KNOWLEDGE NETWORK ON CLIMATE ASSEMBLIES



From Projects to Permanence:

How to Embed Permanent Assembly Infrastructure

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November 2026

Key messages

A small but growing trend of more permanent citizens' assembly infrastructure is emerging that moves us beyond the more common ad hoc assemblies. A small number of these permanent assembly infrastructures are specifically climate focused, although most have a broader policy agenda.

Permanent assembly infrastructure has the potential to be more responsive to changing policy contexts, facilitate deeper integration into administrative structures, strengthen oversight and monitoring of follow up and build broader social trust and confidence.

Permanent assembly infrastructure can take (at least) two forms: permanent assemblies (e.g., Brussels Capital Region Climate Assembly, East Belgium Permanent Citizens' Dialogue) or specialist units and agencies (e.g., Agency for Citizen Participation in Baden-Württemberg, French National Commission for Public Debate).

The conditions for successfully embedding permanent infrastructure include: (a) getting the design right; (b) political commitment and support; (c) bureaucratic capacity and capability; (d) legal frameworks; and (e) narrative and storylines.

Taking the first step towards permanent assembly infrastructure will vary across political contexts but can include: making the most of ad-hoc assemblies; playing on political innovation; building alliances and persuasive storylines; and creating learning opportunities.

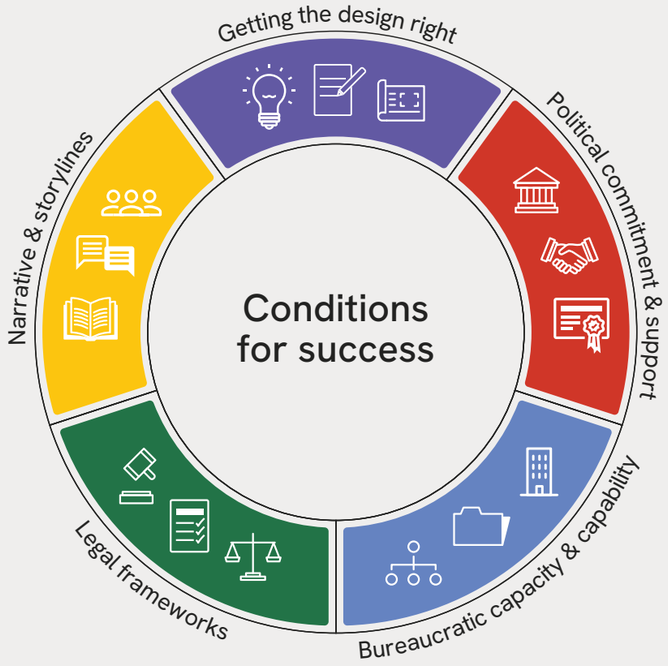


Table of contents

Introduction 4

Why permanency? Why embedding? 6

What does permanent assembly look like? 8

Conditions for success: What needs to be in place to embed permanent climate assembly infrastructure 12

From here to there? Ingredients for taking the first step towards permanent infrastructure 30

Appendix 34

About KNOCA, authors, acknowledgements 36

① Introduction

The majority of citizens' assemblies have been ad hoc (one-off) processes that deliver recommendations for responding to social problems at particular points in time. But if we want democratic innovations (not just assemblies) to have a deeper impact on the quality of our democracies, then we need a more structural approach in which they become an embedded part of political decision-making. This is particularly the case for long-term challenges such as climate change. The evolving nature of the climate and ecological crisis means that public administrations require ongoing citizen input as ecological, social and economic conditions change.

A small but growing trend of more permanent, embedded citizens' assembly infrastructure is emerging. Some of this infrastructure is climate specific. Most have a broader policy remit within which climate is one area of concern amongst others.

The Permanent Citizens' Dialogue established in the German speaking region of East Belgium is typically recognised as the first significant example of a permanent body. It is empowered to work on any area of policy that falls within the competence of the regional authority. Permanent climate assemblies have been established in the Brussels Capital Region and in Milan Metropole as part of its Air Pollution and Climate Plan. As we published this guidance, the Climate Citizens' Assembly in South Korea – the world's first permanent citizens' assembly at national level – was coming towards the end of its first iteration.

This guidance primarily focuses on the embedding of permanent citizens' assemblies. However, it also considers an alternative approach to permanent assembly infrastructure: the creation of a specialised agency or unit that delivers and/or oversees ad hoc citizens' assemblies or similar deliberative processes. In this case it is the agency or unit that is permanent. Examples of such agencies range from the Agency for Public Participation in Baden-Württemberg through to the Regional Participation Agency in Tuscany. Environmentally focused agencies exist, but no participation agency has been established with a purely climate remit.

This is the first guidance we are aware of on how to move from one-off to permanent assembly infrastructure. The guidance considers why we should be interested in permanent bodies and the different approaches that have been taken. It then analyses the conditions that need to be in place for permanency, including key design choices, political commitment and support, bureaucratic capacity and capability, legal framework, and narratives and storylines. Finally, we consider some of the first steps that can be taken towards developing permanent bodies. The guidance builds on the earlier KNOCA Briefing Towards Permanent Climate Assemblies.

We hope that the guidance can both inform and inspire an evolution in climate governance. While it has a particular focus on climate, the lessons it draws can be applied more generally to forms of permanent infrastructure that have a broader policy remit.

Links to all the assemblies mentioned in the text can be found in the Appendix of this Guidance.

Brussels Capital Region Climate Assembly
Photo: © Bryanpro photography

② Why permanency? Why embedding?

In this guidance we are focusing on permanent bodies that are integrated into the everyday work of a public authority and persist over time. Permanent assembly infrastructure can be established within civil society independent of established political institutions - the first example has just been initiated in Stavanger in Norway - but this is not considered within this guidance. Permanent citizens' assembly infrastructure has a number of potential advantages over ad hoc assemblies, including:

- Being responsive to changes in climate and ecological conditions, knowledge, technology, attitudes and behaviours so that recommendations can be timely and potentially revisited and revised.
- Facilitating deeper integration of citizen deliberation into administrative structures. Public administrations, often unfamiliar with this form of input, can develop constructive working relationships and procedures to engage with assemblies over time. This gradual culture shift helps move assemblies from being perceived as 'unusual' exercises toward being recognised as a regular and valuable part of public governance. Streamlining and increased understanding of assembly processes can lead to better delivery and reduce costs. Permanency can help normalise other participatory processes, reducing the continual need to justify public engagement.
- Strengthening oversight and monitoring of follow-up. Permanent bodies can track the fate of previous recommendations and hold authorities accountable through ongoing review.
- Building broader social trust and confidence in climate governance. This will take time – and assumes that commissioners are responsive to the recommendations from the assembly. Repetition of an assembly will slowly build familiarity with the process and its recommendations amongst the wider public, stakeholders and the media. Inclusion of the diversity of voices within a community in decision making is a potential defence against increasing polarisation around climate.
- Empowering a growing cohort of citizens who not only contribute to climate governance through the work of an assembly, but take their deliberative capabilities, knowledge and confidence to act into everyday life.

A note on language and definitions

While we use the terms ***embedding*** and ***permanent*** in this guidance, other terms are often used such as ***institutionalisation***, ***mainstreaming*** and ***anchoring*** to capture the move away from ad hoc assembly processes. It is not that we don't like these terms. But they tend to be used in different ways by different people, so we thought we would be more specific about what we are talking about!

Embedding refers to the extent to which an institution has become part of the accepted way of doing things. Permanent refers to an institution that is expected to remain in place over time. An institution can be permanent but not embedded – if it is generally ignored by political actors.

But nothing is permanent! The bodies we discuss in this paper have different legal and regulatory status. Even the most legally robust institutions can be removed. Some of the examples are also associated with particular climate plans and so are time limited.

This categorisation of permanent assemblies means that some polities that regularly hold assemblies are not included - for example Ireland, where the government has commissioned five national assemblies, and the European Union, where the Commission is organising its eighth citizens' panel. In neither case has a permanent citizens' assembly been established that takes place at defined regular intervals or a specialist agency created. Both remain particularly vulnerable to changing political contexts - for example, in Ireland, the most recent coalition government has not committed to organise a citizens' assembly during its term of office. However, in both cases, it would not take much more structural change for these to become permanent assembly infrastructures.



The Austrian Citizens' Climate Assembly
Photo: © BMK - Karo Pernegger

③ What does permanent climate assembly infrastructure look like?

3.1 Permanent climate assemblies

The most widely recognised infrastructure is a permanent citizens' assembly. The first fully embedded permanent assembly infrastructure was established in East Belgium – the Permanent Citizens' Dialogue. This is not climate specific. It can consider any issue that falls within the competence of that level of regional governance.

The Ostbelgien Citizens' Dialogue is composed of three separate institutions.

1. The annual citizens' assembly, with a new topic and membership each year.
2. The Citizens' Council which is composed of 24 members of previous assemblies that selects the topic for each assembly and provides oversight of the assembly and the follow-up by the regional parliament and government. One third of the Council is replaced after every assembly takes place to ensure rotation of membership over time.
3. The permanent secretariat that provides logistic support.

Since the East Belgium Dialogue was established, around 20 other permanent bodies have taken root (see Appendix). Of these, at least four are climate specific. Three operate at the metropolitan level: the Brussels Capital Region Climate Assembly, the Milan Metropole's Citizens' Assembly on Climate and the Copenhagen Climate Assembly. The fourth is the Climate Citizens' Assembly in South Korea – the first permanent citizens' assembly established at national level. The South Korean assembly only began its work in 2026, so it is too early to reflect on the conditions of its success to the same degree as the earlier assemblies.

The Brussels and Milan climate assemblies show how different permanent assembly infrastructure can vary in their design and operation. Both work on an annual cycle, with new members selected each time. The Milan assembly has a relatively constrained role, with a focus on the implementation and evaluation of the municipal Air and Climate Plan that is in place until at least 2030. The Plan aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality and combat the effects of climate change. The assembly considers how existing policies within the plan are best delivered and can evaluate the actions of the municipality in its delivery of policies.

The Brussels Capital Region Climate Assembly is engaged in policy formulation. In its first three cycles it focused on housing, food and the sharing and collaborative economy. In contrast to the Milan assembly, in Brussels the agenda is set by assembly members: a small group of members of the previous assembly sets the agenda for the next one, after consulting with the government, political parties and other stakeholders. The government is required to provide an initial response to the assembly's recommendations within three months and then a more detailed explanation of its actions within a year. A monitoring committee made up of members of that year's assembly is established to oversee government action on their recommendations. They have the right to meet with Ministers at least twice and can ask to meet anyone from the administration or cabinet to be informed about government activities.

Two permanent assemblies, two different models. Brussels is an assembly with agenda-setting power primarily tied to the executive branch of government, whereas Milan primarily deals with the administrative branch on policies already decided by elected politicians.

The Copenhagen Climate Assembly has elements of both Brussels and Milan. Like Milan it is formally integrated into the municipality's climate plan. But in this case, it is running over three separate cycles with the first two cycles focused on policy development – more akin to Brussels. The third cycle turns the assembly's attention to considering the implementation of the plan. It is currently an open question as to whether the assembly will continue as a part of Copenhagen climate governance.

The Climate Citizens' Assembly in South Korea more closely resembles the Brussels assembly in that it has agenda setting powers and is tied to an executive body. A small group of assembly members forms a planning group that selects the topics that the rest of the assembly then considers. The assembly feeds into the work of the multi-sector Presidential Commission on Carbon Neutrality and Green Growth.

The Citizen Observatory of Transitions in Clermont-Ferrand is not climate specific, but has a broader focus on ecological, social, and democratic transitions. It was established to monitor the implementation of recommendations from an earlier assembly and to assess the relevance and effectiveness of public transition policies.

3.2 Specialist units and agencies: an alternative approach to permanent infrastructure

Rather than create an assembly that runs on an annual basis (or some other time period) like in East Belgium, Brussels, Milan or South Korea, public authorities can also establish specialist units or agencies that are able to deliver citizens' assemblies. It is the agency that is permanent – the assemblies it organises are ad hoc and time limited. Such agencies can be required by law to deliver or oversee citizens' assemblies under particular conditions.

A number of environment-focused independent agencies exist at national and regional levels. Examples include:

- Quebec's Environmental Public Hearings Board (Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement, BAPE),
- French National Commission for Public Debate (Commission Nationale du Débat Public, CNDP)
- Tuscany's Regional Participation Authority (Autorità Regionale per la Garanzia et Promozione della Partecipazione, TPA)

They are all mandated to organise or oversee deliberative processes on large-scale developments that have potentially significant environmental impacts. BAPE and CNDP can also organise or oversee debates requested by other parties.

More generalist agencies can also be found. For example, the Agency for Citizen Participation in Baden-Württemberg has gained a growing reputation. The Agency drew inspiration from the earlier Office for Future-Related Issues (later the Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation) in Vorarlberg, Austria. Unfortunately, the Vorarlberg agency, established in 2013, was disbanded in 2025, reminding us that even apparently permanent infrastructure can be removed.

The Agency for Citizen Participation in Baden-Württemberg was established in 2023. The Agency (a 'public-law-entity') initially sat under the Office of the State Councillor for Civil Society and Participation and then, following state elections in 2026, now sits under the Department of Central Administration. An administrative directive defines its mains tasks:

- Provision of cost-free advice on dialogic (deliberative) citizen participation and design and delivery of participation processes, not only to other state ministries, but to any other authorities within the state, including public companies and, in particular, the 1,101 municipalities. This ensures quality of processes and means that commissioning bodies are free to participate more actively in the process while avoiding role-conflicts
- Holding master agreements with professional participation firms capable of running relevant participatory processes (e.g. citizens' assemblies). The Agency can take care of the procurement process for authorities, reducing bureaucratic hurdles and prices.
- Since 2025, distribution of a funding pot to support small municipalities below 20,000 inhabitants. The Agency can carry costs of up to €30,000 in each case, thus increasing accessibility for less well-resourced authorities to organise participatory processes

During the first three years of its existence, the Agency gave advice in more than 250 cases, employing the master agreement around 50 times. The support of the Agency means that municipalities and other authorities have been able to commission participatory processes in situations where they do not have the capacities or competencies to run them themselves.

The Baden-Württemberg and Vorarlberg agencies are not climate-specific, although climate sits within their policy remit. In principle, such an agency could be created that provided ongoing support to different levels of governance to organise assemblies that specifically focus on climate-related topics – or like BAPE and CNDP, empowered to organise assemblies when policies, programmes or projects are proposed that are judged to have potentially significant climate impacts above a certain threshold.

Beyond these different types of independent agencies, many public authorities already have participation units that specialise in different forms of public engagement – the city of Barcelona arguably being one of the most high-profile examples. The French government is home to the Interministerial Centre for Citizen Participation (CIPC). Following a government decision to promote deliberative engagement, the CIPC accompanies other ministries, providing training, methodological guidance and access to contracted practitioner organisations. Typically, these units have a broader agenda than just deliberative engagement – and in some cases such participation expertise will be found within climate departments. For example, in Camden and Westminster City Councils in the UK, participation specialists based in their climate departments are networked with other participation specialists across the public body. In both cases, these civil servants have organised ad hoc climate assemblies amongst other public engagement activities.

3.3 The climate vs. generic distinction in permanent infrastructure

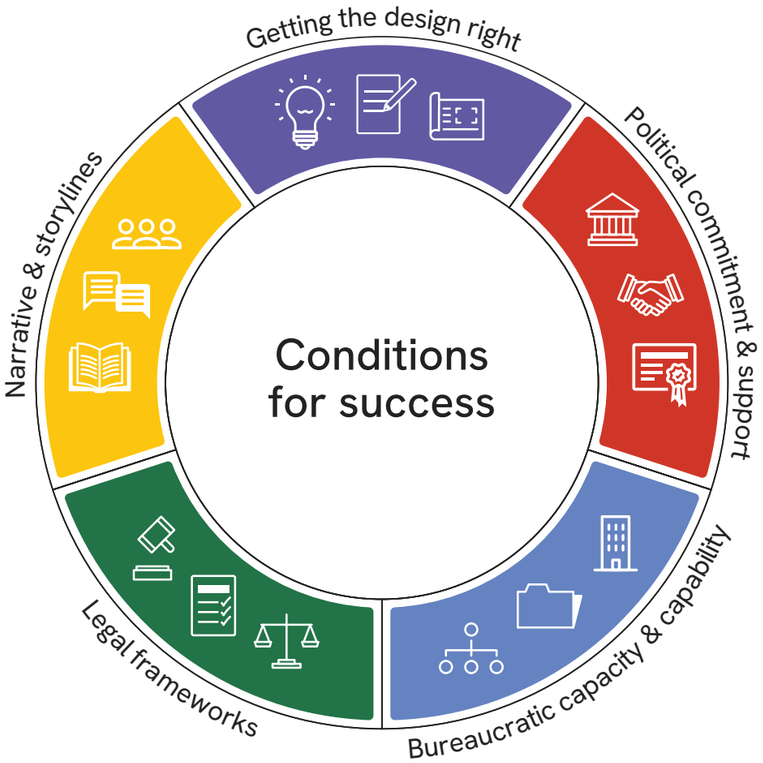
Most permanent assembly infrastructure is not climate specific. Climate can be considered, but it is one area of policy amongst others within the remit of the body. However, it is not a simple choice between climate or generic remit for assembly infrastructure. It is possible for a permanent body to be created that has a broad policy remit (i.e., it can focus on any area of policy, be it health, transport, housing, education, etc.), but which is required to consider the climate implications of any issue within its deliberations and recommendations. In other words, it is directed to reflect on climate repercussions of policy developments. Whether this would be a formal requirement or a more permissive directive (which the assembly can choose to embrace or ignore) is an open question.



East Belgium Permanent Citizens' Dialogue
Photo: © buergerdialog.de

④ Conditions for success: What needs to be in place to embed permanent climate assembly infrastructure?

No two permanent assembly infrastructures have emerged in quite the same way. The political and administrative contexts have varied. But a few factors seem to be significant and are worth the attention of anyone wishing to embed permanent infrastructure:



4.1 Institutional integration – getting the design right for your context



While no off-the shelf design for permanent assembly infrastructure exists, certain characteristics are common across cases. For example, in permanent assemblies, members tend to be rotated on an annual basis and functions such as governance, agenda-setting and oversight take similar forms. Permanent infrastructure needs to be designed to be responsive to the specific social, political and institutional context in which it is going to operate. The variation of practice across the relatively small number of existing permanent bodies provides a sense of the different choices that can be made.

4.1.1 Where does the assembly infrastructure fit in the policy cycle?

Permanent infrastructure can be developed for different parts of the policy cycle – from policy formulation through to implementation and evaluation. It would be too much to think that a single assembly would be able to function across all parts of the policy process without overwhelming citizens. Design needs to be specific to the function of the assembly.

The permanent climate assemblies in Brussels Capital Region and Milan Metropole show us two very different approaches to integration into the policy process.

In Brussels, the assembly is empowered to formulate proposals that the Regional Government is then expected to respond to. These could be new areas where the government is not currently working or proposals to modify existing policy. This is also the case for the South Korea Climate Citizens' Assembly which is tasked with formulating policy recommendations for the Presidential Commission on Carbon Neutrality and Green Growth.

In Milan, by contrast, the Air and Climate Plan is focused on the implementation of the existing Air and Climate Plan. Its role is to evaluate existing action plans, to propose improvements to those plans and to review and evaluate implementation.

Beyond climate, most permanent assemblies are closer to the Brussels model in that they formulate policy proposals. But like the Milan assembly, the Citizen Observatory of Transitions in Clermont-Ferrand also has a monitoring role, in this case it is charged with monitoring the implementation of proposals made by a previous ad hoc citizens' assembly.

The specialist agency in Baden Württemberg tends to organise assemblies for public bodies focused on policy development, but it could deliver assemblies at other points in the policy cycle. The environmentally focused agencies such as BAPE and CNDP are generally empowered to organise assemblies and other participatory processes at a specific point when large-scale development plans are being assessed.

4.1.2 How much agenda-setting capacity for citizens?

Permanent assemblies vary in how agenda-setting power is distributed. Designers have to navigate the tension between empowering citizens to focus on the issues that are of interest to them and giving agenda-setting power to public authorities so that the assembly focuses on an issue that is at a point in the policy cycle where input would be deemed meaningful and useful.

Critics of agenda setting by citizens question how everyday people will be able to select the most relevant issues – or know what type of issues assemblies are best at dealing with. Critics of government agenda-setting question whether they will be willing to open up the most challenging issues for consideration by an assembly. Often practice is somewhere in between, with a balance between empowering assembly members and ensuring input from public authorities and other stakeholders.

In Milan the agenda is more constrained because government has already articulated the Air and Climate Plan. The assembly is working within those confines, with the administration deciding which areas of the plan to prioritise during each cycle of the assembly.

Again, the Brussels assembly is almost the polar opposite. It is citizens who decide the agenda, but not those who have just been recruited for the next cycle. Rather a committee of 25 assembly members drawn by lot from those members who have been through the previous cycle (ensuring gender balance and at least one Flemish-speaking member). The principle is that they have developed a practical understanding of climate policy and the types of issues an assembly can manage as compared to the general public that have not been through such a process. The agenda-setting committee consults the government and stakeholders, narrowing its choice of issues down to three. These are then shared with the administration which provides feedback on which would be most meaningful and useful for them. The final decision resides with the committee. This annual exchange over the agenda has helped foster closer working relationships between the assembly and the Brussels administration – and increased understanding and visibility of the assembly amongst key public officials. A key role here is played by the assembly Secretariat (see 4.3.2).

The South Korean Climate Citizens' Assembly has a slightly unusual design in that 20 members of the 200-person assembly volunteer to be part of a Planning Group which decides which three issues the assembly will consider – the remaining 180 then break into three streams to tackle these issues. The Planning Group reviews proposals submitted via an online platform. In the first year they had the challenging task of working through 690 proposals that had been submitted by citizens, experts and relevant government ministries amongst others.

In East Belgium, the Citizens' Council plays a similar agenda-setting role: it is empowered to decide on the remit of each citizens' assembly. The praesidium of the parliament has the right to propose up to three issues per annual cycle. The Council is required to establish a citizens' assembly on one of these issues within each governmental five-year term. The Citizens' Council is also restricted to selecting issues that fall within regional government competencies. While members of the Council make the final decision, the administration provides an assessment of potential topics for them to consider in relation to its competences, the current policy making context and how much space there is to make a contribution.

The Paris Citizens' Assembly manages the tension between citizen and government agenda-setting by incorporating both approaches in each assembly cycle. The Assembly is divided into two working groups. The first selects one of three proposals from the mayor to develop a draft law (délibération in French). The other group is more exploratory, working on an issue that falls within the city's jurisdiction generated from amongst assembly members (voeux).

For the specialist agencies and units that are empowered to organise assemblies, agenda setting can take different forms. For some agencies, such as BAPE, CNDP and TPA, the main trigger for public dialogues is the proposal of large-scale projects. CNDP and the TPA can also oversee debates requested by other parties, with the CNDP also able to consider petitions. The Agency for Citizen Participation in Baden-Württemberg tends to be commissioned by public bodies within its region. Citizens had the right to petition the former Vorarlberg Agency.

Brussels Capital Region Climate Assembly
Photo: © Bryanpro photography

4.1.3 Managing recommendations – not overwhelming the system

One of the challenges that public authorities face when attempting to integrate recommendations from climate assemblies is the sheer number that many assemblies produce. This can be a problem for both implementation and keeping track of follow-up. While this is a challenge for ad hoc assemblies, it is even more so for permanent assemblies when a new set of recommendations appear on an annual basis. Proposals from assemblies that have been accepted or modified are rarely fully implemented within a year. As a new assembly begins, the administration is often still dealing with recommendations from previous years. Additionally, the more recommendations, the more likely it is that public authorities will 'cherry-pick' proposals – selecting those that are easier to implement and fit with their governing approach. Organisers have increasingly attempted to reduce the number of recommendations and/or signal the assembly's priority areas for action.

When originally conceived, the Citizens' Council of the East Belgium Permanent Citizens' Dialogue was empowered to organise up to three assemblies per year. This was altered to one a year for two reasons. First, multiple assemblies would place too many burdens on the members of the Citizens Council who oversee the assemblies and monitor the response of the regional authority. Second, it was soon realised that over time this would produce more recommendations than the part-time parliamentarians and relatively small executive were able to handle. The Council is also required not to organise two assemblies in a row on the same areas of policy, again so as not to overwhelm relevant parliamentary committees and government officials.

In Brussels, the first cycle produced a large number of proposals: 80 in total. This caused two problems for the administration. Like in East Belgium, it found it did not have the capacity to deal with all the recommendations at the same time. But it also did not know which to prioritise. Subsequent cycles drastically reduced the number: the second cycle generated 32 recommendations, and the third synthesised proposals into 8 priorities (and 20 recommendations overall). This change was supported by the development of a formalised set of criteria for selecting and prioritising recommendations which includes thematic relevance, climate impact, feasibility, social and economic impact.

In Clermont-Ferrand, the permanent Citizens' Observatory decided to focus initially on just four of the forty recommendations of previous assemblies to ensure it could manage its workload and address the proposals thoroughly.



Brussels Capital Region Climate Assembly
Photo: © Bryanpro photography

4.1.4 Procedures for official response and oversight

The permanency of an assembly means that its integration into the system should, in principle, be more developed than ad hoc processes. Administrations are often required to work within a specific schedule to respond to recommendations, with some permanent assemblies establishing specific bodies to oversee the action of the authority. Lessons from participatory budgeting in Brazil show us that where a public authority reorganised bureaucratic structures to prioritise response to citizens' demands within a year, trust and participation in the process increased markedly.

The Brussels Climate Assembly has formal requirements for response by the regional authority. After a public launch of the assembly report, the administration then assesses the feasibility of the recommendations, with the government required to issue an initial response within three months and a more detailed follow-up within twelve months. A monitoring committee of 10 randomly selected assembly members oversees government action for one year and meets ministers twice. Beyond these two codified meetings, the committee defines its own working methods and level of engagement, including verifying implementation by consulting affected groups or requesting meetings with relevant administrative or ministerial staff. The Secretariat plays an important role in coordinating this process. The main challenge occurs when it is not Brussels Environment that needs to coordinate the response – engagement with other departments has been less consistent (see section 4.3).

In Milan, the municipality has two months to accept or reject the contents of the citizens' report, to publicly justify and publish its choices. For any recommendation adopted by the municipality, it is committed to follow-up on its implementation. Each proposal is assigned to an internal referee in the municipality who is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the proposal in the following year.

Under the South Korean Climate Law, recommendations of the Climate Citizens' Assembly are to be reflected in national policy following review and resolution by the Presidential Commission on Carbon Neutrality and Green Growth. A Special Committee for the Climate Citizens' Assembly drawn from the Commission will review the recommendations and a plenary meeting of the Commission will then deliberate and make resolutions. At present, no formal timescales for formal response from relevant national and local government bodies have been established.

In Clermond-Ferrand, the Observatory monitors the follow-up of previous assembly recommendations. To do this, a representative from the relevant administrative department is assigned to engage with the assembly.

In East Belgium, a public hearing is held in the parliament followed by more detailed consideration within the relevant parliamentary committee. Within a year, an explanation is provided on how recommendations will be implemented – or why they have been rejected. Throughout the process, the Citizens Council plays an oversight role.

Paris has developed a sophisticated, structured approach to coordinating with government departments. From the moment the assembly decides on its remit, a civil servant is identified as the reference person for handling recommendations. This individual serves as a bridge between the assembly and the administration, mobilizing expertise over the course of the year, liaising with external experts, stakeholders, and NGOs, and supporting the design of workshops. This helps ensure that the process remains grounded in administrative realities while maintaining openness to external perspectives. For three quarters of the year, members work on their remit, issuing a 'citizens' opinion'. The final quarter of the cycle is devoted to joint analysis by both the administration and political leadership. The conclusions are then presented back to citizens through two to three workshops over the course of about two months, allowing for iterative feedback and refinement.

Once a draft law or proposal is formally adopted by the Paris City Council, responsibility shifts to the relevant department. Follow-up mechanisms are built into the process: six months after adoption, the Participation Department meets with the responsible team to review progress and complete a tracking document. Three months later, this report must be validated by both the department's hierarchy and political leadership. About a year after adoption, a final review meeting with citizens is organized, producing official follow-up documents that close the cycle. This carefully timed process – remarkably rapid in comparison with other public policymaking processes – ensures that citizens' recommendations move from proposal to Council decision to administrative implementation and finally to transparent accountability within the space of a single year.

While the Baden-Württemberg agency does not employ a formalised oversight process, it has not had an issue with lack of uptake of assembly recommendations. In large part this is because the Agency requires a clear mandate and commitment from the commissioning body before it agrees to work with them. In Vorarlberg, the agency typically established a Responder Group to track the response and implementation of assemblies. This group usually consisted of a mix of assembly members and representatives of stakeholder organisations.

Peoples Plan for Nature, UK
Photo: © Involve - Jemima Stubbs

4.1.5 Learning through doing – and evaluation

None of the assembly infrastructures function in quite the same way as they did when they were first established. This does not mean that infrastructures are completely redesigned – most of the major design choices stay the same. But one of the real strengths of permanent bodies is that those involved can learn and redesign in light of experience. Such learning is enhanced where it is informed by independent evaluation.

In East Belgium, experience quickly showed that one assembly per year was enough rather than up to three as originally conceived. Similarly, the introduction of a requirement of the Citizens Council to select at least one issue proposed by the parliament in each five-year term responded to the desire for a degree of sharing of the agenda-setting of the Permanent Citizens' Dialogue. The revisions of the practices of the Dialogue have been informed by a sustained independent programme of research and evaluation led by Belgian universities.

In Brussels, the number of recommendations has been streamlined over time in recognition that this increases the likelihood of the administration being able to respond in a meaningful way to the citizens' input. After a three-year review led by the secretariat and engaging experts on citizens' assemblies, further enhancements to the climate assembly's structures and practices are being considered.

In Milan, initially half of the membership was rotated out of the assembly halfway through each annual cycle. But their experience was that this did not give citizens enough time to build collective knowledge and understanding, so they moved to rotation on an annual basis. At the same time, a decision was made to reduce the scope of the remit so that the assembly was much more focused on improving the implementation of measures within the Air and Climate Plan rather than proposing new ones.

The South Korean Climate Citizens' Assembly is being evaluated by an academic research team. It is not clear yet whether this will inform revisions to the functioning of the assembly in future years.

Paris has also revised aspects of its assembly, informed in part by the research and evaluation undertaken by a postgraduate student who is part of the participation unit. For example, the agenda-setting element in the first iteration took several sessions and is now a more streamlined process.

4.2 Political commitment and support



Permanent infrastructure not only requires political support from key politicians for its establishment, but also to ensure that it is sustained over time. Political backing from high-ranking politicians is crucial for the efficient work of civil servants supporting the citizens' assembly infrastructure (see section 4.3.). It grants civil servants a clear mandate and the authority to secure participation from other parts of the administration throughout the process, from the formulation of the remit to the information phase and the follow-up of recommendations.

Whereas ad hoc assemblies can be successful with only partial support across political parties, the long-term sustainability of permanent infrastructure requires support across electoral cycles – in other words, commitment across parties. A degree of protection is afforded by securing a legal footing for infrastructure (see Section 4.4.), but that can remain vulnerable if a new political administration feels that it was not part of the building of the institution.

The Permanent Citizens Dialogue has been successful in large part because a great deal of political work was done by G1000 in Belgium to ensure that all political parties bought into the institution while it was still just an idea – through individual meetings and convening all parties. The President of the region who had been a key driver behind the process was willing to take more of a back seat politically to ensure that other political parties made their commitment to the process.

In contrast, the Brussels Climate Assembly illustrates the risks of more politically constricted support. While it enjoyed strong backing from the high-profile Green Minister of Ecology, this association led some to view it as a partisan project. Elections in June 2024 and the protracted inability to form a new government over the following year meant its future became uncertain, particularly as the largest parties in the emerging majority (which did not include the Green Party) deprioritised the assembly. While its continuing status has now been confirmed, a more politically inclusive strategy might have made that process a lot smoother.

Similarly, the Paris Citizens' Assembly and the Baden-Württemberg agency were both established by green-left leaderships. In both cases, the same political coalition won the following election which has given both institutions further opportunities to embed. Their vulnerability to a leadership with different ideological commitments in the future is unclear.

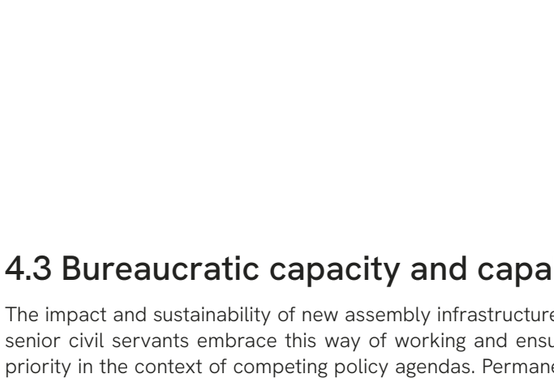
The South Korean Climate Citizens' Assembly has been established under the Democratic Party following two impeachments of Presidents within twenty years and widespread civil society mobilisation. The Democratic Party is explicitly committed to 'people's sovereignty' and on this basis is experimenting with a number of democratic innovations – the permanent citizen's assembly being particularly high profile.

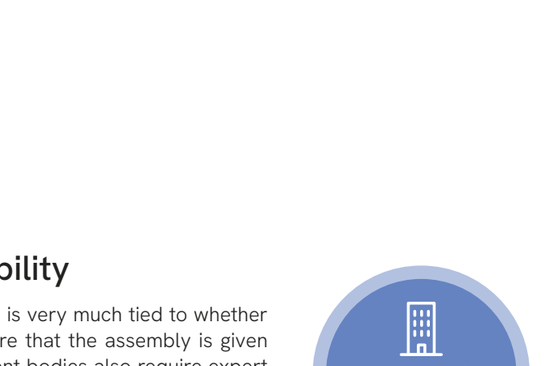
While most permanent infrastructure has been commissioned by left-of-centre parties, that is not always the case. The Office for Future-Related Issues in Vorarlberg was established under conservative political leadership and the East Belgium permanent dialogue enjoys support from across the political spectrum. Changes in levels of political support have also affected the capacity of independent agencies such as the CNDP to work effectively – presidents and ministers send signals as to the priority given to these bodies.

Political support for permanent infrastructure can be generated from citizens themselves – as one of the recommendations from an ad hoc citizens' assembly or other participatory process. In Paris, the idea of a standing citizens' assembly was proposed by an assembly organised as part of the national Grand Débat. In Rennes, the charter drafted by citizens through a citizens' convention and adopted by the metropolitan council includes the establishment of a permanent citizens' assembly, the introduction of compensation for citizens, and a guaranteed right to follow up on recommendations. Similarly, in Clermont-Ferrand, the city council first set up a one-off citizens' convention with the goal of drawing up a roadmap for elected officials on the ecological, social, and democratic transitions. After six months of work, the citizens proposed 40 recommendations, including the establishment of a standing body to monitor the measures they had implemented, and to assess the relevance and effectiveness of public transition policies. As this experience of a deliberative process was successful and the standing body was requested by citizens, it strengthened political support and enabled the creation of administrative structures. This monitoring body evolved into a permanent citizens' observatory.

4.3 Bureaucratic capacity and capability

The impact and sustainability of new assembly infrastructure is very much tied to whether senior civil servants embrace this way of working and ensure that the assembly is given priority in the context of competing policy agendas. Permanent bodies also require expert knowledge within the bureaucracy – typically some sort of dedicated secretariat – that is able to support the delivery of the assembly and is given licence to work across different parts of the administrative system to ensure its responsiveness. The secretariat relies on necessary financial resources being made available.









South Korean Climate Citizens' Assembly
Photos: © climatevoice.kr

4.3.1 Senior bureaucratic support

Senior civil servants need to give their support to permanent infrastructure otherwise it will not be prioritised within the bureaucracy. In large part, civil servants will be guided by the signals of politicians, but they have some latitude in the standing given to citizens' input vis-à-vis other priorities. In addition to their operational responsibility for budgets, schedules, staffing, and work processes, senior officials have established relationships and authority to gain access to relevant information or people throughout the administration. It is senior civil servants that create the conditions for cross-departmental cooperation that is often necessary in being responsive to an assembly.

Many of the operational procedures involved in running an assembly, such as democratic lottery and compensating citizens for their time, are new to public institutions and often need to be developed from scratch, particularly where there is no existing legal or administrative framework to support them. This requires endorsement from senior civil servants and their understanding of how to navigate the bureaucratic system to help create the new procedures, mechanisms and infrastructure of assemblies.

Senior endorsement for permanent citizens' assemblies is specifically vital, as a cycle usually lasts at least a year, and the implementation of recommendations can take several years. Senior support motivates middle-ranking and junior staff to align their work with the needs of the assembly, counteracting bureaucratic inertia.

Bureaucratic buy-in can be critical when a new government comes in as it will take cues from senior bureaucrats. Where an assembly infrastructure is viewed as a standard procedure, it is less likely to be questioned by a new executive.

The variations in the way that public bureaucracy works across different countries and levels of governance means that in some jurisdictions senior administrators are political appointees and will thus be much more committed to ensuring the implementation of political mandates. In those countries where that is not the case, the support of well-established senior bureaucrats to prioritise the assembly and integrate its recommendations into the work programmes of the administration is critical.

Locating responsibility as close as possible to the core executive, such as within the office of the head of government, helps ensure the permanent assembly is not easily sidelined or dismissed as the project of a single ministry, an isolated unit, or a minor coalition partner. This positioning signals that the assembly is a core element of governance rather than a niche or partisan initiative, making it more widely accepted and resilient to political change.

In Paris and East Belgium, senior administrative engagement has given the permanent assemblies high visibility and symbolic weight. The most senior civil servant in the East Belgium parliament was the main contact point for the initial development of the law that enabled the establishment of the Permanent Citizen's Dialogue.

In Paris, high-ranking officials and department heads are often appointed by the governing coalition and are loyal to it, ensuring that the bureaucracy acts in line with the coalition's priorities. Since the same political majority has been in power since 2001, political directives are generally actively implemented by the administration. Messages sent from the Secretary General's office receive greater attention across the bureaucracy than from the citizen participation unit. This has helped foster a participatory ecosystem that increasingly integrates citizen input into the administrative culture and its working methods. The assembly sits alongside more established participatory initiatives such as Europe's largest participatory budgeting process, which is endowed with €100 million per year and accounts for a quarter of the city's investments and newer civic participation bodies such as the Council for Future Generations (established in 2016), the Council of European Citizens (2019) and the Council for Civil Society Organisations (2021).

Cross-government cooperation has been harder to achieve in Brussels where the assembly is very much seen as a project directed by Brussels Environment.

4.3.2 Dedicated secretariat

A key ingredient in successful delivery of an assembly is the existence of a dedicated secretariat. Dedicated in two senses: (1) specific officer(s) whose role it is to support the assembly process and its integration into the public authority; and (2) commitment to the process, given that most other administrators will initially be suspicious of the process and concerned about extra workload. While citizens are at the centre of all these processes, the secretariat makes things happen – both ensuring delivery of the assembly and its integration into the bureaucracy. Most permanent assemblies outsource some of the design and facilitation tasks to external providers, but the presence of the secretariat is a key determinant of the quality of the process. They are typically the only citizens' assembly experts within the authority and thus become guardians of the infrastructure.

Many administrations operate with a single full-time secretary, although experience in Brussels suggests that at least one-and-a-half full-time positions are needed. In East Belgium, three members of the administration work on the Citizens Dialogue. Preparation and organisation of each assembly, coordinating follow-up to recommendations, and communication are very different skill sets.

The tasks carried out by the secretariat vary. For example, specialised tasks, such as the civic lottery and facilitation, are often outsourced due to their technical and time-intensive nature. However, some administrations, including East Belgium and Paris, manage the sortition processes in-house, thereby reducing external costs and enhancing institutional learning over time. Generally, facilitation is entrusted to external process experts. But in Paris and Clermont-Ferrand, for example, this role is carried out by the secretariat responsible for the citizens' assembly. While in-house moderation can generate cost savings, it raises questions about independence of the process and the ability of politicians and administrators to put undue pressure on the process.

The Agency for Citizen Participation in Baden-Württemberg acts as the secretariat for the different assemblies it organises for other public bodies within the region. Most bodies it works with do not have the capacity or experience to deliver these sorts of assembly projects. The Agency takes a lot of the stress and strain out of the process by holding master agreements with professional participation firms which lowers bureaucratic hurdles and ensures specialised advice; and being responsible for the design and delivery of the participation process, freeing the commissioners to participate more actively and avoiding role-conflicts. The Agency actively runs communication campaigns with mayors and leaders of other public bodies to make them aware of their services.

4.3.3 Budget

One of the easiest ways to undermine an institution is to reduce the flow of resources – to not fund it to the necessary level. Adequate supply of funding can be integrated into the legal anchoring of the permanent infrastructure, although politicians and administrators typically have discretion on fiscal flows.

Several municipalities have adopted multi-year budgeting strategies to create a degree of predictability and reduce vulnerability to annual political decisions. Paris, for example, allocated funding for several cycles at once – around €60,000 per cycle in addition to one full-time secretary, one intern, and a part-time researcher – thereby ensuring continuity of operations.

Brussels employs a similar approach: funding for three cycles has been granted in advance, with the decree agreed at the end of 2025 formalising the assembly as a recurring project. Such a decree removes the need for repeated political validation and provides the most reliable mechanism for securing stable funding.

Copenhagen has also committed to multi-year financing, allocating approximately €100,000 per cycle along with funding for one full-time civil servant.

Across all the cases of permanent assemblies, cost structures vary according to how much of the work the municipality conducts internally and how much is outsourced (see section 4.3.2).

The savings associated with the Agency in Baden-Württemberg are significant if the alternative is to try to install capacity to organise deliberative processes in all 1,001 municipalities and other public bodies within the state. The Agency's annual budget is about €500,000, covering salaries of 8 people, office rents and the services required for it to function. The funding pot for small municipalities is an additional budget that was set at €450,000 for 2025/2026.

East Belgium Permanent Citizens' Dialogue
Photo: © buergerdialog.de

4.4 Legal framework



Constitutional, legal or regulatory formalisation both enables permanent infrastructure and provides some defence from shifting political priorities. Legal anchoring provides a formal status to institutions. Such anchoring does not guarantee the permanence of citizens' assemblies, but it significantly strengthens institutional resilience and places a barrier in the way of political forces wishing to undermine the institution. Embedding deliberative processes in formal frameworks provides continuity across political cycles and enhances their legitimacy, though the degree of protection ultimately depends on the strength of the legal basis and the political will to uphold it. Any legal status can be overturned.

The detail of codification can vary. In some instances, codification will only define basic elements of an assembly – for example the use of democratic lottery. But it can be an opportunity to carefully think through – and codify – the different elements of the assembly infrastructure: how the process will work and how it is integrated into the existing governance framework.

The East Belgium Permanent Citizens' Dialogue has been embedded within the institutional framework of the Parliament of the Region since 2019, making it the first legislature in the world to establish such a deliberative process by law. Following its amendment in April 2024, the law now stipulates that a maximum of five citizens' assemblies may be held per legislative period, with each legislative period lasting five years.

The South Korean Climate Citizens' Assembly is the first explicitly defined within national law – Article 19-2 of the Framework Act on Carbon Neutrality and Green Growth for Coping with the Climate Crisis that came into effect in October 2026.

Since 2022, the Brussels Climate Assembly is enshrined in the region's Air, Climate and Energy Management Code, which requires citizen participation in climate-related policymaking. In March 2024, the regulation was amended to permanently include the climate citizens' assembly, on the condition that a ministerial decree be adopted before the end of 2025 to define key parameters such as meeting frequency and budget. While the election of less supportive parties in 2024 could have led to the blocking of the decree, it was eventually passed and so the Assembly now has a stronger legal standing.

The Paris Citizens' Assembly has been formally established in the rules of procedure of the Paris City Council since October 2021, with further consolidation in October 2023 which explicitly formalised the assembly's rules of procedure, including the ability to propose deliberations or wishes. Embedding these provisions should make it more difficult for future governments to abolish the assembly or restrict its powers.

The Milan and Copenhagen assemblies are more time limited in that they are formally required parts of climate plans with specific time-limited mandates. In Milan the Air and Climate Plan has a mandate until 2030. In Copenhagen, the Climate Plan integrated an assembly into its development phase between 2023 and 2026. Its future after that date is unclear.

For those permanent agencies that promote or organise assemblies, the level of legal formalisation varies. In Vorarlberg, the right to establish a citizens' council (an alternative deliberative format) has been enshrined in the regional constitution since its amendment in 2013: regional government or a citizens' initiative can activate a council. But the legal provision did not enshrine the Office for Future-Related Issues. In this case, the agency was abolished in 2024 meaning that municipalities and the regional authority no longer have direct advice and guidance. While Baden-Württemberg has a regional law that promotes Dialogic Citizens' Participation, this was in place well before the Agency for Citizen Participation. The Agency was established under an administrative directive. In principle this leaves the Agency somewhat exposed to changing political whims, but at present its performance and support across different levels of governance helps ensure its sustainability.

In France, the CNDP guarantees the right of everyone living in France to access information and to participate in debates on projects or policies with significant environmental impacts, a right enshrined in Article 7 of the Environmental Charter. Under the 2002 law on local democracy, the CNDP must be consulted by the promoters of major projects and may also be consulted by the government on spatial planning or environmental policies. Its remit was significantly expanded by the Grenelle II Act in 2010 and further reinforced by reform in 2016, which broadened the scope of public debate, assigned new responsibilities to the CNDP, and introduced a right of citizens' initiative. The right of initiative allows citizens and institutional actors to formally refer matters to the CNDP.



The Austrian Citizens' Climate
Photo: © BMK - Karo Pernegger

4.5 Narrative and storylines

The stories we tell about deliberation on climate are critical. Narratives act as social rules, shaping individual and collective behaviour. They help us maintain our identity, guiding our actions and behaviours. A critical element of whether or not an institution becomes embedded is whether the stories we tell about it resonate with our existing ways of seeing the world. Narratives are constantly changing – think, for example, of the power of storylines pushed by the far right that have emerged in recent years.

It is very difficult to construct a persuasive narrative about climate and deliberation from scratch, so new narratives and storylines will build on what already exists. Narratives need to 'feel right' to be enacted. Different elements of a storyline may also appeal to different actors – whether politicians, bureaucrats, stakeholders and wider publics.

In Paris, storylines around the citizens' assembly were able to fit quite easily into an existing narrative of participatory governance that encompasses more familiar and long-standing participatory methods such as participatory budgeting and neighbourhood councils. But where the assembly has been particularly successful is in the development of a storyline about the rigor and credibility of collective deliberation over an extended period, far from superficial consultation or ad hoc opinion gathering. This storyline has been embraced by civil servants from other departments who were initially sceptical, especially those doubtful about participatory mechanisms in general.

In East Belgium, the original storyline of the politicians who initiated the process was one of countering political apathy and cynicism with 'reasoned citizen participation'. Their earlier positive experience of an ad hoc assembly provided firm foundations for this narrative to emerge. The administrators who took up the process kept the narrative of reasoned citizen participation (which was opposed to referendums) and of giving citizens a say (as opposed to elections that take place only every five years). In many ways it is the storylines within the administration that have proved more robust. For the second generation of politicians who came into Parliament after the 2024 election, the existing narrative is less persuasive, and some see the Citizens' Dialogue as a burden. Emerging storylines navigate somewhere between bridging the distance with citizens and of making better policies, but as of yet they do not resonate to the same extent.

The Democratic Party of South Korea has an explicit commitment to 'people's sovereignty' which has helped enable extensive experimentation with democratic innovations, including citizens' assemblies.

The Vorarlberg agency example is salutary. Here a narrative around the potential of citizens' councils to reduce feelings of political alienation was particular important. Contrasting accounts have been offered as to why the original Office for Future-Related Issues was transformed into the broader Office for Voluntary Engagement and Participation (OVEP), and then why this latter office was more recently abolished, but interviews suggest that national-level scandals and growing distrust in politics diminished the power of the original storylines that no longer resonated in the same way. The loss of an embedded storyline was a critical disabling factor.

In Baden-Württemberg, a widely shared symbol is the basis for new storylines around deliberation. The social and political disruption generated by widespread protests around the rebuilding of Stuttgart railway station plays a critical role in the self-understanding of politicians and administrators – and the wider public. 'The politics of being heard' combines with 'how we do politics here' – a new style of leadership and way of working enacted by the former Green minister-president Winfried Kretschmann who won the election in the wake of the station debacle. He instigated the position of the State Councillor responsible for participation in 2011 and, more than a decade later, the Agency for Citizen Participation. This storyline resonates in different ways but is particularly important in framing political deadlock or when addressing crises and challenges. The narrative is less centred on citizen participation as such and more on making societal conflicts – especially sensitive, politically risky issues – discussable and negotiable, especially for politicians. The way in which assemblies involve a broad cross-section of citizens is seen to enhance the legitimacy of political decisions. Narratives within the administration foreground the way in which citizen participation can improve planning by integrating early feedback and diverse information sources. This storyline stresses the need to move beyond ad-hoc consultations and avoid reliance on the 'usual suspects,' instead engaging the 'silent middle' of society that is typically underrepresented and realising a more balanced understanding of public preferences.



The Irish Citizens' Assembly (An Tionól Saoránach)
Photo: © ICA

⑤ From here to there? Ingredients for taking the first step towards permanent infrastructure

So, we have an idea about what needs to be in place for effective embedding of permanent climate assembly infrastructure. But how do we get the idea of permanency on the agenda in the first place? Drawing from experience from across the different examples of permanent assembly infrastructure, we offer the following thoughts on how to get started. Not all of them will be relevant to your context, but some will hopefully resonate.



Make the most of ad-hoc assemblies

It is striking, but not a surprise, that most permanent infrastructure has been prefigured by one or more ad hoc assemblies. Running a one-off assembly can give politicians and administrators confidence that they can do this sort of work and that it is valuable compared to politics as usual. The idea of more permanent infrastructure builds on that success. This is certainly the story for the much-celebrated Permanent Citizens' Dialogue in East Belgium where the perceived success of a one-off assembly gave local politicians the confidence to think more adventurously.

In Clermont-Ferrand, Paris and Rennes, the idea of a permanent assembly was one of the proposals of an ad hoc assembly or similar deliberative process. Decision makers were required to consider the idea in their response to the assembly. Assembly members put the idea on the political agenda.

Advocates of permanent bodies have rarely exploited the opportunities that ad hoc assemblies foster. Understandably, most advocacy is focused on ensuring the commissioner takes the assembly's recommendations seriously. This is important. But it is also a moment to seed the idea of permanent infrastructure. Politicians and administrators will be most receptive at that moment where a participatory process is perceived as successful and they are taking credit for the process.



Play on political innovation

Many politicians like to be seen to be in the vanguard of political innovation. That is certainly what permanent climate assembly infrastructure represents. Only around 20 permanent assemblies exist – of those only three or four have climate as a specific theme. We have seen what the OECD term a 'deliberative wave' of citizens' assemblies. We are arguably in the initial phase of a new 'permanent deliberative wave' and some politicians – and indeed senior administrators – will be attracted to being at the forefront of this trend.



Seek out and support activist public administrators

Bureaucrats sometimes get a bad rap in the deliberative and participatory worlds as barriers to democratic innovation. Some are resistant to new ways of doing their work. But others are frustrated by the practices and systems within which they operate. Alliances can be built with public administrators who would like to see their authorities take participation more seriously. Foster their enthusiasm and provide support when opportunities emerge to propose new ways of working. Putting permanent assemblies on administrators' agendas means that when they are asked by politicians for ideas to deal with climate and transition challenges, new institutional thinking is in the mix.



Build a persuasive narrative and storylines

Building a narrative around permanent infrastructure needs to be sensitive to context. What are the existing concerns about democratic and climate governance that the adoption of permanent infrastructure might respond to? Deliberative infrastructure might be part of a storyline in response to growing fears around misinformation, polarisation and the rise of the far right. Or the challenge of building public acceptance of the transition to a low carbon economy as it begins to impact our everyday lives. Or, as in Stuttgart, a particular event might provide a potent symbol for narrative construction. Politicians, administrators and other key stakeholders know we are in democratic and ecological trouble, but we need storylines that resonate with their condition and context, that give meaning to permanent infrastructure. It is an open question about whether such infrastructure is better framed in climate language – or whether other language is more likely to resonate.

Recent work by Nets4Dem suggests that two overarching narratives tend to be present in those places where participatory formats have been embedded: one around effective governance; the other related to democratic resilience. Narratives of effective governance place an emphasis on the contribution of deliberative processes to policy quality, administrative efficiency, and democratic legitimacy. They encompass themes such as diversity of knowledge, the ability to navigate policy complexity, improved policymaking, and strengthened acceptance of governmental decisions. Narratives of democratic resilience emphasise deliberation's capacity to strengthen democratic culture by countering political alienation, reducing populist temptations, reinforcing trust in institutions, and complementing representative democracy.

But narratives and storylines are not abstract things. They need to be sensitive to context – to existing narratives and storylines that shape individual and collective behaviours. Teasing out the opportunities for reshaping or reordering existing ways of thinking needs to be done through engagement with key political, administrative and civil society actors to understand the way in which they make sense of the world.



Build broad political support

The tendency is to be attracted to a political entrepreneur who is open to taking the risk of instigating a permanent body. This can be a dangerous strategy in the longer term. The Brussels Climate Assembly was strongly associated with the Green Party, pushed through by the Green Minister of the Environment in the government of the Brussels Capital Region. When an executive was formed that did not include the Green Party, the assembly lost its most visible champion. In these circumstances, the confirmation of the decree that sustained the assembly was an extremely close call. Compare this situation to East Belgium where G1000 spent a great deal of time working with each political party to ensure they supported the proposal for the permanent infrastructure. Seven years later and the recent revision of the dialogue decree was supported by all 24 members of the regional parliament. One of the ways of building this support is articulating storylines around the assembly that resonate across party political lines and are responsive to local conditions and context.



Build civil society alliances and public support

Most of the permanent infrastructure has been developed top-down – it is a process driven by political elites. It has not been a broader public demand. The development of local and national movements for deliberative reform in climate governance and beyond has been a relatively unexplored strategy. South Korea is an outlier here where civil society actors were active in promoting the idea of climate assemblies, including through a demonstration assembly project.

In some jurisdictions, an earlier ad hoc assembly has recommended permanent infrastructure and coalitions of assembly members and local stakeholders have come together to lobby for action. This happened to some extent in Clermont-Ferrand, Paris and Rennes. Cumbria in the UK is a current example where a broad coalition of assembly members and civil society organisations is emerging following a recommendation for a permanent body from an ad hoc assembly.



Create learning opportunities from early adopters, including peer-to-peer interactions

Politicians and administrators from East Belgium are probably getting a little sick of the amount of attention they are getting! They have been highly accommodating in responding to requests from other governments, parliaments and bureaucracies that want to know more about how the process works and its impact on political decision making and broader political culture. Peer-to-peer learning from others who have faced similar political challenges or work in a similar administrative position is incredibly helpful for cutting through scepticism and reasonable concerns about the impact on workflows.



Design for context – and fire-test ideas

Designing permanent assembly infrastructure needs to be responsive to the political, social and institutional context, but also needs to learn the lessons from existing initiatives. While no two bodies are exactly the same, similar design choices have been made across a number of cases.

We can think of design in two ways. First the characteristics of the assembly itself: how are remits to be decided; how often does it meet; how many members, etc. Second, how the assembly is to integrate with other political and bureaucratic institutions: where are the openings for such institutional change; is the assembly infrastructure to be climate or generic in its focus; where is it to be based in the administration – as close to the core executive as possible, or part of existing climate governance structures?

The tendency when taking the first steps is to expect too much from permanent infrastructure. To make too many promises about what permanent bodies can deliver. Bring in experts who have experience of designing permanent bodies and those who have experience working with them as part of the design process to help ground proposals.

Appendix

Websites of Permanent Assemblies

- German-speaking Community in East Belgium, Belgium
- Nancy, France
- Paris, France
- Villeurbanne, France
- Poitiers, France
- Rouen, France
- Haute-Garonne, France
- Lisbon, Portugal
- Rennes, France
- Marseille, France
- Brussels, Belgium
- Milan, Italy
- Aachen, Germany
- Copenhagen, Denmark
- Bordeaux, France
- Clermond-Ferrand, France
- Lüneburg, Germany
- Greifswald, Germany
- New Westminster, BC, Canada
- South Korea
- Stavanger, Norway

Websites of permanent agencies

- Environmental Public Hearings Board (Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE), Quebec, Canada
- National Commission for Public Debate (Commission Nationale du Débat Public, CNDP), France
- Regional Participation Authority (Autorità Regionale per la Garanzia et Promozione della Partecipazione), Tuscany, Italy
- Agency for Citizen Participation in Baden-Württemberg, Germany
- Interministerial Centre for Citizen Participation (CIPC), France

Design choices for permanent citizens' assemblies

The table below illustrates how different design criteria are enacted in permanent assemblies across Europe. The list is not exhaustive; rather, it is intended to invite broader reflection on how diverse deliberative solutions can be designed to address the specific needs of contexts.

Criteria	Observed Variants
Origin of the initiative	Public authority, citizen proposal, civil society or mixed
Level of governance	Local, regional
Degree of institutionalisation	Regulatory basis or not
Permanence	Through iterative practice or established legal framework
Participant selection	Civic lottery exclusively or mixed methods
Topic selection	By assembly participants, the public, the executive, administration, elected officials, municipal council, or a combination of these actors
Length of deliberation	Minimum 5 sessions, mandate from one year to three years
Main function	Policy development, implementation, evaluation, monitoring
Outputs produced	Recommendations, plans, legislative proposals
Response from authorities	Mandatory or non-mandatory response, formalised follow-up or not
Participatory follow-up rights	Inclusion or not of citizens in the follow-up process
Challenges encountered	Legal barriers (e.g. compensation, status), budgetary constraints

Different functions of permanent citizens' assemblies

Permanent assemblies have been created to fulfil different functions within the policy cycle. This table lists these functions in the left column and briefly describes the roles they perform, as well as indicating examples of assemblies that exist (a non-exhaustive list). These categories are not strictly distinct from one another because empirical reality is so diverse that some assemblies serve multiple functions.[1]

Type of Assembly	Decision-Making Role	Main Functions	Examples
Thematic Consultative Assembly	Consultation on a specific topic	Develop recommendations Deliberate on a specific public policy (see above for different ways that topic can be chosen)	East Belgium, Paris, Brussels-Capital Region, Aachen etc.
Assembly Contributing to a Plan	Contribution to a plan to be developed	Enrich a plan to be developed with citizen input Provide democratic legitimacy	Copenhagen (climate plan)
Implementation Assembly	Implementation or monitoring of policies	Propose implementation measures for an already established plan Monitor concrete policy application	Milan (climate plan)
Hybrid Assembly	Combination of monitoring and consultation	Self-selected topic & institutional request for input	Brussels, East Belgium, Paris, Marseille, Rouen
Citizen Monitoring Assembly	Oversight, accountability	Evaluate the participatory dimension of public consultations Assess public policies on ecological, democratic and social transitions	Rennes, Clermont-Ferrand, Bordeaux

1 This table as created by Nabila Abbas and Héloïse Legris for the webinar and launch of the working group "échanges de pratiques Assemblées citoyennes permanentes", of the Institut de la Concertation et de la Participation Citoyenne (ICPC) on 25 April 2025.

From Projects to Permanence:
How to Embed Permanent Assembly Infrastructure

November 2025

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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.

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to the organisers, civil servants and politicians from different jurisdictions who were so open to our requests for information about the particularities of their assembly infrastructure, participants in the FIDE/KNOCA workshops on permanent citizens' assemblies and Ione Ardaiz and Daniel Oppold who kindly reviewed the text.

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KNOWLEDGE NETWORK ON CLIMATE ASSEMBLIES