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Deepening and Connecting Democratic Processes. The Opportunities and Pitfalls of Mini-Publics in Renewing Democracy

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Received: 20 September 2018; Accepted: 13 November 2018; Published: 15 November 2018



Abstract: In recent decades, so-called “mini-publics” have been organized in many countries to renew policy making and democracy. One characteristic of mini-publics is that the selection of the participants is based on random sampling or sortition. This gives each member of the community an equal chance of being selected. Another feature is that deliberation forms the core of the process of how proposals are developed. In this paper, we investigate the possibilities and challenges of sortition and deliberation in the context of the call for a deepening of democracy and more citizen engagement in policy making. Based on extensive research on citizens’ forums (G1000) in The Netherlands, we show the potential of mini-publics, but a number of shortcomings as well. Some of these are related to the specific design of the G1000, while others are of a more fundamental nature and are due to the contradictory democratic values that deliberative mini-publics try to combine. One of these concerns the tension between the quality of deliberation and political impact. We conclude that combining institutional approaches could be a way out to deal with these tensions and a step forward to both deepen and connect democratic processes.

Keywords: democratic innovation; mini-public; legitimacy; deliberative forums; sortition; democratic values

1. Introduction

In response to an actual or perceived decline in legitimacy of the political system, public officials search for new ways to involve citizens and organizations more directly in policy making (Torfing and Triantafillou 2011; Cain et al. 2003). At the same time, they also feel the need to innovate the existing forms of representative democracy (Grönlund et al. 2014; Smith 2009). These developments present a number of challenges to democracy today. First, how can innovative forms of policy making, and democracy give a voice to a broad group of people and avoid the risk of excluding particular groups, like ethnic minorities or young people? Second, how can these forms be more effectively connected to extant political and bureaucratic processes?

In recent decades, so-called “mini-publics” have been organized in many countries in an attempt to renew policy making and democracy (Grönlund et al. 2014). There is a broad variety of mini-publics, including citizens’ forums, citizens’ juries, planning cells, 21st Century Town Meetings, and consensus conferences (Ryan and Smith 2014). What they have in common is that the selection of the participants is often based on sortition, giving each member of the community an equal chance to be selected. In addition, deliberation forms the core of the process of how proposals are developed by mini-publics. Instead of political or socio-economic power, it is the power of ideas and arguments that counts, as well as the willingness to be convinced by others.

In this paper, we will investigate how sortition and deliberation can contribute to deepening democracy and increasing citizen engagement in policy making, and reflect on their possibilities and challenges. The article is structured as follows. After a brief discussion of how mini-publics differ from other arrangements of citizen participation, we will provide an overview of the main advantages of sortition and deliberation that are mentioned in the literature. We will then discuss how these are realized in the practice of mini-publics, illustrating our arguments with examples from extensive research on deliberative forums (G1000s) in the Netherlands.

We will show a number of shortcomings, and discuss how some of these are related to the specific design of the G1000, while others are of a more fundamental nature. One of the problems is that the potential for democratic renewal of both sortition and deliberation—as exemplified in the mini-public—is hampered by the lack of connection between the outcomes of the deliberative forum and the formal process of decision making. This is partly due to contradictory democratic values that deliberative mini-publics try to combine. Deliberative mini-publics, not unlike other (representative) democratic arrangements, aim at achieving a number of democratic values that are at odds sometimes, e.g., legitimacy and quality of decision-making. However, there may be a way out, and in the final section we suggest that combining institutional approaches could help to deal with these tensions between democratic values. We believe that empowering mini-publics through a follow-up in political and public debate and a (public) vote on the outcome can be an important step forward in deepening and connecting democratic processes.

2. Mini-Publics as a Form of Democratic Innovation

There are different ways to respond to concerns about lack of representation and legitimacy. Local authorities, in particular, have turned to interactive governance, collaborative governance, co-production and similar forms of citizen involvement with the aim of sharing responsibility for policy making and increasing policy support among relevant stakeholders (Ansell and Gash 2007; Torfing and Triantafillou 2011). In addition to this, citizens have been given a greater say in policy and political decisions through referendums, citizens' initiatives, citizens' forums, citizens' juries and many other forms (Smith 2009; Grönlund et al. 2014; Fishkin et al. 2000). Although all forms have in common the aim to share responsibilities between the government and the public and increasing the influence of citizens, the central concepts that are used vary within different contexts. For example, within government discourses and in the public administration literature, the central focus usually is on policy making and governance (Torfing et al. 2012; Torfing and Triantafillou 2011), whereas in the political science literature key concepts are democracy and democratic innovations (Michels 2011; Smith 2009; Cain et al. 2003).

In the broad spectrum of democratic innovations, Smith (2009) makes a distinction between three forms. The first are *popular assemblies*, which are open forums where citizens engage in face-to-face interactions and decide over a range of issues (Smith 2009, pp. 30–31). Examples are town meetings, participatory budgeting, and forms of co-governance, in which decisions are made collaboratively between citizens (and their organizations) and the government.

The second are forms of *direct legislation*. Direct legislation is direct democracy through the ballot box, examples of which are binding referendums and initiatives (Smith 2009, p. 112; Setälä and Schiller 2009). Although referendums have become a common political institution in many countries and at various government levels, the use of the instrument as a binding device is still limited to a selected group of countries. More recent is the form of “liquid democracy” which combines direct democratic participation with a highly flexible model of representation. Citizens can choose to either vote directly on individual policy issues or to delegate their votes to issue-competent representatives who vote on their behalf (Blum and Zuber 2016, pp. 162–63; Paulin 2014).

The third form of democratic innovation is called *mini-publics* (Smith 2009, pp. 72–110). Although there are many forms of mini-publics and as many definitions (Ryan and Smith 2014), there are a number of common features (Smith 2009, p. 76). These are: (1) a broadly inclusive and representative

sub-group of the affected population, usually selected through random sampling (Bohman 2007; Fishkin et al. 2000); (2) deliberation in a series of small group and plenary sessions; (3) independent facilitation, aiming to ensure fairness of proceedings (Steiner 2012); and (4) evidence provided by experts (Luskin et al. 2002). Examples of mini-publics are citizens’ assemblies or forums, citizens’ juries, and consensus conferences.

The democratic innovations mentioned above may differ on three dimensions (cf. Fung 2006). The first dimension concerns the issue of “who can participate”: Is it an open forum allowing everyone to participate, or are participants selected by sortition or other selection mechanisms in order to have an inclusive and more or less representative sub-group? The second dimension deals with the issue of “how are decisions made”: Is voting the main mechanism to arrive at decisions or do deliberation and opinion formation form the basis for decision-making? According to Fung (2006), only a small set of venues are deliberative in the sense that citizens take positions, exchange reasons, and sometimes change their minds in the course of discussions. In terms of the third dimension, which concerns the impact of public participation, Fung (2006) notes that participants have little or no impact on policy in most participatory venues. We will take up this point for mini-publics later in this paper and for now focus on the first two dimensions to categorize the different forms of democratic innovation (see Table 1):

Table 1. Democratic innovations.

		How Are Decisions Made?	
		Deliberation	Voting
Who can participate?	Selection Open	Mini-public Popular assemblies	Direct legislation

Mini-publics differ from other forms of democratic innovations because they combine sortition as a basis for the selection of participants with deliberation as a basis for decision-making. Sortition means that each member of the (political) community has an equal chance to be selected. Deliberation means that it is the power of ideas and arguments that counts, resting on the willingness among the participants to be convinced by others (Dryzek 2000; Steiner 2012). This combination may contribute to both a broadening and deepening of democracy, in the sense that it increases firstly the range of issues under collective control, secondly the effective number of participants that exercise influence, and thirdly the degree to which that control is substantive rather than symbolic (Dryzek 1996). How this works out in practice and which are the possibilities and challenges of sortition and deliberation in the context of the call for more citizen engagement in policy making will be discussed in the next sections.

3. The Arguments for Sortition and Deliberation

The combination of sortition and deliberation, so it is argued, redresses two problems that characterize much of current public decision making. First, sortition would increase the (descriptive) representativeness of the participants as compared to self-selection, which is often biased towards citizens that are better educated and have higher incomes (Fishkin et al. 2000). In other words, a mini-public would be more *inclusive* or *diverse* than other forms of citizen participation. Second, deliberation would encourage the search for consensus and agreement, instead of focusing on—and sometimes even amplifying—differences as often happens in a process of bargaining and voting (Steiner 2012; Dryzek 2000). This would make a mini-public more *thorough* and *rational*.

3.1. Why Sortition?

Most advocates of sortition (e.g., Van Reybrouck 2016; Stone 2016; Vandamme and Verret-Hamelin 2017) refer to ancient Athens, which built its political system on the idea that citizens would alternate between governing and being governed. This idea also comprised that all citizens were

considered capable of governing, as compared to a system in which this responsibility is only entrusted to a group of (elected) representatives. It is precisely because of the presumed “malaise” or “crisis” of representative democracy that sortition is presented as a promising alternative for voting (Malkopoulou 2015).

To be sure, most of the arguments in favor of sortition do not imply abandoning elections altogether. Likewise, mini-publics are not intended to replace national parliaments or local councils. Instead, the aim is to somehow combine sortition and voting, with sortition adding to electoral mechanisms and compensating some of the shortcomings of voting. From this perspective, Delannoi et al. (2013) identify several contributions sortition can make to political decision making. They argue that:

- (1) It may increase descriptive representation, since sortition ensures that characteristics of the population as a whole are reflected in the mini-public. This requires a considerable sample (several hundred people) to cover all of these characteristics and the sample must be drawn from the entire population. There should be no pre-selection on the basis of motivation, experience, knowledge etc. since the population also includes people who are not motivated, lack relevant knowledge, or are unexperienced.
- (2) It may reduce the conflict between elites: with sortition, there is no conflict between political parties or factions that can paralyze the system. Moreover, there is no cartelization of the party elites which excludes many others from decision making and could occur at the expense of the public interest.
- (3) It may enhance participation: sortition offers a new avenue for participation and makes sure this actually takes place. It countervails the apathy of many voters, by offering more diverse and inclusive participation, giving voice to people that are often neglected.
- (4) It may ensure rotation: as a result of sortition, all political offices regularly become vacant. This keeps certain politicians from remaining in the same position for a long time and leads to the alternation of governing and being governed.

Applying this to mini-publics, we can see how many of the possible advantages could theoretically work out. First, there is an equal chance to participate, as compared to various formal and informal barriers in other forms of participation. Second, the emphasis is on reasoned arguing, and the absence of both elite conflict and special interests is expected to contribute to this. Participants do not have to feel the burden of promises they have made to others and can talk freely about the topics which are put on the table. Third, the diversity of participants leads to a diversity of perspectives and the inclusion of different views and arguments. These perspectives are often overlooked, since various groups in society either do not participate or are not represented in other decision-making arenas.

3.2. *Why Deliberation?*

The rise of deliberative forums like citizens’ summits, consensus conferences, citizens’ juries, and deliberative polls over the last twenty to thirty years, is closely related to the deliberative turn in democratic theory (Dryzek 2000; Steiner 2012). Deliberative democracy adds to both representative democracy and direct democracy. To deliberative democrats, it is not enough to have free and fair elections—although this as an important precondition—but they want to enrich this process of governance with deliberative elements. Likewise, deliberative democrats would applaud the influence of citizens that stems from direct democracy, but also want the public debate in the run-up to a referendum to be characterized by high-quality deliberation (Gastil and Richards 2013).

Although deliberative democracy refers to a wide range of ideas, concepts, and models (Elstub et al. 2016), several positive effects are often mentioned. Deliberation would create “better citizens” (Cooke 2000; Nabatchi 2010; Niemeyer 2014), contribute to a higher quality of the process of decision making, and thus lead to better decisions and more effective policies (Chambers 2017; Niemeyer 2014; LeDuc 2015). Moreover, because deliberation involves a process of careful scrutiny of

the problem, consideration of many alternatives, and reason-giving, not only the process but also the decision itself would be regarded as fair (Cooke 2000; Nabatchi 2010; LeDuc 2015).

To qualify as deliberative, such processes have to meet a number of criteria (Blacksher et al. 2012; Ryan and Smith 2014). First, participants have to be able to obtain balanced and factual information, to increase their knowledge of the issue at hand. Second, diverse perspectives have to be included, to avoid dominance of participants with higher incomes and higher education and the exclusion of relevant points of view. Third, competing moral claims and values can be freely discussed, tested, and challenged, based on mutual respect. The experimental literature on mini-publics shows that such criteria require relatively small groups, supported by independent facilitators who are able to optimise this specific form of deliberation (Grönlund et al. 2014; Caluwaerts and Kavadias 2014). Moreover, the composition of the mini-public needs to reflect the diversity of the population, including all relevant subgroups. The basic rationale for the mini-public approach is that if the random sample that is gathered to deliberate is representative of the population, and if it deliberates under the appropriate conditions, then “[...] its considered judgments after deliberation should represent what the larger population would think if somehow those citizens could engage in similarly good conditions for considering the issue” (Fishkin and Mansbridge 2017, p. 9).

3.3. Connection with Politics and Decision Making

Our discussion of the main arguments underpinning both sortition and deliberation shows the close connection between the two. Sortition is crucial to increase the chances of a diverse group of participants, which in turn increases the quality of deliberation. At the same time, inclusion and diversity only make a difference for decision making when ideas, arguments and the willingness to listen and be convinced prevail, instead of voting, interests and the power of the largest number. It is no coincidence that both Bouricius (2013), starting from the perspective of sortition, and Gastil and Richards (2013), starting from the perspective of deliberation, develop an institutional design which is meant to combine the best of both worlds.

As we argued earlier, mini-publics are an example par excellence of this mix of deliberation and sortition. Then again, given the focus of the experimental literature regarding mini-publics on various strategies to refine and optimize the design of mini-publics, deliberative democracy theory runs the risk of focusing too much on the internal dynamics whilst disregarding the external effects (cf. Elstub et al. 2016). Therefore, we join those authors who have shifted attention from the impact or “uptake” (Goodin and Dryzek 2006) of the micro world of mini-publics to the macro world of political decision making. This relates to a growing strand in the literature on deliberative democracy, which no longer sees mini-publics as isolated spaces with ideal conditions for respectful and inclusive reason-giving, but instead emphasizes the importance of a mini-public’s embeddedness in the broader public sphere (Niemeyer 2014; Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2016; Curato and Böker 2016). Several mechanisms are suggested for linking mini-publics to political decision-making to increase their impact (Lafont 2015; Hendriks 2016; Pogrebinschi and Ryan 2017).

There is an actual risk that a well-designed deliberative forum which meets all of the criteria mentioned above hardly has any significance beyond the forum itself. To us, this is an important aspect of the current debate on deliberation and mini-publics and we will return to this point in our findings and conclusion. As aptly described by Raisio and Ehrström (2017, p. 31), participants may

“[...] often feel empowered during the deliberation—a positive experience of deliberation ideally creating a feeling that the citizen has exercised his or her citizenship— [yet] the lack of actual influence over policy-making would make this sense of empowerment short-lived.”

This could imply that those citizens become disengaged and are less likely to participate in future deliberative processes. Moreover, it provides ample opportunities for politicians to pay nothing more than lip service to the outcome of the deliberation.

4. Methods, Data and Cases

How do the advantages of sortition and deliberation derived from the literature compare to the practice of Dutch mini-publics? In order to answer this question, we will focus on the cases of the G1000 which were organized in municipalities throughout the country. The G1000 is a particular type of mini-public which started in Belgium in 2011, inspired among others by David van Reybrouck, a Belgian author and opinion maker (Van Reybrouck 2016). A lot of research on mini-publics focuses on the quality of deliberation, by either measuring the transformation of preferences (Fishkin et al. 2000) or measuring crucial dimensions of deliberation, such as respectful listening, respect, and justification of arguments (Steiner et al. 2004; Caluwaerts and Kavadias 2014). This article focuses on the design of the mini-public and how this design affects participation and the connection with politics. The analysis which we present in the next section is based on in-depth case studies of five G1000s that took place between 2014 and 2015, (as reported in Boogaard and Michels 2016) and additional data we collected for the G1000s of 2016 and 2017 (Binnema and Michels 2017).

With regard to *sortition* and *deliberation*, we used the following data:

- Reports from the local G1000 organizers on the number of participants and the setup and program of the meeting, which show both which share of the citizens who were invited actually showed up, and the way in which the discussions during the day were organized;
- A digital survey among participants held shortly after the event, in which they evaluated the discussions, topics and decision making process during the G1000, also including background characteristics of the participants to analyze the diversity in terms of age, gender, education and political activity; and
- Observations and semi-structured interviews with participants by the researchers during the event to analyze their motivation and their evaluation of the deliberative aspects of the G1000.

With regard to the *political uptake*, we used the following data:

- Interviews with G1000 organizers, municipal councilors, aldermen, and civil servants regarding the political uptake of the G1000 agenda;
- Content analysis of the political agendas of the council, newspaper articles, newsletters, web sites, and documents published by the local G1000 organizers, which we used to track the impact of the G1000 proposals on the local political institutions.

The first G1000 in The Netherlands was organized in the spring of 2014 in the city of Amersfoort. This example has been followed in other communities until the current day. In contrast with the Belgian G1000, which was held at the national level, all of the Dutch G1000s have been at the local or regional level. So far, a dozen G1000s have been held both in larger cities like Amsterdam, Nijmegen or Groningen, and in smaller communities like Gemert-Bakel, Borne, and Coevorden. While there is some variation, both over time and between different local settings, four elements are common to most of the Dutch G1000s that we have studied (Boogaard and Michels 2016; Michels and Binnema 2018). First, the participants are selected through *sortition*, except in some municipalities where formal or practical barriers prevented this. Second, there is an *open agenda*, meaning that the topics are not set in advance by the organizers of the G1000. Instead, they are discussed and decided upon by the participants during the day, leading to 10 proposals that constitute an “Agenda for the City”. Third, the G1000 is organized by *citizens*, not by local government, although politicians and civil servants do facilitate the meeting and often participate as well. Fourth, participants talk with each other in *small groups* (6 to 8 people at each table), with an emphasis on *dialogue* and deliberation, supported by trained facilitators. As can be seen from this description, this largely follows the design of the Belgian G1000, with the important addition of the “open agenda”.

In our analysis, we will not discuss each of the G1000 meetings in detail or specifically compare them with each other. Rather, we will evaluate the main characteristics (sortition, deliberation) and effects (political uptake), based on the more extensive research presented in Boogaard and Michels

(2016), As we argued earlier on, some aspects of the design are particular to a G1000, but several other apply to other mini-publics as well. Therefore, we will also draw a number of lessons about mini-publics more in general.

5. Sortition, Deliberation, and Political Connection in Dutch Mini-Publics

Since sortition is considered a crucial aspect of a mini-public, our first question is whether it actually increases participation, both in terms of quantity and diversity. In much of the academic debate this is acknowledged as a problematic, or at least challenging aspect. Bouricius (2013, p. 7) states that it is a “[...] (testable) assumption [...] that most citizens would readily participate for a set period of time, with appropriate compensation, in a process in which they believed their input really mattered”. This already presupposes a number of conditions that have to be met before citizens are willing to participate. In a similar vein, Delannoi et al. (2013, p. 29) argue that:

“[...] any compromise to an individual’s free time and personal liberty is regarded as a burden. We would envisage that any society that implemented a comprehensive program of sortition for public offices would also address the question of how citizens could be suitably motivated and rewarded.”

The experience with the G1000s in The Netherlands clearly shows that the mere fact of being drawn by lot does not guarantee participation. Actually, non-participation is very substantial: 90 to 95 per cent of those invited decide not to show up, for a variety of reasons. Some people mention practical time constraints (jobs, sports activities, running errands), while others think they do not have the required expertise or knowledge to contribute. Some find the open agenda of the G1000 too abstract, e.g., the invitation letter only mentions in general terms that participants will talk about the future of the city. They prefer to talk about more tangible issues they experience in their daily life. Others are afraid that an open agenda will mean that the conversations go in all different directions, and that the G1000 will have no political impact (cf. Jacquet 2017 for a more extensive discussion on reasons for non-participation).

This low turnout had serious consequences for the composition of these mini-publics, which was way less diverse than what was hoped for. Instead, it displayed the kind of underrepresentation of the lower educated, young people and ethnic minorities that is well known from other forms of citizen participation. Moreover, as a result of the lack of diversity, a number of issues known to be relevant to the local community (e.g., safety, crime, immigration) were hardly on the table, let alone represented in the Agenda for the City (Binnema and Michels 2017).

Given the high degree of non-participation, a mini-public based on sortition suffers from a similar lack of diversity as other forms of citizen participation. Self-selection and high non-response are likely to be a more serious problem in large-scale mini-publics (300 to 600 participants). In these cases, a further stratified sampling among those who respond to the first invitation is not possible. Actually, sortition has to be supplemented by other selection methods. For example, the Belgian G1000 started with sortition as a selection method, but gradually decided to opt for a combination of sortition and the targeting of specific groups through formal and informal networks (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2014). Even then, systematic biases in mini-publics are likely to remain, with an overrepresentation of citizens who are politically interested, civically active, and have higher political trust (Curato and Niemeyer 2013; Smith 2009). A systematic failing to include not only citizens with different socio-demographic characteristics, but also those who are less interested in politics, less civically active and more cynical, undermines the legitimacy and democratic value of the forum.

Turning to deliberation, we can draw a more optimistic picture of the G1000s. Based on both our own observations and interviews during the meetings, and surveys that were held after the G1000, we find that participants are positive about the deliberative process. Not only did they feel they could freely raise their own ideas, they also appreciated the contribution of other participants and described

an atmosphere in which participants were willing to listen to each other and to look for common ground. The institutional design of the G1000 was important in this respect; questions about the future of the community and the role of citizens were discussed in small groups. Moreover, the facilitators at each table, who were trained in advance, gave enough room for the dialogue, while at the same time keeping participants on track to develop policy proposals. Finally, and somewhat ironically, the overrepresentation of higher educated and politically active citizens actually was favorable to the deliberative nature of the G1000 and the focus on rational arguments.

However, some critical remarks are in order. First, and in contrast to many other citizen forums, including the Belgian G1000, experts did not play a role. The idea behind this was that citizens participated in the deliberations with an open mind without anyone trying to influence their ideas about relevant topics and possible solutions. Yet, the consequence of the absence of experts was that participants did not have the same level of information and knowledge and had to rely on their own experience. Some groups therefore developed proposals that could not be implemented due to financial or legal restrictions, or which turned out to be redundant with existing policies. Second, due to the abstract wording of the questions of the forum (“What do you consider important for the future of your city?”, “What should be done about this?”, and “What are you going to do?”), many discussions remained rather superficial. Moreover, remaining at a rather abstract level also implied that conflicting views and contestation were avoided. The search for consensus and common ground was detrimental to a careful consideration of different values and viewpoints.

Finally, we turn to the problem of the lack of the connection between the G1000s and the political arena. The recommendations of these forums had little impact, as the recommendations never made it onto the council agenda or the agenda of the municipal executive. They were rarely discussed in any political forum and, with a few exceptions, did not bring about notable changes in existing policies (cf. [Michels and Binnema 2018](#)). Several factors may have played a role in this. First, the forums were one-off, only lasting one day, and as such put only limited pressure on politicians. The outcome of these one-off forums could easily be put aside by politicians, whereas participatory processes held repeatedly over time may experience institutionalization and legitimacy in the eyes of politicians, adding to their impact (cf. [Pogrebinschi and Ryan 2017](#)). Second, the abstract wording of the questions that started off the deliberations resulted in rather vague recommendations and unspecified proposals. By using an open agenda, the aim was for the participants to decide the topics and to discuss whatever they considered relevant. This seems to have diminished the political impact of the deliberation results: some of these turned out to be part of existing policy already, which made it easy for the local councilors to ignore them.

6. Design Problems and Fundamental Tensions

So far, we have shown that the Dutch G1000s, with sortition and deliberation as key characteristics, suffer from a number of shortcomings. There are two types of problems: the first type concerns problems that are typical for the design of the Dutch G1000s which could to a large extent be solved by introducing design characteristics that are used in mini-publics elsewhere. The second type concerns more fundamental tensions that all mini-publics have in common, and for which no easy solutions exist. Moving beyond the practical issues and constraints related to the format, we would argue that part of the problem is that deliberative mini-publics attempt to combine democratic values that can be contradictory ([Michels and Caluwaerts 2017](#)). Democratic values include legitimacy, accountability, inclusion, impact, and quality of deliberation and decision-making. In trying to realize these values, fundamental tensions arise which make it impossible to optimally meet all criteria at the same time. This is, as a matter of fact, not different from representative democracy which also tries to combine different contradictory values ([Dahl 1956](#)).

We start with the first type of problems, those that are typical of the design of the Dutch G1000s. A first problem is the extreme low response rate leading to a lack of diversity of the group of participants. Both as a matter of principle and for budgetary reasons it was decided that the participants

of the G1000 would not be compensated. However, there are convincing normative and practical arguments to justify such a compensation (Bouricius 2013; Van Reybrouck 2016). While politicians and civil servants are reimbursed for their role in decision making, citizens are expected to share their ideas and expertise for free. Given the emphasis on citizen engagement and in order to stress that the ideas of citizens are taken seriously, this is a strange difference. Moreover, although the lack of compensation is not the main reason not to participate, we know it does form a barrier for some citizens (cf. Jacquet 2017).

Second, there was no role for experts in the Dutch mini-publics. As a consequence, participants did not have the same (level of) information and knowledge and had to rely on their own experience. We outlined how this sometimes led to proposals that were not feasible because of financial or legal restrictions or proposals that overlapped with existing policies. We believe that experts should play a role, to provide the necessary background information, to create a level playing field and to help the participants in refining their ideas. This is a common characteristic of most mini-publics and seen by many as a condition for deliberative processes. It also potentially increases the impact of the proposals developed during the G1000, as attention can be paid to the feasibility of proposals and their chance of getting implemented.

A third problem, which in our view asks for a redesign of the G1000, concerns the idea of an (entirely) open agenda. Although it enhanced the responsibility participants experienced for the proposals they devised, it also led to vague discussions and, at the end, to rather abstract and unspecified proposals. In most mini-publics elsewhere, the idea of an open agenda is understood differently: the topic of the forum is usually more specific (e.g., the constitution, abortion) but, at the same time, participants are free to put on the table topics and points of view which they deem important. Moreover, it can be argued that a deliberative process among citizens (and experts) is particularly suitable to discuss sensitive or controversial issues before they enter the political arena (cf. Raisio and Ehrström 2017). It is doubtful whether the current G1000, as a one-day event and with a focus on consensus and common ground, provides enough room for this type of discussion.

Moving to the more fundamental problems, we would like to point at the loose or absent connection with politics and decision making at that characterizes most mini-publics. From the perspective of democratic values, there is a fundamental tension between the quality of deliberation and political impact. Deliberations only make political sense if there is some idea of how the outcomes of the deliberations translate into policy measures and political decision making. However, a strong focus on the impact of the deliberations might also reduce the quality of the deliberation process and hamper the search for alternative, creative solutions that are not yet part of the political debate. In the Dutch G1000s, the focus on the deliberations which were driven by a completely open agenda, reduced the opportunities for political impact even more.

A second tension is between the values of inclusion on the one hand and legitimacy and accountability on the other. Even if there is a diverse group of people participating, the mini-public will never adequately reflect the entire population. As we have shown, the legitimacy of the Dutch G1000s was further undermined by a lack of diversity and a very high non-participation rate. This leads to questions of legitimacy and accountability: How legitimate are the outcomes of the forum? To whom is the forum accountable? Since the participants are selected by lot, they are not representatives in a formal sense, and they are not obliged to be accountable—some of them may also not feel the need to. Actually, this is one of the main arguments in favor of sortition, that participants can speak freely and do not have to take into account the desires and preferences of an electorate. However, what is the connection between the participants of the mini-public and the public at large if it is not through representation?

Third, the values of quality of deliberation and the quality of decision making of the mini-public can be at odds. Deliberation should alternate with aggregation (voting), but moving to aggregation too quickly might interrupt a fruitful dialogue. Since support for the outcome of decision making is often related to satisfaction about the process leading to that outcome, a more sophisticated voting

mechanism needs to be developed that does justice to the preceding deliberation. In the Dutch G1000s, we saw a strong focus on deliberations during the day and a sudden move towards voting for a top-10 of proposals at the end, which was not only unexpected, but also unsatisfying for most participants.

7. Conclusions: Combining Institutional Approaches as a Way Out

In response to perceived problems of representative democracy, both politicians and citizens are endorsing new forms of democracy that increase citizen engagement and give citizens a greater say in decision-making, thus improving the connection between politics and citizens. Mini-publics are one example of this development, resting on two claims: first, that they give a diverse group of people a voice (through sortition) and, second, that they create a basis for better argued and more rational decisions (through deliberation).

As we have shown, the mini-publics in The Netherlands (G1000s) suffer from a number of problems. Some of these are typical for the design of this particular kind of mini-public, and they could to a large extent be solved by introducing design characteristics that are used in mini-publics elsewhere. Indeed there have already been some institutional interventions with regard to the design of the most recently organized G1000s (Eckardt and Benneworth 2018). In the most recent G1000s, experts had a role in the process, if requested by the participants. Also, in some cases participants were given a financial compensation. Finally, some of the recent G1000s dealt with a more specified topic (e.g., energy; fireworks) and thus a less open agenda.

The organizers of recent G1000s also encouraged politicians to give more serious consideration to the topics put on the agenda during the deliberations. They did so by trying to ensure the commitment of political actors to the outcome of deliberation beforehand, in line with what Johnson and Gastil (2015) coined as “formally empowered deliberation”. However, the challenge of connecting with the political sphere remains the most difficult to meet. One solution to be considered is to devise a decision-making procedure in which the outcomes of deliberation have to be debated publicly and are voted upon in a referendum (cf. Table 2). Alternatively, the procedure would include a debate and a vote on the outcomes in parliament or council. Such a decision-making procedure combines and connects two institutional approaches, the mini-public and (direct) legislation.

Table 2. Institutional approaches combined.

		How Are Decisions Made?	
		Deliberation	Voting
Who can participate?	Sortition Open	Mini-public	(Direct) legislation

There are very few examples to be found in which mini-publics are formally empowered as part of a decision-making process. One example is the much-vaunted Canadian British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly in 2004 on electoral reform, which was more than just an advisory body. The recommendations of the Assembly were proposed to the entire population in a binding referendum and were thus clearly tied to a public ratification process (Smith 2009, pp. 88–93). Another example is the citizens’ assembly on abortion in Ireland in 2016 which paved the way for a referendum on this topic and a new law presented to parliament. The combination of deliberations with public and/or parliamentary ratification fosters both diversity and the quality of deliberation, and connects the outcome of the mini-public to the broader political sphere and political decision-making.

Combining these two institutional approaches might also be an answer to some of the fundamental tensions we identified earlier on. More in particular, it creates a basis for combining high quality deliberations and political impact. Furthermore, it addresses the tension between inclusion on the one hand and legitimacy and accountability on the other hand by connecting the participants of the mini-public with the public at large.

We are fully aware that democracy is an ongoing and much debated process. The challenges faced by representative democracy which we discussed in the introduction are only partially met by an improvement in the internal and external effectiveness of deliberative democracy. Moreover, it is important to appreciate that balancing between different and often conflicting values is part of any form of democracy. Think, for example, of balancing between the voice of the majority and the interests and opinions of the minority, or between seeking consensus and efficiency. Yet, we do believe that adding direct legislation to mini-publics would be a meaningful step forward to deepen and connect democratic processes.

Author Contributions: Both authors contributed equally to the paper at all stages.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank the editor of the special issue, Hendrik Wagenaar, and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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