegehren (climate referendum), industrial association. They had regular facilitated meetings to receive information about the process and content of the assembly and to give input: the individual stakeholders were invited to provide a briefing document with their perspectives for how to reach climate neutrality and to meet with assembly members on the fourth weekend to discuss their standpoints and roles with them.

Besides providing knowledge and differing perspectives, the aim of installing this forum was to create ownership for the process and the results.

Further information: <https://klimarat.org/>

Climate Assembly Erlangen (March to October 2022)

Commissioner: City of Erlangen

The remit of the assembly process was to discuss and further develop climate mitigation measures, aiming for climate neutrality in 2030. The process resulted in the city climate contract (Stadtvertrag Klima) with self-commitments for action by policy makers, business owners and stakeholders as well as participants.

The 25 citizens and the 35 stakeholders worked separately but iteratively: stakeholder and citizens forums met alternately, with the results of the meetings feeding into the meetings of the other group. The stakeholders came from key areas relevant to climate protection in Erlangen and were mapped and selected in a moderated workshop with civil servants prior to the assembly. It included representatives from policy, business, city administration, municipal companies, agriculture, educational institutions, clubs, associations and initiatives. The citizens and stakeholders had two common meetings, one at the beginning and one before the final decisions were taken by the citizens.

Further information: <https://erlangen.de/aktuelles/klima-aufbruch>

5.4 Citizens and stakeholders deliberating together

A small number of designs take the integration of stakeholders into assemblies even further by having stakeholders in the same room for longer periods than in Austria or Erlangen – in some cases for the whole process. The principle here is that direct stakeholder engagement will further increase the likelihood of implementable recommendations given they have support from key actors. The purpose of this format is to increase the (societal, social, political) impact of a climate assembly by getting as many affected and influential people in the room to discuss and co-create together. It can be seen as a form of partnership.

One of the earliest and most high-profile climate assemblies – the French Citizens’ Convention for the Climate – might be seen as an example here in the sense that the boundaries between assembly members and stakeholders were not as firmly policed as in other assemblies. Groups of citizens working on recommendations were able to directly engage with stakeholders to the extent that some observers of the Convention regard it as a process of co-construction (Giraudet et al 2022).

The engagement with stakeholders within the Convention was not formalised. Other processes have either created formal opportunities for stakeholders to participate directly in the deliberations of the assembly or, more radically, created assembly formats where stakeholders are part of the whole deliberative process. The Citizens’ Convention for Climate and Biodiversity in the Region Burgundy Franche-Comté in France is an example of the first approach; the Climate Commission Ravensburg in Germany and the G1000 processes in the Netherlands are examples of the latter.

As we will discuss in the next section of the Briefing, integration of the stakeholders into the deliberations of assembly members raises significant questions about power dynamics and selection and whether such processes are better understood as different institutional forms to the more common standard design of climate assemblies.



Citizens' Convention for Climate and Biodiversity Region Burgundy Franche-Comté (November 2023 – June 2024).

Commissioner: Regional council

Remit: Develop lifestyles the citizens desire, that target carbon neutrality and biodiversity protection and that are compatible with reaching carbon neutrality, the limits of our planet, stressing that citizens, institutions and economic players must all be involved in defining and implementing these lifestyles

The BFC Climate Assembly involved 50 citizens and 30 stakeholders (from the not-for profit and for-profit sector) who met to consider how carbon neutrality and biodiversity protection can be achieved. The citizens met five times. Towards the end of the process, during two meetings, the stakeholders were present and worked alongside citizens with the aim of supporting the development and enriching their recommendations. During the last session an even wider circle of stakeholders and public authorities, were involved to consider the final recommendations of the citizens and finalise the programme of new actions to be launched.

Further information: <https://missionspubliques.org/pf/convention-citoyenne-pour-le-climat-et-la-biodiversite-region-bfc/>

Climate Commission Ravensburg ("Klimakommission Ravensburg"; November 2019 to July 2020)

Commissioner: City of Ravensburg

The remit of the Ravensburg assembly was to develop targets and measures to reach climate neutrality by 2040. The result of the process was the 'Ravensburger Klimakonsens' signed unanimously by the City Council in July 2020. The process was conducted as a mixed process with all participants in a shared space: 10 citizens, 10 politicians, 5 civil servants and 10 stakeholders. They formed a temporary climate commission, a consulting group that met four times. This format allowed for creating ownership, identification with the process, as well as strengthening the cooperation of different actors and citizens with the city.

Further information: <https://www.ravensburg.de/rv/umwelt-klima/co2-neutrales-ravensburg/klimakommission.php>

G1000 assemblies in Dutch municipalities

Commissioner: Municipalities of Rheden (2022), Sluis (2023)

The remit of the assemblies was how do we together make Rheden/Sluis sustainable? G1000 in the Netherlands uses a 'whole system in the room' approach, which has been applied across a number of Dutch municipalities on a range of policy issues. Selected citizens, civil servants, politicians and employers (both commercial and non-commercial) participated in the meetings. The ratio between citizens, policy makers and employers was about 8:1:1, with a total of 380 Rheden and 175 in Sluis. However, the policy makers were not entitled to vote for the recommendations. The rationale for this structure is to ensure those with responsibilities within society are involved in the dialogue and the creation and implementation of proposals.

Other interest groups such as NGOs and professional associations are not direct participants in the assembly (unless called on to give evidence), but were brought together beforehand to learn about and commit to the process and sign a partner agreement to support implementation of the results. On the last day they were invited to engage with assembly members to discuss the outcomes.

Further information: <https://g1000.nu/projecten/>

6. Challenges and Risks of Stakeholder Involvement – and How They Can be Mitigated

Stakeholder engagement has great potential to enhance the impacts of climate assemblies. However, there are also risks associated with stakeholder involvement. While involving stakeholders that hold significant power in society can, on the one hand, be beneficial to the implementation of results, on the other hand, they can disrupt equitable deliberation or further amplify their power.

Four risk factors can be identified: (1) delegitimising the process through selection biases; (2) distorting the process through power imbalances; (3) diminishing the quality of deliberation; and; (4) scepticism amongst stakeholders

6.1 Delegitimising the process through contested selection

Which stakeholders should be involved is fundamental to the legitimacy of the assembly process (OECD, 2020). The democratic principle is that anyone affected by a decision should have a say. In the case of climate change, everyone will be affected to a certain degree (Oppold and Renn, 2023). Judgements of who is most affected are shaped by social and political viewpoints, involving implicit considerations of justice, fairness, and power (Kahane, 2013).



Stakeholders are by definition organised interests. But different social groups within society are more able to organise than others because of differential access to resources. Organisers of assemblies face the reality that some interests are well organised and vocal whereas others are marginalised and unheard. This, after all, is part of the logic of democratic lottery in the way that citizens are selected, in principle unaffected by the distribution of resources and power. When it comes to stakeholder engagement these differentials are marked.

From the perspective of democratic legitimacy, the aim is to select a range of stakeholders that 'balance' different interests (Merkel et al., 2021; OECD, 2020). But legitimacy and justice can be contrasted with effectiveness. In other words, the inclusion of some stakeholders may be more important when it comes to implementation of recommendations because they have more power and influence to affect change. The danger is that for convenience, organisers engage only powerful stakeholders and those with whom they have already established contacts and positive experiences. It is crucial that stakeholder mapping goes beyond well-established groups and considers less visible or organized ones and checks for potential biases (Oppold and Renn, 2023). A climate assembly can be delegitimised by inviting only 'the usual suspects' whose voices are always heard and who always get a seat, leading to feelings of unfairness and potentially obstruction from those not invited. In Erlangen, for example, some companies not invited to participate in the stakeholder forum opposed the action plan that resulted from the climate assembly.

Decisions regarding inclusion frequently prioritize groups perceived as cooperative and moderate, while marginalizing those viewed as extreme or divergent from the mainstream (Kahane, 2013). However, involving more radical groups can also be risky. Suspicion from the public towards particular groups can be enough to undermine the legitimacy of the whole process. It can also be challenging to work with groups that have a more radical agenda than most other interests. For example, in Scotland's Climate Assembly, the Secretariat worked hard to create an inclusive Stewarding Group, drawing in the activist group Extinction Rebellion (XR). XR activists participated in the early meetings of the Group, helping to set the agenda, but then withdrew just as the assembly began its work, arguing that the ambitions of the assembly were not radical enough. The media interest in such conflict could have derailed the process (Boswell et al., 2023).

In practical terms, stakeholders are typically selected through the interaction between organizers and commissioners, often using methods such as a systematic mapping (Oppold and Renn, 2023). In Erlangen, for example, a workshop was held with civil servants from relevant departments of the municipality, during which a stakeholder mapping using criteria of influence and affectedness was conducted. The 35 invited stakeholders came from three groups: (1) education, NGOs, associations, initiatives, (2) companies, unions, chambers, and (3) administration. A particular focus was placed on companies as organisers wanted to involve stakeholders with large carbon footprints. In Ravensburg, as in many other cases, the challenge was, on the one hand, to involve all relevant stakeholders and, on the other hand, to limit the Commission to a workable size. In the G1000

assemblies in the Netherlands, it is not only citizens who are drawn by lot but also employers, along with policy makers and civil servants. In other processes, for example in Stuttgart, stakeholders are invited to apply: an invitation is sent to a long list of stakeholders and a short list is generated from those who reply. Marcin Gerwin, the influential Polish climate assembly organiser has made the case that it is stakeholders themselves who should decide who speaks on their behalf. Where there are more stakeholders than space or time, stakeholder workshops should be organised where stakeholders can decide who will represent their interests (Gerwin 2020).

6.2 Distorting the process through power imbalances

In every deliberative process, participants and facilitators must navigate power dynamics. When these processes involve stakeholder representatives, power dynamics can be particularly pronounced. The power of stakeholder groups greatly diverges and so also the extent to which they might be able to influence the commissioning, organisation and follow-up to the assembly. Stakeholder groups with significant investment capital or whose decisions impact employment and state revenue, hold considerable sway over governing parties. As such, powerful stakeholders might dominate and in worst case hijack the agenda. Alternatively, power may be exerted through control or access to mass media, enabling mobilization or manipulation of public opinion on the climate assembly.

Groups may possess disproportionate influence, if they exhibit high levels of internal cohesion among their members. Representatives of large, diverse organizations often need to invest more resources (money, time and energy) to consult, mobilize, and unite members behind collective positions compared to representatives of organizations with clear, narrow interests and unified memberships. Consequently, stakeholders representing citizen groups often require more resources merely to participate in deliberations compared to those representing businesses and corporate interests. In the stakeholder board of the Austrian Citizens' Climate Assembly, for example, differentials of power could be witnessed between Chambers of Commerce when compared to social and environmental NGOs.

Equally, those organisations that speak for or represent under-resourced and marginalized groups within society are often overwhelmed with invitations to participate in public engagement exercises that can divert their resources and put a strain on their ability to sustain their activities. They may require direct funding to participate.

One example of how to potentially address the risk of domination comes from the examples where stakeholders have been involved in assemblies. While stakeholders are participants in the deliberations in both Dutch, Ravensburg and French (BFC) assemblies, in the end it is only the citizens in the assembly that have the right to vote. However, while this guarantees that power is equally distributed amongst citizens at the end of the process, it does not affect the balance of power during the process.

6.3 Diminishing the quality of deliberation

Deliberative reasoning is often juxtaposed with strategic forms of interaction. In deliberation, individuals openly share their perspectives and interests while seeking common ground – and are open to changing their positions. In contrast, strategic interaction involves adjusting contributions to maximize the chances of achieving personal or organisational objectives. Where representatives from interest-based or advocacy organizations are participants in assemblies, the likelihood of strategic interaction increases. The dynamics of deliberation will be affected.

Additionally, where organizations have a history of involvement on an issue and with relevant actors, they are better equipped to anticipate others' positions and actions and strategically engage with them. Successful strategic positioning can result in 'capture', where one stakeholder group shapes or reframes a process to serve its own interests while marginalizing competing interests. In extreme cases, stakeholders may resort to methods such as coercion and deception, which undermine the principles of free public deliberation.

Such strategic behaviour is not necessarily a problem in relation to governance and evidence giving roles, but is more problematic when stakeholders are participants alongside citizens. In general, representatives of stakeholder groups are less likely to be open to changing their positions on the basis of persuasion and the danger is they show a lack of genuine engagement with citizens' perspectives. This was experienced in the Austrian nationwide assembly, when the stakeholders met the citizens in the middle of the process. The strategic behaviour of some stakeholders meant that mutual active listening and appreciative discourse was not possible. Interviewees have confirmed the challenge of the strategic behaviour of stakeholders, but underlined that this tends to change a lot in the course of the process with a shift towards mutual learning as stakeholders come to better understand the nature of assemblies.

6.4 Stakeholders' scepticism

The risks considered so far relate to the challenge of balancing stakeholder interests against the deliberative ambition of assemblies. It assumes that stakeholders will engage. But stakeholders are often sceptical towards climate assemblies, particularly when they have had no direct experience of this or other forms of public participation (Boswell et al., 2023; Niessen and Reuchamps, 2022; Sandover et al., 2021; Vrydagh et al., 2023). Boswell and colleagues find for example that the relationship between stakeholders and climate assemblies can be fraught, because climate assemblies 'can be perceived as a threat to or distraction from hard-won status and insider influence' (Boswell et al., 2023, p. 191). This perception of assemblies as direct competitors for influence is one reason why stakeholders tend to support climate assemblies only as long as they are consultative. Once they are attributed with more decision-making power, scepticism grows (Niessen, 2019).

This scepticism is nourished by the perception of citizens as lacking expertise to address the complexity of the issue. Additionally, stakeholders question their representativeness and anticipate that citizens will prioritize their own interests rather than seek consensus. This may lead to stakeholders often not inherently opposing mini-publics but struggling to grasp their added value. They often view assemblies as top-down participatory tools that are simply intended to inform the broader population about policy reform or validate organisers' political preferences (Sandover et al., 2021).

Studies suggest that stakeholders' scepticism towards climate assemblies often stems from misconceptions around what climate assemblies are and what they can achieve, as well as from a lack of understanding of how they might contribute to more robust climate policy (Averchenkova, 2024).

7. Conclusions

This Briefing has analysed who stakeholders are in relation to climate assemblies, what roles they have played and the benefits and risks associated with their engagement in terms of both democratic and climate governance outcomes. When the right conditions are in place stakeholders can support the work of assemblies with their diverse expertise and knowledge, and they can be a guarantor for the quality of the process. They can be ambassadors of climate assemblies by communicating about them within their peer groups and facilitating the implementation of the results.

It is common and widely accepted practice that societal interests are integrated into governance structures and provide evidence to assemblies. This is relatively uncontroversial. As is the developing practice of stakeholders providing feedback to assembly members on their draft recommendations. This feasibility check can be helpful as assembly members craft their proposals.

Experimentation is increasingly taking place with stakeholders engaging directly with assembly members, either as part of the process or on occasion throughout the process. This is a qualitatively different approach to stakeholder arrangements. Those who are developing these approaches contend that they are more effective because those responsible for delivery and most informed about the social and political conditions are directly involved in the deliberations. Practitioners more familiar with traditional approaches are concerned about power imbalances and strategic action on the part of stakeholders.

What is clear is that stakeholder involvement can have many benefits, most obviously enhancing the legitimacy and credibility of the process, extending knowledge and understanding and increasing the efficacy. But it also bears risks related to power imbalances, vested interest and hidden agendas.

What is clear is that stakeholder involvement has to be carefully considered. This will include (1) stakeholder mapping; (2) designing stakeholder engagement in ways that mitigate power imbalances and strategic action; (3) transparency about the roles of stakeholders at different points in the process; (4) giving citizens final decision power over the recommendations.

8. Future Network Activities

Our knowledge and understanding of the impact of different strategies for engaging stakeholders is limited. KNOCA could enhance this knowledge base that is so essential for more robust practice.

- Different stakeholders are more or less motivated to participate in climate assemblies. Future research needs to better understand these motivations and consider what this means for assembly design.
- Robust comparative research is needed between more standard assembly approaches and those that embed stakeholders more extensively within the deliberative process
- While this Briefing laid out different approaches to stakeholder engagement, more detailed KNOCA Guidance would support the community of practice.

9. Research Methods

The Briefing draws on existing literature, based on a search of the Scopus database¹ and a series of interviews conducted with practitioners who have developed novel ways of involving stakeholders – see Appendix for details.

¹ We used the search string: “(deliberat* OR ((citizen* OR public OR local) W/O (assmbl* OR engage* OR democracy OR participat*))) W/2 climate”

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Appendix

Interview Guideline

- What was the purpose / aims of engaging stakeholders in general?
- What expectation did you have when engaging them and were they met?
- Who held which expectations? Which impacts of the climate assembly were expected by the stakeholders?
- How were stakeholders mapped and selected? What types of stakeholder are included (NGOs, public, business, social partners, youth)?
- Which forms / models of engagement were used, in particular to elicit the different perspectives on climate change and policies.
- What impacts did stakeholder engagement have (according to the intention of the climate assembly) and on climate policy? → are there any impacts beyond them?
- Have the legitimization and credibility of the assembly's results been increased?
- Follow-up processes: if there were any, how have stakeholders been integrated into or have got active to be integrated – both as those responsible for delivery of specific recommendations and as part of oversight/monitoring
- What other implications did stakeholder engagement have (during and after the CA) and what role did they play? → pros and cons

Overview of analysed assemblies:

Citizens' Assembly	Region/city	Interviewee ID
Klimaaufbruch (mixed citizens and stakeholder assembly)	Erlangen (Germany)	I1 I2
Klimakommission (citizens, stakeholders, policy makers, civil servants)	Ravensburg (Germany)	I2
Regional climate citizens assemblies	Upper Austria	I3
Burgundy Franche Comté Climate Assembly (mixed citizens and stakeholders assembly)	Burgundy-Franche-Comté (BFC) (France)	I4
Climate Assembly	Scotland (UK)	I5
National climate Assembly	Austria	I6
G1000 Netherlands - regional climate assemblies (mixed policy makers, employees, citizens)	Rheden, Sluis, Helvoirt (Netherlands)	I7 and Dutch report of new developments in sub-national assemblies

Table 2. Examples of Climate Assemblies with different forms on stakeholder involvement

Location	Title	Date	Remit	Form of stakeholder involvement	Purpose of SH involvement
Scotland	Climate Assembly	11/2020 – 3/2021	How should Scotland change to tackle the climate emergency in an effective and fair way?	A stewarding group decided on the question for the remit and this group was in place until 9 months after the assembly	Having an impact; to raise awareness among the stakeholders; to raise the legitimacy of a CA; putting pressure on ministers to engage more
Poland (different cities)	Citizens' Assemblies	2016 – 2018	Different topics	Working meeting for experts and stakeholders before every meeting of the citizen assembly in the educational phase; 60-90 minutes time slot at the end of the day for different presentations of stakeholders	To bring in information and different perspectives
Ireland	Citizens' Assembly	2016 – 2018	Different topics, i.a. "How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change"	Stakeholders are witnesses and provide submissions	Make suggestions (submissions) at the beginning of the process
Upper Austria	Climate assemblies	2022 – 2023	Develop recommendation for (regional) climate policies	Stakeholders were mainly involved in the reflection group that met after the assembly to discuss the possible implementation of the recommendations and in workshops following the assembly to set up strategies of implementation or to give expertise.	get the stakeholders' expertise and support the implementation of the results
Austria	National Climate Assembly	1/2022 – 6/2022	Develop recommendations for policy measures that can reach climate neutrality by 2040	A stakeholder board (10 representatives from unions, chambers, NGOs, Klimavolksbegehren (climate referendum), industries association, energy business) had regular facilitated	Present their perspectives for how to reach climate neutrality; to create ownership and committed for the results of the

				meetings to get information and give input; they provided a briefing document and met on the fourth weekend the citizens to discuss with them their standpoints and roles.	assembly and support their implementation
Erlangen	Klimaaufbruch	3/2022 – 10/2022	Discuss and further develop climate mitigation measures aiming for climate neutrality in 2030, resulting in the city contract climate (Stadtvertrag Klima) with self-commitments for action	Iterative process; 10 politicians, 10 stakeholders, 5 civil servants and 25 citizens met consecutively, informing each other, mirroring the results of the other group, with two common meetings, one at the beginning and one before the final decisions were made.	create ownership, set timing of the remit, increase effectiveness of the process and strengthen the cooperation with the city
Ravensburg	Klima-kommission	11/2019 – 7/2020	Developing climate mitigation measures in four thematic fields (mobility, energy, awareness/education, CO2 compensation).	The meetings were held with the whole group (10 sorted citizens, 10 policy makers, 10 stakeholders, 5 civil servants)	create ownership, identification with the process and strengthen the cooperation with the city.
Netherlands	G1000 Netherlands Climate Assemblies	2022/2023	CO ₂ neutrality sustainability	<p>'Getting the whole system in the room'. Citizens, employers, civil servants, and politicians are together in all meetings. Politicians are not allowed to vote.</p> <p>Partner agreement with further stakeholders (experts, initiatives, NGOS, example: housing societies, construction companies) to implement the results, but not interfere in the process.</p>	Mutual learning, increase feasibility and speed of implementation, increase the (societal, social, political) impact, taking decisions together as a society

Table 3: Overview and short description of analysed climate assemblies. The information is mainly based on interviews with the commissioners and practitioners, except for Ireland (Devaney et al., 2020) and Poland (Gerwin, 2018).