

National citizens' dialogue

Guide to the model
for organizers



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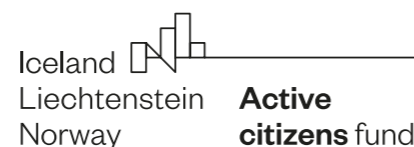
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Warsaw, February 2024

How to read the guide?

We learned a lot about energy costs at the **Civic council on energy costs**. The publication you are reading is a presentation of an idea for conducting a national discussion with citizens. We have collected and described our own and foreign experiences as well as the conclusions we drew together with the people involved in the process we are describing. You will find there links to interesting articles, knowledge bases, descriptions of processes similar to ours, and to source texts that we had analysed and from which we drew information ourselves. We have also collected advice on communication and evaluation, as well as the most valuable tips – below, you will find graphic highlights to help you find particular fragments. We are trying to show a certain way of thinking as well as actions that follow it and their sequence. The described national process resembles a multi-variant model, the final appearance of which is to be decided by its initiator and implementer. We encourage you to contact us, visit the website, read the reports and browse the publications recommended in various parts of the text in order to deepen your knowledge and find practical tips.

We hope that the publication, although it does not provide final answers to all questions and doubts, will support the decision-making and implementation of the process in your country, involving all its inhabitants.

We wish you a pleasant and interesting reading!

Key



interesting publications and guides we recommend, in Polish or English



advice on communication activities



ideas for evaluation activities as part of the **National citizens' dialogue**



tips on implementing the model, resulting from our activities



interesting videos and recordings we recommend, in Polish or English

National citizens' dialogue

throughout the publication, we highlight the name of the model in color

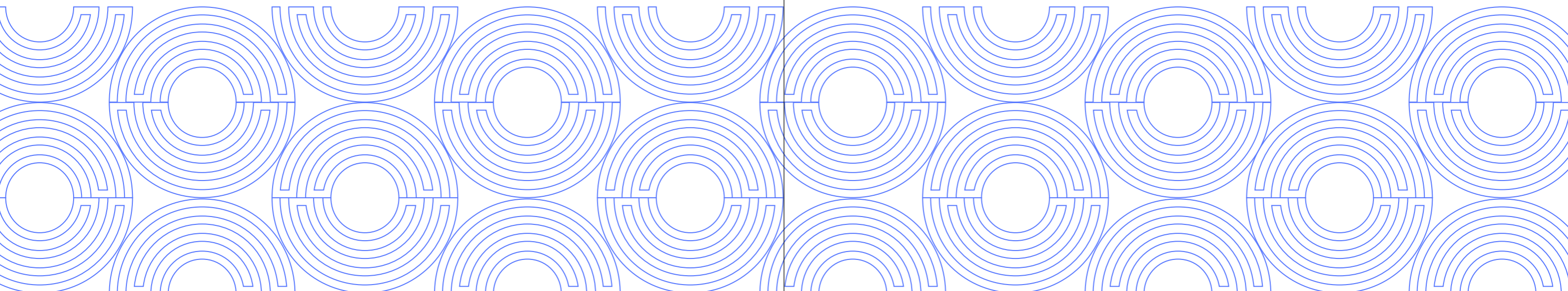


references to the four ways (so-called paths) of coordinating the dialogue, described in detail in the chapter "Who initiates and implements the model? Four paths."

Our experience

references to the **Civic council on energy costs**

By way of introduction and in a nutshell



Ladies and Gentlemen,

this publication was created with the intention of sharing experiences from the organization of an event called Civic council on energy costs by the Shipyard Foundation and the resulting conclusions for other processes on a similar, national scale. Our process aimed to reflect on the issues of the growing problem of energy poverty caused by, among others, rapidly increasing energy prices. In this guide, **we will focus on the National citizens' dialogue method, an operation model that can facilitate difficult discussions on important topics**, which are abundant in a country like Poland. The Shipyard Foundation – the main initiator and organizer of the project – has been creating and developing civic participation processes for years, and the competences acquired and experience gained from their implementation are what we want to share (if you are interested in the Assembly Participants' recommendations regarding solutions to the problem of energy poverty, please [read our report >](#)).

The process we organized consisted of two stages, which together constituted a coherent whole. In the first one, Citizens took part in meetings organized locally and open to everyone (so-called local councils). In the second one, whose purpose was to summarise the conclusions from local councils, we gathered a representative group of around one hundred people drawn from all over the country. We used the citizens' assembly method, which meant several days of carefully designed educational and deliberative activities, which ended with the randomly selected participants issuing a "verdict" – a recommendation for actions serving a given cause. In the case of the 2022 process, these were recommendations relating to rising energy costs and energy poverty.

Carrying out the model we propose requires combining a number of different components, which is a big challenge due to their complexity, as well as working with many stakeholders. Each process requires the construction of a new "coalition" around the thematic issue. This is quite tedious work, but without it the entire project would fail.

On the scale of Poland, both locally organized councils and citizens' assemblies had been already held in previous years (the Shipyard organized local councils within *the Civic council on education* in 2019, and there were eleven examples of citizens' assemblies at the city level when the process started), but never in the form of combined or sequential actions. A citizens' assembly had never been organized on a nationwide scale in Poland before. We can, therefore, claim that it was a new and somewhat experimental event.

The Civic council on energy costs was unprecedented. It is not just that no one else had attempted to organize a similar process in Poland. What made it unique was also, or perhaps primarily, the fact that it was launched, so to speak, as a bottom-up initiative – from the basic idea through implementation. Numerous partners participated in the process, but none of them, including the Shipyard itself, was a public administration body.

By carrying out the council, Poland joined other countries that are looking for new (albeit, in fact, ancient) methods of modernising democratic mechanisms. The core of this idea is to introduce processes involving citizens in formulating opinions and even verdicts on important public matters. It is not simply about a group of citizens, even if they are highly motivated and have strong views on a given issue. Such groups, including activist, advocacy or lobbying ones, are often self-sufficient in striving to be included in decision-making processes and to have their voices heard. However, it should be remembered that such groups have their place in the process described here – they act as advisers, and their task is to present specific solutions or a way of thinking about a given problem to the assembly participants. The essence of the idea described here is to give space to people whose voice, for various reasons, is often unheard in the broader social discourse.

In citizens' assemblies, which constitute the second step of our model, a group of citizens is selected by lot in such a way as to create a kind of *micropublic* representative of a given community (city, region or country). The point is, therefore, to limit the challenge of the so-called self-selection of participants. This mechanism may even involve in the process people who, as a matter of principle, do not go to polling sta-

tions, e.g. because they do not believe in the effectiveness of their votes, or they do not find anyone they would like to vote for; in Poland, it has been a large group in recent years.

Deliberative processes, such as the proposed model of the **National citizens' dialogue**, also have one very important feature, particularly significant in the face of deep polarization in Poland (although it is worth emphasising here that this is a phenomenon that goes well beyond Poland and is of a somewhat structural nature). Namely, they have **enormous de-escalation and depolarization potential**. The citizens' assembly is of fundamental value in this respect. When recruiting for the assembly, appropriate proportions of education, age, gender and place of residence (in line with the characteristics of the population in Poland) need to be maintained, but political party preferences of future participants are not checked. While sitting at the tables where they talk, the participants do not know which "tribes" or bubbles they belong to. Therefore, they do not have "imprinted" prejudices, which makes communication much easier and allows them to focus on the proper topic of the discussion. We were ourselves surprised at how great the willingness to talk (listen to each other) was among the participants, both during the citizens' assembly and local councils.

Moderators accompanying the group were also assisting in safe and valuable discussions despite differences. And perhaps that is why as many as 98% of people participating in the assembly agreed in an anonymous evaluation survey with the following statement: "People attending such events are free to express their divergent views on energy poverty." Witnessing a process that confirmed that **discussing socially difficult topics is somehow possible** was for us, as the organizers, a very important experience. It gives us hope that even in issues that are much more difficult and divisive for public opinion, under appropriate conditions, a similar "miracle" will happen. Anyway, it is definitely worth a try.

I would like to emphasise at this point that the projects we have described in no way invalidate other traditional models of democratic representation, and in particular representative democracy and direct democracy. They rather complement them as a form of advanced consultation combined with civic education. Each of them, in our opinion, has its place in the democratic "division of work". They can even (and we recommend it) occur in successive sequences, e.g. members of a representative body (e.g. city council or houses of the parliament) initiate the process of an educational and deliberative citizens' assembly, and then make its results public and implement them on their own or launch another procedure that is stronger and more binding as to its results, such as a referendum or plebiscite. In this way, all three forms of opinion expression are fulfilled.

In the context of ongoing debates and disputes in Poland, resolving some of the great challenges, such as retirement age, migration policy and many others, requires concluding a new social contract of sorts. Such a **sequential use of tools seems more reasonable and better than using only one**, e.g. only decisions of the executive power or a hastily invented and, in fact, instrumentally used referendum (often provoking the deepest social divisions). Sometimes, it is worth preceding them with a public debate as well as a series of local councils and a national citizens' assembly. Of course, in such a case, it is necessary to ensure that the results of the participation process are well-publicized for people voting in the referendum. If society considers the process itself, its result and the verdict of citizens like "themselves" valuable, the direction set by the verdict may turn out to be a helpful guideline in formulating own decisions, which will be expressed by the community in the final referendum.

Of the three types of democratic procedure described above, the **deliberative model** is the least recognised and practised. We are constantly learning and trying to improve it. This publication describes our, the Shipyard's, experience in this matter. **It is not a ready-made recipe, but rather a revelation, to those interested, of the tips and lessons we can formulate based on it.** We do not patent this process and we believe it should be open to various forms of borrowing, modification and criticism. We believe that at the current stage of crudely shaping such tools, it is necessary to retain several key elements, but it is certainly too early to formulate any orthodox rules for this process. In the process of implementing the project, we also relied on the experiences and tips of others who had been on this path before us. Following in the footsteps of our

predecessors, we discovered, apart from numerous inspirations, also some limitations and sometimes even questionable, in our opinion, decisions. We already know that many of them still require consideration. As I mentioned above, **we present this guide as a set of tips, not a ready trail, as it is still a long journey to the azimuth.** We are aware that if this type of mechanisms were to be used by public institutions (which we count on) at the national level, e.g. the parliament or government, this process would of course be structurally strengthened, but this does not mean that new challenges would not arise.

We see some hope in the fact that the solutions described here are being increasingly implemented at the level of public institutions (executive and legislative authorities). More and more countries and institutions are following this path. **According to OECD > data from 2023, over the last forty years, more than seven hundred examples of the use of deliberative techniques by public authorities have been described in the countries that belong to this organization.** One of the most important initiatives in this matter is that for two years now, citizens' assemblies at the European level have become a permanent part of the repertoire of consultation tools in the European Commission's policies (as announced, they are to be organized **three times a year >**). It can be assumed that such methods of civic influence on the processes of formulating public policies will soon become the norm. This may take various forms, such as the Irish model, which includes a kind of third chamber of parliament that deals with selected issues. There, **public authorities >** are generally the promoter of this type of solutions, which is actually a kind of a rule abroad – although apart from Poland, the bottom-up beginning of such a process also occurred in 2011 in Belgium (**G-1000 >**). In most other such experiences at the local, national and even supranational level, the initiative came from public institutions that somewhat commissioned the assembly, decided on its topic and thus took on the consequences of the "verdict" issued.

The **Civic council on energy costs is part of a larger participatory tradition in Europe.** Its achievements, values and solutions may become a universal experience for civil society organizations that would like to organize a similar process outside our country.

However, we hope that the tools described in this publication and their derivatives will be used in the practice of national institutions also in Poland. We believe that government representatives will want to use this instrument; in fact, we have had encouraging experiences of inspiring the authorities to use participation tools and recognising them as their own in the case of, among others, public hearings. If the idea of implementing processes of this type on a larger scale at national level became more likely, the experiences described in this guide could prove useful. Importantly, when organizing the Civic council on energy costs, our **goal was also to create a tool** that, although drawing on foreign experience, is **adapted to our Polish reality.**

Finally, I would like to encourage you to read another text, which concerns a certain reflection on the ambitious vision I described in a kind of program text (almost a manifesto), **Another Idea for Democracy >**. The implementation of the ideas contained therein would require much more skills and agency than the Shipyard has, although, from the beginning of its existence, it has been trying to develop tools for civic participation, while building an environment to deal with it. It would be necessary to recognise (in the form of a contract or pact) that in Poland, we want to overcome many of the challenges we face. This, however, would require launching complex processes, of which councils and assemblies are only a part. Who knows? Perhaps we will build the remaining parts around them someday.

It seems that we have crossed a certain point of no return. We believe that the enthusiasm and attachment to deliberative techniques among decision-makers, social organizations and our society will only grow. And that is what we wish for!

Kuba Wygnański
President of the Shipyard Foundation

Acknowledgments

Before we begin to delve into the issue being the clou of this publication, we, as a project team, would like to wholeheartedly thank everyone who contributed to this process.

Success was achieved thanks to those who believed in the concept presented by Kuba Wygnański, before the project received its official name, and those who decided, as **experts** representing various organizations, to join us in the journey through the entire process of the *Civic council on energy costs*: from the concept stage, through preparation, implementation, summary and promotion of results, to the evaluation of the entire model.

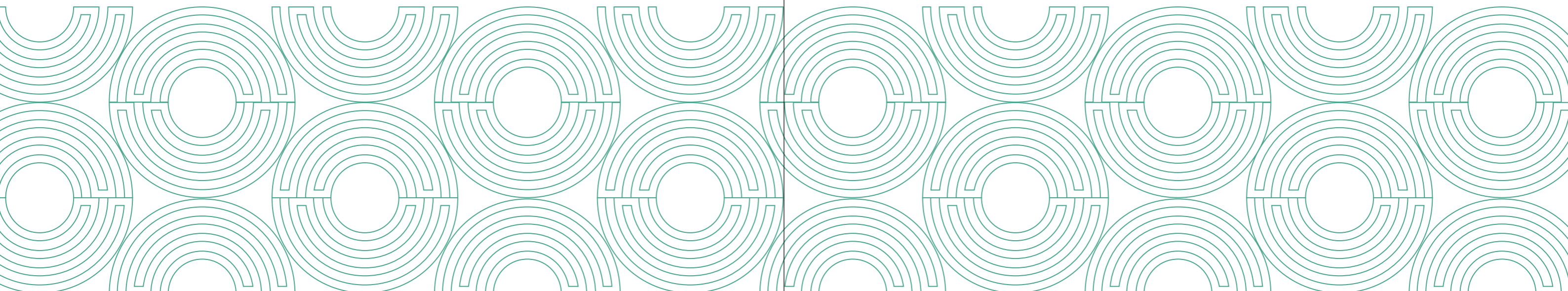
We would like to thank all the **organizers and people promoting local councils throughout Poland, as well as their participants.** Without you and your participation in these discussions, our reflection on the two-stage process contained in this publication would be meaningless. That is the part that makes our model unique. We would like to thank those who were preparing themselves so painstakingly and carefully for the meetings during the first *National citizens' assembly*. All the experts did a tremendous amount of work to make it possible for people to talk about a topic completely new for most of us. We are grateful for the professional materials and presentations which made it easier not only for Polish citizens and assembly participants, but also for all of us involved in the process, to find our way around the issue of energy poverty, which was the main topic and to which we refer in the guide.

We would like to thank all the extraordinary **assembly participants** who said "yes" to recruiters, not knowing exactly what they were deciding to participate in, and who persevered with great commitment, enthusiasm and determination until the very end. We thank them for their dedication to the case, which pushed us not to give up and jointly promote the verdict they reached. We would like to thank the **moderators** for their patience, great commitment and many useful discussions about the methods used in the model. We would like to thank the **observers**, whose comments and reflections were extremely valuable, for monitoring the correctness of the process. We would like to thank the **media** who found the topic and the formula of the **national dialogue** interesting enough to write and talk about it. We would also like to thank the **politicians and officials** who followed the process at its various stages, promoted it and participated in it. We would like to express our special appreciation to the **entities supporting us financially**, as without them, carrying out this experimental project would be very difficult. Finally, we would like to thank **people working at the Shipyard**, in particular members of the civic participation, research and consulting teams who joined the project for a shorter or longer period of time, and whose substantive as well as organizational support was invaluable.

This would not have happened without you! Thank you!

Civic council on energy costs team

What is the National citizens' dialogue model?



The model presents a simplified course of a nationwide participatory process in which citizens are involved by national authorities in making decisions on a key and complex issue. It can be used for an in-depth and nationwide discussion on a socially and/or politically important topic, which culminates in the implementation by decision-makers of a package of solutions addressing the question posed to citizens. We would like the model presented here to be applied in Poland, but perhaps also to serve other countries whose characteristics and socio-political situation are similar to Poland's. We believe that it can be used to find solutions to important issues related to, among others, climate protection, healthcare, migration policy and the retirement age limit.



Photo: Wojciech Radwański

National citizens' dialogue, or the model that we have tested and which we propose in this publication, has two stages:

- I. publicly available **local councils** scattered throughout the country, engaging in discussion a wide and diverse group of inhabitants and various stakeholders;
- II. **national citizens' assembly**, involving a representative group of citizens in developing a set of recommendations at the end of the process.

We use the phrase "model" with a certain shyness and humility. We are aware that experience from the implementation of the process, even supported by other, previous actions (e.g. [Civic council on education](#) ›, [Warsaw Climate Assembly](#) › and [Citizens' Assembly in Lublin](#) › projects), does not yet give us the right to use the concept of a model. However, we see great interest in the combination we used (local councils and citizens' assembly) in the context of the structure of the nationwide participatory process. Therefore, we would like to share our (and our interlocutors') reflections and indicate points that could help reproduce the activities in other contexts as well. This is, thus, an attempt to create a more universal solution, in the form of a model. We would also like to encourage its use, as well as point out its advantages and related challenges.

Before you start...

Before you start organizing the process and launching this huge machine, you need to ask yourself a few important questions. These are **questions about the goals of the process, time, financial and personal resources, and above all, about the possibilities of implementing solutions**. Are there resources and political willingness to implement changes? A great adventure awaits, but it is also an extremely demanding one. Therefore, it needs to be handled responsibly.



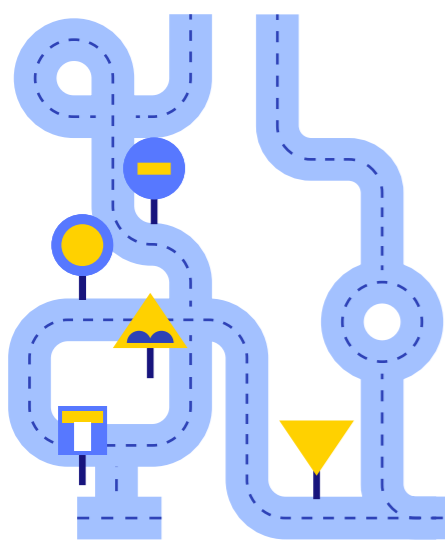
When is it worth starting such a process and are you, as an organizer, actually ready for it?

Below, you will find tips that may suggest what questions you should ask yourself before beginning the process and what resources you should consider. The indicated publications refer directly to the citizens' assembly but are translatable to the **national model** proposed by us in this publication.

- [Enabling National Initiatives to Take Democracy Beyond Elections](#) ›, newDemocracy Foundation [EN]
- [How to run a citizens' assembly](#) ›, RSA, Involve, Democratic Society, My Society [EN]
- [Direction: Citizens' assembly. Tips for those interested](#) ›, Lublin City Hall, Lublin Research Group, the Shipyard Foundation, dr Marcin Gerwin [PL]

Course of the model of the NATIONAL CITIZENS' DIALOGUE

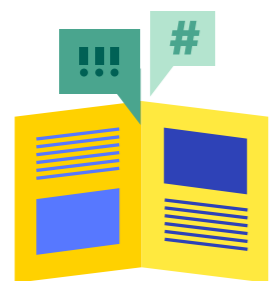
1. Initiating the process



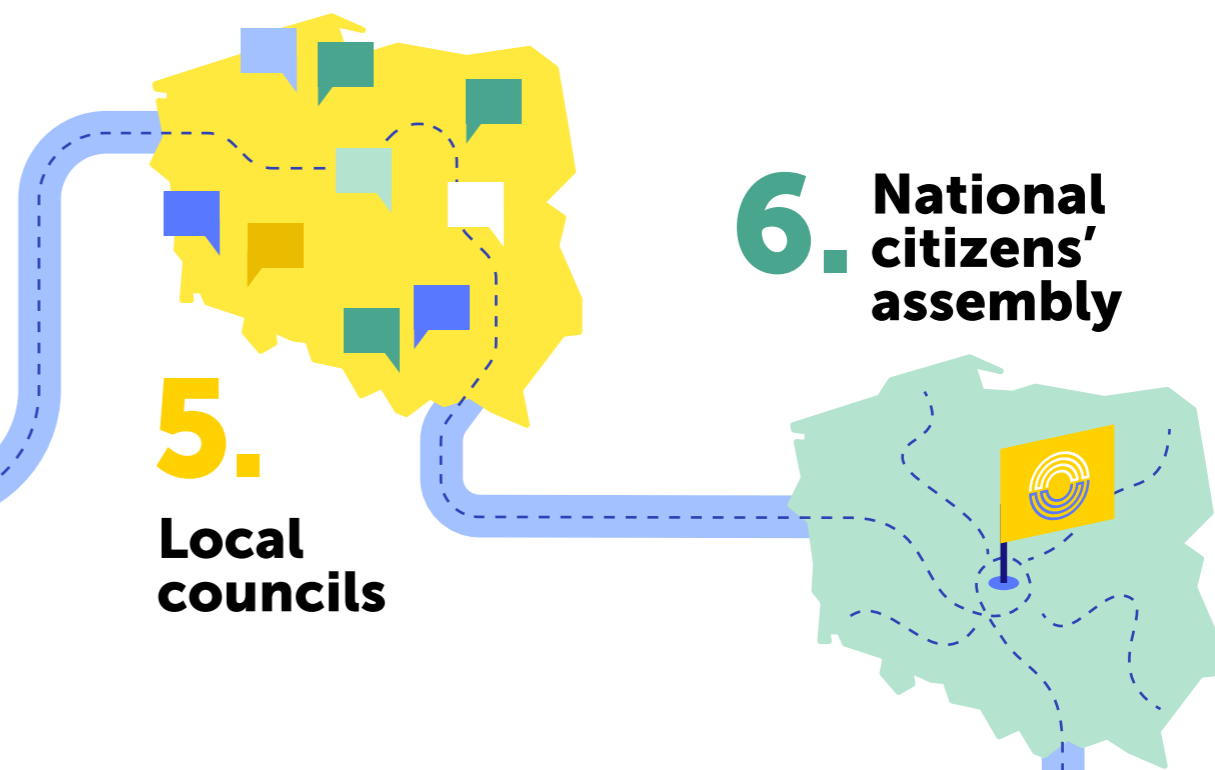
4. Inauguration of the process



2. General preparation of the process

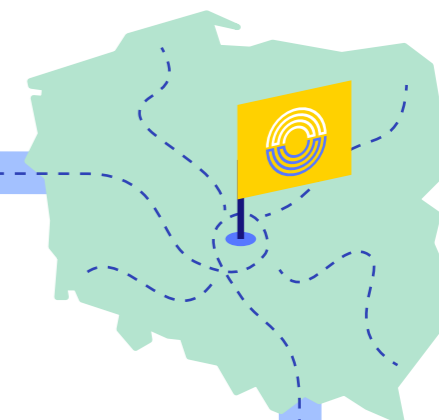


3. Knowledge base and communication about the problem

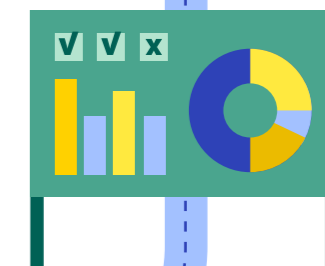


5. Local councils

6. National citizens' assembly



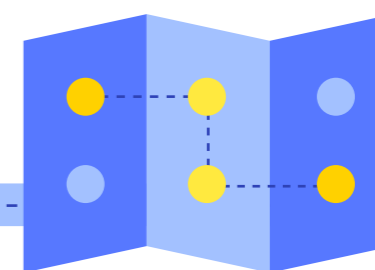
7. Summary of the National citizens' assembly



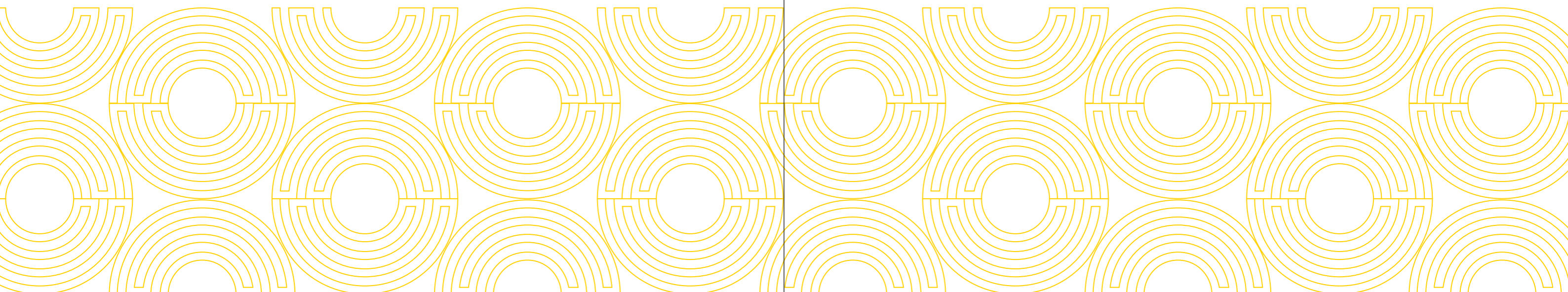
8. Evaluation



9. After the summary - next steps



1 Initiating the process



Every ship sailing into deep waters needs a captain. You might ask yourself: what does it take to manage such an expedition? The captain must be a person who will be able to prepare supplies for the voyage, gather a crew that have various competences, launch the ship into the high seas and guide it on the long journey, often ridden with reefs, all in order to ultimately safely arrive at the port. Moving away from this maritime metaphor and back to reality, we might rephrase the question: what should a successful process look like to have real impact on solving a challenge on a national scale? Who should be the captain?

Our experience and that of other participation practitioners, as well as many years of operation of other organizations, clearly indicate that **a good participatory process is one in which a decision-maker is in charge or in cooperation, but which also includes civil society organizations, citizens and other stakeholders, who work out key decisions together.** In this group, the role of the decision-maker is crucial, as the basic resources with which we started this chapter are in the hands of state institutions (the government or its subordinate ministries and institutions). It will be their responsibility, above all, to implement the developed solutions. The recognition of the process, its direction and agency may depend on their involvement.

Who initiates and implements the model?

Four paths

As we mentioned at the beginning, the presented model is not uniform or one-dimensional. The organization of a nationwide process depends on many factors, including political willingness, implementation and budget resources of the institution or other entity deciding to organize the process, balance of power, or electoral moment. An entity that undertakes to implement such a project must take into account the possibility of implementing the developed solutions: do you actually have the resources for this? Do you have a group of partners to help you? Do you have political support? What do you want to achieve through the process?

A lot depends on who initiates the process. This includes, among other things, potential goals and effects of the process, but also implementation possibilities during the process. Below, we present four basic paths of initiating the process:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1.
It is initiated and implemented by the decision-maker (outsourcing only specific elements, such as moderating meetings or randomly selecting participants).</p> | <p>2.
It is initiated by the decision-maker and implemented by an NGO selected by way of a competition, in cooperation with the decision-maker.</p> |
|--|--|

In the above two cases, the probability of taking the developed solutions seriously and implementing them is greater than in the case of solutions number 3 and 4.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>3.
It is initiated and implemented by an NGO but involves a decision-maker in the cooperation.</p> | <p>4.
It is initiated and implemented by an NGO, without the support of a decision-maker.</p> |
|--|--|

The first two paths are more likely to result in changes being implemented, whereas numerous discussions and experience with other processes indicate that the second path is the most realistic and potentially effective. The third and fourth types of processes have less potential for agency and achievement of a political effect in the form of changing the law. Their nature, paired with good communication, can lead to, among others, a society-wide discussion on a given topic or a revelation of social moods and expectations. Which is where their strength lies.

What should you take into account when preparing for the process?

Let's start with the first or second path: you are an official in an institution at the national level and you are ordered to organize the process described in this publication. You are probably wondering where to start. If you want to benefit from the support of the organization, and you are also thinking about what to write about when preparing an announcement. Below, you will find some tips based on many years of our experience in cooperation with the public sector and discussions with a representative of one of the Polish ministries.

Tips

- Developing, assessing and introducing legal/legislative solutions in the country requires interdisciplinary knowledge and inter-sectoral, inter-ministerial cooperation. In order to build a good cooperation platform for the preparation, commissioning, implementation and consumption of the process result, **since the very beginning you need to involve all necessary ministries in the planning of the process and solidly anchor it in each of them** (obtain support and "green light" for the actions from the highest-ranking and most powerful decision-making people possible). Their "blessing" may prove crucial for future cooperation and the final effect of the process.
- The big challenge you have to face is the actions of decision-makers in the electoral perspective, which entails focusing on short-term effects and wanting to influence the results of electoral polls. **The process, however, requires long-term decisions** and often a cross-party contract, which will be simply difficult and demanding.
- **Ensure transparency, legitimacy and neutrality of the process** by appropriately assigning roles and dividing the scope of responsibilities, activities and spheres of influence of all parties involved in organizing the process. Transparency and compliance with the process methodology can also be ensured by external observers.
- Talk to organizers of citizens' assemblies in other countries in order to obtain some support in your on-going challenges. **Mentoring support** can prove very useful both at the beginning and during the project. Unfortunately, the model we described had not been used before, but there is a large group of participation practitioners who can still be helpful. Look, for example, for [mentoring programs](#).
- **Tender for the implementation of the process** – when preparing it, it is worth taking a look at the structure of similar processes in other countries and consulting people who have already completed such a process commissioned by a state administration entity. This process requires the involvement of an entity experienced in introducing innovative, local or nationwide methods of citizen participation, possibly also of implementers of a citizens' assembly. Check the team's personal potential for complex project implementation.
- And of course, read this publication till its very end. 😊



Read [tips on how to support working the process into the creation of public policies based on the publication regarding citizens' climate assemblies](#). [EN]



You don't work in a public office? The process can still work for you! Read about our experience regarding initiating the process within the fourth path.

Our experience

The Civic council on energy costs was organized from the beginning as a bottom-up process, independent of the Polish government, financed by the European Climate Foundation (so we followed the fourth path from the list of process initiators). It was also the first time local councils and **National citizens' assembly** of this kind and on this scale had been organized in Poland. Such a structure required a huge amount of work to involve decision-makers, inform them, interest them in the process and convince them to accept the verdict. Since the very beginning, we conducted very intensive and open communication with the decision-makers and various institutions subordinate to them. Mapping stakeholders and entities possibly interested in the process took almost two years, and ultimately, we distinguished nearly 150 different types of entities related to the topic of the process and wondered what role to assign to each of them. Some entities had knowledge, others were "spreaders" directing us to the organizers of local councils, yet others were considered by us as potential sources of funding (although it should be emphasised that due to the high sensitivity of the process, the decision about who to get financing from to carry it out required some in-depth thinking). This is not an optimal way of carrying out the process due to the high risk of sunk costs, i.e., on the one hand, the difficult process of recruiting participants, and on the other hand, the lack of certainty as to the acceptance, let alone implementation, of the developed solutions. What helped us not to sink were the following:

- the above-mentioned extensive database of nearly 150 contacts, prepared for the purposes of organizing the process;
- wide network of contacts and the status of a trustworthy organization experienced in implementing participatory actions, which made it easier to reach institutions and politicians, and contact the organizers of local councils;
- including recognisable **partners** in our activities, such as the Copernicus Science Centre and the Polish Academy of Sciences. We also tried to involve other institutions in the process, but, unfortunately, we faced refusal. In a bottom-up process, the presence of nationwide institutions, recognisable but at the same time politically neutral, is extremely important for communicating the process and making it credible;
- creating a substantively solid and diverse **Council of experts** that accompanied us and those participating in the process at the local and national level. The involvement of many partners resulted in a situation where organizations that had not previously cooperated got to know each other better and advisory communities consolidated, which made it easier for them to perform joint activities (e.g. meetings of the group on energy efficiency of buildings and creation of a Working group for a socially just climate and energy policy operating at the Working Community of Associations of Social Organizations WRZOS).

Nevertheless, we encourage you to use path one or two. Both, foreign examples and our own experience, indicate that an **undertaking of this scale has a greater chance of success if it is anchored in state institutions, or perhaps even in national legislation**. Ideally, the decision-maker should initiate or commission the process, or at least be involved in the project as a partner. It is worth that the topic chosen for discussion should be one over which the initiator has influence. The bottom-up implementation model is susceptible to many risks that this type of process cannot afford due to the scale of the project. It should assume **good will for truly listening to the verdict of citizens**. This element may seem obvious, but reality often shows how difficult it is to co-create long-term solutions and implement them, even if will and initiative comes from the very top ([French Citizens' Assembly on Climate](#) > could serve as an example). Of course, the efficiency of the process also depends largely on the arrangement of work in subsequent stages of its implementation and the manner of presenting and communicating the verdict, but we will elaborate on this in the following parts of the publication.

Institutionalization of dialogue?

When thinking about an effective process focused on change, i.e. using legislative tools, the participation of the decision-maker seems essential. In the long run (or at the very beginning, you never know it for sure) establishing such a model may be very helpful. Formal anchoring in the political and legal system (at central and perhaps also at local level), i.e. providing a structure, procedures, management system or budget, can significantly facilitate efficient and effective implementation for the initiator and decision-maker. Institutionalizing and officially embedding the model in the law-making process, as well as including it as one of the stages in the process of conducting consultations on important, difficult topics with citizens, may contribute to the regular use of the tool and to its dissemination, understanding and acceptance by various social groups and stakeholders in the country.



You can read more about possible ways to institutionalize deliberative processes on the OECD website: [Eight ways to institutionalise deliberative democracy](#) >, OECD on Public Management Policy

How long does the **National citizens' dialogue** last and how much does it cost?

The *Civic council on energy costs*, i.e. the process we follow when talking about the model of the **National citizens' dialogue**, cost approximately **EUR 200,000** (additional funds may be allocated for more extensive advocacy, monitoring and evaluation activities after the process), but we see that these funds were insufficient funds, especially for communication purposes. Abroad, funds ranging from EUR 500,000 to EUR 2,000,000 are usually allocated for a national citizens' assembly alone (on the [Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies](#) > website, you can review the budgets of climate assemblies according to substantive task and communication funding, as well as get direct contact details of people organizing them). Where to get funds? For example, from the budget of a given country or the European Union, or from grants from social entities. Depending on the source of financing, the partnership between the initiator and the implementer of activities also varies.

Creating a partnership base, as well as logistics and organizational issues related to conducting local councils and a national citizens' assembly takes approximately **a year**. Please remember that the possible extension of the process may be influenced by, among others, the decision to additionally carry out:

- a study on the impact of the process (external evaluation);
- advocacy and monitoring activities, which in turn depend on who and on what scale conducts them as well as how extensive the verdict is);
- a larger number of meetings within one of the stages of the **National citizens' dialogue** (e.g. extending the educational or deliberative part of the assembly).

Process goals

As we mentioned above, the manner in which the process is initiated often determines its goals. However, regardless of what the legal setting is and who is in charge, the overriding value is to influence a specific national or local policy. **There is a problem – a big challenge affecting a large part of society, and you want to find socially acceptable and jointly developed solutions to it, organized in terms of costs, implementation time and importance. And although the specificity of the developed action plan (from general directions to dozens of recommendations) may vary, the goal remains consistent.**

See what other goals of the process may be, depending on the initiator:

Bottom-up process

- looking for a space for debate and causing a nationwide stir on a given topic
- advocacy activities
- "installing" the model method permanently in the law-making path in the country

- education (acquiring or expanding knowledge), information and increasing public awareness
- finding and arranging solutions to a difficult challenge
- improving the quality of public debate
- proving that an in-depth discussion and reaching conclusions accepted by the entire group, regardless of the differences between its members, are possible
- calming down the discussion and making long-term decisions
- mapping and integration of circles working on the substantive side of the process
- dealing with a topic that arouses particularly strong controversy and requires immediate action

- generating a question to be asked in the referendum
- "clash between vision and reality"
- setting an action plan and specific solutions for strategic processes for which funds were obtained

Process initiated by the decision-maker

A number of goals are common, regardless of the initiator, although they will not necessarily always be implemented. The decision regarding which of them to implement will depend on you and your resources:

- education (acquiring or expanding knowledge), information and increasing public awareness of a selected issue;
- improving the quality of public debate on a given topic, achieved through the participation of experts and the emphasis on gathering diverse perspectives;
- proving that in-depth discussion and reaching conclusions accepted by the entire group, regardless of the differences between its members, are possible; it is a kind of strengthening the faith in democracy based on conversation on often complex and controversial issues;
- in a world where information is presented briefly, often in populist language, and political decisions can be influenced by the next elections, such a process gives some space to calm down the discussion and make long-term decisions;
- the processes undertaken in this type of initiatives are complex, i.e. they concern many issues and, therefore, a wide range of decision-makers; thus the aim of the actions carried out may be to **map and integrate communities working on the substantive side of the process**: both a group of experts who can get to know each other and name common challenges, as well as representatives of public institutions, ministries or the parliament, who then work on implementing solutions, often in a cross-sectoral manner;
- (this may be a thread for advanced organizers) **exploring the topics of the "future" that have not yet been addressed, but may be crucial in terms of the country's future**; these are paths about which most stakeholders and citizens themselves have similar and limited knowledge, which few have thought about, which are not as lively in the public debate or well-established, which are not a priority in terms of the solutions required by the state, nor are they controversial and biased with politics and parties, but which are important to discuss together because they may become important in the near future (e.g. use of artificial intelligence, universal basic income).

In the case of decision-maker-initiated processes, objectives related to the following may be important as well:

- **clash between vision and reality**, i.e. working on or testing political and expert concepts by introducing them into a debate with citizens. They are assessed by other experts, parties, assembly participants, but also by the decision-makers themselves at a local (during local councils) and national level; this type of evaluation model may be particularly valuable for people in power before the elections, as it allows for some kind of verification and selection of ideas in terms of real needs of the society;
- **working on a topic** that arouses particularly strong controversy and requires immediate action. The process can ease the burden of a political decision for the decision-maker; it may also be brought to a conclusion by a referendum and thus focus on generating questions to be asked in the referendum;
- **setting an action plan and specific solutions for strategic processes** for which funds were obtained, e.g. in the case of Poland: deciding how to use funds from the Just Transition Fund, the purpose of which is to facilitate Poland's implementation of the European Green Deal.



Bottom-up processes can be more focused on:

- looking for a space for debate and causing a nationwide stir on a given topic - these processes more likely concern what people think and what they expect from politicians, providing greater flexibility in approaching the problem, but also potentially a lower chance of actually implementing the changes;
- advocacy activities;
- especially in the case of first experiences in a given country, establishing the principles and conditions for **"installing" the model method** permanently in the path of law-making in the country. You should think deeply about the topic to be taken up for the so-called first wave of the discussion using this method, as a good effect will help encourage the decision-maker, experts and citizens to implement it and not miss the possibility of carrying out this type of process in the future.

Initiating the process in a polarized society

In Poland and similar countries, the problem of strong social and political polarization is a fact. Neither institutions nor state offices enjoy much trust from citizens, and they are perceived as highly politicized. This makes it much more difficult to obtain social approval and trust in a process initiated, conducted and signed by the decision-maker. It is easy to fall into the trap of "communication towards one side" while discouraging the other side from getting involved and participating. At the same time, we are aware that it is necessary to look for opportunities to organize the process jointly, to involve or even initiate the process by the decision-maker, because only with such synergy is it possible to achieve the intended goals of the model, i.e. bring about political change in the field of complex social problems.

How can it be achieved? The solution we have reached based on numerous discussions in various groups may **be to initiate or support the process by institutions that are more neutral in social perception**, e.g. the ministry responsible for a given topic (unless it is highly politicised and has a party-oriented management style), the office of the Ombudsman or the academic community; and in the Polish context, entities such as the Polish Academy of Sciences. These are entities with great authority and presumed impartiality, although the challenge here may be that reputation, unfortunately, does not always go hand in hand with agency and the ability to act on the developed solutions. The topic certainly requires in-depth, joint reflection. Great attention should also be paid to building partnerships: social trust is a delicate matter and one partner or public figure with an unfavourable image can ruin the chances of maintaining a position of neutrality, which is especially important in the first steps within the model, when it is not yet highly recognisable.

What is worth emphasising, however, is that both our own experience and that of our interlocutors representing processes abroad confirm that **deliberative processes, such as local councils and citizens' assemblies, have depolarizing potential**. As such, we understand the impact of the experience gained by the participants on their **faith in democracy** › and the **ability to engage in a discussion despite differences** ›. It is about the ability to make and accept a decision reached by a very diverse group, often involving people with conflicting views, who would not normally be able to listen to one another or come to an agreement. What makes it possible are the fact-based approach (expert participation and voice) and the meeting format (participation of moderators, meeting structure). We write about this to name a very important advantage of using the model, mainly in societies that are losing faith that they are able to "stick together" again, and, at the same time, face major social challenges that require joint reflection. **We believe that our model can enable, facilitate and work in favour of depolarization**. It is particularly valuable to initiate and conduct processes, especially in countries where the level of trust in each other and in state institutions is low.

During discussions with colleagues from civil society organizations operating in countries such as Hungary, we came to the conclusion that a **lower level of trust in state institutions and a generally lower rating of their transparency may require the inclusion of "fuses" in the process initiated, for example, by the government**. It is about ensuring the principles that facilitate control over the organization of the process and

the path leading to the verdict: maintaining the principles of the adopted process methodology, selection of experts, moderators, random selection of citizens included in the participation, selection of entities carrying out orders, substantive presentation of the topic and creation of solutions. This role can be played (at least partially) by a monitoring team external to state institutions, an independent entity employed to organize part or the entire process, a social watchdog organization, as well as a group of observers of the method. However, it is about ensuring transparency, not contesting the process; after all, the goal is to let go of divisions and create a space for common discussion on an important topic, even if the conditions are difficult.

About communication in the project

Unfortunately, communication is often something left to think about at the very end. Therefore, we will now try, in the middle of the chapter on initiating the process, to explain why it is really worth devoting time and resources to these actions in the process of **National citizens' dialogue**.

As in every project, the most important task of the organizer is to answer the question: what is the goal of the entire process and its individual parts? And who do you want to reach at each of its stages? This is the starting point for the preparation of a communication plan. Communication of the entire process requires very solid thought and development. It is worth considering the involvement of a professional who will support you during the process and prepare a communication action plan on the dialogue, adapted to different recipients and contents of key messages, that we care about.

The goal of the entire process, regardless of its topic, is to obtain socially acceptable solutions to a given problem as a result of an extensive discussion. Therefore, the following two areas should be combined in communication:

- reliable communication about the problem or issue that is the topic of the discussion, written in simple language;
- showing the value of discussion based on the method of the **National citizens' dialogue**.

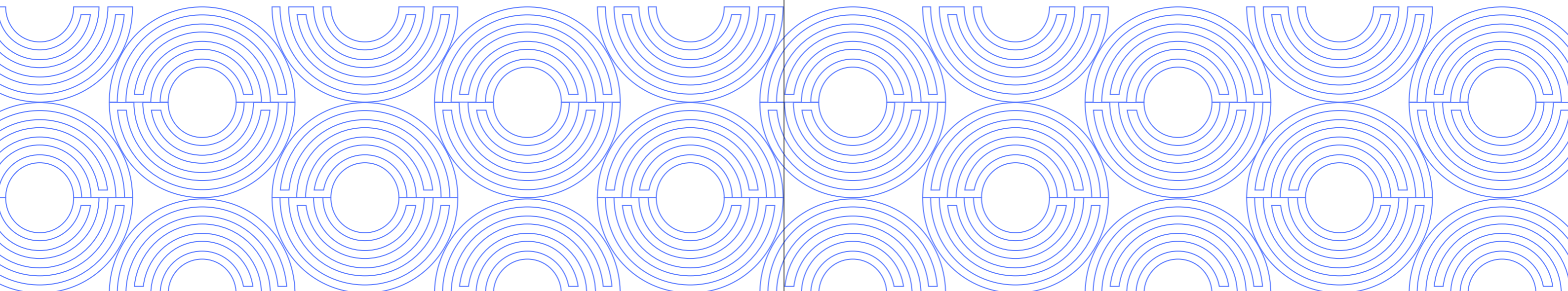
The basis for understanding the (still new in our country) participatory process and its topic is language.

For the clarity of reception, it is also important to **prepare icons and graphics** (e.g. charts, timelines) regarding the problem and the process, which will then be used in communication. From the very beginning of communication, you should bear in mind the recruitment that awaits you: people organizing and participating in local councils and those who will take part in the national assembly.

There is a risk, as we mention later on, that people will be afraid of the topic and will not want to participate in the process, believing that it requires expert knowledge. Your role is to encourage (using a simple and clear message) everyone to join the process, informing them what their role is and that thanks to participation in the councils or assembly, each of them will have the opportunity to learn about the topic in depth and from various perspectives, since they will have the occasion to ask experts questions regarding all unclear issues.

Certainly, the more national processes take place, the easier it will be to communicate each subsequent one. At the beginning of this path, when the model has not yet gained popularity and when society is only learning about this type of democracy, you need to be flexible in all actions and make decisions quickly in a changing reality. This principle also covers communication, which may need to be "in constant change". Therefore, consider preparing a relatively flexible communication action plan and taking into account the need to respond to current needs.

2 General process preparation



Process topic (remit)

Choosing a topic, working on defining the problem and creating directions for solutions is one of the biggest challenges when implementing the project discussed in this guide. What principles need to be taken into account? It is important that the remit and the question included in it are balanced: general enough to promote good discussion even among those who have no connection with the topic on a daily basis, but also complex enough to provide real dilemmas and challenges for people involved in the process. This is the basics of the issue, presented in a nutshell. Want to know more? We invite you to read the chapter!

What remit?

We assume that at this stage, you will already have outlined in your head the topic or problem that the process or task assigned to you will address. However, if you are just starting to take on this challenge, here are **a few tips regarding the process**.

1. Designate an important issue

When thinking about the remit, it is worth choosing an issue that is complicated to solve, but at the same time important for a significant part of society. The difficulty of the issue may be that it divides society (e.g. abortion issues, building a nuclear power plant) or it may be complex and requiring many reforms and financial effort (e.g. healthcare reform). Some topics cannot be implemented in a single term and require strategic thinking (e.g. changes in the education system or counteracting climate change). Remember that you want to involve hundreds of citizens and large financial resources in the process and start a national discussion; that is why it is worth taking up a topic that is actually difficult to resolve and should find a solution thanks to joint discussion. Remember that a well-chosen topic can ensure the interest of various stakeholders in the process: society, decision-makers (if they are not the initiators) and the media.

2. Formulate the main question of the process

Having selected a topic, or more generally: an issue to which you want to devote the process, you must know that **it is possible to use different approaches to determine the main question that you will pose to society and that asking yourself this question (that is, naming the goal and setting a certain framework for people to think about) is extremely important for the entire project.** Example: your topic is the energy transition. The process will look completely different if you want to focus on the issue of determining the energy mix (e.g. what should the energy mix in Poland look like by 2050?) than if you want to focus only on a part of the problem, e.g. solving the problem of people in the energy poverty crisis (example from our process: How to solve the problem of energy poverty in Poland?). It is different if you're giving a wide field of decision-making (asking, as above, about the energy mix) and different if you want to set conditions (e.g. Poland must abandon coal. How to replace it in the energy mix in the coming decades?). The process may involve a simple decision (referendum style) or strive for a relatively open range of assumptions for the strategy of activities.

3. Alternatively: consult the society

Moving from a general issue to a specific question may be subject to collective reflection and some organizers, e.g. in [Belgium](#), decide to take this step. You can open the discussion to a wider group by organizing additional public consultations (including also the assembly participants, if you introduce this element in the second part of the entire process), or start a discussion with a group of experts, stakeholders as well as local and political circles (discussed below). The topic may also be open to clarification at the beginning of the process (then it takes on a diagnostic nature), during the process (e.g. between local councils and the citizens' assembly, with the aim of broad inclusion of issues initially identified as important in the clarification

process) or after the assembly (to promote the verdict and undertake a broad discussion on its implementation or its exploration). At this point, much depends on resources, but also on skills - this solution may be interesting to more experienced organizers. It is worth realizing that this stage may significantly extend the entire process and increase its cost. However, it is good to remain open to modifications or joint work on specific issues within the topic.



There are many sources of knowledge that will help you wisely develop and determine the topic of the process, such as those regarding citizens' assemblies, which are very relevant to our issue:

- [Setting the remit](#), KNOCA [EN]
- [Seminar: "Zoom on citizens' assembly"](#), (presentation on determining the remit of the assembly), Shipyard Foundation [PL]
- [Citizens' assembly: whether and how to organize it?](#), Shipyard Foundation [PL]

Our experience

As the initiator of the process, we set ourselves a topic and a specific question: *How to solve the problem of energy poverty in Poland?* This was accepted by the European Climate Foundation, which agreed to finance it due to its consistency with the Foundation's assumptions regarding support for nationwide climate processes. Financing by an international civil society organization working for the participatory creation of national solutions in the area of climate protection forced the thematic orientation and inclusion of climate issues, but energy poverty was nonetheless directly related to this agenda.

The choice of topic was guided by several factors:

- the topic was very important from a social point of view (it concerned every tenth Polish family), and at the same time neglected for many years by successive Polish governments;
- we felt that in the near future, in the post-pandemic situation and with growing inflation affecting energy prices, the problem may intensify and require decisive, difficult decisions; we believed that those undertaken by society in this type of process would have greater clout and legitimacy;
- we wanted it to be politically neutral, i.e. it could not be easily associated with the program of a political party, and this seemed important to us from the point of view of bottom-up implementation requiring cooperation and involving the widest possible group of decision-makers; and also so as not to block the path to discussion with a large part of society (with the polarization mentioned earlier);
- the neutrality of the topic was also important from the point of view of the pilot nature of the process and our concerns related to the reception of the topic by citizens and potential accusations of its politicization; if you carry out a similar project for the first time and at the same time you do not have extensive communication resources, it is worth choosing a non-antagonizing topic;
- just before the project started, Russia attacked Ukraine; energy, its type, cost and who controls it, were crucial for the security of Poland and the entire region; energy costs, quality and availability (not only in Poland) were one of the most important factors contributing to the growing uncertainty related to the supply of energy raw materials; we asked ourselves about alternative scenarios for energy acquisition strategies, looking for one that would offset the effect of price increases;

we wondered whether and what energy costs we would be able to jointly bear as a state, as local communities and as individual consumers, as well as how to prepare the country to save energy and manage it more rationally;

- during local councils, we operated at the level of a general issue, and specific question was clarified at the stage of preparation of the citizens' assembly.

Work on the substantive part in the process topic

After formulating the issue and assigning the thematic framework, there is still a lot of work to be done on specifying the remit, the directions of solutions and their final wording. The starting point given in the process will determine the direction and goal of the process. The work will be arranged differently depending on what you want to achieve at the end, e.g.:

- very specific solutions or general directions of action;
- answering specific questions;
- guidelines embedded in time (e.g. how to achieve climate neutrality by 2050) or on a specific budget (e.g. how to most effectively spend PLN 2 billion on improving health care);
- answering questions on **how** to do something or **whether to do something**; the former will require setting a course and directions in a more problem-oriented manner, the latter is a classic 'yes or no' question (but with a citizens' assembly, even a question posed in this way can give more nuanced answers).

The presence of a decision-maker in the process (as an organizer or initiator) is a great convenience, as it is their responsibility to determine at the very beginning how detailed or general the demands to be voted on in the process should be, so that they have a chance of being taken into account in planning public policies. The lack of a political partner gives a lot of freedom in planning actions and effects, although it also creates many barriers on the way to systematize knowledge.

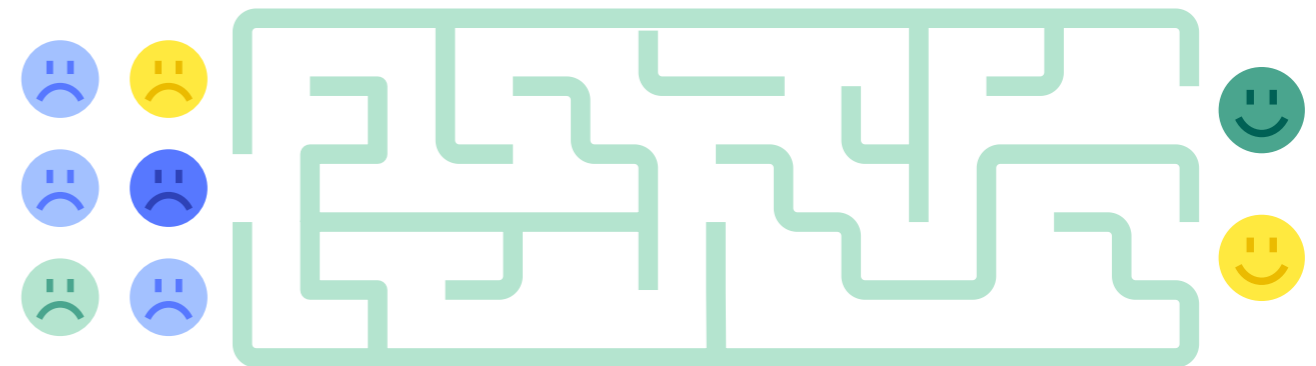
As we have mentioned on numerous occasions, coordinating the process on a selected topic (e.g. retirement age) often does not have to go hand in hand with having specialist knowledge about this issue (e.g. legal provisions, specific provisions or statistics from other countries, as well as ideas for solutions). This is completely understandable and normal. At the same time, the activities include educating citizens, i.e. explaining the sources of the problem and naming the directions of its solution. **National citizens' dialogue is an educational process based on expert knowledge.** When preparing the program, you will probably cooperate with experts from universities, organizations and companies specialising in a given issue, providing you and the people involved in the process with data. Perhaps you will use personal experience of people affected by the particular problem or activist groups with their positions on a given issue, to show a wider spectrum of opinions (in the citizens' assembly, these are the so-called parties). This wide group of people will help you prepare the educational grounds for the citizens included in the model. We write about this in more detail in the next chapter.

Supporting the discussion with facts and scientific knowledge helps participants go beyond their own beliefs, make the dialogue more constructive and the developed solutions more effective. But **how to work with the topic so that it is understandable and accessible to everyone?** How to organize the educational process and the subsequent reflection on reaching specific solutions? You already know that you need expert support, but how to prepare a program and work with topic specialists? Which parts should be provided by experts, and which should be developed by a group of citizens?

How to organize this work? We will talk about our idea based on experience and conclusions from the process in the chapter below.

Top-down approach

We recommend a strategy for introducing substantive issues, which in short could be called a "top-down approach". We refined it in subsequent processes and over the years it has proven very effective. It consists in first introducing a more general theoretical framework, showing the background of the problem and the diagnosis of the situation, then talking about directions (or even future scenarios), and finally about specific solutions that address them. This way of working with the topic requires time during the meeting: for expert presentations, answers to questions, discussion of introduced issues and clarification of ambiguities, which is why the educational part of the assembly usually lasts at least several days. The scenarios should also provide for balanced time between knowledge elements and discussion, which helps assembly participants (as laypeople) better structure and understand the acquired information.



Solution dilemmas

In the following two paragraphs, we ask a lot of questions, but we do not provide simple answers. It seems that there are many paths and good solutions here and they depend, to a large extent, on the decisions made at the beginning of the process and the substantive issues discussed.

An important decision, from the point of view of creating the program, is how to approach the proposed solutions in detail and who to involve. Does the expert group share their recommendations, or only make diagnoses and show the most important sources of the problem? If presentations end with proposed solutions, how detailed are they and are there any limits to their maximum number? Or maybe it is the participants who, after listening to presentations showing the diagnosis of the problem, develop solutions on their own? If you decide so, you need to consider how to deal with newly emerging postulates, which should undergo some type of selection and common consent of the participants to be included in the list of voted solutions. But the method of making this choice (voting, discussion, etc.) is up to you.

It is also important to consider the formula according to which the preliminary/final recommendations will be voted on: will a long list of detailed solutions be developed during the process? Will there be dilemmas, directions and future scenarios apart from them, or instead of them

Local councils and citizens' assembly

This type of model, consisting of local councils and citizens' assembly, gives an additional dimension to thinking about the structure of the substantive program. The structure should be consistent within each stage and provide an educational contribution, while at the same time assuming a wise transfer of knowledge between the first and second stage. We will write about it in more detail, but just to provide some context: local councils are several-hour-long, one-off meetings open to everyone, scattered throughout the country, and therefore – as the name suggests – carried out locally. And on the other hand, citizens' assembly is a process lasting at least several days, for a selected group of citizens, providing space for in-depth discussion. After the **Civic council on energy costs**, we have a lot of thoughts on how to work with the remit of the process, and we openly admit that our experience gives a lot of room for improvement. That is why we share a certain, not yet tested, vision resulting from evaluation and discussions with a group of other civic participation practitioners. This vision determines work on the topic in accordance with the scheme below.

Local councils as a space for diagnosing the situation and setting initial general directions

- **Who provides substantive knowledge?** This task is mainly for experts who prepare speeches or materials regarding the diagnosis and background of the problem (including, possibly, outlining the local context), and also name the main directions of solutions or future scenarios.

Materials prepared by substantive units in offices or ministries can also be helpful by providing important background and thematic framework, e.g. information about implemented and planned actions, challenges and conditions.

- **How do you work with the remit?** Participants discuss what they heard in the first part of the meeting and suggest local challenges and problems they see. If there is time in the process (and you think it is valuable), they evaluate the indicated directions of solutions or future scenarios in a simple questionnaire, uniform for all meetings
- **What is the effect?** Local diagnosis of the situation and (possibly) individual voting on directions of solutions.

Knowledge gathered after the councils shows:

- How a given topic resonates locally, e.g. what the problems in particular areas are and what the level of understanding of the issue is;
- What are the first selected directions of solutions.

Citizens' assembly as a place for in-depth understanding of the issue, discussion and development of specific solutions

- **Who provides substantive knowledge?** Unlike in the case of councils, here the materials prepared by substantive units in local governments' offices or ministries are much more important: they should be expanded because they constitute the basis for the educational part. They provide important background and thematic framework, e.g. information about ongoing and planned actions, challenges and conditions.

Experts, based on the conclusions and knowledge from the councils, prepare speeches or materials regarding the diagnosis and background of the problem (including, possibly, outlining regional or local differences), name the main directions of solutions or future scenarios, and prepare specific solution proposals based on them.

Parties (presenting positions during the educational part of the panel) and citizens (proposing solutions in open public consultations) can also help in building substantive value.

- **How do you work with the topic?** People participating in the process learn about subsequent, deeper and deeper layers of the problem and discuss them. Having at their disposal expert proposals (directions or specific solutions to the problem) and conditions given by the decision-maker, they try to better understand what constitutes the challenge and develop the best strategy to solve it. It is good for them also to have space to develop their own ideas.
- **What is the effect?** In-depth understanding of the issue and its solutions, discussion aimed at developing a voting strategy, selecting a package of directions/scenarios or specific solutions accepted by a significant part of the group.

Tips

- An interesting solution to be applied during the educational part of the process are **scenarios of the future** (as in the [citizens' assembly in Rzeszów](#) carried out in autumn 2023). They can conclude a local council meeting and constitute an important educational point in the citizens' assembly. This technique allows you to present solutions as several competing general visions of the future, and thus indicate dilemmas and directions that will need to be considered. Such scenarios can be an ordering tool during the process (on the basis of which solutions are then selected) or constitute its finale, depending on decisions related to the degree of specificity of the verdict. But it helps participants understand that reality consists of limited resources and wise public policy must ultimately assume the choice of a single leading path.
- During the educational part, it is worth considering taking care of people who have **different learning styles**. We can give you some tips on different educational tools some of which we have tried ourselves:
 - introduce work in small groups or pairs;
 - use visual aids that are not overloaded with content, such as infographics, slides with photos and graphics, educational videos, etc.;
 - provide reading materials, both before the process (e.g. a textbook collecting the most important issues topic by topic), during the process, and between meetings;
 - refer to specific examples and current reality, e.g. show the types of people most often affected by the problem; you can use to this end so-called personas (i.e. exemplary, typical people, whose situation the group analyzes in order to understand their reality) or invite people affected by the problem to talk about it; this is particularly important as a method to escape the trap of looking at various issues only from one's own perspective.
- Don't bite off more than you can chew when it comes to the amount of content you can convey. We know well how difficult it is to **select substantive material**, especially when the time for presentations is limited. Hiring one or two people as so-called expert advisers can help you prepare this selection and work with the expert group. Their tasks will include managing the process of creating scenarios, selecting content, introducing you to complex issues and helping you resolve dilemmas.
- This may seem trivial, but it is extremely important: make sure the **language is simple, understandable to the average recipient**. Work on it with experts: review the materials, presentations and manuals they have prepared. This is extremely important because, at the end, each person has to make a decision on a complex topic. For it to be of good quality, it must result from a thorough understanding of the issue that is the subject of the entire process.



See interesting, innovative examples of presenting knowledge during education in the publication [Innovations in local climate assemblies and juries in the UK](#), Involve [EN]



Stakeholder collection

Such a complex and complicated process requires mapping people, institutions, organizations and other entities interested in a given topic and related to it in various ways on a daily basis. This is the so-called group of stakeholders. At various stages, you will ask them for help (e.g. in terms of broadly understood communication of the process, giving comments, providing information, supporting activities), offer them cooperation (e.g. co-organization or participation in a meeting, preparation of an expertise, support for advocacy activities), and even establish more long-term partnerships (e.g. by inviting them to join the group working on the remit of the process and the cross-sectional presentation of the discussed issue or supervising with you the methodology, maybe by asking for their patronage over the process). This group will help you achieve the goals of the process and is necessary for its smooth implementation. It is important to define the goals of such cooperation, indicate which of them are of key importance, and to point out what you expect from various people and entities.

So **who (or what competences) it is worth having on board**, both broadly, as stakeholders, and narrowly, including in closer cooperation in the implementation of the process?

- **Experts:** it is highly probable that, as the implementer of activities, you will not be a specialist in the issue covered by the process (unless you initiate the process as, for example, a ministry dealing with a given topic); that is why it is so important to gather a strong representation of civil society organizations, institutions, scientific communities (academia) and think-tanks that will be able to develop a substantive scope related to the topic of the process: present diagnoses, dilemmas, and even directions or specific solutions. **Reliable knowledge based on facts as a basis for discussions** is the strength of processes similar to the **National citizens' dialogue**. We mentioned earlier that gathering a group of experts is quite a long and tedious task, but it is a type of investment that will prove to be very valuable in the long run. They will accompany you throughout the entire process, engaging in various types of tasks: substantive, advisory, consulting, verification, communication, advocacy and many others. Lack of knowledge regarding the topic should not be an obstacle for you in coordinating the project, because this group of people is supposed to secure the process from the point of view of providing knowledge and you will rely on them throughout the process. This group of people and organizations will help you:
 - make the entire process credible in terms of substantive content;
 - understand, based on data and facts, the causes of problems, challenges and phenomena that will be discussed in the process;
 - show the paths and directions of existing solutions, also using available scientific and practical knowledge; it is worth making sure in advance whether and with what agenda each expert enters the process - the aim is to build thematic balance;
 - support the organizational team and the recipients of the activities, i.e. citizens participating in the meetings (it will address their doubts and questions);
 - develop publicly available materials constituting a source of information and education on a given topic (so-called knowledge base);
 - in the dissemination of the process, as each of them has its own networks and contact bases;
 - in advocacy activities – both during and after the work of citizens.
- **Representatives of decision-makers, local and national authorities (officials and politicians):** they are the ones who can formulate and present a diagnosis, provide and collect data, disseminate the process, help promote and attract participants in individual stages of the process. They can also make it credible and - most importantly - will ultimately be the recipients of the recommendations presented by citizens. It also means that they will be the ones who will be on the roadmap for achieving the implemented changes (perhaps they will even be the ones to participate in its creation). The process may also help

in building a network of cross-sectoral cooperation within state structures, which will help ensure the implementation of the developed solutions after the process.

- **Parties:** these are institutions, organizations and informal groups as well as other entities or people whose operation is related to the topic of the assembly or who are directly influenced by the issues discussed during the assembly. Their inclusion and open recruitment into the process are intended to open the process to various voices (even those outside the mainstream), make it transparent, non-exclusive, as well as take into account the opinions and views of various parties for whom the issue under discussion is important. While taking care of the quality of the knowledge transferred to the assembly participants, remember that they should still be parties basing their opinions on publicly available data and facts, on scientific knowledge or personal experience; their presence can be designed in various ways: as live personal speeches (recommended for live processes) or recordings prepared in advance by the party during the educational part, with the possibility of contact and consultation of solutions created during the deliberation part by assembly participants.
- **Observers:** they are essential as the ones who monitor your previously planned actions during the process. They ensure its methodological correctness, support you in carrying out ongoing evaluation of the subsequent parts of the process, help to improve its quality in its subsequent stages or to increase the quality and the effectiveness of the next full process. The goals, tasks, competences, rights and obligations of this group are precisely established at the very beginning and recorded in the rules and regulations, which should be an action guide for all process participants (all those involved in the process should be informed about their role and presence). The rules and regulations should also include tools that this group can use to implement its activities, define the relationship with the initiator, implementer, experts, parties, and most importantly, with participants in each of the two stages of the process: local councils and national citizens' assembly.
- **International and European institutions:** depending on how the process and its verdict are received by the national authorities, how open the government and parliament as well as state administration institutions are to the discussion, you can decide to include the EU and international institutions in the process and in advocacy actions supporting the change. These entities willingly meet with expert organizations from various countries and have the competence to speak out and seek solutions on various issues - from legal through human rights to health issues, climate action, the fight against poverty, etc. These institutions often have their own channels which, when used well, can encourage and motivate national decision-makers to introduce the desired solutions and changes.
- **Founders, grantors and sponsors:** it may turn out that you will need financial support from additional sources. In such a case, make sure to involve non-controversial organizations, institutions or companies. As in the case of partners, this decision also requires caution due to the nature of the process based on dialogue and anti-polarization, aimed at connecting citizens around an issue that is important for a given country. A well-thought-out selection of partners financing the process will prevent communication challenges that will have to be faced in the future in the event of hasty and reckless actions in this area.
- **Media:** your area of interest should certainly include both national and local media. Remember that the journalists should represent various expert and political views. Think about reaching out to industry media that collect and analyse current knowledge about threads related to the issue addressed to society in the process, but also those that are interested in topics related to democracy, engaging citizens in developing social contracts, as well as the country in general and its condition, and society (e.g. media monitoring may turn out to be of great support). Having allies in this group will certainly help make the project of a **National citizens' dialogue** public, recognizable, interesting and worth following; ultimately, this is the group that, if it appears at the summary of the process and becomes interested in the voted recommendations, will carry the verdict forward to the decision-makers (if they are not present in the process) and to the entire society.

It is in the interest of the initiator and implementer of the process to have as wide group of allies and advocates as possible. This is why it is useful to involve the people mentioned above. Their presence (or absence) can sometimes determine the success or failure of the entire project. Think carefully about who in this group (stakeholders, co-workers, partners) should be involved in your process and in what role.

Communication advice

Communication with media

The preparation of a media database: contacts to editorial offices and specific journalists who deal with issues of both civic participation and the topic of the process, should constitute part of the stakeholder mapping stage. It is worth asking partners and expert organizations collaborating on the project about their media contacts. Ensure that the media are kept informed about individual actions and what is happening in the process (about both small steps and milestones). Cooperate as closely as possible with the entire group of stakeholders and develop the best communication channel with each of the above-mentioned groups.

Joint communication of actions with partners

Common, coherent and consistent communication of the process and its topic cannot be neglected. But how do we involve in it the people, institutions and actors who are among formal partners and affiliates? At the beginning, make sure to indicate to each of them their roles and responsibilities in the subsequent stages (remember to make the rules of the proposed cooperation clear to everyone since the very beginning) and also make sure that they know what you expect of them in the area of support for the promotion of the process, but also for advocacy actions afterwards. Partnership cooperation in this area may contribute to a greater public interest and support attendance at meetings, and thus the goal of the process, i.e. a nationwide debate on the issue. Tell them about your expectations already at the beginning – substantive and communication support, but also co-responsibility for disseminating the process and its results. Your task is to prepare the strategy, communication materials, press releases, reports and articles regarding the process and the issue it addresses, for use by the group of your partners. Plan their involvement also in the publication of substantive texts and interviews they can give in the media about their participation in the process. Meet with them at the beginning to hear what their expectations and communication goals are – it is worth answering them effectively and including them in communication plans, as long as they do not contradict our values or main assumptions of the process. Ensuring their visibility in the process will be very important for most of them, so use all the tools available nowadays (including social media) to associate them with the process. Provide the group with a communication plan (and update it at key moments) and ask them to designate areas and contacts in which they can help (informing about the process on their websites and social media, referring to ongoing actions during media appearances, etc.). Join your forces and reach, but **remember that it is your task to ensure that the message is consistent – prepare propositions of information** you want them to include, inform them in advance of important dates so that they can plan time for support.

Our experience

Being aware that the implementation of the process came at a time of quite strong polarization in the society, we were concerned about our credibility and that of each step we took. That is why we paid particular attention to the widest possible selection of political, social, institutional and non-institutional partners. Properly combining them also helped us strengthen the legitimacy of the process, its result and the positive narrative around its agency, which was crucial to its success.

The Shipyard initiated the process from the bottom up as an organization that has experience in experimenting with various methods of engaging the public in discussions about issues important to them, but does not have much knowledge about energy poverty.

Therefore, in the initial phase of preparations, we invited organizations conducting activities similar to ours (we needed this type of support in this innovative and extensive process), but also substantive ones dealing with social issues, social assistance, poverty, climate, environmental protection, energy, renewable energy sources, construction, with fight to increase people's knowledge about air quality in the country, study of various social phenomena, and analysis of national and European policies in the field of the discussed topic. It is no longer a secret that we had been working on the database collecting all potential project partners for almost two years, and the result of this work was an extensive collection of 150 various entities, which enabled us to create a Council of experts consisting of 22 organizations and institutions.

Despite, or rather because of, the bottom-up nature of the process, throughout the entire preparation and implementation period, we did a lot of work to establish contacts and interest in our project among decision-makers, as well as various public institutions. Reaching out and encouraging them to participate turned out to be quite a challenge. The ministries with which we tried to cooperate showed less than we expected, or practically no interest in it. However, we do not forget that, through contact with some of the departments, we were given the opportunity to promote the process to audiences that were not available to us and access to some (limited) data on the issue addressed by the process.

At the initial stage of preparation for the process, we engaged a PR agency that helped us determine the direction of communication and develop a name for the project. At a later stage, due to the limited budget, communication actions were carried out using the Shipyard's resources. Monitoring traditional and on-line media was an important tool for tracking what, who and how the process and its topic was talked about. We used it to build content on the project website: www.naradaoenergii.pl, but also to acquire appropriate partners and recognize the mood around the topic discussed in the process (it was the time of inflation and war in Ukraine, which strongly influenced media coverage of the topic). A larger budget would allow for the preparation and implementation of a communication strategy by a professional company, which would certainly translate into greater media presence of our process.

We knew that the lack of media presence involved in reporting subsequent stages of the process would make it difficult or impossible for us to achieve the desired effect in the form of implementing the recommendations. We believed that through them and the awareness they built around the topic in the society, we would create pressure. Media coverage of the process was very difficult to achieve. We acted together with most of our partners (mainly from the Council of experts), sending to our contact databases press releases and notices of planned events (including briefings and press conferences) intended for the media. We did not manage to establish relations with the media, including the national media, to the extent we desired.

Reflections

Despite difficulties at various stages of the process, we managed to attract media attention from time to time, and we also know of people who followed the process with bated breath and were writing about it with great commitment. We also managed to establish cooperation several times, which resulted in the opportunity to comment on the process in several interviews that we (the Shipyard) or our partners from the Council of experts gave.

However, in our opinion, an additional effect of this two-year cooperation with partners in the implementation of the project is the integration of the environment as well as an increase in their visibility and recognition, appreciated by some expert organizations. Our partners had the opportunity to get to know each other better and recognize the actions carried out by each of them. We know of situations where some organizations have joined forces to achieve common goals. We also tried to ensure that their projects related to energy poverty were promoted through the communication channels available to us – those of the Shipyard and of the project, including: Facebook, websites or newsletters.

Knowledge base and communication about the problem

A process such as a **National citizens' dialogue** is intended to address, at most times, difficult, complex topics on which there are different positions and opinions. That is why it is necessary that it was based on comprehensive, reliable sources of knowledge. Therefore, before you start large-scale promotion, **you need to create a place where you will gather knowledge about the issue** you want to talk about (its definition, source of challenges, types of solutions, opinions of various communities, local and national diagnosis, etc.). Developing a knowledge base is the first step in answering the following question to the people we want to invite to a joint conversation: why should we talk about this at all? Think about what tool you want to use throughout the project to publish and promote all these threads – in our case, we created a separate website and a project profile on Facebook (functioning in parallel to the general website and profile of the organization). You can also consider setting up an open group on social media to provide additional space for exchanging experiences (however, you must then provide for additional time in the process to visit, moderate the discussion and inform about actions taken).

We recommend creating an accessible **knowledge base based** on reliable information material, the main element of which will be educational materials for conference participants and everyone interested in the topic – the most important documents and articles (past and current ones) regarding the causes of the problem, possible solutions, good practices, actions undertaken so far, expert opinions, diagnoses or data sources, collected in one place. The second important area on the website is information about the process itself - its purpose, schedule, planned actions and news (published on an ongoing basis during the process). As the main message on the website, **prepare a clear summary of the most important information about the process** to convey the essence of the topic to visitors in an easy and accessible manner.

It is worth asking experts supporting the process substantively to create content for the knowledge base. They can indicate valuable (sometimes free) materials available on-line, which will allow, among other things, for looking at the issue from a different perspective. This may affect the assessment of the entire process as an objective one, especially at its initial stage. A publicly available knowledge base will ensure that potential users will have access to **reliable information** on a given topic in one place.

Monitoring of media (paid option) or on-line content (e.g. free Google Alerts) can also be helpful in creating news. This will allow you to receive current information related to the problem and you will be able to find out which media or public figures are talking about a given topic.

Plan time to update the knowledge base and review articles/news daily. This is especially important when the topic of the process is a current problem that is talked about a lot in the media (as was the case with the topic of energy poverty as a result of the war in Ukraine). Such activity will help you attract regular visitors and users of the website – they will know that all the most important and up-to-date news on a given topic are collected there.

Once you have prepared the main communication channels, such as a website and social media, the next step is an information and educational campaign as well as actions encouraging participation in the process.

Evaluation

When planning the process, it is worth thinking from the very beginning about **evaluation, understood as a structured reflection on the goals of the project you have chosen and the actions you will take to achieve them**. Do not wait to plan your evaluation until the project is nearing completion. By then, it may be too late to find out some important things and collect data that would allow you to make recommendations for the future.

Evaluation can be used to achieve a number of goals – from ongoing operational improvement of your actions, through assessing the impact of the process, verifying strategic assumptions, to providing valuable input to communication and advocacy actions (e.g. promoting the tools of deliberative democracy or the final verdict of the model's second stage, i.e. citizens' assembly).

Depending on the human, financial and time resources at your disposal, you can carry out the evaluation with a team, outsource it to an external subcontractor, or combine these two approaches (e.g. obtain assistance from external researchers in preparing research tools or in analysing the collected data). When selecting a subcontractor, pay attention to their previous experience conducting evaluation projects of proportionate scale, and optionally, their experience in studying and evaluating deliberative/participatory processes. A solution that slightly economizes resources and costs may be establishing cooperation with people observing the process who have research experience (e.g. as researchers working at universities).

It is crucial to plan the evaluation well at the stage of designing the entire process. The starting point for reflection should be a clear definition of the goals of the councils and the assembly: from the point of view of the change that is to take place in the participants, broader social change, impact on decision-makers, but also change for your institution or organization. Assessing the state of achievement of these goals is the heart of evaluation. As a part of planning reflection on the process, you should also decide what, from whom and at which point you would like to learn within the evaluation (i.e. asking evaluation questions, selecting the study group, creating a schedule). It is important to combine the planning of the evaluation with the planning of the entire process, so as to have an idea from the beginning when research actions will occur and to conduct them during the implementation of individual stages of the project. The scale of the evaluation will each time depend on your needs and capabilities, but we encourage you to take it into account – even to a limited extent.

What tools should be used in evaluation?

The most basic, and at the same time not requiring financial effort, tool for conducting evaluation are **ongoing meetings within the works of the team coordinating the process**. Optimally, they should take place before the beginning of each major stage of activities (to discuss the assumed goals of the stage and manners of achieving them, as well as to make corrections to the initial assumptions) and after its completion (time to reflect on both the adequacy and effectiveness of the actions taken, as well as on the status of achieving the objectives the process is intended to serve). Added value may be provided by a situation in which such meetings are conducted by someone outside the main coordinating team; it is worth having a person who will, in the midst of current affairs, remind you to conduct such discussions, moderate them and encourage

you and your team to reflect on your actions. Do not forget to take notes from the meetings – only this way the reflections occurring in their course can be fully used to create summaries and recommendations after the process is completed.

Another fairly basic tool for model evaluation are **surveys for participants**. The word “basic” has two meanings in this context. Firstly, it refers to the universality of this tool. Secondly, to the nature of the data it allows us to collect and the benefits resulting from its use. Although surveys are not sufficient to fully describe the experience of people participating in the process and its potential impact, they **allow us to determine how it is generally perceived, how it affects the level of knowledge and views of participants, as well as how diverse these views are and what these differences are due to.**

In our model, surveys accompany both local councils and the national citizens' assembly. At the local level, they are addressed to both people organizing the councils and those participating in them. At the national level, only assembly participants are surveyed, and each of them is asked to fill in a separate questionnaire during the first and last assembly session (in the so-called pre/post scheme). With the approach we propose below, this type of surveys also allows us to find out what the assembly's reception is, compared to other assemblies.

The experience from our process suggests that, within the activities involving local councils and the national assembly, it is **worth assuming at least the following elements of evaluation** (we write more about the survey design itself in the next subsection):

- **surveys summarising local councils (especially pilot ones):** one addressed to the organizers, the other to the participants of the councils;
- **surveys for participants of the national assembly:** one before its start, the other after its end; their aim is to compare indicators regarding attitudes and level of knowledge, sense of civic agency or assessment of the assembly method, thus showing the impact of the process on assembly participants;
- **survey for participants after each meeting/weekend of the assembly:** used to continuously assess the implementation of individual assembly stages and introduce changes in the method and/or structure of subsequent meetings;
- **interviews with people participating in the assembly immediately after the end of the process:** they allow for deepening the conclusions drawn from the surveys and provide in-depth material about the impact of the process on the participants.

You may want to consider the following once the process is complete:

- interviews (group or individual) with observers;
- interviews with experts involved in the process.

In the course of the evaluation, **it is important to remember to systematically gather knowledge**. The methods may be different, depending on possibilities and resources: keeping notes from meetings and observations, databases with responses to surveys, summarising interviews. It will be possible to return to the records and databases once the process is complete, in order to take a holistic, project-wide look at what was successful, what was difficult and what is worth looking at in the future. This is an important basis for drawing conclusions and making future recommendations.

The above comments concern evaluation assessing the achievement of “close” process results. However, it **is also worth thinking about impact evaluation**, which may include the long-term impact of the process on society, the decision-maker, but also systemic changes. In our process, the framework for the impact study carried out by an external research company was the assumptions of the study of the impact of climate assemblies created by the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA).



More information about assembly evaluation can be found in the documents on the KNOCA website:

- [Impact evaluation framework](#) >, KNOCA [EN]
- [Approaches to Evaluation of Climate Assemblies](#) >, KNOCA [EN]
- [Workshop on Evaluating the Impact of Assemblies](#) >, KNOCA [EN]

How to prepare an evaluation survey?

On the website www.partycypacjaobywatelska.pl, you will find [three templates](#) > of questionnaires accompanying the study of the citizens' assembly participants. The questions included therein were repeatedly tested and improved in the assemblies conducted by us (and not only by us), and some of them were also consulted or co-created by external experts and scientific teams dealing with deliberative methods¹.

However, since these experiences concerned in particular the so-called climate assemblies, the presented questionnaires necessarily focus partly on questions related to this issue. This is because the assessment of the impact of citizens' assemblies concerns, among other things, the change in attitudes and the state of knowledge in the field covered by each specific process. We decided to separate thematic questions in the templates: they are highlighted in **green**. They should be treated as examples – in assemblies dealing with issues other than climate, they can be modified or replaced in such a way as to adapt the questionnaire as needed. The remaining questions are of a universal nature. Of course, not all of them have to be included in the questionnaire; the decision on this matter is always up to the assembly organizers.

When using questionnaires, it is worth paying attention to several methodological and technical assumptions. These assumptions do not necessarily apply to every similar process. Should this be the case for you, or should the decision be made to modify the presented tool by yourself, it is worth bearing in mind that:

- **Questions in questionnaires should not only concern participants' opinions about the event itself and its organization.** It is also important to collect data about their views and opinions on the topic covered by the assembly, their attitudes towards deliberation/democracy as such, their involvement, as well as data enabling the assessment of their knowledge about the assembly's issues. In our proposal, the latter data is based on respondents' self-assessment of their knowledge, and not on checking specific information they have (or do not have).
- **Assessing the impact of the assembly on the opinions, attitudes and knowledge of participants involves carrying out two measurements: before the work begins** (usually during or before the first session) **and at its end** (during the last session). If the assembly lasts longer than a few weeks, or if it is accompanied by an intense media debate or events that are relevant to the discussed issue and which may influence its reception or the opinions of participants, it is worth supplementing the studies with surveys on a control sample (a representative sample of people not involved in the assembly). If this is not possible, it is worth asking questions that are also asked in publicly available opinion polls so that the data from these polls could be a reference point in the assembly's assessment.
- For purposes of **data comparability**, it is very important that the questions repeated in both surveys accompanying the assembly are worded identically. In addition to these questions, both in the pre-assembly survey and in the post-assembly survey, there are a number of questions specific to these stages and therefore not subject to comparison.
- It is very important to **collect the so-called metric data enabling comparison of the assessments and opinions presented in the surveys with the socio-demographic characteristics of their participants.**

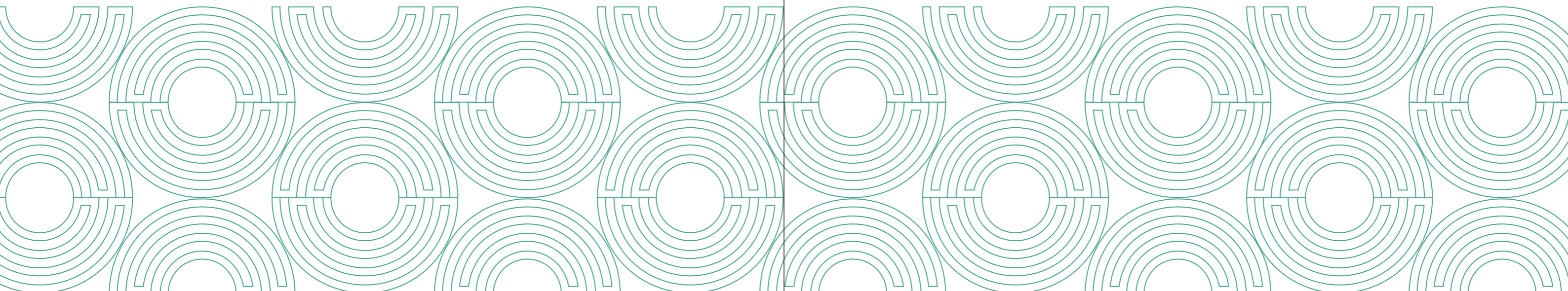
¹ We would especially like to thank prof. Paulina Pospieszna from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, who, as part of her own research and through contacts with groups of researchers from Luxembourg and Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium, significantly influenced the shape of the evaluation questionnaire for the national assembly.

This includes, for example, data such as the age of the respondents, gender, level of education, financial situation of the respondents (this is particularly sensitive, so it is worth considering whether you actually need it), and their place of residence. So why are these questions not included in our assembly questionnaire? This is due to the fact that in the case of this assembly, this information is collected earlier, at the stage of recruitment of participants. This data is then linked to the survey with the use of the participants' identification numbers – each of them is asked to enter their number in the survey. This limits the time needed to complete the study and increases their comfort. Remember that a survey without an identification number (or personal data, if you decide not to assign numbers to participants) is incomplete.

- **Identification numbers** in the study accompanying the assembly also serve another important function: they enable comparison of assessments and opinions formulated at various stages of the assembly by the same people. This is very important because it helps not only to find out what the general opinion about the assembly or its topic was and how this opinion changed, but also how it changed in the case of people with different characteristics.
- When assigning identification numbers to participants, **remember about the ethical and legal conditions of this step**. If you want to ensure their anonymity in the study, you must ensure that the numbers in your database are not linked in any way to their personal data.
- **Questions** asked to respondents should be formulated **as simply as possible**, even if the problem is complex.
- Remember that the survey is completed independently – **make sure that its format (colours, fonts) is as readable as possible, so that even people who do not participate in this type of situations on a daily basis know what to do**. Include additional instructions in your questions, if you think they are needed.
- **Questions should be formulated in accordance with the principles of methodological correctness**. There is no space here to discuss these principles in detail – if you are not sure whether you know them, consult specialists, especially quantitative researchers.
- Make sure not to exaggerate with the number of questions asked (there should certainly be no more of them than in the proposed templates; if you want to add something, consider removing something else). **Filling in the entire questionnaire should take no longer than 10 minutes**.
- **Plan the process of completing the surveys in such a way that it does not affect the course of the entire assembly, and at the same time make it convenient for the participants** (e.g. dedicate a specific part of the session to this). Make sure that all assembly participants have returned their filled-in questionnaires to you and that nothing raised any doubts.

Filled-in surveys should be delivered to the person coordinating the assembly evaluation in paper form (unless the surveys are completed electronically, which we do not recommend, as it is inconvenient for some participants). Then, the coordinating person is responsible for entering the results into the electronic database and for the process of their analysis.

3 Inauguration of the process



Every long-term project, especially one designed to attract and interest a wider audience in its course and results, requires its **inauguration** to be carefully planned. The success of the entire project may largely depend on what this event will look like. It is advisable (if possible) for it to be organized in a place that does not evoke negative connotations, that is associated with inclusivity, that is related to one of your partners or in a place that is significant or symbolic from the point of view of the issue to be discussed. It may also be a location associated with the organizer or the ordering entity. It would be good to conduct an on-line broadcast if possible, since you want to reach as wide group in the country as possible with information about the start of the process. After all, for the first stage, you need local activists, leaders and local governments to conduct local councils. It is best for such a meeting to be organized in a place that is easily accessible in terms of transport.

When sending an invitation to a meeting, it is worth carefully considering the target group: local and national authorities, public institutions, civil society organizations and think tanks, media, substantive partners. Already at the invitation level, it is worth sending the program and providing information about the meeting formula; preferably, it should be inclusive of all participants, so that it constitutes a kind of prelude to what is to happen in the next stages: meetings, discussions, sharing experience and knowledge and a common reflection on the problem and solutions to it.

Our experience

The inauguration was scheduled for mid-March 2022. Two weeks earlier, Russia had invaded Ukraine, sparking a full-scale war just outside Poland's borders. In our case, due to the date planned several weeks earlier, we wondered whether there was any space for energy-related discussions at that time. Is it even appropriate to talk, instead of constantly and loudly protesting against the brutal, shameful attack on Ukraine? However, we felt that such a discussion made sense because the topic of energy is part of a broader picture: the one where the war is taking place. Energy, its type, cost and who controls it are essential factors to our collective security. Therefore, taking all these circumstances into account, we held the inaugural meeting. Due to the circumstances, a narrow group of people was invited to the event (mainly the Council of experts, partner organizations and institutions, representatives of politics and public institutions, and the media).

The meeting took place at the Copernicus Science Centre, a nationally recognized institution that was the main partner of the process.

During the inauguration, together with experts, we presented the phenomenon of energy poverty, its causes and possible solutions. We also elaborated on how it is possible to get involved in the project – by organizing local councils in local governments and communities.

The entire event was broadcast live.

Communication advice

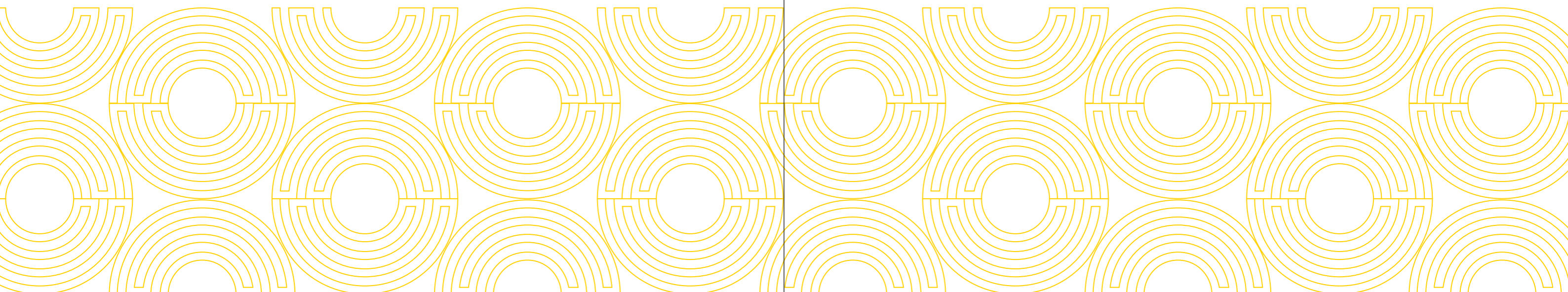
At the beginning of an **information and educational campaign**, the goal is to interest a wide range of people in a given topic and talk about how, through joint discussion, acceptable solutions to the problem and binding recommendations can be reached. This is the moment of trying to introduce the topic of our **National citizens' dialogue** into the public debate, when it is worth remembering that the more people learn about the process, the greater the chance is that during the recruitment process (read more in the **Draw** > subsection) it will be easier to encourage randomly selected people to participate in the assembly. Greater recognition translates into greater agency and greater willingness to engage partners, experts, media and, ultimately, politicians at various levels. Therefore, it is worth planning the **inauguration day** in detail.

Every organizer should remember about:

- **the guest list, which must include the media: local and national ones;** a top-down process is easier to communicate and enjoys greater media interest, and therefore has a greater chance of gaining popularity among wider public;
- organizing a **briefing** or **press conference** and providing space for asking questions;
- **preparing a press release** to be distributed during the inauguration and sending it in an electronic version before and after the event along with photos for use (to the media invited to the inauguration, as well as to a wider list); remember to obtain permission from the meeting participants to use their image for promotional purposes of the event and to properly label the photos (source of the photo and its author);
- preparing a convenient workspace for journalists, camera operators and photographers (press box, microphones, good visibility and sound quality);
- **involving a photographer** (or camera operator) on behalf of the organizer (photos to be used both on the website and for publication in the media);
- possible **handling of the online event** (if you choose to live stream it), including, among other things, responding to comments during the live coverage, etc.;
- **planning a number of media activities** (radio, television, portals, Internet TV, podcasts, etc.) for the time after the inauguration, aimed at telling the general public about the initiated process as well as informing and inviting them to participate in it and follow it.



4 **Local councils,** i.e. discussions throughout Poland, available to everyone



What is the purpose of the councils?

The purpose of this stage is to conduct local, several-hour-long meetings scattered throughout the country, based on a simple, repeatable, previously prepared scheme.

Narady Local councils are one of the two most important elements (apart from the citizens' assembly) that make up our model and prove its unique character. Many countries use the national citizens' assembly method to discuss complex **topics** >, they are not, however, combined with local meetings, but more often with collecting opinions via the Internet or as part of additional public opinion polls. Nevertheless, in our opinion, local councils open up new possibilities and serve many purposes. In this part, we will try to answer the question why to combine councils with an assembly and tell you about the unique nature of this stage. Read what councils can be used for:

- they provide an opportunity to **open a broader, nationwide discussion** on a selected topic, available to a large group of citizens; the conclusions drawn from the meetings are based on knowledge, local diagnosis, discussion and exchange of views;
- they can also be a good **exploratory and diagnostic tool** before the start of the assembly, to provide it with knowledge, to collect first ideas and to test in practice how a given topic is received, allowing it to be further defined, to name any ambiguities, controversies or the first directions of socially acceptable solutions;
- in special cases, when there is more time and the issues require it, councils can be used to **develop the topic itself** and **define** more precisely **interesting directions of the problem**, e.g. help find areas in which the developed assembly recommendations can be implemented (as a pilot), responding to local challenges;
- meetings can play an extremely important **educational and informational role**; an important element of this knowledge is to make participants (including representatives of local government authorities) aware of what is and what is not their responsibility and what they do and do not have influence on (the latter issues should be delegated upwards to the national level);
- apart from their educational value, councils can be used to **strengthen local communities by providing space to meet and talk in different conditions than usual**; in our process, the aspect of good discussion at the table and breaking the spell of an emotionally arousing confrontation with an office or neighbours turned out to be surprisingly important; it requires preparation, moderation support and training, but it gives good results, especially in highly polarized communities;
- from our experience, talking at the local level is often easier and more natural for citizens; it is easier for people to talk about local issues and make decisions about them, so with some topics this part can be used to **open a broader discussion, also on local issues** (unless it makes no sense, because the topic is nationwide, e.g. construction of the first nuclear power plant and adding the atom to energy sources); a local council can make people aware of how much they can do on their own, without relying on the authorities, but also encourage them to act for change in a given area;
- the councils are relatively cheap to implement thanks to the support of local partners and the meetings they conduct, and at the same time they provide the **opportunity to achieve a mass scale of impact and open a "national debate"** on a given topic; this is very important from the point of view of convincing decision-makers to get involved in the project and the public perception of activities;
- the councils may become the source of **delegates to the assembly** (this was done, for example, **in Canada** >).

Thus, it can be said that citizens' councils, in order to best complement the assembly, must meet several goals. They should be, first of all, an **educational and information space**. They should assist process participants in **diagnosing the situation** from their local perspective and act as a **place for discussion and dialogue**. **The verdict, with clearly outlined recommendation directions**, is a way to establish a **direct connection** between the councils and the assembly.

We realize how difficult it can be to find balance between various council goals. It is easy (and this was also our mistake) to give in to the temptation of knowledge and the resulting high expectations towards this stage. Goals will probably also depend on the topic, resources and time. But **we encourage you to limit your expectations and take advantage of the diagnostic and discussion value of the meetings**. And if you want to include some form of verdict at the end of the meetings, focus on formulating a few simple directions or dilemmas – with a meeting lasting several hours and often initially low awareness of the issue among the participants, this may be the only thing achievable.

As many as 80% of Polish women and men believe that processes such as the National citizens' dialogue should be organized on a regular basis, and 79% said they would be willing to participate if they were drawn >.

This may indicate a certain social curiosity, openness and readiness to participate in this type of processes.

Our experience

Our goals were ambitious, considering the time and the assessment of the participants; even perhaps too ambitious. The councils intended to diagnose the local situation, present the problem, its scale, main challenges and solutions, as well as (preceded by a discussion) a collection of individual opinions on specific solutions on local, national and European level. We prepared two several-minute-long films (about the problem and its solutions), several rounds of issues for discussion in groups (working with the so-called personas and a table with recommendations), and the meeting ended with filling in an individual 10-page survey. As it turned out, the survey was too long because, in addition to the part regarding the evaluation of the meeting and detailed information about the participants, it contained an extensive section regarding the verdict (preferred solutions).

The summary of councils and evaluations with their hosts and hostesses showed that we expected too much in such a short time (approx. 2.5 hours). The meeting did not guarantee sufficient time to educate the participants on the very difficult, new topic that we invited them to discuss. This prevented them from moving freely around the proposed solutions, selecting the best ones and properly filling in the final survey. However, the participants managed to indicate general directions that interested them. Those gathered at the meetings appreciated the opportunity of joint discussion, in a different form than usual, on a topic important to them.



Communication advice

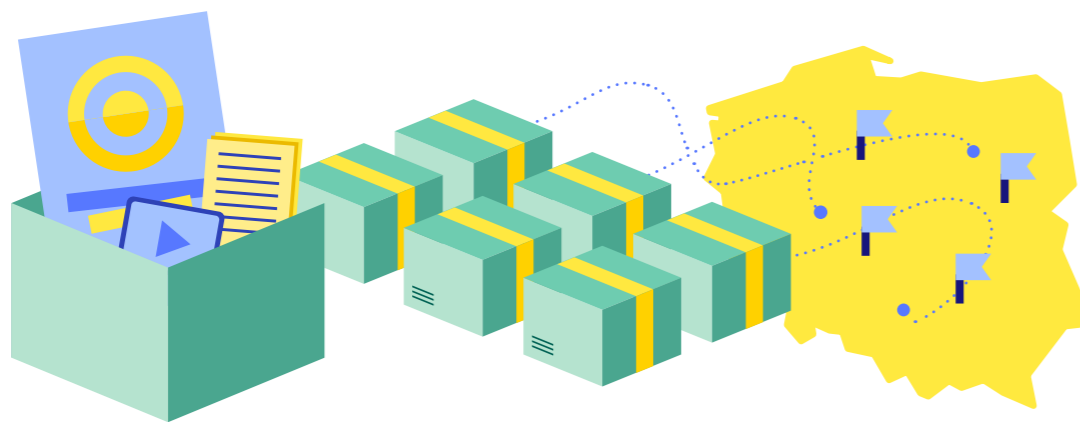
The process of inviting people to organize and participate in local councils should be supported by widely distributed messages that would answer the following question: **why should the organizers, but also the participants of the councils, devote their time to organize and participate in them?** Of course, this message depends on what you really want to achieve with the councils and what their goals are. Your task is to get people interested in the topic so that they decide that it is worth organizing a meeting, sitting down to talk and discuss the issue.

A very important reason why people decide to participate is their belief in the **real impact on change** (e.g. of specific regulations). Therefore, if the entire process and its effects have a chance to translate into reality and systemic changes (there is some guarantee of agency), try to make it as loud as possible in your messages. Emphasize social impact, refer to the common good and the idea of direct democracy. However, if you do not have assurances that the solutions created during the council will be implemented, you must base your communication on a slightly different rhetoric, referring to the sense of community, action for your community and local diagnosis, which can be transferred to the national level.

How to conduct a council?

In this part of the process, local partners are invited to organize the event: civil society organizations, local governments, informal groups, local leaders are responsible for logistics, promoting the event in local media, conducting and summarising the council. The aim of local councils is to make them as accessible as possible, both in terms of organization and participation. This means that the meetings are open and there are no restrictions on who can participate in them.

Your task, as the initiator or organizer of the process, is to prepare all the materials needed to conduct and summarize the council (scenario, examples of so-called personas, educational and workshop materials for working at the meeting, sample form for the summary, promotional materials), to encourage its organization and to support people willing to take on the role of leaders (e.g. by organizing training, writing guides, providing financial support, printing materials).



Try to prepare the meeting tools, handbooks and rules in such a way as to enable both an official from the big city and a youth group member or a senior woman from the Rural Housewives' Associations to join in as hosts. The more diverse people feel invited to the discussion and have the power to conduct such a meeting themselves (or take part in it), the better for the process and its impact on the surroundings.

How can you support the organizers of local councils? Depending on the resources you have, you could:

- support them financially, e.g. by offering to pay for the room, catering or moderation services, and even by paying for the organization of the meeting (micro-grants for local governments to conduct councils); at the same time, you can also create a database of experts and possibly moderators who will agree to support the council substantively;
- train the organizers in moderation and/or introduce them to the process;
- allocate resources for the moderation of meetings by you and your team, or hiring or training professional moderators who will be sent to conduct meetings in the field (our experience has shown that the fear of conducting a meeting is one of the biggest barriers in this model of cooperation, so such relief for local leaders could increase the number of councils);
- prepare templates for promotional materials: posters, social media posts, press releases, etc.;
- organize, record and share a demonstration council to familiarize potential organizers with the course of the meeting.

Communication advice

Local meetings are a perfect time to invite journalists who work in regional media to observe the process, so ask the local organizer to do so (and add the addresses to your contact database). Prepare a press release template for this person in advance, explaining the most important goals and method of the process.

It is worth sending your photographer and/or camera operator to selected local councils (if you plan to prepare a film about the process) unless the person organizing them provides a professional photographer whose photos will be shared with you.

To stay in touch with the participants, suggest collecting e-mail addresses. You can then provide the participants with information about further steps in the process and the final result. This data may also be useful to you for evaluation activities; tips for this stage can be found below.

Think also about creating an interactive map of local councils. It may encourage some people to organize their own councils, perhaps serve as a guide to convenient places for meetings, and you will obtain good promotional material that you can later use in communication, presentations or reports.





Evaluation advice

How to include evaluation at the stage of local councils? You will learn this in the chapter below.

Pilot

A good solution in preparing a fruitful council is to implement its pilot. This can help you calmly test the scenario and verify your understanding of the topic before you officially announce the start of this stage. Evaluation tools, e.g. in the form of a summary meeting of the team organizing the pilot or a simple survey, can be very helpful in wisely refining the final course of meetings to which you will invite local organizers. Additionally, observation may be a valuable evaluation tool at the pilot stage. Reserve time to go to the first few meetings (in the case of our process, these were two pilot meetings). Prepare an observation card with the key issues you want to look at and take notes – without it, it will be difficult to later remember all the important things you observe. Observation is a great tool to check how the meeting scenarios you have prepared work in practice, where the organizers, moderators and participants encounter difficulties, and which parts or exercises are particularly successful and fruitful. You can use the conclusions from observations to constantly modify meeting scenarios, guidelines for organizers, and adjust the methods of support you provide during the implementation of the councils. The results of the pilot evaluation will provide you with conclusions regarding ad hoc changes that are worth introducing in the scenarios or the model of support for organizers.

Evaluation of local councils

Moving on to the evaluation of the councils, in reflecting on whether they work as you planned, it will be crucial to consider the experience of the organizers as well as participants of the councils. You can conduct interviews with the organizers (when there are only a few people, and you have more time) or a survey (especially if it is a larger group). When asking them questions, pay attention to the strengths of the solutions you used, but also to what could have gone wrong. It is also important to determine what was missing to make the councils more successful and better achieve your goals. In the case of a study regarding the organizers, it is most convenient to use an on-line survey.

There will be too many people participating in the councils to talk to everyone in person, so a survey will be better suited. Depending on the goals of this stage of the process, include in the questionnaire questions about the meeting experience (e.g. whether it provided new knowledge, whether it was possible to express one's opinion freely) or ones about preferred solutions in the topic discussed at the meeting (if the councils are to translate into some form of a verdict of the participants). It is also an opportunity to examine attitudes and levels of knowledge about the topic in the wider society, which can be useful in communicating the process and planning the educational part for the national assembly.

Do you want to see what a survey questionnaire for people participating in local councils might look like? Check out our website! >!

Our experience

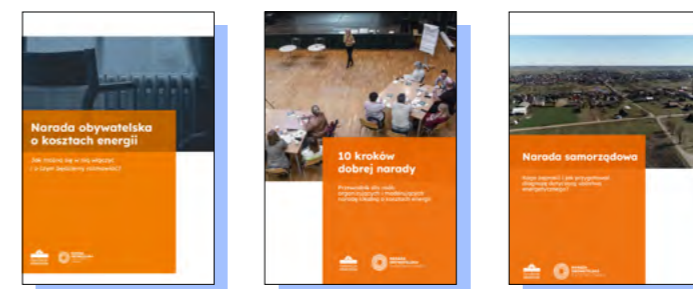
Local councils on energy costs were organized between March and July 2022. 45 meetings were held during this period. **We started with two pilots**, which helped us to refine the tools and significantly modify both the course of the meeting and its summary.

We organized an information campaign using a fairly wide network of contacts to various stakeholders, including specific local governments and organizations. When implementing the process bottom-up, i.e. without promotional support from the decision-maker, having such a base is one of the most important elements facilitating successful recruitment and reaching the target group with the message.

We prepared the following materials:

- flexible scenario templates (for meetings lasting from 2.5 hours to two days), in two versions: for civil society organizations and activist movements, as well as for local governments;
- two educational films;
- materials for workshops;
- surveys to be completed at the end by the participants and separate ones for the organizers.

In addition, we supported the organizers with a step-by-step guide on how to conduct a council, an information webinar and a comprehensive manual on the problem of energy poverty. **You can read the materials here >.**



Initially, we did not offer **financial support**, but over time it turned out to be necessary as an important factor encouraging the implementation of the councils (the organizers reported mainly needs related to renting a room, catering, printing materials, and sometimes also hiring a moderator or expert). In this context, it is important that we started the council stage three weeks after the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine. At that time, most people, organizations, institutions and local governments directed their resources (including financial ones) to support Ukrainians, so both this and lack of time could lead to much less willingness to devote attention to meetings and to bear the costs of organizing them.

In practice, everyone used the shortest version of the scenario, the meetings were attended by an average of 17 people, 11 out of 45 meetings were organized by local governments, and we personally participated in 10 meetings by conducting them. Working with the topic turned out to be difficult: the tools prepared and the wide substantive scope combined with the length of the meeting meant that the verdict of the participants was quite superficial. The participants indicated the general directions of changes, but it was obvious that they were lost in the multitude and complexity of the recommendations to be voted on, and consequently it was difficult for us to understand the participants' motivations behind the selected solutions.

As for the evaluation threads, we used questionnaires distributed in paper form to people participating in the councils. It was also possible to complete the survey on-line for people who did not manage to do it during the meetings. The aim of the surveys was to assess the organizational aspect of the meetings, identify areas for improvement in scenarios and materials, and examine the participants' knowledge and attitudes towards energy poverty. In the survey for organizers, we also asked about the assessment of the support offered to them. We received from the participants nearly **700 surveys**, which we analysed, and **we included conclusions from them and feedback from people organizing the councils in the report: [Local councils on energy costs. Summary](#)**.

Tips

- We say this from our own experience: do not exaggerate your expectations regarding the results of the councils. There will probably be too little time to develop and discuss detailed solutions. The script should not be too extensive or long. Local organizers may have very different, often limited, experience in conducting this type of meetings and different organizational competences.
- It is worth ensuring that the materials used during the council are easy to use: have educational value and inspire conversation. However, if you have a larger budget, you can look for more innovative solutions to support councils, e.g. using tablets (see the [Strategy Room model](#) used in Great Britain).
- Start with a pilot to assess how the script and materials work.
- Provide substantive support: prepare materials explaining the problem, a Q&A section, or consider expert support (potentially with an expert in a given field participating in the council). With more complex topics, such support may prove crucial in convincing the organizers to take on the role of meeting moderators. The materials must be understandable and easy to use as well as contain the essence of the problem.
- Give potential council organizers time to become familiar with the topic, identify resources, prepare meetings and promote them. The stage of conducting councils should last several months. However, we do not live in a vacuum. Unless the topic is actually on the front pages of newspapers and triggers collective protests, the readiness for an organizational leap may not be as great as you would expect, and you will certainly need to support the meeting hosts in terms of communication and organization, which takes additional time.
- If you want to obtain more in-depth knowledge and conclusions from the meeting, you can encourage the organization of, for example, two meetings within one place: one with the participation of residents, the other with the participation of people who know the topic and are interested in it (stakeholders), to have the freedom of discussion in more homogeneous groups.
- An established partnership of organizations or a strong partner in the form of an association of local governments can help you reach local partners.
- Be careful about the pre-election period as it will be difficult to encourage local governments to organize meetings around this time.
- Local governments that would implement selected points from the verdict after the meeting will face the challenge of dealing with limited resources. A solution to this situation may be to plan remuneration in the project budget for a group of experts who will support the local government in implementing the verdict (e.g. individual consulting). The experts will help adapt the voted solutions to local needs and talk to local authorities so that they do not feel confused about the effect of the meeting and its implementation.

Summing up the local council stage

The summary of the councils is the second important communication point of the process, after the inauguration. The obvious step is to write down the conclusions in the form of a report. The document should be based on a summary of conclusions from local meetings. In practice, this means collecting and analysing surveys filled in by participants and feedback from meeting organizers. The summary of the first stage should include key organizational information (where and how many meetings took place, who organized them and who participated in them) and the most important conclusions. **Depending on the topic, these conclusions may:**

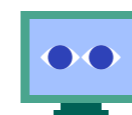
- indicate certain direction(s) to be developed at a later stage of the process;
- provide additional substantive threads or important questions that came up during the discussions;
- reveal common, strongly desirable solutions or, on the contrary, a peripheral but also problematic dilemma or challenge that should be included in the discussions in the national part of the process.

A good practice, especially from the point of view of communication, but also the accessibility of the report, is to prepare a **summary of information** in the form of an infographic including the most important conclusions. Remember to write in the report **what the next steps in the process are** and what elements from the meeting summary will be included in the second stage. Do not forget to thank the organizers and people participating in the councils, as this part of the process is based on partnership and joint work. Their contribution is very important and significant.

Communication advice

The report and its summary should be available on the process website and social media profiles. When promoting the results, you can prepare and send a **press release** to the media, organize interviews in national and perhaps local media, organize a webinar, briefing or press conference during which you will provide information about the council, announcing the transition to the second stage of the process implementation: a national citizens' assembly.

Think about making a **video summarising** this stage. It's always easier for people to understand the process if they can see it. Try to involve the organizers of local councils and your partners to ensure that the report is distributed as widely as possible to people interested in the topic of the process.



Watch the [video summary of Local councils on energy costs](#).

5 Difficult connection, or how to wisely connect local councils and the citizens' assembly

The sequential occurrence of these two elements gives an opportunity to strengthen both of them. You should be aware that local councils and the citizens' assembly, in the model we propose, should operate as two stages of the same process, and not two completely separate processes. Importantly, in this chapter we focus not so much on our experiences, but on our reflections and lessons learned in retrospect.

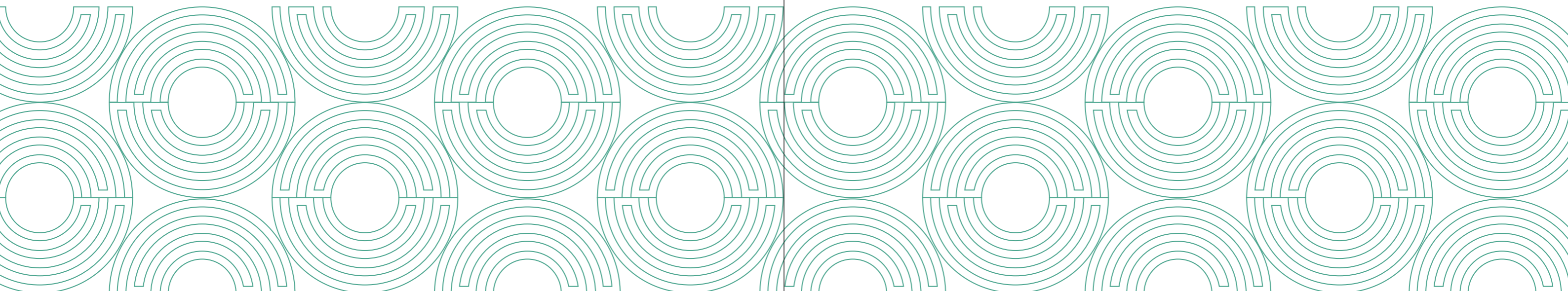
Firstly, it is important to **use the findings of the participants of the local councils during the assembly itself.** Substantive connection of both stages of the process seems to us to be a key issue; it allows, among others, for harmonising and aligning the entire process between all people involved. Perhaps people participating in the councils should identify the first solutions already during brainstorming? Or collect and define various problems that can be the basis for the work of assembly participants? There are many potential paths, but the goal remains the same: councils' participants must feel and actually be needed in the process. It may also be worth considering alternative forms of participation for people from the councils in the national citizens' assembly, e.g. as delegates.

The council stage can also be a space to **involve people from outside the organizational team in planning the course of the assembly and receiving feedback** on your vision of this process. Including diverse communities that care enough about the topic to participate in the council, in some stage of the assembly planning, can make your process better and take into account a wider range of needs and interpretations of the problem. It is also possible to use the councils as a **space to share knowledge and experiences** in a strictly local context with the assembly participants. Nothing prevents the findings of the council participants from constituting a specific voice of their communities as well as their individual views and ideas.

We also consider it important that the experts present during the assembly refer to what was developed during the councils. Who knows, maybe this is where the most interesting ideas or observations have already appeared? The fact that experts commented on them makes them more significant in the eyes of the assembly participants. As for the assembly participants themselves, civic councils are an ideal space to send them a kind of specific call or appeal. An interesting solution would be to create a direct communication channel between the participants of the first and second stages of the process, so that they could exchange experiences and views.

6 National citizens' assembly

- several-day-long,
in-depth co-decision
process for a representative
group of citizens



How does it work?

The second most important element of the process, i.e. the citizens' assembly, is ahead of you. In an ideal scenario, you already know what the topic is, you have a group of people providing substantive advice, the public opinion is aware of the process, and you have the decision-maker's declaration of willingness to implement the developed solutions. You know what results from local councils and what conclusions can be implemented into this part of the process. Now your task will be to prepare and conduct the assembly.

At this stage, a randomly selected group of approximately one hundred citizens is involved in the process and devotes time to **thoroughly understand the issue, conduct dialogue and formulate opinions**, i.e. a social verdict.

During the meetings of the citizens' assembly, in accordance with its methodology, participants go through three stages:

1. in the educational part of the assembly, **citizens learn and become aware of the facts**; they listen to people specialising in the assembly's topic whose role is to familiarize them with the challenges discussed and to present possible solutions;
2. in the deliberative part of the assembly, they **discuss and exchange arguments** about the solutions they have learned, under the supervision of professional moderators;
3. in the end, they **make a decision**, i.e. a verdict regarding directional or detailed solutions regarding the process.



Many wise minds have considered the methodology of the citizens' assembly, and therefore, for the purposes of this publication, we will not go into great detail about its assumptions but will refer you to various valuable sources. We will, however, relate to our experience and, in this context, we will show you how the steps of the process might work and what lessons we draw for future organizers from our good decisions and mistakes.



To read while preparing yourself to the assembly:

- [Preparing for a climate assembly. Guidance for policy officials](#) ›, KNOCA [EN]
- [Assembling an Assembly Guide](#) ›, DemocracyNext [EN]
- [Direction: Citizens' assembly. Tips for those interested](#) ›, Lublin City Hall, Lublin Research Group, The Shipyard Foundation, dr Marcin Gerwin [PL]



Watch:

- [What is a climate assembly](#) ›, KNOCA [EN]
- [Innovating Local Democracy - Citizens' assemblies in Cambridge, Dudley and Test Valley](#) ›, Involve Foundation [EN]
- [Citizens' assembly: what is it? How does it work? Democracy goes back to its roots!](#) ›, Institute for Direct Democracy [PL]

What is the purpose of the assembly?

While previously, during local councils, the strength of the process was a public, broad, dispersed discussion focused on diagnosis and general conclusions, the goals and strengths of the assembly lie elsewhere. What matters in the assembly **is not the quantity of participants, but, above all, the quality of participation**. About a hundred people take part in the meetings; on a national scale, this is not a large number of people who have to give a verdict on a socially and/or politically important issue. However, what is important is that people representing the entire community come together. Participation theorists use the term mini-public, microcosm or "country in a nutshell" as the assembly participants are selected in accordance with socio-demographic criteria in order to reflect the structure of the entire community, most often in terms of age, gender, place of residence and education (sometimes also including some additional criteria tailored to the process topic).

We come from different parts of Poland, we are of different ages, we deal with different matters every day, we also have different views and experiences. If it weren't for the "National citizens' assembly on energy costs", our paths would probably never have crossed. And yet, as a group of randomly selected Polish women and men, as diverse as our society is, we met to look together for ways to counteract energy poverty in Poland.

Fragment of the preamble "Voice of the Assembly Participants" from the [Summary of the National citizens' assembly on energy costs](#) ›

What are the goals of the assembly?

- By design, it is a process in which **there is time to calmly get familiarized with the arguments and facts that allow you to go beyond your own perspective and for a balanced discussion** under the supervision of professional facilitators. The result is an opportunity to better understand the problem in question. According to the results of our evaluation survey, during the *National citizens' assembly on energy costs*, as many as 77% of people confirmed that they often or sometimes changed their minds on the topics discussed during the assembly.
- It is also important **to make a decision in the form of a package of directional or detailed solutions at the end**. It is made after several days of listening to the facts and discussing them in a diverse group, so it is potentially more thoughtful and of higher quality than a verdict made without these elements of the process. Depending on the assumptions, it may be of advisory or implementation nature for decision-makers. If you accept politicians' participation in the process, there is a chance to make a decision tailored to the needs and based on actual possibilities and resources. **A decision made by citizens has a chance to gain greater social support than the same decision made ex cathedra by politicians**. This is especially important in the case of difficult, complex or controversial topics. In the past, assemblies made it possible to address really difficult social issues and gain the approval of citizens, such as the Irish process on abortion or the French process on assisted dying.
- There is ample evidence of the **significant depolarizing nature of the assembly**. Despite the high statistical

probability that people participating in the process may represent different views, with good facilitation and an appropriate scenario they are able to discuss and make a common decision with mutual respect. Moreover, they are able to regain faith that discussion makes sense and that this type of process can be a good tool for making important decisions together, which is especially important as 75% of Polish men and women believe that ordinary people are able to reach an agreement despite differences in views, and **68% of respondents** believe that ordinary people are able to respect the decisions of the majority, even if they do not agree with them.

- The assembly also aims to verify the ideas proposed by people participating in local councils.

The following theses are confirmed by the evaluation process we carried out, the results of which can be found [here](#).

Why the assembly?

Citizens' assembly is not the only method that can be used to implement the second stage described in the model. The range of solutions is very broad. Our recommendation is to use one of the deliberative methods, the principles of which are based on the representativeness of a randomly selected group and the time devoted to education, in-depth discussion and verdict. This is important in view of the values and strengths described above and of complementing the knowledge gathered widely during the local councils. Additionally, the assembly is currently one of the most recognisable, described and most frequently used tools from the deliberative stream in Europe.

But the catalogue of different deliberative methods is wide and perhaps your situation will lead you to another one. However, in this publication we describe the citizens' assembly method as we have used it in practice several times and we still believe that with a few adjustments, it stands as one of the main elements of the model.

[Read more about deliberative methods](#)



Climate citizens' assemblies. Source: www.knoqa.eu

Initial conditions

In the previous chapters, we wrote about several elements that are extremely important as a starting point for a citizens' assembly. We highlighted:

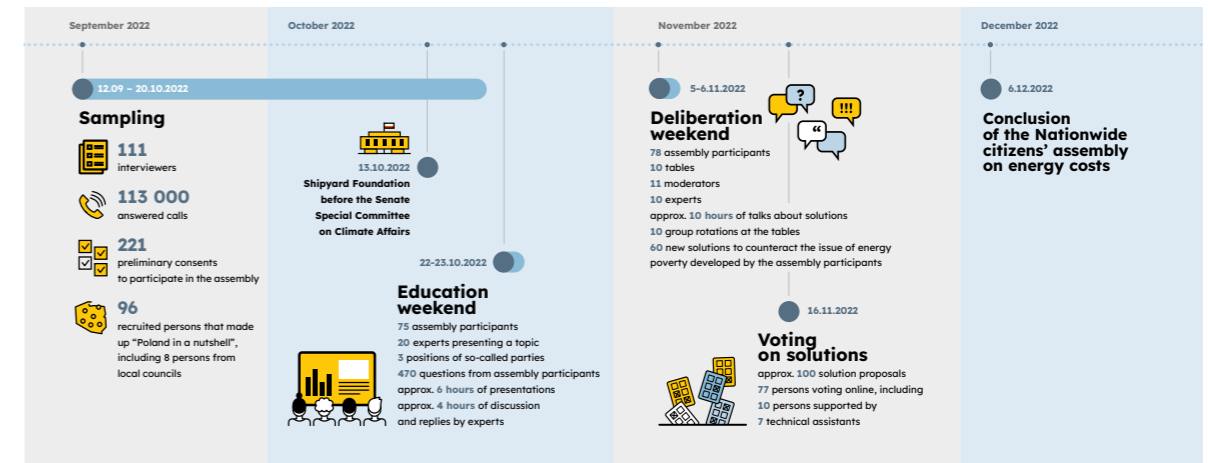
- how important it is to create a strong expert group and identify key stakeholders as well as how to refine the process topic (remit) with them (and perhaps not only with them);
- how local councils can help organize knowledge and collect information from a wide range of citizens;
- how to prepare the process in terms of communication and evaluation.

Now we want to focus on describing the structure of this part of the model and giving some tips that result from our thoughts and evaluation.

Our experience

Preparing and conducting the citizens' assembly within the framework of the **Civic council on energy costs** took about four months (however, it should be remembered that a lot of substantive work on the remit, lasting up to several months, had already been done at the stage of local councils). During this time, we recruited assembly participants, parties and observers, as well as prepared the substantive program and logistics for the entire event. Additionally, we opened the process to broadly understood public opinion, announcing an open call for postulates that were to constitute a form of additional decision-making support for people participating in the process - following the example of what was done [in Ireland](#).

The event itself lasted five days spread over two months. Two of them were devoted to education about the problem of energy poverty, two to deliberation, and the last one, conducted online for financial reasons, to voting. The summary took place on 6 December 2022.



Recruitment of assembly participants



Draw

The key assumption of the citizens' assembly is the **random selection of participants**. Why is it so important? It results from the very definition of an assembly, which is to serve democratic decision-making or resolving key public dilemmas at the local, national or global level in a way that gives everyone an equal chance to take part in this process and so that the process is as resistant as possible to the distortion of decisions by the influence of various particular interests.

Drawing participants, as a form of protection against these particular interests and a way to legitimize the decision-making process, was a popular practice starting from the Athenian democracy (when there were even special technical solutions for draw: cf. illustration) to the times of the Republic of Venice. To this day, various bodies issuing public verdicts on important matters (e.g. panels of judges and lay judges) are selected via drawing in some countries. In recent years, the idea of randomly selected democratic bodies has experienced a real renaissance and is becoming (again, although for the time being rather on an experimental basis) the focus of interest as a method to address the challenges of the functioning of representative democracy as such.



Fig. Kleroterion - a device for drawing judges of dicasteries (tribunals) in ancient Athens. Source: [Wikipedia](#) >

In the English-language literature accompanying the development of citizens' assemblies, the process of participant random selection is called *sortition*. The term has no good equivalent in Polish. In our context, its closest equivalent would probably be the term "*selekcja*" ["selection"] (close, although broader in meaning). The aim of this process is to reduce the number of possible recruitment decisions to one, most fair solution. In this context, the concept of justice refers primarily to the following criteria:

1. **Inclusivity** – ensuring equal opportunities for each eligible person to be selected for the assembly (e.g. every citizen of a given country). From this point of view, when organizing an assembly, you must precisely define its target population. You also need to make a conscious decision on how you will reach potential assembly participants and what tools you will use to select the final assembly composition from this group (for more information on this topic see the publication [Citizens' Participation. Using Sortition](#) >).
2. **Egalitarianism** – equal opportunities for selection require not only the use of methods that offer equal probability of reaching potential people participating in the assembly, but also proceeding in such a way as to minimize the risk of "distorting" the selection for other reasons. Care should be taken, in particular, to ensure that assembly recruitment greatly reduces the risk of the burden of self-selection (a phenomenon in which, despite theoretically equal opportunities, only the so-called traditional suspects, i.e. people who are active in the public sphere anyway, end up in the pool of the assembly participants). The composition of the assembly should, to the greatest extent possible, reflect the diversity of the initial population, not only in social and demographic terms, but also in terms of the diversity of opinions and attitudes important for the assembly, including in relation to the participation itself.
3. **Independence** – the composition of the assembly should be selected in such a way that its verdicts are not biased by the impact of various interest groups. Random selection significantly reduces this risk.

Some of these demands are relatively easy to meet while others are very difficult to fulfil. In reality, some of them should be treated as a kind of ideal reference point for recruitment activities. In fact, there is no selection method that would guarantee full inclusivity and egalitarianism (we do not, in any case, know of an example of a process for which it would not be possible to formulate objections in this respect). No recruitment process is truly random – researchers rather talk about them in terms of "near randomness" (cf. [Sortition and its Principles: Evaluation of the Selection Processes of Citizens' Assemblies](#)² >). The extent to which they will meet the aforementioned criteria is a function of the availability of data to reach potential assembly participants, the quality of communication around the recruitment, decisions regarding the choice of draw procedure and, last but not least, the financial and organizational efforts. The optimal course of action may therefore vary depending on the population the assembly concerns, how easily you will be able to reach it, how quickly you want to do it and what resources you have at your disposal.

The assembly draw process generally includes the **following sequence of steps**:

Preparatory actions

At this stage, you need to decide **how large the citizens' assembly should be**. Of course, as a rule (to a reasonable extent), the larger it is, the better, although in practice its scale translates not only into financial but also organizational challenges. Generally, depending on the specificity of the assembly and whether it is local, national or international, it includes between approximately 50 and nearly 200 people (among the 30 processes examined by A. Gąsiorowska, the average number of participants was 72 people – [source data](#) > for the article provided by the author³). At this point, you also need to **establish the definition of the assembly's target population** (what group/community should it represent?) and determine in what respects your assembly should reflect the structure of this population. These are usually criteria such as age (the composition of the assembly is supposed to reflect the age of the population in a specific proportion of the group), gender, place of residence (e.g. town or region size categories) and education, but sometimes also others, such as profession or socio-economic status, disability, ethnicity, and finally criteria related to civic activity or the topic of the assembly. As these criteria are very numerous and the group of assembly participants is quite small, they are usually controlled only in terms of "boundaries", that is, for each criterion separately (e.g. care is taken to ensure that there are enough people with a certain level of education and, independently of this, a certain gender in the assembly composition, rather than that there are enough people with a given education and gender). We also need to determine what appropriate proportions mean in this context. **The rule is usually that the composition of the assembly is to be proportional to the structure of the population (identified on the basis of the best available public statistics)**, but sometimes exceptions to this rule are made, e.g. by including in the assembly slightly more people from the smallest regions or belonging to certain minorities.

At this stage, you also need to decide how you will reach potential participants with information about the assembly. Depending on the situation, various scenarios are possible (see below).

² doi.org/10.16997/jdd.1310, Gąsiorowska, A., (2023) "Sortition and its Principles: Evaluation of the Selection Processes of Citizens' Assemblies", *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 19(1) [EN] (access: 1.12.2023).

³ doi.org/10.16997/jdd.1310, Gąsiorowska, A., (2023) "Sortition and its Principles: Evaluation of the Selection Processes of Citizens' Assemblies", *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 19(1) [EN] (access: 1.12.2023).

Citizens' lottery (1st stage)

If you are unable to effectively inform all members of the population about the possibility of participating in the assembly (which is usually impossible), recruitment to the assembly typically takes place in two stages: in the first stage, a pool of people who can apply to participate in the assembly is randomly selected. It usually includes, depending on the nature of the process, from about ten thousand to even several hundred thousand people (in France). Their applications are registered, and the resulting database is used in the second stage of recruitment, i.e. drawing the right people to participate in the assembly.

The key decision at this stage is the selection of a method of contact with the randomly selected candidates to participate in the assembly. There are many ways to do this. Below, we discuss only a few of the most common ones, but we often deal with their numerous variations. If you have access to the register of all such persons (e.g. population register), **you can use it to select candidates from it and send them invitations via mail**. Although this seems to be the optimal course of action, it carries significant risks: in many countries (including Poland), resident registers are not a reliable source of information about their actual place of residence, so it is possible that a significant part of your invitations will not reach their recipients. In a slightly different variant, when the population register is not available, but the organizers have access to the records of residential premises, **the draw concerns not people, but the addresses of these premises** (in Poland, such a strategy was adopted, e.g. in Warsaw or Rzeszów). This has other consequences, e.g. it makes it impossible to treat the selection at this stage as fully random. Mail invitations may (though this has not yet been confirmed by conclusive research) increase the risk of excluding certain groups because not everyone receives mail equally often, not everyone feels comfortable responding to formal letters, and it requires different efforts for different people. Finally, it is a relatively costly and time-consuming method.

Another way to proceed is to use a strategy typical for many surveys, i.e. **recruitment based on random selection of addresses constituting the starting locations and searching for people willing to participate in the assembly using interviewers**, in the so-called random-route procedure (this is how, for example, recruitment to one of the first citizens' assemblies in Ireland took place). In addition to the significant costs of such a procedure, there are also other risks awaiting you: potential assembly participants may not be at home, we may encounter more than one interested person in a given household (so you must decide in advance how to proceed in such situations), there is an increased risk of excluding from the assembly people who are not open to such a direct form of recruitment, etc. We may also encounter the objection that such a procedure does not meet the requirements of full randomness. Some assemblies use even less rigorous techniques that are common in social research or in marketing, **such as recruitment among participants of online assemblies or respondents of other studies**, sending invitations to contacts from commercial e-mail databases or through campaigns collecting e-mail addresses. However, we do not recommend these techniques as they have little in common with the above-mentioned postulates of fair recruitment.

Another procedure, also borrowed from the social research workshop, is **telephone-based selection**. This method can be used where it can be assumed that all or almost all members of the assembly's target population have a telephone. Even in such cases, this approach may raise reservations among purists of the citizens' assembly method. However, this is how we recruited participants of the first **National citizens' assembly on energy costs**, and we see some advantages of this approach that are often not taken into account in the discussion on this topic.

There are more possible solutions. There is no space here to fully discuss their features as well as their advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, we did it only in summary in the table below, referring to the most frequently used or considered methods.

METHOD	WHY YES?	WHY NOT?
Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> direct contact possibility of ongoing control over the recruitment process possible even if you do not have access to the population register relatively high response rate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> very expensive, time-consuming often conducted "on the occasion" of other studies susceptible to "exclusions" (some people are rarely at home) risk of abuse
Text message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fast and cheap it can be mass method 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> very low response rate risk of abuse requires access to or generation of a telephone numbers does not meet the requirements of equality and inclusivity
e-mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fast and cheap it can be mass method 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> in Poland, it requires obtaining the interested party's e-mails (auto-selection) very low response rate risk of abuse does not meet the requirements of equality and inclusivity
Letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> does not require access to the population register "official", uncontroversial will reach those who are rarely at home very low risk of abuse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> low response rate expensive, slow many recipients will not pick up on time exclusive for some groups of recipients problematic when the quality of population records is low
Telephones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fast and relatively cheap it can be mass method possibility of ongoing control over the recruitment process it will also reach non-obvious/difficult target groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> very low response rate limited trust in this form of communication high risk of abuse requires a quick "yes"/"no" decision does not fully meet the requirements of equality and inclusivity

Our experience

A randomly selected group of almost one hundred adult citizens living permanently in Poland took part in the **National assembly on energy costs**. It reflected the socio-demographic structure of the country's population in terms of four criteria: gender, age, level of education, and place of residence.

The selection of assembly participants involved random generation of telephone numbers (in a procedure called *Random Digit Dialing*), which were then called by trained interviewers. They invited the number holders to participate in the assembly and collected various data on them, which enabled close, ongoing control of the process and possible adjustments during recruitment (in some countries, although rarely, phone calls were supplemented or replaced by text messages, but in Polish conditions such a solution does not seem to be applicable for various reasons). In addition to the socio-demographic characteristics of the candidates, these data may include additional information about them, e.g. attitudes towards the issues covered by the assembly, their views on the govern-

ment policy on a given issue or the level of social activity. Although this additional information is not usually a “hard” recruitment criterion (and it was not in our case), it makes it possible to control whether the final pool of candidates for the assembly does not differ from the entire population in this respect – and if it does, to respond to these differences on an ongoing basis.

Our reflections

Although it is easy to see the disadvantages of recruiting by telephone (e.g. not everyone has mobile phones, others have more than one phone, the effectiveness of such recruitment is low due to the strong reluctance to this type of phone calls and the habit that they are used for marketing purposes), some of these problems can be eliminated, e.g. by calling landline numbers, developing a convincing interview script, offering intensive training and monitoring the work of interviewers, etc. Above all, thanks to this approach, you can constantly monitor the recruitment process and make adjustments to make it fairer. This approach also has an advantage over methods based on drawing from resident records in that it is not sensitive to problems with the quality of these registers. Moreover, it makes it possible to reach potential participants who are not included in these registers (because, for example, they are homeless or live in care facilities – our national assembly included such people). It is also a relatively cheap procedure.

It is important to emphasize that in the recruitment phase, that in order to participate in the assembly, you do not need to have expert knowledge on its subject – it is provided during the meetings and in the prepared information materials.

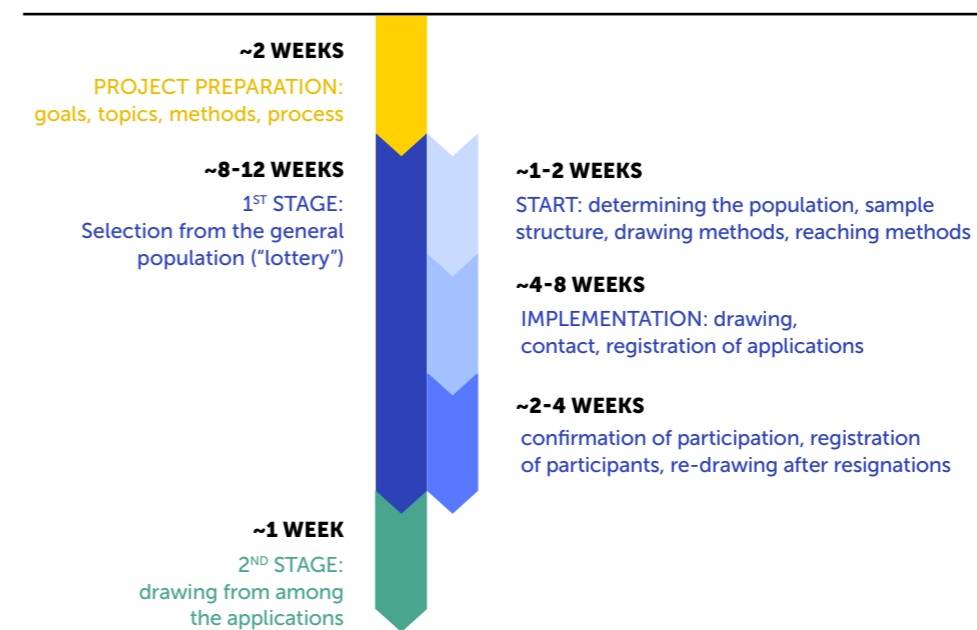
Actual draw (2nd stage)

With the pool of applications for the assembly selected as a result of the actions described above, we can conduct an actual draw of participants. We can also implement this step in several ways, which differ in the level of complexity and have both their supporters and opponents. We know the target structure of the assembly (the so-called ideal composition) – as we determined it before starting the first stage of recruitment. **Some practitioners of the method generate, based on the data, a specific set of individual candidate profiles, equal to the target assembly size, in which sets of their characteristics are generated randomly to meet the assumptions regarding the target assembly composition (cf. e.g. [Citizens' Assemblies. Guide to democracy that works⁴](#)).** Candidates are then randomly assigned to these profiles. For this purpose, some people use specialized software built on algorithms to optimize the selection (and make it available to others free of charge – this is what the Sortition Foundation does, for example). Others (including us) prefer solutions that are much simpler and more time-consuming (and perhaps less perfect in terms of the equality of opportunities they offer), but are more transparent to observers of the process, e.g. through a public ritual resembling the drawing of groups in a football competition or dice throws. Both of them aim at randomly selecting from all applications to the assembly a pool of assembly participants that corresponds to the previously adopted assumptions in terms of socio-demographic (and possibly other) characteristics.

⁴ M. Gerwin, 2018 [EN] (access: 1.12.2023).

Additional draw (3rd stage)

A step (often overlooked in existing studies) in the recruitment process is the **additional draw of assembly participants in place of those who decided to take part in the assembly but then dropped out**. Such cases may be relatively numerous, depending on the circumstances and the way the process is organized. In the case of some assemblies (including those we conducted), an additional pool of participants is drawn, and it constitutes a reserve for the proper assembly composition. However, this reserve may turn out to be insufficient. Therefore, it is worth engaging time and resources in the recruitment process to additionally draw new participants to replace those who resign from participation before the first meeting of the assembly.



Source: own work,
inspiration: [dr. Antoine Vergne](#) >
(Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018)

Communication advice

How to make people selected randomly from all over the country, who receive a phone call or a letter inviting them to participate in a national assembly, want to take part in it? The more communication and promotion can be done at the earlier stages, the easier it will be at this extremely crucial moment. The difficulty is that the process – from the inauguration, through local councils to the current moment – is extended in time, which may cause us to lose momentum; moreover, people may have already forgotten about our inauguration or the verdict of the local councils. Therefore, now is the time for an intensified communication effort and a precise narrative of what the planned national citizens' assembly is and what it will consist in. Their aim is to support recruitment (the greater its presence in the media, the greater the chance that citizens will want to take part in it) and to attract the interest of a wide group of people in the entire process. This is also important because of the organizer's next steps – dissemination and public expectation of actual implementation of the recommendations developed by the citizens' assembly. After these weeks, it is worth looking into the media contacts database again and updating it.



At this stage, the group of message recipients is very wide and diverse. Your message must reach both media, politicians, people participating in the assembly and, more broadly, society at large, as well as expert groups and civil society organizations. Do not focus on the national assembly itself – it is important to refer to the local council stage in order to show the assembly as part of a larger whole – the national dialogue. Of course, many promotional activities depend on who initiates the process and what resources they have. If the organizer is the central state administration, it can use media space for social campaigns and issue an official invitation from the country's authorities to participate, which will increase the publicity of the event.

One of the important threads of communication should be focusing on the **community** as people living in a given country who have the right and obligation to follow and evaluate what is happening there in terms of various important issues. We might say that as citizens of one country, we are connected indirectly and directly by various problems and challenges on which we have the right to express our opinion and to be heard. This message is particularly important in a highly polarized society, where the temperature of the discussion and tension are often very high. Therefore, the focus is on talking about **citizens and the community**, as well as on thinking about the topic of discussion and the problem to be solved in terms of the **common good**. This will put the interlocutors in a situation of looking at themselves, others and their country from a bird's eye perspective and will support the process of withdrawal from thinking about solutions and recommendations from one's own perspective. Such actions can help open up to more strategic and long-term solutions.

Evaluation advice

It is worth remembering about evaluation already at the recruitment stage – especially if you plan to implement further similar processes in the future or if there are justified concerns that recruitment may be difficult. Studies and reflection at the recruitment stage can serve two purposes. Firstly, they will **show the strengths and weaknesses of the recruitment process**, which will allow you to modify your actions or plan them better in your next venture. Secondly, they will enable the **identification of the participants' motivation** to take part in the process as well as their concerns and hopes related to it. This knowledge may be a valuable tip for organizers and group facilitators who plan meetings with assembly participants. It will help the facilitators to better respond to the participants' needs, reduce anxiety about participating in something new and unknown, and thus build greater commitment to the process.

If the recruitment process goes smoothly, you can schedule the stage of asking evaluation questions for the first meeting with the participants. Just include them in the pre-assembly survey, as specified above.

In the case of a process such as ours, where recruitment took place via telephone, **you can, however, collect on an ongoing basis valuable data that support this process and are also important for its evaluation**. Firstly, when conducting conversations with potential assembly participants, you can start not with the recruitment itself (i.e. with asking about their interest in participating in such a process), but rather with a short survey introducing the topic of the assembly. Such a survey serves several important functions: it allows your interlocutors to immerse themselves in the topic you want to talk about and to understand the context well. This is needed because many of them may have difficulty understanding what your proposal is all about. Data from the survey also give you the opportunity to check whether the pool of people who agree to join the assembly in the next step differs significantly from the entire population – not only in terms of socio-demographic structure, but also in terms of views and attitudes. In the case of our assembly, for example, we could make sure that people declaring participation in the assembly did not differ from the general population in terms of political views or opinions on climate.

Secondly, plan the recruitment interview script in such a way that it allows you to collect information to address potential problems in recruitment, e.g. regarding reasons for the refusal to participate in the assembly. If there are any technical or communication barriers (a poorly worded invitation, inconvenient time limits, poorly expressed intentions) or fears that prevent your interlocutors from agreeing to participate in the assembly, you need to know about them. This will help you modify your communication to more effectively convince your recipients that it is worth accepting the invitation.

Cooperation with the participants



Source >

At this stage of the process, it is extremely **important to take care of the assembly participants and to make sure that their participation in the process is the minimum possible financial, logistic and personal effort**. Without the participation of a diverse and representative group of citizens, the assembly will not take place; and this diversity brings with it: different financial situations, conditions for participation, different levels of trust in the process, etc. The most important tip is therefore related to the ability to communicate in a quick, direct, patient and nice manner with assembly participants and to be flexible in responding to their needs. Do not spare money to arrange this stage.

Our experience

From the first contact, throughout the duration of the project until its completion and even later – the Shipyard constantly remained in touch with the assembly participants, responding to their needs. It was clear to us that they were our key resource and that they deserved special attention.

As part of our work, **we created a team responsible for constant contact with the assembly participants** – it was the first point of contact to address all questions, ambiguities and difficulties from the recruited people. The team also helped those assembly participants who needed assistance to plan their trip to Warsaw step by step.

National assembly is a high time cost for people participating in it, which is why we provided everyone with a full refund of travel costs. A serious problem that some of the assembly participants encountered was transport-related exclusion and the need to spend up to two days travelling to Warsaw. Therefore, in addition to the measures described above to speed up critical elements of the journey, we supported people in need, for example by paying for a taxi from their place of residence to the nearest station. This assistance was also helpful in the case of the assembly participants with disabilities or the elderly.

During the assembly, we made sure that the needs of the above people were met and that they felt taken care of by us. **We took care of the general accessibility of the spaces** where the meetings were held, and we also tried to approach each participant individually (taking care of, among others, access to elevators, comfortable chairs and diets these people were following).

The assembly was held at weekends, but also required frequent travels on surrounding days. We noticed that this was a barrier for some people. We did not want to completely separate the families, seeing also that their presence gave the assembly participants comfort and a sense of security. **So, we helped accommodate their loved ones and provided the children with appropriate care.**

A few days before the final vote, we met with the participants to explain to them the course of the process step by step and the tools used during voting (because it was taking place online). However, during the voting, those who needed it were provided with the assistance of volunteers accompanying them at home, along with the equipment needed for voting. During the process and final voting, **we provided technical support for the assembly participants.**

During the assembly, **we focused on honest, open and cordial communication.** It was important for us to find at least a moment for a quiet conversation with the assembly participants, where, in addition to remaining constantly open to feedback, we wanted to learn more about them. We were aware that our process was a kind of precedent, i.e. that the experience of participating in it was not only new and unique on a personal level for the participants, but also for our society at the national level. We wanted its participants to remember it in a particularly positive manner.

Communication advice

When your communication activities are successful and you manage to introduce the topic and methodology of the process to public debate, and the group of process participants is complete, the next stage is to provide current information about the course of the national assembly. There are many ways to do this. This can be done both by sharing some parts of the assembly via live broadcast, as well as by ongoing contact with the media and posting news on the website and in social media – yours and your partners'.

The start of the assembly is a very important moment when you can once again have a positive impact on strengthening the credibility of the process as well as showing the values and positive features behind it, including representativeness, transparency, combining different perspectives, creating a safe space for discussion or its effect in the form of a verdict in the spirit of the common good.

Evaluation advice

During the assembly, it is worth using the results of the current evaluation when planning and shaping the concept of the next stages: education, deliberation and voting.

The most attention in the evaluation should be devoted to assembly participants – it is thanks to their involvement that the process makes sense at all, and its results can be a credible argument for the decision-maker. Evaluation can play a dual role. On the one hand, it should check whether, in accordance with the assumptions, participants receive the appropriate portion of knowledge and preparation for making decisions, and whether the assumed goals of the process are achieved. On the other hand, it should provide specific information on how to improve the organization of the event and the process of working with the group.

A very practical research tool is the **initial survey (before the start of the process) and the summary survey (at the end)**. You can conduct it quite easily because you meet all the assembly participants in one place. They should fill in the initial survey at the beginning of the first day of the assembly, before the start of educational activities; its aim is to examine attitudes and the declared state of knowledge, but it may also include assessing the recruitment process and examining the motivation of participants. The summary survey is completed at the end of the last day (its goals will be described below, in the section summarizing the assembly).

Comparing the results of both surveys (initial and summary) will give us insight into very valuable data, but their analysis and interpretation take time – it is part of the work performed after the assembly ends. Therefore, you will use the conclusions drawn from them, primarily when planning subsequent projects and in communication and advocacy actions conducted after the process is completed.

It is worth considering smaller, ad hoc research activities at the end of each assembly day or weekend.

They will allow you to quickly collect the latest opinions and impressions of the participants regarding the organization of the event, the way of transferring knowledge and conducting discussions. They will enable, at least to some extent, ongoing modification of the manner of working, so that it better responds to the needs of the assembly participants to allow them to better and more comprehensively understand the examined issue and to provide a comfortable space for exchanging views. Quick study forms and those that provide an immediate preview of the results, without the need to encode surveys in a database or conduct independent analyses, will work best here. Online surveys may be a good solution – with access via a link or QR-code to the questionnaire, which participants will complete on their smartphones at the end of the meeting. The advantage of this solution is that you can immediately see the results and, based on them, efficiently prepare feedback for experts and facilitators. Pay particular attention to the assembly



participants with special needs who may have difficulty with this form of survey because, for example, they do not use smartphones. In such a situation, ask for help, for example, the facilitators who will complete the survey together with the respondents on their phones or collect data on paper and then transfer them to the online survey.

A good way to conduct ongoing evaluation is also to hold short, even 30-minute **meetings with facilitators** at the end of each assembly day. They will allow you to collect their thoughts on the prepared scenarios and manners of working and see which of them actually promote discussion and involvement of participants, and which ones do not work. Facilitators can also be a valuable source of observations about the assembly participants: their needs, concerns and ways of reacting. If you have a summary of surveys conducted at the end of the day or weekend, such a meeting is also a good opportunity to show it to the facilitators. Think together about the consequences and develop recommendations for the following days. You can still make some changes to the program!

In the context of actions that enable ongoing assessment of how the assembly operates, working cooperation with process **observers** might be established. These are usually people who are particularly interested in the issues of deliberation, often rooted in the academic world. They often have experience in observing or studying other assemblies in Poland and abroad, and they know various models of working with this method. This gives them a unique perspective – it allows them to see phenomena and processes that are difficult to notice, especially for first-time process organizers. In order to be able to use their expert knowledge on an ongoing basis, a good solution is to create a permanent communication channel for the duration of the process, e.g. allowing them to submit comments through a contact person from the team. You can also collect feedback via a file or form in which observers can leave their observations, comments and recommendations on an ongoing basis and – if they prefer – anonymously. Notes from observers can raise awareness of difficult or risky situations and can be used regularly to improve the process..

Conducting the assembly: education

How to prepare yourself for educational meetings?

The aim of the education (learning) stage is to make the assembly participants aware of the sources of and solutions to the problem: what are the relationships between individual directions of changes, what are their costs, impact on the problem and the time needed for implementation. It is also a moment to collect first reflections, ambiguities and additional ideas for solutions from the participants themselves. Therefore, it is so important to think carefully about how you will approach the issue and how you will work with experts and collaborating offices or public institutions. Please, check the [General preparation of the process](#) > chapter for more detailed info.



Education is the first stage of the assembly, which can last two days or more (the duration is determined on the one hand by the scope of the topic, and on the other by resources, especially the budget). During the meetings, experts in fields related to the topic of the assembly talk to participants about possible solutions within individual thematic threads. Representatives of the so-called parties present their views as well. In addition to speaking to assembly participants, experts and parties can also prepare additional educational materials, e.g. reports, analyses, and in the case of officials, information about the office's current and planned activities on the assembly topic. All these materials are provided to participants electronically and in paper form, and they are made available on the website.

Learning meetings – in order to ensure the transparency of the process and enable people who do not participate in the meetings to benefit from expert knowledge – should be open to the media and broadcast online, and the materials should be posted on the website dedicated to the process.

Our experience

Not only education...

The first process of this type in Poland, the lack of a directly involved decision-maker, five days of meetings, often hundreds of kilometres from home, an organizer without much national recognition – we knew that we required a great deal of credit from each of the nearly 100 people who turned up at the Copernicus Science Centre hall on 21 October 2022. Apart from the most important component, which was education, in these first days we also had to find time to convince the assembly participants that it was worth being there and staying until the end of the assembly. In this process, creating a good atmosphere, strengthening faith in the sense of the entire project, integrating the group, taking care of the people who trusted us and decided to take part in this experiment were extremely important to us. We had this in mind, both by ensuring high quality facilitation and inclusive language, as well as by providing care to people who needed additional support (as mentioned above).

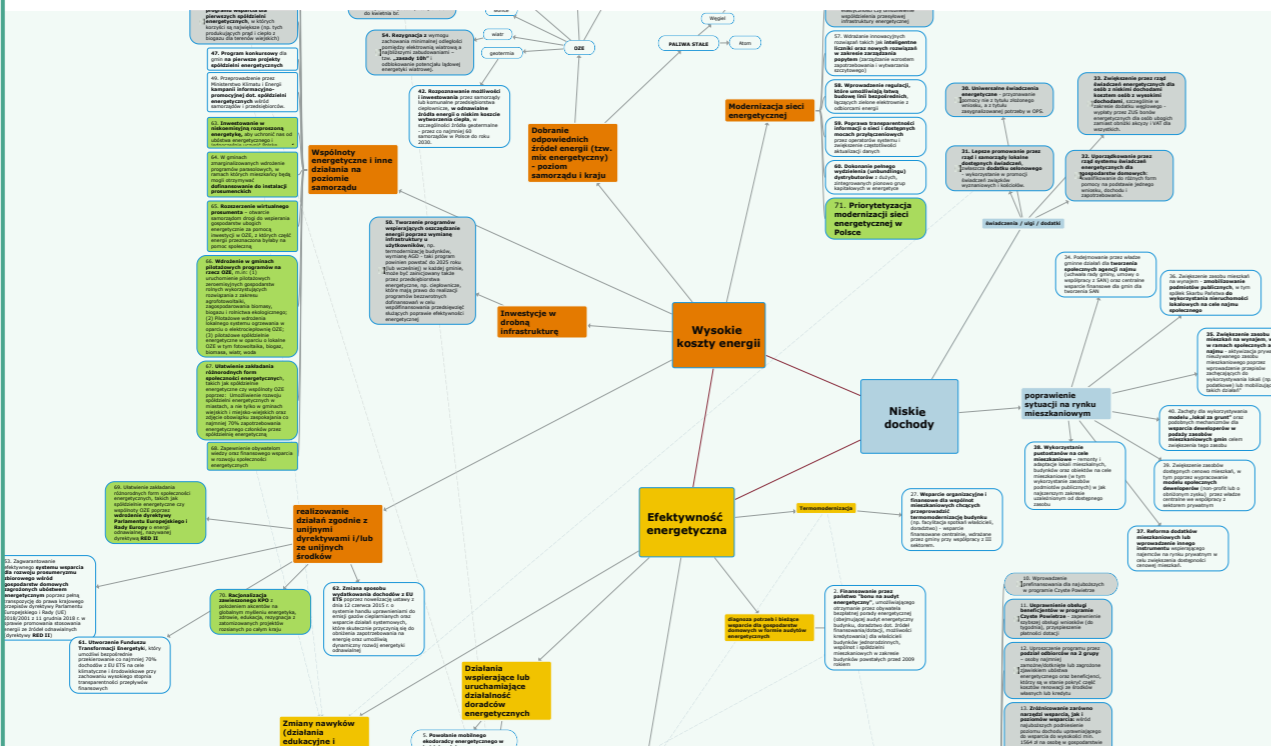
... but also education

There are many ways to transmit knowledge. Taking into account the resources and time we had, as well as our previous experience, we decided to approach the learning stage in a more innovative way than the classic arrangement: expert presentation-questions-presentation-questions, etc. We wanted to ensure that the knowledge provided by a group of experts did not consist of the sum of individual opinions of specific communities but was the result of their joint reflection and decisions. Therefore, the structure of the educational meetings consisted of five main, large thematic blocks, within which we gathered several organizations that were to agree, before the assembly, on the thematic scope of the presentations, main conclusions and proposed solutions. Such combined speeches were longer – each lasted about an hour and consisted of a diagnosis of the problem, good practices and specific solutions, possibly reflections or polemical voices of the speakers. Each presentation ended with a board with proposed solutions. This part involved experts specializing in topics such as environmental protection, energy, energy efficiency, energy poverty and renewable energy sources. There was also space for speeches pre-recorded and played during the education stage given by so-called 'parties', i.e. individuals representing organizations, institutions or informal groups working in the field related to the topic of the assembly, but who were not invited to the assembly as experts. After each block of speeches, there was a section for questions. As a result of the entire educational weekend, we collected more than three hundred of them.

Our reflections

In retrospect, we see the potential for more intensive work with experts before the assembly. However, it requires longer preparations (we allocated a month for this stage), and perhaps also an additional live workshop meeting for the entire expert group. It can be helpful to look at the problem holistically and from different perspectives, as well as to agree on one scenario of speeches to limit the repetition of threads. We suggest that the schedule and budget should allow time and resources for the work of experts, and that you should warn them of the need for flexibility and availability on their part.

Moreover, there was not enough time to refine the overall list of recommendations, so the one provided to the assembly participants was too long (over sixty solutions) and uneven in terms of specificity. Their number turned out to be quite overwhelming in terms of reception and further work. We feel that **perhaps a more promising idea for working on solutions is to create and show more general directions during education (learning) stage, e.g. in the form of dilemmas or scenarios of the futures, and at the same time to focus on naming their effects and mutual relations between each other. With such a structure, the task for the assembly participants would be to choose the best directions and develop a more detailed action plan under the supervision of experts.** In the previous chapter, we devoted more time to considerations regarding working with the topic (you will find them in the [Process topic](#) > subsection).



People we talked to after the process also told us that there was no clear **voice of those affected by the problem** – their perspective and experiences could have added clarity and named the most important problems from their point of view. They can be invited as parties to the process. You may also think about other forms of transferring knowledge that practically illustrate the discussed phenomenon, such as a study visit. However, we all know that they are more time- and resource-consuming.

Conducting the assembly: deliberation

In the second, deliberation stage of the assembly, participants debate over solutions under the supervision of neutral and independent facilitators. The purpose of these meetings is to thoroughly analyze the proposed recommendations or directions, and to select those that the group considers crucial to solving the problem presented to the assembly. This part of the assembly, for practical reasons and to ensure the participants' comfort of work, takes place behind closed doors, i.e. without access to the media and online broadcast. However, it is worth reporting its course, e.g. in photographs, and informing the public that the event took place.

The course of this part should assume a series of different tasks for the group carried out in smaller teams (approx. 8-10 people) with changing composition and conducted by facilitators. It is time for:

- discussion about a package of directions or solutions in terms of various criteria (e.g. implementation time, costs, precision in solving the problem) in order to share knowledge and identify any ambiguities;
- adding new propositions;
- micro-voting to explore preferences and get closer to the set of recommendations most widely accepted by the group;
- a discussion about the values shared by the assembly participants.

Pre-prepared work materials are important – primarily a list of solutions discussed during educational meetings. It is good to refine it between the educational and deliberative meetings, especially in terms of important decisions to be made – what are the strengths and weaknesses of individual solutions, their cost, implementation time, precision of addressing the problem. Experts, as well as advisers from the office or ministries (if the process is in partnership with a decision-maker) can help prepare such a list. It is worth sending the list to participants in advance so that they arrive filled with knowledge and questions.

In search of the common good

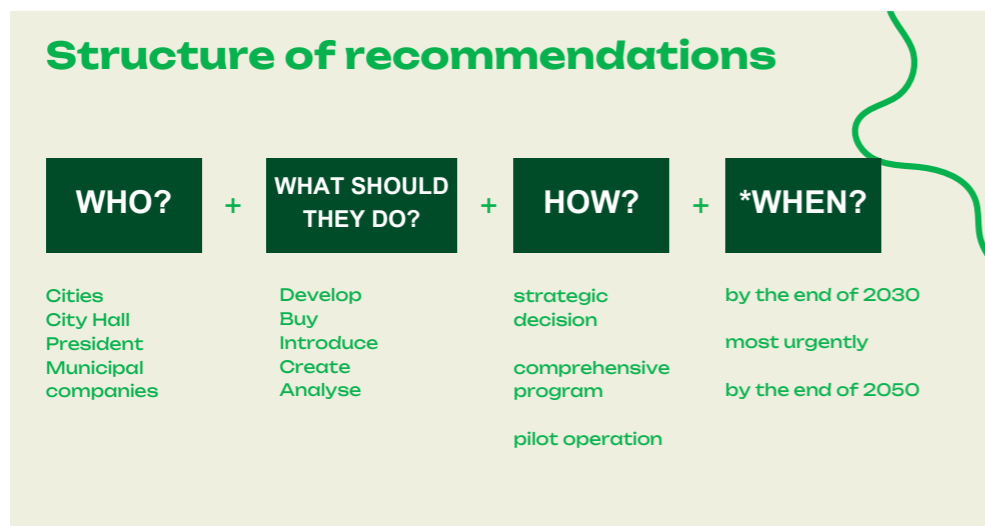
During the deliberation stage, an important goal is to create a space for exchanging ideas between participants, clashing points of view, seeking compromises and, as a result, shaping “collective wisdom”. It is important that during these few days of discussions we refer to the category of the common good and go beyond our own point of view. The value of the group is its diversity, requiring participants to be open to confronting their own opinions with the opinions of others. However, it is important to direct the group to look for solutions that are important from the point of view of the common good. And this is often not synonymous with what may be most desirable from an individual's perspective.

Tips

- **Consider including experts in this part** as people who can provide ongoing advice on substantive issues that may facilitate understanding the problem or emerging dilemmas. We know that people dealing with the citizens' assembly method have divided opinions regarding the presence of experts during the deliberation stage. Some advocate a clear separation of the assembly participants from external opinions at this stage, others appreciate expert subject-matter support during the discussion, enabling, among others, quick verification of the facts and response to emerging doubts. Our experience suggests that employing 2-3 people as advisers, like a “phone call to a friend”, can improve work and make it easier for participants to talk. However, it is worth ensuring that experts are treated only as advisers and not as full participants in the discussion.
- **The selection of the facilitation team is extremely important.** Hire people who have experience in this type of processes, know how to deal with conflicts and create a good atmosphere. Most of the time, deliberation involves discussions in groups – it is up to the facilitators to ensure that the participants feel free and safe to express their own opinions and acknowledgement or oppositions towards the opinions of others. With a diverse group of facilitators, it is easy to develop different working styles – it is worth, therefore, doing mini-briefings during the assembly's operation in order to harmonize conclusions during breaks and predict elements of the scenario for the next part of the work.
- It is worth **printing out for each participant various materials**, resources, teaching aids and, above all, a list of solutions and directions that were developed during the educational (learning) phase. This is

a package that will be used very often during the deliberation part – as a source of notes, references, etc., and ultimately it constitutes the basis for voting. It is worth using this list during various exercises and tasks to familiarize participants with the solutions in terms of various factors, and to make sure that their content is understandable (e.g. whether it requires clarification or new wording).

- Developing new ideas seems easy, but **creating good quality recommendations is very difficult. It is worth supporting the assembly participants working during the deliberation part.** They can be supported by general rules, e.g. in the form of simple graphics, such as those used in the Rzeszów Climate Assembly:



- A content **template for a good recommendation** can also be very helpful. Be open to assembly participants reporting the need for an additional speech, expertise or expert opinion. Enabling contact and listening to an outside person may contribute to increasing the transparency and inclusiveness of the process, and at the same time it may simply be necessary for the participants to make a decision.

Our experience

We planned a deliberation weekend to take place two weeks after the educational meeting. The participants, working in changing smaller groups led by the facilitator team, were able to provide each other with opinions on previously heard proposals for solutions and collect new ideas, sometimes clarifying those previously proposed by experts during the educational meeting. We used a special algorithm that prevented people who talked to each other in the first round from meeting each other in subsequent rounds, so that they could meet new people and get to know their points of view.

Deliberation was a time of exchanging arguments, listening to each other and opening to the opinions of others. This process was accompanied by a group of experts who were ready at any time to answer additional questions arising during the discussion. These two days were also intended to help those gathered in arranging a personal hierarchy of what would most effectively bring us as a society closer to the assembly's goal and, at the same time, would be realistic for implementation in terms of costs and execution time.

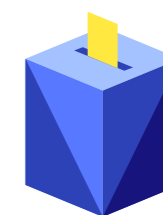
Sixty new recommendations were created in these two days – too many to be discussed in such a short time and to be decided whether to include them in the final voting list. We need additional time to reflect on editing the list of recommendations and the ballot paper outside the meeting.

We obtained consent for additional editorial work from the assembly participants, but it would be more comfortable and more consistent with the assembly's rules if they accepted the proposal list together during the meeting. We feel that there was not enough time for this work, to the detriment of the process.

Taking into account the nationwide dimension of the process and the importance of the problem, the category of the common good, as mentioned above, was an important aspect. Therefore, at the beginning of the deliberation weekend, we planned a discussion with the assembly participants about the values and features of good policies, introduced in a speech by Kuba Wygnański, presenting both topics and the thread of making decisions regarding national policies in the spirit of the common good. Watch this speech on [Youtube](#).

Conducting the assembly: voting

At the last meeting, assembly participants reflect on the submitted list of recommendations, on which they worked during the deliberative meetings. **A common practice is individual voting taking place on paper ballots and counted on an ongoing basis, so as to present the group's verdict at the same meeting.** Arranging solutions on a list is not always easy, it may require creating larger categories within which we will ask assembly participants to choose one or several preferred solutions (addressing the same problem in a different manner) or to rank the solutions in accordance with a specific hierarchy. You must also clearly recall the criteria for accepting the recommendation for the verdict of the entire citizens' assembly (usually the 80% rule is used as the support threshold) and what the verdict means for further political decisions (in Poland, the vast majority of assemblies accept the binding nature of the decision, but in other countries it is often an advisory vote).



The final voting list should be made available to the assembly participants a few days before the meeting so that they could read it and plan their verdict.

Tips

It is a good idea to nuance the voting process, as there are often small differences that can indicate where a group's support is realistically directed. You can do this by, for example, providing several answer categories to choose from. In Poland, the following scale is often used:

- I definitely support it;
- I rather support it;
- I neither support nor disapprove;
- I don't really support it;
- I definitely don't support it.

Two positions from the above list (I definitely support it and I rather support it) translate into support for the recommendation, and the remaining positions translate into its rejection.

Celebration

Take into account that the moment of voting is often the last meeting of all assembly participants. Organizing an assembly is a huge undertaking involving a lot of emotions – do not let fatigue get the better of you and make sure the summary is festive and ends nicely with a bit of a celebration, e.g. a group photo, a cake or a thank you from the decision-maker. Be sure to announce what will happen next with the verdict. If you are planning a separate meeting to review the process, provide details and an action plan.

Our experience

In our process, voting took place online. The decision was mainly due to the need to reduce costs in an already tight budget. Nevertheless, its implementation required weeks of logistic preparations: approximately 20% of the group needed assistance or equipment to be able to take part in this form of voting, and an additional group needed training in the use of the Zoom application and the online voting tool, for which we provided space during an additional online meeting. The online voting form consisted of over 120 solutions arranged in several sections:

- voting on a dozen or so largest cross-sectional issues – separately and in hierarchy;
- voting in blocks for individual, detailed solutions.

We also added a proclamation prepared by the assembly participants (with our support) to the ballot in order to formally obtain the group's acceptance of it.

Reflections after the verdict

- The biggest challenge for the assembly participants was the length of the ballot paper – they had to choose from over 120 solutions. In this context, a separate section of the ballot paper related to the selection of the most important directions turned out to be helpful in the final assessment of the verdict and its analysis. It allowed us to see what the priorities of the assembly participants were, mainly in a situation where, in general, most of the solutions gained great support from the group, and assessing the most important directions based only on detailed recommendations was quite difficult.
- In terms of communication, a very important step was the acceptance by the assembly of the proclamation prepared by the assembly participants. The wording, adopted almost unanimously, gained great power as an important and sublime message of the group.

Evaluation advice

Remember to conduct a survey at the end of the assembly, at the last meeting (optimally one in which the assembly participants attend live). It should include questions corresponding to those posed in the survey before the meetings began. It is worth measuring indicators of knowledge and attitudes related to the assembly topic that were examined at the beginning. Comparing answers to the same questions will allow you to observe and document the change that takes place in the participants' awareness as a result of educational (learning) and deliberation actions.

In addition, the final survey should include an assessment of the organization of the process and the perceived results.

Summary of the citizens' assembly

This type of undertaking must end with strong accents and on a solemn note. There can be many ways to do this, but the key ones are:

- creating a **report** containing easily described conclusions from the process;
- organization of a **summarizing event**.

Report

The form of the report depends on the possibilities and resources, but the absolute minimum is a document summarizing the course of the process and the main conclusions.

Remember – few people will delve into the content of a long document (dear Reader, we are thrilled that you are still with us, because this guide is not on the thinnest side either). This does not mean that we encourage a short form – such a long process requires thorough preparation. But it is a good idea to use a short, eye-catching 1-2 page summary. **Think about developing several main general directions and an infographic summarizing the process** – these materials are intended to serve not only officials focused on details, but also the public opinion, media and politicians who often operate at a higher level of generality.

See what a [summary of the most important points of the verdict](#) > may look like.



Source >

Depending on the method of working on solutions, the voted ideas may be contained on one page or be a list of detailed recommendations including several pages. Be careful – if this list is too long, it will be difficult to extract the main message.



See what process reports may look like:

- [The Citizen Dialogues on Canada's Energy Future](#) › (Canada) [EN]
- [Citizens' assembly on energy costs](#) › (Poland) (EN)
- [National Issues Forum](#) › (USA) [EN]
- [The National Conversation on Immigration](#) › (UK) [EN]
- [The path to net zero Climate Assembly](#) › (UK) [EN]

Summary meeting

The results of the voting of the national citizens' assembly, analyzed and compiled in a readable whole, must be shown to the world – and more specifically to the decision-maker, public opinion, media and, of course, all people involved in the process. This is the moment to hold a celebratory presentation of the results of months of work made by a great number of people. Therefore, it is worth organizing a **summary meeting** as widely publicized as possible, to which all stakeholders will be invited, but also those parties who, in your opinion, can strengthen the agency of the process ending with a specific result. Make sure that the invited guests represent a diverse group – in terms of politics and worldview – and different environments (including the representation of citizens involved in the process). Provide a good, maybe symbolic, location for the meeting, an interesting programme for the stakeholders – a press conference or press briefing and the opportunity to address the media and give interviews to the politicians who are present and the experts supporting you throughout the national process.

This is an opportunity to emphasize and make the audience aware of the importance of the opinions summarized in the report. This is an opportunity to call the decision-maker to action, to make a declaration, or to jointly create a map of actions aimed at achieving the expected change. Make the most of this (brief) important moment of interest – think carefully about the entire scenario.

Do not forget to thank the audience for their presence – maybe even send a thank you e-mail after the meeting to the media, the decision-maker and other guests. Use this opportunity to send a link to a post on the website or Facebook post with information after the meeting (to be shared), photos, an electronic version of the report, or a prepared press release.

Communication advice

This meeting is primarily intended to present a verdict, but you can also use it for communication purposes to:

- summarize the entire process;
- get the results commented by experts, politicians, and perhaps even the citizens involved in the process;
- show infographics, a summary recording (if you have had the funds and time to prepare it), evaluation data;
- organize a briefing, press conference, and media interviews with individual people involved in the process or representatives of politics and public administration at the local and central level, indicated by you;
- create messages to share on social media, in which you tag the accounts of partners and politicians present in the room.

Here – just like at the inauguration – look after the media representatives by helping them in their work, providing information to be used in the article, photos, quotes or videos from the process. Think carefully about the language you will use to communicate the verdict to various groups – the key to effective communication is a clear and simple message, which may be difficult given the complex issues that these types of processes deal with.

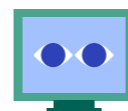
Do not forget – the prepared summary report together with the press release should be sent to all stakeholders, including journalists (updated database).

The dissemination of the verdict, the key result of a multi-month process, should be carefully planned.

If you have the resources for it, a professional information campaign will be extremely helpful. This is, of course, the sphere of ideas – if you do not have sufficient funds, it will require some creativity and greater support from a wide range of partners. At this stage, however, we are counting on the snowball effect – if the process was visible, strong communication closure would be much easier.

Our experience

The summary of the process took place at the Copernicus Science Centre and gathered about a hundred people, including the assembly participants themselves, but also politicians from coalition and opposition parties, media, activist circles and representatives of public and local government institutions. The two-hour meeting was divided into a summary of the verdict, a proclamation from the assembly participants and comments on the process from invited guests divided into expert, activist and political voices – ensuring pluralism of opinions.

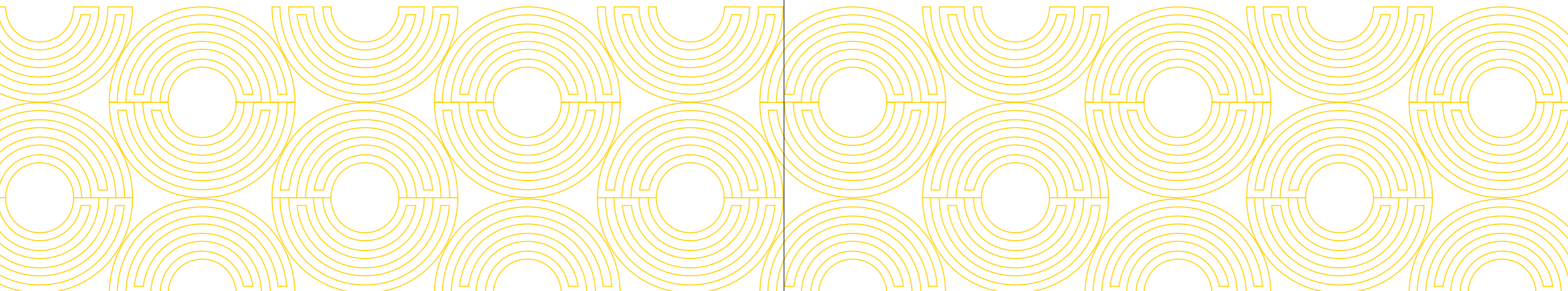


Watch the recordings from the summary of the **National citizens' assembly on energy costs**:

- [Nationwide citizens' assembly on energy costs - how to counteract the problem of energy poverty?](#) › [EN]
- [Experts and Parties on the results of the first national citizens' assembly](#) › [PL]
- [Politicians on the results of the first national citizens' assembly](#) › [PL]

7 After the dialogue summary

Next steps



We have already told you how to prepare, conduct and summarize local councils and the national citizens' assembly. However, to make sure that the effort of months of work does not go to waste, it is a **good idea to ensure that the verdict is implemented**. As in many previous moments, here too the paths of action will be different depending on who is in charge of the project.

Cross-sectoral cooperation and roadmap

This is the path for the organizer who has the support of the decision-maker. **In the case of processes supported top down, the action will consist in wise and thorough work – often cross-sectoral one – on planning a road map for implementing recommendations, and then on its implementation and monitoring.** It is work between public officials' rooms, ensuring political support and action on the part of the decision-maker, and informing the public about progress, challenges and barriers. It is a laborious process of pushing actions forward, often for months and years, because, as we know, the dimensions of the problems are usually very complex. Some recommendations can be implemented almost immediately, but most require time and political will (e.g. finding sources of financing or redirecting funds that are usually insufficient in the state budget). To monitor the implementation of the verdict, a road map can be prepared - see how it was done within the [Citizens' assembly in Wrocław](#) >. It is then worth being updated successively – both in the form of internal documents and a public source of information. An example of such a system for reporting the implementation of recommendations can be found, for example, within the [Warsaw Climate Assembly](#) >.

Advocacy actions

This is the path for the bottom-up organizer. Work at this stage is primarily an **advocacy process** aimed at maintaining public interest and putting pressure on public institutions to attract their interest in the verdict as well as to ensure the adoption of the developed solutions.

This task requires specific competences, time and resources, so we assume that it is an **additional and optional step**. However, we ourselves faced the challenge and the need to continue to “stick to the topic” in the course of the dialogue, despite our limited knowledge in this area. We did this mainly because we felt that, given the resources invested in the process, we saw the need to support the implementation of the verdict, and thus prove that the model is a good way to make decisions on difficult, nationwide issues.

Support in the advocacy fight

A **strong group of partners**, i.e. representatives of the organizers, experts, assembly participants, organizers and participants of local councils, partners (including media), decision-makers (if they are involved in the process), PR specialists or local governments can help ensure the implementation of the verdict. For this action to be effective, it is worth planning it at the beginning of the process: thinking about with which tools, by engaging whom, by reaching whom we will achieve the goal of disseminating the voting results and the effect of change. Project partners – if they know from the beginning what their role is – will be more open to further action. However, it is worth allocating appropriate remuneration for specific tasks.

A group of experts can be engaged to further promote the subject-matter issue and the solutions developed in the process, e.g. in the form of a series of debates, interviews, media articles. Such a **media debate of political and expert nature** can expand the group of people who will hear about the assembly's results as well as trigger a serious and reflective discussion about the directions of solutions proposed by the assembly. Also, think about non-obvious leads, i.e. stakeholders who will have an interest in implementing the verdict, e.g. business representatives – their presence may be risky from the point of view of process

transparency, but on the other hand it may increase the pressure to implement solutions. The last tip is to involve politically or socially recognizable people who will make fighting for a given topic their hallmark and an important element of their agenda.

Of course, the **range of actions is wide**: petitions, manifestos, protests, appeals, and the actors to be reached are very different: ministries (government), parliament, local government, media, activists, business, experts, etc. Conducting advocacy actions, especially in a polarized society, requires relying on knowledge – facts, figures, research results. This will help maintain the subject-matter nature of communication and discussions, as well as prevent the possible polemics around the verdict.

Another idea for ensuring the visibility of the verdict and potentially also striving for its implementation is **to involve citizens in this process**. Assembly participants as well as the participants of local councils and their organizers can become one of the greatest advocates and ambassadors carrying the verdict, promoting both its provisions and the method of the national dialogue itself. They should be aware from the beginning that their role may go beyond issuing a verdict. You can think about additional training, strengthening advocacy skills, providing appropriate materials, etc. This is also a good move towards depolarization – the assembly participants themselves have different views, so if they are convinced of the value of the decision taken together, they can more effectively spread this idea to other people around them.

Monitoring the implementation of the verdict

If you have the opportunity, make sure to monitor the implementation of the adopted solutions. It is worth planning this task (at least initially) at the stage of preparation and design of the entire process, thinking about stakeholder groups and communication strategy. During the meeting, it would be necessary to analyze what is happening around it and update ideas for conducting post-verdict monitoring activities, consulting them and informing about them the entities that will be involved in their implementation (expert organizations, activist, etc.). This may turn out to be a task spread over months, perhaps years, so it will be a mission for the persistent ones. Perhaps this task can be performed mainly by expert and state institutions, and not necessarily by entities carrying out the participatory process itself.

A frequently used idea to ensure the efficiency of the process is to create a **team to monitor the implementation of the verdict**, consisting of, for example, people participating in the process, representatives of the civil society, activists and experts but most importantly – public officials. This solution will work better in the case of processes initiated by a decision-maker, because it requires long-term support (organizing meetings) and reporting (e.g. once a year).

You can keep up to date with the work of the team created to implement the verdict (if any) and the activities of public institutions and ministries. In citizens' assemblies, decision-makers often **use regular reports on the implementation of the verdict** – this can be a source of information and pressure.

Communication advice

Try to create a diverse message about the effect of the process to the widest possible audience, especially including decision-makers. Polarization within the society and the existing high tensions may pose a threat to the verdict. It is in the interest of the initiator and organizer of the process to effectively reach various parties of the political scene, media, publicists and activists with the results of the vote. This tip should be taken into account by the organizer of the process, regardless of whether it is organized bottom-up or commissioned, e.g. by a decision-maker.

What may seem surprising is that it is difficult to determine the moment that ends the communication process, because with the nationwide scale of actions and the opening of a wide discussion, the topic may come back – both in the form of the need for expert presentations on the issue being discussed and con-

siderations about the future of the method used. Keep yourself informed, follow reports, organize meetings, you can also think about establishing an inter-sectoral working group to analyze the implementation of changes. If you act bottom-up, check media reports about progress, follow proposals for amendments to the law, and raise alarms if – despite the promises made – solutions are not implemented. But also praise every introduced change that results from the verdict of the assembly conducted within the **National citizens' dialogue**. Remember to inform the assembly participants about the progress or lack of progress. If you are a bottom-up organizer, do your best to ensure that the assembly's recommendations reach all policy-makers responsible for this topic. Be present wherever possible – represent the assembly and its verdict at conferences, meetings, and participate in discussions.

The end of the **national dialogue** is the time to make a decision on the further involvement of the entity responsible for implementing the process, including further communication (also via the project website or social media profiles dedicated to the project). If you plan to organize another process in the future, your decisions will probably take into account the maintenance of the created communication channels and their updates for the possible implementation of next projects of this kind. Remember that the great value after the process is over is the group that worked in its favour with you. It is worth staying in touch with the community gathered around the problem, informing the members about interesting events and your next activities. You will probably go through many more things together.

Referendum?

We do not have a clear answer to recommending a referendum (which arouses many emotions in all of us) as an extension of the model we have described. It seems that preceding the referendum with a long, fact-based discussion involving a wide range of people provides good grounds for holding it. It can be said that the society actually discussed the topic during local councils and the national assembly, had access to a group of experts and had time to exchange ideas and learn solid arguments for various solutions. It reached a verdict accepted by most of them. Now this voice and the accompanying publicly available knowledge package can serve the society in response to the referendum question. However, it begs the question whether a referendum is actually necessary, needed and financially justified, since such a large group has already decided and has actually represented the country in a nutshell. Perhaps a referendum will help with issues that only a referendum can lawfully resolve, such as amendments to the constitution or particular provisions of the law. A decision on a referendum certainly cannot come at the end of the process. If you want to include it in the **national dialogue**, you must decide on it at the very beginning and transparently build it into the message about the process – as its climax and an important legislative step.

To read:



- An article in which **Kuba Wygnański from the Shipyard Foundation shares his thoughts on the referendum** › [PL]

In fine – something to read:



- **Beyond elections: The use of deliberative methods in European municipalities and regions** › [EN]
- **Designing the Follow-up to Climate Assemblies** › [EN]

Summary evaluation

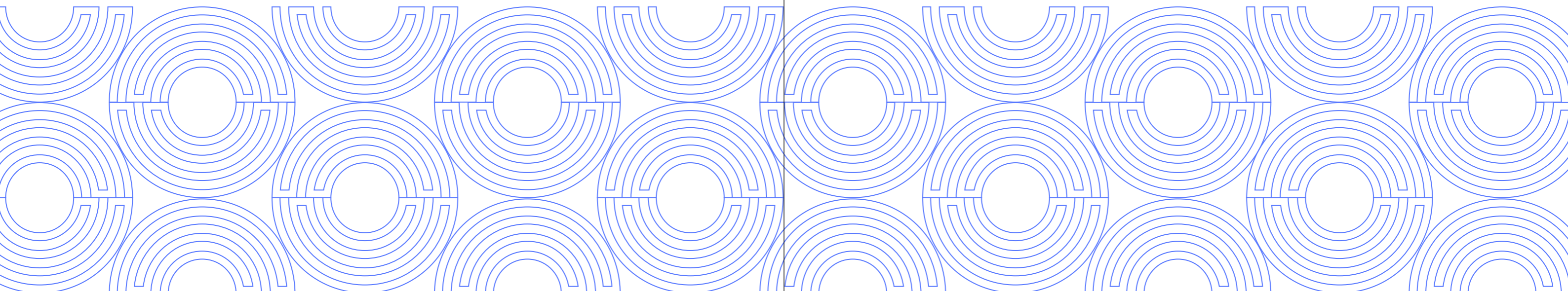
After completing the actions, it is time for a summary evaluation, the so-called ex-post evaluation. Its aim is to reflect more deeply on the process and its results. You can carry it out up to several months from the date of completion of the process, although questions directly related to the participation in the event (concerning the increase of knowledge, the assessment of the organization and the neutrality of the process, or the possibility of talking across divisions, etc.) are worth asking immediately after the event, when the memory of these issues is still intact. Summary evaluation may also include the impact of the process on the reality in various dimensions. The conclusions from this study are primarily used to plan subsequent processes in this area; they may lead to changing the assumptions or the model, and not only modifying specific individual solutions that you want to use in the future. The results of studies conducted at this stage may also play a key role in communication – both for the implementation of the developed recommendations and for the dissemination of this form of deliberation.

Ex-post evaluation, apart from the previously mentioned survey analysis, may include (depending on the availability of time, resources or research competences in the team coordinating the process) e.g. individual and group interviews with people participating in the assembly, experts, observers, and also representatives of other stakeholder groups. After completing the assembly, the interlocutors can look at the process holistically, from a greater distance, as well as evaluate its course and effects more completely. Remember not to wait too long to start the study, as memories fade quickly. It is good to talk to participants as long as they remember the recent events and the emotions accompanying them.

If you decide to complete your knowledge from surveys with in-depth conclusions from interviews, you can consider interviews with the following stakeholder groups:

1. **Participants** of the national assembly – interviews with people participating in the assembly, conducted after the end of the process will allow you to deepen the conclusions from the surveys and better understand what challenges the assembly participants faced during the process. They will also provide in-depth material for analysing the impact of the process on the participants as well as tips for organizing similar activities in the future. It is also a unique source of content to be used in communication about the process and its effects.
2. **Observers** – after the assembly ends, it is worth meeting with the observers for a group discussion. In this case, mutual exchange of observations between participants may be of additional value. It is worth seeing how observers evaluate various aspects of the assembly, but also thinking together about the sources of difficulties and trying to develop recommendations for the future.
3. **Experts** – discussions with them are of double value. Firstly, you can ask how they evaluate the organization of the assembly and cooperation with you, e.g. how well they knew and understood your expectations towards them in the process. On the other hand, it is worth taking advantage of the fact that these are people with extensive subject-matter knowledge in the area, they know the context in which the assembly is held and the key stakeholders. They often have their own experiences of trying to introduce certain threads into the debate or convince decision-makers. We suggest talking to experts about the assembly's verdict and its dissemination – what strengths and weaknesses they see in the document, as well as what opportunities and threats to its implementation. These observations may be helpful in planning the verdict communication process, especially if the process was organized bottom-up. In the case of this group, we suggest conducting individual interviews so that the interlocutors can freely express e.g. doubts regarding the selection of other people to the expert group or their contribution to the process.

8 **Can something be done differently?**



At the very beginning, we mentioned that the **National citizens' dialogue** is not a perfect or unchangeable model. At the very end of the publication, we return to this thread to share various ideas for major and minor modifications to the model. These ideas sprouted in our heads before, during and after the implementation of the actions, taking hours of meetings and reflections. We had to decide on specific solutions, but the model itself requires flexibility and openness to changes (unfortunately, also those that need to be introduced already at the process stage). You may also need to modify it. Or maybe you will plan it differently from the beginning? See what the course of our thinking was.

Local councils as a tool for the first stage.

- We see a dilemma resulting from the length of meetings and two paths to explore.
 - Is it possible to organize councils longer than a few hours (and thus encourage local organizers to conduct them and provide them with appropriate resources)? The goal would be a better-quality discussions between the participants and, potentially, the conclusions drawn from it. However, such an approach would require investment in expanding the moderation competences of people conducting the meetings and greater support of on-site experts.
 - Or maybe, on the contrary, local councils should be even simpler, to increase their accessibility and to reach a mass scale? Are local organizers ready to conduct such meetings? If we go in this direction, we must be aware that it may come at the expense of the quality of the discussion, which is a key component and value of the process.
- We devoted a lot of energy to considerations regarding the subject-matter scope to be discussed at local councils. Much will depend on the selected topic of the **National citizens' dialogue**, but we consider this dilemma of the subject-matter scope to be independent of the selected issue and remaining valid. We asked ourselves questions about several issues.
 - Should we focus only on threads that can be implemented and understood at the local level, or should we also address challenges for the country (and even at a higher level, e.g. for the European Union policy)? We know that it is easier for the participants to talk about the diagnosis and local challenges, which are also more intuitive for the organizers – especially if they represent the local government. This is an additionally tempting path due to the short meeting time. However, we need to consider how to talk about local problems on a national scale (e.g. during a national assembly).
 - Not all topics will have a clear division into local and national dimensions of solutions – such a situation may concern, for example, worldview issues or solutions that are solely the responsibility of the national policy (e.g. amendments to the Constitution). How to present the topic wisely at the local council level then?
 - Perhaps it is also worth considering including some participants of local councils in the citizens' assembly, e.g. as delegates, on pre-established terms?

The national citizens' assembly as a tool for the second stage.

- Is the name "citizens' assembly" actually understandable to people? If we think about the first experiences of this method for a given community, it is very important to create as few obstacles to their participation as possible, and we know that the name of the method is quite difficult to understand (it may be misleading). In our process, it happened that people talking to us thought about solar panels after hearing the word "panel" ("panel" in Polish means "assembly"). Other

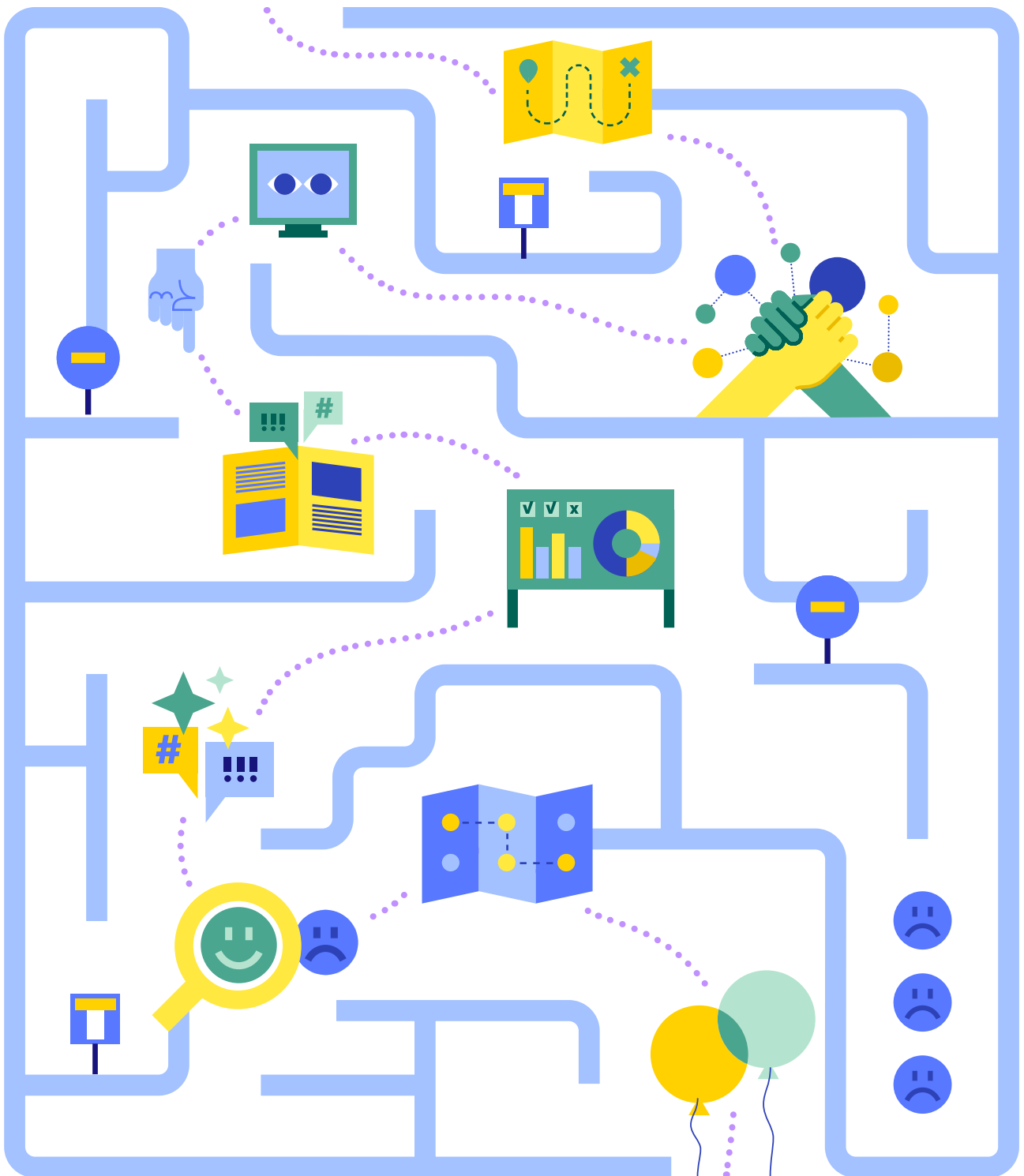
countries go for simple, catchy names, like the American "America Talks" or the French "Great National Debate", somehow hiding the name of the method itself. But other countries, such as Great Britain and Ireland, which have dozens of experiences with the use of citizens' assemblies, freely use the name of the method – their communities are already more familiar with the assembly and its assumptions. So, a lot depends on the context.

- In the assembly itself, could the group of participants consist not only of drawn citizens, but also in part of people from local councils (still bearing in mind the socio-demographic proportions) or decision-makers (e.g. as auditors)?
- Could the model of a **national dialogue** look different? It may introduce some type of changes in the methodology, based on available tools from the OECD database or previously implemented processes, e.g. in [Canada](#) or the [United States](#). One of the important modifications and a departure from the assembly method (which was inspired by the Canadian process of discussion on energy) that we had in mind was the organization of local processes taking place simultaneously, instead of one organized process at the national level. The group would still be drawn, the method would still be deliberative (education-deliberation-verdict), but the meetings would take place regionally, e.g. at the voivodeship level. Perhaps the final note would be a meeting of delegates from the regions and a final common verdict. This would (probably) reduce transport (and other logistics) costs, and perhaps increase the availability of meetings for assembly participants. However, we saw greater value in the clash of perspectives and hearing the voice of society in its entire spectrum.
- Whether and how to work with a wider group of society during a national citizens' assembly? How to give voice to people who were not selected to participate in the assembly but want to get involved in its work and influence the verdict? The simplest path is to organize additional open public consultations (their form and scope would, of course, be the subject of a separate consideration – there are many methods of conducting this type of dialogue).
- Should data and process elements be made available to the public and the media, and if so, how widely? This concerns issues such as the image, name and surname of the assembly participants (or their characteristics in accordance with the sample selection criteria), as well as broadcasting the process. A good practice is to make public speeches during the educational (learning) phase and the summary meeting along with the verdict, but you could also think about showing fragments of deliberation or voting.

What happens after the **National citizens' dialogue** (local councils + national citizens' assembly)?

- With greater resources, it is possible to consider re-organizing meetings at the local level (to disseminate the verdict, discuss its understanding and wise implementation, including locally) or other broader consultation activities, giving the opportunity for a wide range of recipients to comment on the verdict of the dialogue.
- We have already touched on this earlier in the guide, but we would like to come back to it again – could a referendum be a potential final note in the process? We do not claim that this is a mandatory element of the model, but we see that sometimes (e.g. following the example of Irish citizens' assemblies) a referendum may constitute its extension and legislative closure.

We wish you best of luck in organizing a **National** citizens' dialogue!



“By carrying out the council, Poland joined other countries that are looking for new (albeit, in fact, ancient) methods of modernising democratic mechanisms. The core of this idea is to introduce processes involving citizens in formulating opinions and even verdicts on important public matters.(...)”

Deliberative processes, such as the proposed model of the National citizens’ dialogue, also have one very important feature, particularly significant in the face of deep polarization in Poland (although it is worth emphasising here that this is a phenomenon that goes well beyond Poland and is of a somewhat structural nature). Namely, they have enormous de-escalation and depolarization potential.(...) Witnessing a process that confirmed that discussing socially difficult topics is somehow possible was for us, as the organizers, a very important experience. It gives us hope that even in issues that are much more difficult and divisive for public opinion, under appropriate conditions, a similar “miracle” will happen. Anyway, it is definitely worth a try.”

Kuba Wygnański, Shipyard Foundation

The „Civic council on energy costs” was innovative in the way it [through the organization of local councils] extended the opportunity for public dialogue before the citizens’ assembly. This enabled voices from various communities across Poland to engage in the assembly process, in particular helping to set the agenda for the deliberative part. We can learn a lot from our Polish colleagues.

Graham Smith, University of Westminster, Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies
(international network for exchanging knowledge about citizens’ assemblies)

Growing divisions, rising inequalities and a widening gap between citizens and politicians continue to weaken social cohesion. It has never been more important to engage in collective action and redefine what civic participation means to us.

The “Civic council on energy costs” in Poland and other citizens’ assemblies in the Central and Eastern Europe region have proven that when the right conditions are in place, citizens are not afraid to cooperate in solving some of our biggest challenges and are smart about solving important dilemmas. Not taking advantage of it is a luxury we cannot afford.

Éva Bördős, DemNet (Hungarian citizen participation organization)

At the **Shipyard Foundation**, we have been creating and supporting effective solutions to social problems for fifteen years, involving citizens in deciding on public matters, and helping organizations and local governments plan and implement social activities. We develop and disseminate good practices, create tools to facilitate social activities, conduct social studies, train people and develop educational materials. The effects of the Shipyard’s activities are beneficial for, among others, senior citizens, students and teachers alike, local communities, activists and local government officials from all over Poland. We believe that the best decisions are the result of an open discussion. That is why we try to give everyone the opportunity to participate in discussions on issues that are important to them and to influence the decisions made.

The actions carried out by the Shipyard include: public hearings on the National Reconstruction Plan, citizens’ councils on education, citizens’ assemblies in Warsaw, Lublin and Rzeszów, as well as the first national citizens’ assembly in the country