Citizens' Voices:
Experiments in Democratic Renewal and Reform

EDITED BY GEMMA M. CARNEY & CLODAGH HARRIS
Deliberative and participatory democracy specialist group
of the political studies association of Ireland

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Editors' Introduction

T he papers in this e-book emerged from '**Beyond the ballot: diverse forms of citizen engagement between democratic elections,'** a symposium of the participatory and deliberative democracy specialist group of the Political Studies Association of Ireland. Over the past 18 months or so we have had the pleasure of working together on questions of participation and democracy. This work resulted in three panels at the annual conference of the Political Studies Association of Ireland in October 2011. The range of research on democratic participation demonstrates a resurgence of interest in the study of civil society and an appetite for democratic renewal in Ireland's current process of financial, political and social change. The work presented here is mindful of challenges, but also seeks to look beyond current preoccupations, critically evaluating alternative modes of development for politics, democracy and civic engagement in Ireland.

The 'Beyond the Ballot' symposium, held in Dublin in March 2012, is part of this broader appetite for change. We hope it was just the first of many public, academic and civic events which question, criticise, investigate and at times celebrate the status of democracy. This book, which publishes short versions of the papers presented on the day, is kindly supported by a 'New Ideas' grant from the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and by the PSAI.

The first three papers are all about experiments in participatory and deliberative democracy.

Professor Jurg Steiner's paper sets out the praxis of deliberation, establishing why democratic deliberation is not just an academic exercise. Learning to deliberate is at the very essence of what makes us human.

Next, Professor Peter Vermeersch explores Belgian a citizens' experiement, the G1000, born out of a frustration with representative democracy's failure to form a workable agreement.

Finally, one of the most exciting pieces of work undertaken by political scientists in Ireland in recent years, *We the Citizens* demonstrates how deliberation can work in an Irish context.

In chapters four and five, we turn to the activist's perspective - looking at civil society organisations, the use and usefulness of participatory research and the idea of civic engagement. One of Ireland's most well respected activist-academics, Dr. Mary P. Murphy

reflects on 'Claiming our Future' as a struggle for civil society to move beyond narrow, state defined roles. Her reflections on this experience offer a frank and open account of the challenges and opportunities for civil society in articulating an alternative vision for Ireland. Finally, Drs. Chris McInerney and Gemma M. Carney open the debate on the role of the university in this struggle, outlining a number of potential means through which academic institutions can provide civic education, training and facilitate civic engagement.

Like most creative work, this e-book was a collaborative process. It would not have been possible without the generosity of the authors in allowing their work to be made available in the new democratic space that is on-line, open access publication. As participatory and deliberative democrats, we hope that this publicly available e-book will be of civic value. We plan to produce a wider collection of work on participatory and deliberative democracy at a later date.

All of our work is based on a political and ethical commitment to the ideal of democracy as rule by the people and political equality. All institutions are tested at a time of crisis, and the institutions of democracy are no exception. Dramatic changes in global capitalism have put a strain on the relationship between government and the people. We hope that by taking the initiative in exploring these issues, by investigating the capacity of democratic institutions to innovate we can begin to establish means by which ordinary people can influence their democratic system other than just as voters on election day.

Gemma M. Carney
Clodagh Harris

March 2012

CHAPTER ONE

Learning to Deliberate

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To talk about politics in a deliberative way, means to be truthful in what one says, to respect the arguments of others, to give good reasons for one's own arguments, and to be open to changing one's position by the force of the better argument. Deliberation defined in this way, can take place among political leaders, among ordinary citizens, and between political leaders and ordinary citizens. As I have argued elsewhere, we need more deliberation in all these respects (Steiner, 2012). Human beings have a natural propensity to talk with others in a deliberative way. This propensity, however, may easily get lost. Therefore, children should learn early on to deliberate with others. This can best be done within families at the dinner table. But it is difficult to influence from the outside what happens in families, although special classes for parenting may help. The most promising path to have influence on deliberative skills of children is in schools. I wish to show in this paper how this can be accomplished.

Schools play an important role in developing a deliberative culture in the sense that children learn to think about different ways to solve a problem. Earlier in my career, I received a teachers training and taught for some time middle and high school. Based on this experience, I have great hopes that schools can make a major contribution to the development of a deliberative culture in a country. Already beginning with kindergarten, students can be taught to listen to each other with respect, to justify their arguments, possibly also with personal stories, and to be open to yield to the force of the better arguments. A good teaching technique to develop these skills is to have students tackle tasks not only individually but often also in small groups. The challenge with such *group*

work is that some students often dominate the discussion while others are free riding. A good teacher will be able to remedy this problem in showing students that they will be more successful in resolving their task if all participate in an equal and unconstrained way. Groups then report their results to the larger class where they are further discussed. These class discussions should often be organized in a spontaneous way without interventions of the teacher, so-called *free student discussions*. Again there is a challenge because to speak up in a free student discussion is not easy for many students because they may be too shy or lack the necessary rhetorical skills. Here, too, a good teacher can create an atmosphere where, perhaps only over a long period of time, students feel comfortable to speak up to a larger audience. If the teaching techniques of working in small groups, group reports to larger audiences, and free student discussions are used in a systematic way from kindergarten to university, key deliberative skills can be developed, which then can be used to participate as citizens in deliberation of political issues. Of particular importance is that deliberative skills are also taught to children who do not go on to higher education. These children in many cases do not come from families with a deliberative culture, so that schools are the most promising way to bring more equality to deliberation. Special care must also be taken to ensure that girls are not too shy to speak up in class discussions so that later as citizens they are as active as men in deliberative discussions.

While these teaching techniques can be applied in all fields from mathematics to art history, a special challenge to develop a deliberative culture confronts teachers in civics classes. They should present to their students politics both as a strategic power game and as respectful deliberation as two different ways to interpret what happens in politics. Students could then discuss on the basis of concrete political case studies which interpretation is more plausible. A good teacher can make them aware that a definite answer to this fundamental question of political life is not possible. The answer will always depend on the philosophical perspective. The teacher can show that Machiavelli and Kant, for example, gave different answers to the role of power and morality in politics. In this way, students become sophisticated in how politics can be interpreted. To help civics teachers to orient their teaching in this direction, civics textbooks should be more closely linked to cutting edge political science research. Well researched case studies should be included in the textbooks, preferably case studies that are interpreted from both a power and a deliberative perspective. With such textbooks as background, civics becomes more interesting than is traditionally the case. Students will learn that both power and arguments are important in politics and, as a result of such teaching, will become more sophisticated citizens who feel comfortable to participate in a deliberative way in political discussions. They have learned in school that in thinking and talking

about political issues they should act not as consumers but as citizens. To learn such role ascriptions early on in life is very important. Such learning of deliberation should take place from kindergarten to universities and beyond in continuing education. How this can be done at the university level, is shown in a creative way at the Jacobs University Bremen in Germany where students are first taught about deliberation in class and then participate at a Deliberative Day to discuss the issue of public service in general.

In a seminar at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I asked students to reflect on what they learned or did not learn about deliberation in all their school years and how schools could be improved in this respect. Many students wrote that their school years were not deliberative at all. William May gives a particularly bleak picture of how in primary school there was no deliberative culture:

> My primary school experience very much followed the factory model of American education: everywhere we went we walked in single file lines, the time we spent at certain tasks and in locations was determined by the ringing of a bell, and we all took the same orders from the teacher—orders we were expected to obey. In this way the teacher was always right, the authority, the sovereign. Students were charged with finding the answers the teacher wanted because the teacher had the right answer, and very rarely did we come up with our own answers to questions. Problems were solved in the same way—if there was a dispute between yourself and another person, or between two groups, you went to the teacher to arbitrate and ultimately decide who gets to do what.

Rachel Myrick gives a specific example of how emphasis on competition left no room for deliberation:

> Later in my schooling, I found such discussions and debates were often more competitive in nature then cooperative. This was largely because teachers began grading the content of our discussion, and students, worried about their individual grade, would monopolize the conversation. In my English class, when we had discussions about literature, all of our conversation turned into vicious arguments as students fervently tried to prove each other wrong. Similarly, in my History of the Americas class, we were put into pairs and assigned to represent the viewpoint of either John Adams or Thomas Jefferson on a particular topic. We had five minutes to debate our opponent, and the winning team received a better grade. In this environment, all of our focus was on viciously attacking the opponent so we could receive higher marks.

However, students also reported experiences of teachers making a real effort to develop a deliberative culture among their students. Connor Crews reports such an experience from an American history class:

> In my eighth grade American history class, we were required to create a "class constitution" which governed classroom behaviour and expectations for work produced by students. This, by its collaborative nature, required a great deal of deliberation. We came into the process of creating the constitution with very few guidelines from my teacher. The only directions were to address how students should behave in class and be penalized for misuse of class time, if at all. As I recall, we had to reach some sort of a supermajority for the constitution to be passed. Because this was a project which would have an impact on how the class was conducted, all students had a vested interest in ensuring that the outcome was to their liking. Thus, arguments were largely justified in terms of the common good.

Rachel Myrick, who reported (above) her non-deliberative school experiences, had fond memories of Ms. Reid who was very creative in developing a deliberative culture in her classes:

> The most effective example I have seen of a deliberative culture was my fifth grade classroom, led by my teacher, Ms. Reid, who had designed her own educational program and curricula. One integral component of the class was the "Socratic Seminar," in which we would discuss a controversial topic related to something we studied in class. This environment was my first exposure to the seminar method, which arguably many students don't see until high school or college. Being exposed to this deliberative discussion, in which all ideas are respected and arguments must be logical and consistent, helps students develop sound arguments and respect diverse opinions. This concept seems quite sophisticated for ten-year-olds. However, instead of jumping right into the seminar style, Ms. Reid gradually introduced us to the idea. We read articles about effective communication and went over the basic rules. In our first discussions, we began by passing a ball. Whoever had the ball was able to speak. If you wanted to say something, you would raise your hand until the ball was passed to you. We had a seminar multiple times a week, and after the first few weeks, we stopped passing the ball and raising our hands. The conversation began to flow naturally.

Keith Grose remembers that even problems of mathematics can be solved in a deliberative way:

I witnessed the engaging power of deliberative teaching when I entered the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. The mathematics department had a novel way of teaching topics such as geometry and calculus. Rather than sitting in class learning the theorems and methods in a lecture format, the students were split into groups and given lab assignments to learn how these theorems and methods work firsthand. For example, when we were studying geometry, rather than being told about relative triangles by our teachers, we were given the assignment of determining the height of the clock tower on campus with only a small triangle and roll of measuring tape. Then each group had to brainstorm on how best to accomplish this task. Usually at least one group would realize how to use the correct method, in this case relative triangles, to accomplish the task. Afterwards all of the groups would return to the classroom and present their various methods and the class would decide on the best method and why it worked.

These examples show that schools are an excellent vehicle to teach students how to deliberate. The examples, however, also show that too often schools miss this golden opportunity. To be successful in this respect, teachers must be trained and supervised to instill deliberative skills in their students and to encourage them to use these skills also outside class. For me this is the best hope to make deliberative democracy viable.

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Deliberative democracy in Belgium

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Crisis as opportunity: the origins of the G1000

I n the spring of 2011, an independent group of Belgian citizens - from various walks of life and different parts of the country, none of them politicians but all of them passionate defenders of democracy and democratic renewal - launched the idea of organizing a large citizens' summit called G1000. They wanted to bring together 1000 randomly selected ordinary citizens and offer them an opportunity to discuss issues related to the future of the country and formulate recommendations to the government.

The initiative was first conceived as a response to a deepening political crisis. Belgium had been without a federal government for an unprecedented amount of time after the federal elections of June 2010. In those elections the Socialist Party (PS) had secured a massive victory in the French-speaking southern part of the country (Wallonia), while in the Dutch-speaking north (Flanders) the right-wing nationalists of the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) attracted almost one third of the votes, a result that made the N-VA, a party that mobilizes for the break-up of Belgium, the largest political force in the entire country.

The result was a long-drawn-out post-election spectacle of severe party competition. The public received a daily stream of press stories about the small and large rhetorical and tactical struggles between the various constellations of consistently fractious political personalities involved in government formation talks.

For the initiators of the G1000, however, there was a larger story to tell about this stalemate. The Belgian governmental deadlock may have been a crisis of many things, it was also, and perhaps most importantly, a crisis of the classic institutions of representative democracy. The long process of government negotiations increasingly alienated Belgian citizens from those institutions and from the politicians presiding over them. Frequent protests and critical voices in the press did not seem to make much of a difference; citizens simply had to wait until an agreement was found. The traditional world of party democracy – where citizens can effectively interact with politicians through party involvement – felt increasingly limiting.

According to the G1000 initiators this echoed the frustrations that had become palpable in the citizens' protests in the wider world, from Athens to Wall Street, and in people's more general distrust, even contempt, towards democratic politics, especially adversarial party politics, in many contemporary democracies. Like other cases, the Belgian crisis demonstrated that political parties, once created in order to streamline the diverse collective interests in society, now kept each other in a permanent electoral stranglehold.

Bringing deliberative democracy to Belgium

The G1000 initiators argued that this problem should be addressed by bringing the citizen back in. There is a need, they emphasized in a manifesto posted on the internet (http://www.g1000.org/en/) and in the major Belgian newspapers, for experimentation with democratic renewal and, in particular, citizen engagement outside the formal channels of institutionalized politics and outside elections.

This argument was based on the observation of several ongoing trends:

- Although direct political engagement seems lower than before (if for instance measured by party membership numbers), citizens are more aware of public debates about policy-making. This is facilitated by the availability of new media and new digital technology that informs these citizens more rapidly.

- Through the rise of social media citizens have a more direct say in the public debate and in the mainstream media (citizens' journalism). This ability of citizens to

raise their voice has also radically changed the way in which politicians mobilise. Because of social media or online forums politicians can no longer hide from sight in an area reserved for powerholders; instead they have to reside in the public sphere where they can be questioned critically.

- Political parties have, over recent decades, lost a lot of their traditional status as the most legitimate channels for political participation; party membership is decreasing and party loyalty is diminishing.

- Similarly, the classic civil society organizations, such as trade unions and welfare agencies, are less than before seen as a key channel between the masses and the power holders.

Instead of deploring the disengagement and disillusion of citizens in the formal structures of representative democracy, the G1000 wanted to build on the growing engagement and belief of people in other forms of political participation: deliberation will help clear the way towards a better democracy. Theories about deliberative democracy were a source of inspiration as well as examples of innovation in citizen engagement based on some form of deliberation among samples of citizens in other countries (Consensus conferences in Denmark, America Speaks, Fishkin's Deliberative Poll, We the Citizens in Ireland, etc.). Although the idea of deliberative democracy is not new; for decades theorists have argued that democracy should be based not just on votes but also on the incorporation of public debate. However it is only in the last few years that we have seen a strong new wave of initiatives aimed at realizing this theoretical claim through experimentation.

From the outset it was the purpose of the G1000 to build on this trend in order to foster positive and constructive thinking about solutions, tap the creativity of the crowd, seek genuine debate about policy content outside the limiting framework of parties and elections, and search for solutions beyond adversarial politics. The G1000 did not want to ignore the work of parliaments and parties; it rather sought to complement it. Just as in a system of direct democracy, it aimed at the large involvement of ordinary citizens, but through its careful sampling of diverse groups it also wanted to respect the spirit and traditions of representative democracy.

For Belgium this was a new idea. Although local participatory processes involving ordinary citizens had been organized before, no clear tradition of deliberative democracy had been established on the national level. Certainly the larger public was not familiar yet with the idea of organized deliberation and with the array of methods that exist to facilitate it.

Rather than entering the institutionalized politics of strategic bargaining and fixed collective preferences, citizen deliberations create opportunities to engage with politics through argument and narrative. It reflects an understanding of politics as a forum for the exchange of ideas and respectful (dis)agreement, not necessarily along the lines of ideology-based collective interests. The G1000 organizers wanted to show that a deliberative initiative in Belgium could open up new possibilities for fruitful political debate, even if party democracy is in crisis. Citizens' engagement may increase public trust and, in turn, reduce the electoral stress that might otherwise lead to more political deadlocks.

The G1000 process

After having posted the manifesto the organizers began to raise the necessary money through crowdfunding. The initial team of 25 organizers was soon supported by a larger team of more than 800 volunteers.

The G1000 was designed as a three-stage plan: (1) a preparatory phase of agenda-setting: this included the selection of the participants, the selection of themes, fundraising, and the media campaign, (2) the citizens' summit, and (3) the elaboration of the proposals and the publication of the final report.

Agenda-setting

The first phase, which was launched during the summer of 2011, began with an online survey built to find out which issues citizens really wanted to discuss at the citizens' summit. More than 5,000 suggestions were made, and ranked, by thousands of citizens. After some clustering of similar themes, 25 themes were put forward for a second round of voting, of which the first 3 were selected to be discussed at the summit. From the lower ranked proposals a fourth theme could be chosen by each table individually.

The G1000 citizens' summit

The second step was the G1000 summit itself, held on the 11th of November 2011. On that day 704 Belgian citizens gathered from 9:30am to 7pm in order to discuss four themes. The participants were selected at random to reflect the diversity of the country. The selection was done by telephone and handled by a commercial custom research and coordination centre. Four selection criteria were used: gender, language, age, province. Additional recruitment through civil society organizations (10%) was done for groups that are harder to reach (unskilled or semi-skilled sections of the population, underprivileged and vulnerable groups, ethnic and cultural minorities).

Spread over   tables of 10 people, and after having been briefed by experts, the participants went into a discussion about the three top themes that had emanated from the online process and an additional theme of their own choice

Three themes chosen through the online survey were:

1. What do you think about the social security system in our country? How can it be made better?

2. Which measures should the government take in order to ensure that there's a just system of distribution of wealth in these times of financial crisis?

3. What should be the most important principles underpinning our national immigration policy?

The purpose of the discussions was to arrive at conclusions about the importance of the theme in question, formulate ideas for new solutions or policies, and brainstorm about how to create broad public support for these new ideas.

Each theme was introduced by two experts in the field. The tables then discussed the topic on the basis of a discussion scenario and under the guidance of trained facilitators. The results of these discussions were gathered at a central table and projected on a screen so that they were presented back to the other participants in the room. Everyone could then individually vote for the proposals they liked best. This resulted, at the end of the day, in a list of shared and ranked priorities.

The top ideas for the first theme, 'social security', were:
Higher minimum wages
Unemployment benifits should be limited in time
A more egalitarian and transparant pension system
Organize more flexible end of career possibilities
Equalize family allowance for each child
Higher child allowance for lower income families
Ensuring equality of access to the health care system
Reduce excessive usage of the health care system by reinforcing the position of the family doctor

Top ideas in 'Distribution of wealth in times of financial crisis' were:
Lower corporate tax but ensure that every firm is obliged to pay the corporate tax
Currency transaction tax (Tobin Tax)

Top ideas in 'Immigration' were:
Obligation to integration
Fast procedures and objective criteria

The fourth theme could be selected by each table individually from the list of top themes. The following list shows the selected themes and, for each theme, the number of tables that chose the theme in question:

Top Theme	No. of Tables
How do we develop a sustainable energy policy in this country?	16
How many levels of government does Belgium need? Which competences and which size do they need to have?	14
How can we renew and broaden democracy?	7
How can we solve the problem of mobility in a sustainable way?	6
How should education be attuned to the labour market?	12
How can we stimulate knowledge and creativity as a resource for our economy?	5
How do we deal with multilingualism in this country? How important is knowledge of the other language?	9
Should citizens be able to vote for politicians from another language group? Does a federal electoral district make sense?	6
Which role and future do we see for Brussels?	2

Additional channels for participation in the G1000

Although the turnout at the citizens summit was somewhat lower than initially expected, this was compensated by the participation of several hundreds of citizens in addition to the random sample. Since a lot of people had expressed their willingness to engage in the G1000 discussion despite not being selected through the random sampling procedure, the organizers opened up two parallel channels for participation. People could participate in a 'G-off'. These were mini-G1000 events self-organized by NGOs, volunteers, informal networks, etc. Through livestreaming they followed the explanations given by the experts in the main room in Brussels, then they discussed in groups from 5 to more than 100 participants per G-off. Or people could participate individually through an online debate called 'G-home'. For the latter option an online brainstorming tool called Synthetron was used. Through livestreaming the home participants could follow the explanations given by the experts, then they could take

part in the discussion through their computer. The results were kept separately from the results of the summit but they were taken into account in the analysis of the deliberation results and will be included as a separate chapter in the G1000 final report that is to appear at the end of the process in November 2012.

The G32

Finally, in the third, currently ongoing phase of the project a smaller group of 32 citizens will gather three times for a weekend in order to refine the shared and ranked priorities that have come out of the citizens' summit and transform them into concrete policy recommendations. The 32 participants will have discussions in smaller groups of four people as well as in the full group; professional facilitators and translators will give guidance; the group will be allowed to invite experts in order to be of assistance in the elaboration of the technical details of the recommendations.

The sampling of this smaller group was done on the basis of applications submitted by participants at the citizens' summit, the G-off events and the G-home. In total 491 people submitted their candidacy for the G32 (of which more than 300 people at the summit). The 32 were sampled randomly from this group on the basis of several criteria. Again this was done to ensure that the group would be as diverse as possible. Initial sampling criteria were language, gender and age. Posteriori checks were made on geographical spread and level of education.

Looking back and looking ahead

The G1000 has broadly been considered a success. In their evaluation report the international observers at the citizens' summit stated that the project "has given citizens an opportunity to 'use their voice' between elections and to step into the vacuum created by political representatives. One of the most impressive features of the G1000 was the diversity of participants with regard to gender, age, political preferences, and with regard to social, professional, and cultural background. This also concerns the inclusion of different faith communities and a fair representation of the different language communities in Belgium." They also concluded that, even if there were some specific challenges, "the G1000 lived up to the internationally excepted standards of mass deliberative processes, which concerns both the selection of participants as well as the clustering of the topics and proposals."

The presence of the speakers of all the parliaments in Belgium at the closing session of the summit furthermore demonstrated that the process of citizen deliberation was taken seriously by politicians. Their planned presence at the closing ceremony in November 2012, when the final report will be presented, will give the G1000 even more weight.

Nevertheless, the organizers also had to deal with a number of serious challenges. One was related to logistics and funding. The initiative was entirely supported by crowdfunding and no donor was allowed to give more than 7 percent of the total budget. This made the fundraising process labour-intensive and reliance on media presence was relatively high, as was the reliance on volunteers.

One of the challenging tasks on the day of the summit was the facilitation of the discussions around the tables. The facilitators were briefed not to create consensus but rather to manage dissensus. Democratic society can thrive on disagreement, on the condition that there is mutual respect among those who disagree. Evaluations showed that the facilitators were generally pleased with the way in which the discussions had been held and participants were often extremely enthusiastic about the experience.

Finally there is the issue of political influence. While the success of the G1000 is more than a matter of policy impact there remains the expectation and the hope among participants as well as organizers that policymakers will take into account some of the ideas and recommendations when they debate or decide on specific measures. It remains to be seen whether they will. The G1000 has, in any case, already managed to attract the (informal) attention of some policy makers and it has sent out a clear message about the feasibility and importance of the citizens' deliberations. Through dialogue relevant alternatives can be brought to the attention of policymakers and the wider public. Deliberation can give citizens an additional channel to voice their experiences and concerns. In addition, the G1000 has demonstrated that deliberation can lead to the production of new ideas. The participants do not need to be experts in any policy domain; they are experts of their own lives, who have a unique perspective and can provide valuable insights.

Since the citizens' summit of November 2011, the G1000 has inspired a number of new national deliberative initiatives. For example, a deliberative forum for families in poverty has been organized in various municipalities; it has sought to strengthen the voice of the poor in the run-up to the local elections of October 2012. The project is called "Everyone's vote counts" and has aimed to be a "G5000 for vulnerable groups", (see http://www.iedersstemtelt.be/in_beeld.html). Other events directly inspired by the G1000 are underway. Members of the G1000 have been invited to speak for international audiences in various European countries, including the Netherlands, Ireland and Croatia. Several organizations in the Netherlands are seriously considering the organization of a similar event. In addition, the team of the G1000 has explored several paths for the continuation of academic as well as practice-oriented research on similar processes of democratic innovation in Belgium and across Europe.

CHAPTER 3

The 2011 *We The Citizens* Pilot Citizens' Assembly[1]

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reland is in a moment of crisis, and its political institutions have been found wanting. In the most recent general election of Spring 2011, political reform featured as a dominant theme in the manifestos of all the parties. This was without exception, and with a focus that has never been seen before in Irish electoral history; reflecting the dramatic drop by international standards in levels of trust in Irish government. Also without exception all the parties pushed an agenda of reform that included the active engagement of citizens. A coalition between Fine Gael and Labour was formed in the light of the election result. Its Programme for Government promised the establishment of a Constitutional Convention, which is expected to include a large number of ordinary citizens (randomly selected) as members.

This paper reports on the preliminary findings of a deliberative polling exercise carried out under the auspices of an organization called *We the Citizens* (www.wethecitizens.

ie), launched with some fanfare within weeks of the 2011 election. The rationale for this project was to very deliberately and publicly feed into the political reform agenda, the principal objective being to demonstrate the value of citizen-oriented, deliberative approaches to achieving large scale political reform. In short, this was more than just a research project; it also represented an effort by Irish political science to actively contribute to policy, to demonstrate the 'relevance' of the discipline (Peters et al. 2002).

The *We the Citizens* initiative

The Irish government has set out in its Programme for Government its key reform proposals. Irish civil society is replete with groups clamouring for all sorts of additional reforms.[2] *We the Citizens* sought to step outside of the debates over the nature of the reforms that might or should be implemented, and instead to focus on *how* the reforms might be processed – i.e., the aim was to demonstrate the virtue of deliberative approaches by holding our own (pilot) citizens' assembly.

It was decided from the outset of the project that the agenda for the citizens' assembly should be set by Irish citizens, not by the project team. To that end, throughout May and early June 2011 a series of seven regional evening events were held across the country. These were open to all to attend, and without any agenda other than to discuss over a few hours the visions of ordinary citizens of what kind of Ireland they would like for the future. It was the themes emerging from these events that formed the basis for the citizens' assembly (CA) in late June.

As the regional events were drawing to a close, polling was commissioned from the Ipsos/MRBI market research company. This polling served two purposes, both to recruit our 100 CA members and also to measure the opinion of a representative sample of Irish citizens on a range of issues, based closely on the topics that had emerged from our regional events. The agenda for the CA was determined by the survey responses, resulting in all of Saturday being devoted to political reform-related issues and Sunday morning to taxation vs. spending. Expert witnesses were recruited to draft brief position papers, setting out both sides of the argument in question. These papers were circulated to the CA members in advance.

The 100 CA members were distributed around the hall in tables of eight, with a trained facilitator and note-taker at each table. At the start of each session the expert witnesses

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2   For a sample of some of the more prominent ones, see http://www.claimingourfuture.ie/ and http://www.2nd-republic.ie/site/

gave brief presentations summarizing their main points. There then followed an initial period of deliberation at each table, with the experts on hand to provide answers of fact or detail as required. Once these discussions concluded there was a brief round of plenary discussion, the objective being to give CA members an opportunity to hear about the tenor of discussions generally. The tables were then asked to complete another round of deliberations at the end of which they could make a series of recommendations. These were gathered together, and put on a ballot paper for the CA members to vote on.

The deliberative experiment

A deliberative process such as participation in a citizens' assembly is expected to impact on participants in at least two ways (Fishkin 2009), which can be summarized as follows:

1. *Greater efficacy and interest*; they should feel closer to the political system; they should have more interest in political and policy issues, and they should be more willing to become involved in public debate;

2. *Opinion shifts*; there should be changes in their opinions (at least in some policy areas) as a result of the deliberative process.

In order to measure these potential changes *We The Citizens* commissioned a large-scale survey from Ipsos/MRBI that followed international best practice in terms of ensuring a nationally representative sample for age, gender and region. The survey asked a large number of questions that were aimed at capturing the relevant effects of deliberation if they exist.

These questions were asked of a sample of 1,242 people between May and June 2011 (see Figure 1 for details). In the weeks immediately following the citizens' assembly, the CA members were re-interviewed as were 454 of the original sample, 101 of whom had received the same briefing document on the economy that had been given to the CA members. In addition, a fresh sample of 500 respondents was surveyed who had not been surveyed in the first wave of interviews. In all instances, precisely the same survey questions were asked of all the groups.

The purpose of having the group who were sent the briefing document was to separate out the effect of *new information* from the act of deliberation. With this we can determine if people's opinions shifted as a result of the information they were sent or because of the act of deliberation itself.

Figure 1: The We The Citizens deliberative experiment
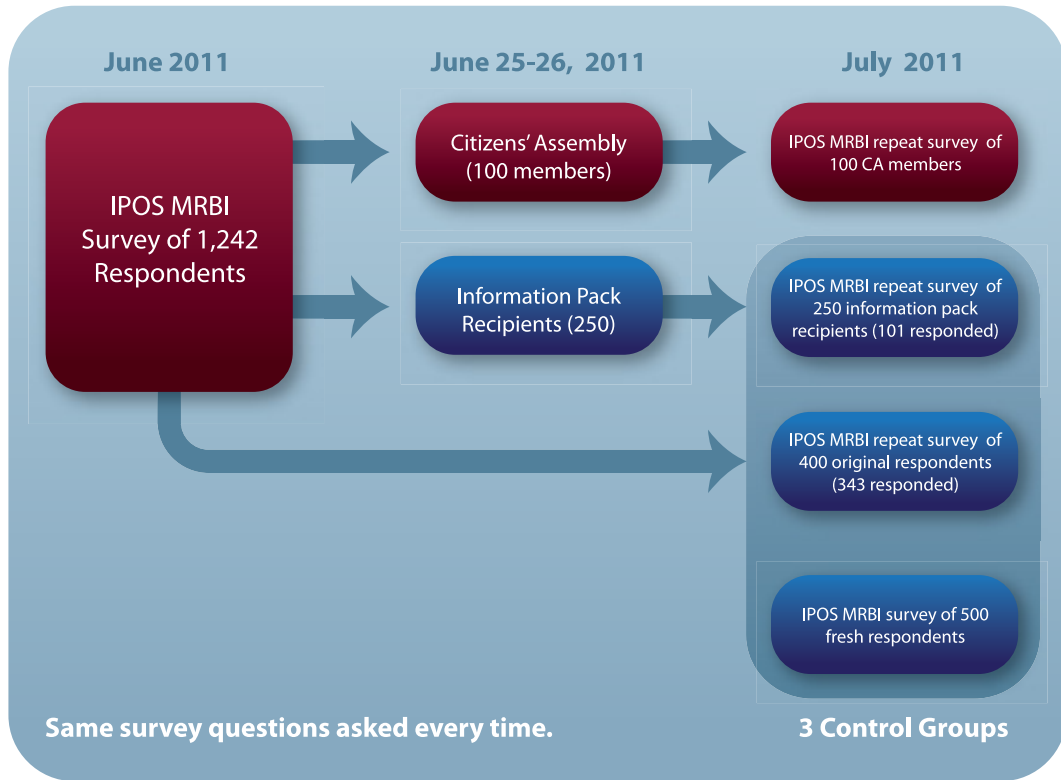
Furthermore the experimental research design allows us to take account of *the impact of being surveyed*. There is a legitimate fear that when you measure something, you affect it. So if a person is surveyed on their political opinions, the mere act of being surveyed makes them more interested in politics, and this could also affect how they behave before being re-surveyed. By including a large (500) control sample who are only surveyed once before the CA and then another large sample surveyed once afterwards we can measure the extent to which surveying is causing changes to the respondents' views.

We can report on the main findings.

Efficacy and interest

The data provide clear evidence that participation in the citizens' assembly had a positive impact on levels of interest in politics and willingness to become more actively involved.

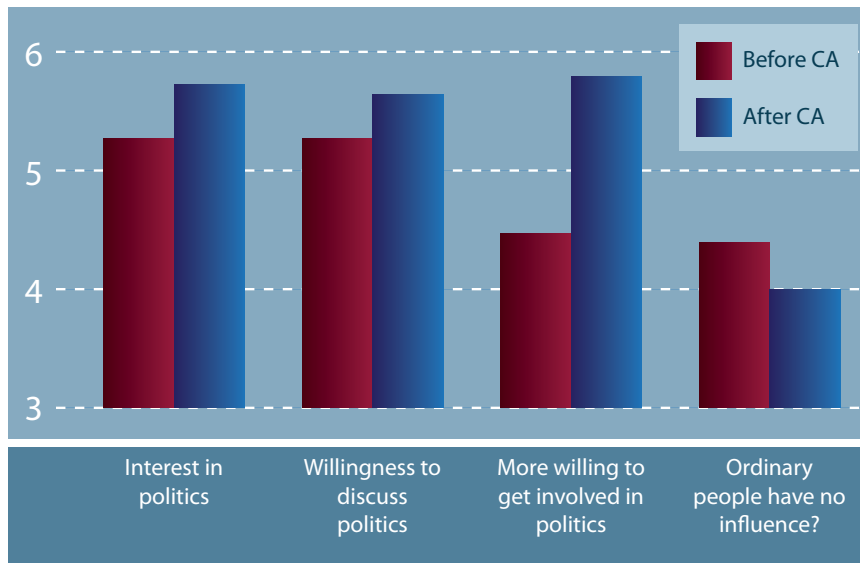**Figure 2:** Efficacy and Interest in Politics

Figure 2 summarizes the trends for the CA members, showing greater interest in politics, more willingness to discuss and become more involved in politics and a greater sense of efficacy (more people disagreed with the statement that ordinary people have no influence). Furthermore, all the opinion shifts are statistically significant and are distinctly different from those of the various control groups. In other words, the changes that we observe are not random or a result of chance: it is the participation in the CA that is causing these changes.

Figure 3: Boxplot of responses to levels of interest
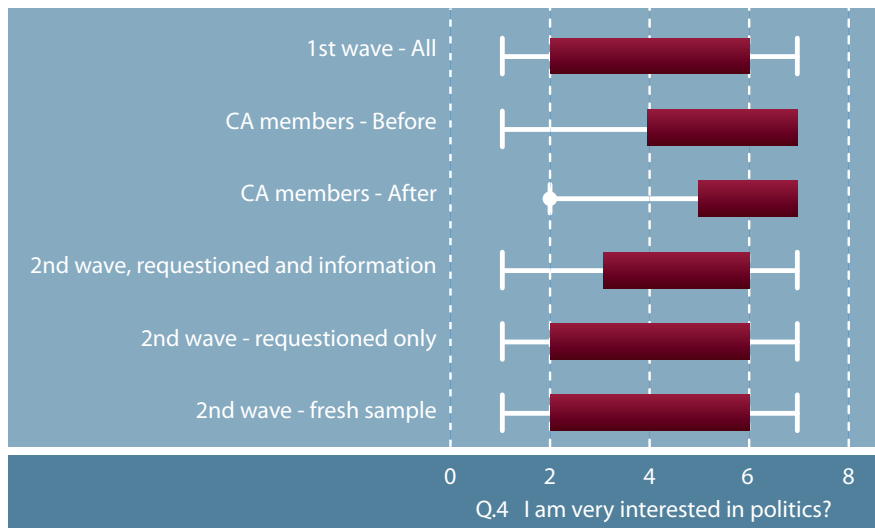
To give a sense of just how different the trends are for the CA members, Figure 3 reports a 'boxplot' which displays the distribution of answers among the different groups for the statement 'I am very interested in politics', for which the response 1 means very little interest and 7 is a great deal of interest.

This shows that the CA participants were initially much more interested in politics than the general population. This is understandable because although we randomly sampled people for an invitation to participate, it was likely that the type of person who would accept such an invitation would be more interested in politics than the average citizen. The CA participants are much more likely to be interested in politics initially, but as the evidence shows the impact of being involved in the citizen's assembly is much greater on this group (it becomes bunched up to the right of the scale) than on any of the other groups. As anticipated, there is also a shift (though a smaller one) among those respondents who received the briefing document. All the other first and second wave respondents are barely affected by the information received.

Tax and spending

Perhaps the most interesting findings were in the substantive areas of debate over the weekend. We found large effects on the beliefs and attitudes of our CA members when it came to economic attitudes.

One purpose of deliberation is to expose participants to the difficult choices politicians face. The classic question of trade-offs is between tax and spending. Traditionally voters are in favour of spending cuts, but against taxes. To force participants to think in terms of the hard choices between the two, the respondents to the *We the Citizens* surveys were asked where they positioned themselves on a 7-point scale on the following statement: 'the government should increase taxes a little and cut much more on health and social services'.

The evidence shows clearly that the CA participants became more willing to accept tax increases. There were shifts of opinion among the various control groups but these were less dramatic, with those respondents who received the briefing document on the economy coming second to the CA participants in terms of the degree of shift.

Figure 4: Taxation and asset sale options
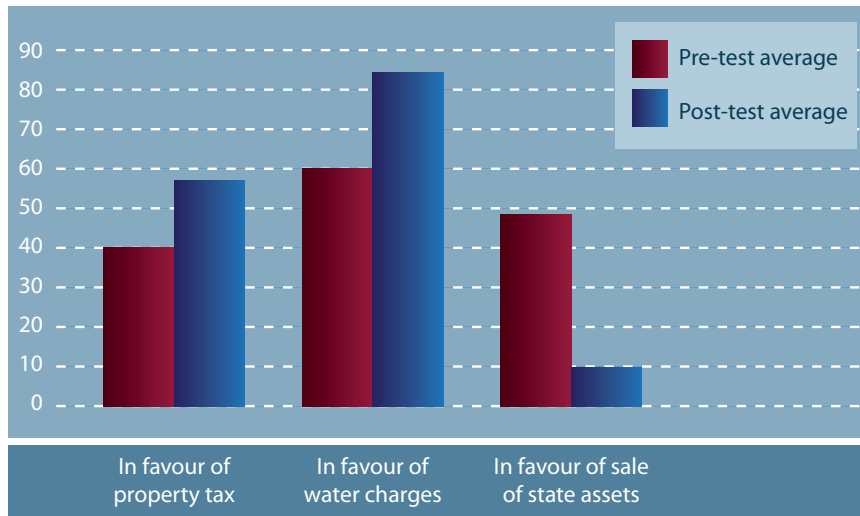
As Figure 4 reveals, the CA members moved to a large extent on every economic question we asked. In all instances these shifts were statistically significant; by contrast, there was hardly any movement over time in our various control groups and any changes that did occur were not significant. When asked about whether they were in favour or opposed to the introduction of a property tax there was a large and significant shift from 40% in favour to 56%. A similar shift took place among the members in their attitude to the introduction of water charges (up from 60% before the CA weekend to 85% afterwards).

The question on the sale of state assets saw the most significant movement of all as a result of the deliberation. Where less than half (48%) of the CA members had been in favour before the weekend, this plummeted to just 10% by the end of the weekend.

Political reform

There was generally less movement on the batteries of political reform questions. The one issue that saw the most significant shifts was over the amount of time members of parliament (TDs) should devote to local and national issues and to helping constituents sort out their problems.

The number of CA members who thought TDs working on legislation was of great importance moved from 37% to 62%. The numbers thinking that helping constituents was of great importance fell from 34% to under 10%. No such differences were found in the control groups on either issue. The respondents were also asked questions about

the amount of time they think TDs should spend on local and national issues. The CA seemed to have an impact in that CA participants shifted in both regards (Figure 5 shows the shift relating to local issues).

Figure 5: Local Service from TDs is a Strength
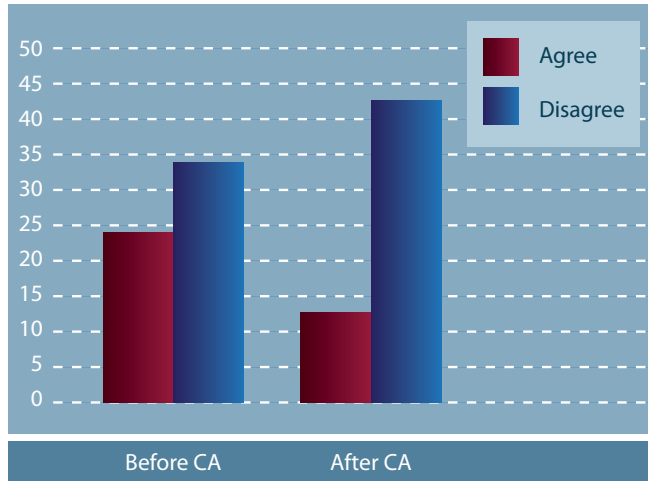
Conclusion

The findings are conclusive. As a result of their participation in the citizens' assembly weekend, the CA members showed significant shifts of opinion both in terms of feelings of efficacy and interest in politics, and also with regard to key substantive issues in politics. These changes were statistically significant, and were in marked contrast to the trends for our different control groups. In short, what this shows is that deliberation works. When given access to objective information, the opportunity to hear from expert witnesses and the time to debate and deliberate on these issues, citizens do make informed decision

The *We the Citizens* deliberative polling experiment has certainly been successful in research terms. And, while, it might be argued that all we have done is to a large extent replicate findings of previous studies (most notably Fishkin 2009), we would have two responses. First, this study has built in a series of additional control groups – more so than in previous studies – that are allowing us to test the veracity of the findings (notably by allowing us to control for information and survey effects): we have only just started to scratch the surface of this.

Second, we return to our primary motivation, which was to feed into the public debates over the desire of involving ordinary citizens in the ongoing debates over large-scale political reform in Ireland. Despite the best efforts of ourselves and others to propose deliberative approaches as a suitable methodology in this time of crisis, the common refrain, not least from members of the media commentariat, was generally along the lines of 'Ireland is different'. The view was that, even though deliberation might be a proven method in other contexts, 'things work differently here'. The findings reported here demonstrate how wrong the cynics were: deliberation works, and it works in Ireland too.

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Participation and Deliberation: a Case Study of Claiming Our Future

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This paper first sets the context by defining civil society and examining the nature of Irish democracy. It then focuses on a case study of a recent initiative Claiming Our Future (COF).

This short paper is aligned with Edwards (2005) vision of civil society as creative, collective, values based action that is capable of imagining alternatives. This understanding draws on Habermasian understandings of the public sphere as a

place of deliberation, the importance of rich associational life and the importance of normative values which aim for a good society. This definition was used in Ireland by the Carnegie Inquiry into Civil Society (2007) and is consistent with Powell's (2007) argument for a 'social left'. The stress on alternative ideas is important. Without a struggle of ideas political debate only focuses on what can be done within conventional institutions. Politics becomes managerial and fails to collectively maximise societal capacity to reach the full experience of humanity and development. Engagement of the electorate in ideational debate requires rich forms of participatory democracy and what Unger (2011) calls a 'high energy democracy'.

This paper examines the challenge Irish civil society faces in participating in political debate about ideas and its capacity to generate real and credible alternatives. Irish civil society has been described by the late Peter Mair (2010) as stagnant and passive, it can be seen as a 'low energy democracy'. The role civil society plays in political change is shaped and managed by the state which, through its institutions, places macro and micro practical and cultural boundaries on civil actors capacity to participate. Political science literature often refers to Ireland's four C's of Catholicism, Centralisation, Clientalism and Corporatism, these impacted on the nature of Irish civil society and its orientation to political imaginary. Participation in public discourse is limited to a pragmatic and anti-intellectual political sphere where consensus was valued and conflict and dissent resisted (Murphy 2012). This was reinforced by the nature of elite power and group think, the nature of the education and academy as well as the nature of the Irish media. In effect Irish civil society was characterized by an absence of overt ideology, conflict, ideas and debate about alternatives (Kirby and Murphy 2009). Historically shaped into 'silos' or discrete sectors (women, disability, unions, environment, farming etc), these pursue sectional interests and are less likely to engage in macro policy debate, an orientation reinforced by two decades of embracing partnership with the state.

A catch 22 exists. It is easier to mobilise people if they believe an alternative is possible, but without mobilisation it is difficult to generate political debate to develop alternatives. Even in the context of significant anger at the response to crisis there is a poverty of ambition and imagination about alternatives in Ireland (Unger 2011). Lack of capacity to engage with alternatives can partially explain the relatively muted response of Irish civil society to five years of economic crisis (Murphy 2012). This rest of this paper explores a recent attempt to develop a cross sectoral alliance to promote progressive alternatives. It begins pre crisis in 2007 and traces the process to March 2012.

In 2007 Community Platform (CP), a network of 28 national antipoverty and equality networks and organisations identified the need to promote a national debate on

alternative economic and social development models. This was a conscious decision to step outside the smothering embrace of social partnership and create space and tools to think about alternatives; in Habermasian terms to create new public spheres. They were motivated by an awareness that 'in a mature democracy - everyone has the right to participate in generating an alternative vision, and everyone shares the responsibility in ensuring we succeed' (Kirby and Murphy 2008:1). Recent research by Harvey (2009) evidenced how the state was consciously reshaping its relationship and becoming more controlling of Irish civil society, this prompted civil society activists to reflect on the growing tension in the relationship between the community sector and the state and what this meant for participatory democracy. Over a period of months a network evolved though personal invitations. Overlapping with Obama's 2008 presidential campaign by late 2008 it named itself 'Is Feidir Linn' ('Yes We Can' in the Irish language) and set out to imagine and articulate an alternative Ireland. In June 2009 they launched '*Shaping our Future'* and determined to move out of silos and develop broader alliances. The rest of 2009 was spent on a deliberative exercise talking, listening and building trust with other sectors in Irish progressive civil society[3]. While reaction amongst civil society organisations was mixed, the dialogue culminated in January 2010 in a meeting between the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, some from the Environmental movement, the Community Platform, Tasc and Social Justice Ireland. Each had published visions of alternatives, were not pursuing electoral strategies and were eager to collaborate. Shared barriers to building impetus for change included a tendency to work in silos, the difficulty in breaking through to mainstream media and the challenge of linking national work to people on the ground at local level. Over a number of tentative meetings three key principles emerged; that action should be *society led* in state free public spheres, that *cross sectoral* work was important and that methods needed to *enable national and local mobilisation and deliberation.*

The next step was to identify ways to build consensus, momentum, solidarity and alliances among those interested in this vision of collective, creative, values based action. Various strategies emerged and the focus became the creation of a public sphere; a public event to mobilise support and popularise the idea that alternatives were possible. Inspired in part responses to the crisis in Iceland *(the Anthill)* a public deliberative event was planned for 30th October 2010 to provide an opportunity to discuss and deliberate on values, the implications of these values for new policy choices and to identify ways of cooperating and coordinating to advance these values and policy choices. Up to 20

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3   They contacted faith, environmental, youth, trade union, development, the Trotsky Irish left, libertarian Irish left, democracy campaigners, culture and arts groups and academic communities.

local meetings and 20 national planning activities were held throughout the country in the lead up to event, on the day over 1300 booked in (there was demand for up to 2000 places), 100 trained facilitators volunteered, €60,000 was raised from philanthropies and unions, office space, public relations skills, book keeping, information technology and event management skills were all volunteered. There was extensive use of social media; use of deliberative dialogue on the website was facilitated through free deliberative software.

There was significant media interest in the deliberative event in the Industries Hall of the RDS in Dublin City on Saturday[4]. A number of priority values were agreed (equality for all, environmental sustainability, accountability from those in power, participation by people in decision making that impacts on them, solidarity between all sectors of society and a sustainable alternative to our boom-and-bust economy). These values were then reflected in six agreed priority policy agendas (a more equal society, change in the way we govern ourselves, decent and sustainable jobs, radical reform of the banking system, and renewal of our public services). Following this model subsequent national *ideas events* were held to explore Income Inequality (in Galway in May 2011) and Economy for Society (in Cork in November 5th 2011) and Democracy (in Dublin May 2012). Each event was designed as a creative deliberative space, accommodating 300 people to carefully consider alternative models of development. The focus on action relevant to peoples lives was maintained though minimum wage, election, gender quotas and wealth taxes campaigns. The focus on alternatives has been progressed, through a core Plan B political economy campaign which runs over 2012-2013. A recall event is planned for November 3rd 2012 in Dublin.

While COF subsequently struggled to capture the sense of scale or energy created in the buildup to and execution of the RDS event in Oct 30th 2010 it has managed to maintain a relatively healthy infrastructure of groups and networks of supporters. 7,000 citizens have registered on its website to receive a monthly e-letter. There are networks in 20 local areas country wide, thematic working groups and a mobilisation group to plan action campaigns. All of this is coordinated in monthly coordinating committee meetings. While the intention is to be a fluid movement, a strategy document sets out a plan to 2013. The movement remains voluntary based, but has secured basic funding of €50,000 p.a. from the Joseph Rowntree Trust. COF has secured office space and has a full time voluntary administrator who coordinates a small number of interns.

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4   See www.claimingourfuture.ie for video footage of the day, outcomes form various events, blogs, details of various projects and 2011 Plan of Action

Beyond agreeing rhetorical sound bites there are significant challenges in maintaining a broad coalition of people who use different language and have different starting points in where they approach the debate about alternatives. The focus of COF has been to deliberate but not to force consensus on such issues. While the initial rush of enthusiasm has faded there still remains a positive groundswell of support for the original intentions of Claiming Our Future and its analysis. Many welcomed the initiative, the risk taking and the hard work. For many local activists the public space and to some degree the hope and optimism created by COF fills a vacuum and allows people make national relevance of their local work. A significant short coming was the inability to seize the moment to establish and build on the energy created in 2010 and to have immediate follow on in terms of keeping people involved and active. There is always the challenge of maintaining a cross-sectoral space. There are more activists from the community sector than the environmental, trade union and other sectors. While these strong working relationships have been advantageous they also represent a fault line as there is a danger of being self-reinforcing as the language, culture and work patterns of one sector can dominate; a space can appear exclusive and there is the risk of clique formation (perceived or real). COF has been mistakenly perceived as a front for various political parties (occasionally Sinn Fein, more often the Labour Party) and also as a new political party. It is also vulnerable to perceptions that individuals may be promoting their own agendas.

Conclusion

It is difficult to assess whether this experience has to date contributed to developing a greater public sphere and/or increased the range of policy alternatives being discussed. There are no established indicators of success and it is still early days, but there has been some public sphere and media success. There have been accusations of idealism, and Utopianism, charges have been made of gullibility and naivety. The reader will make her own judgement but for many activists, doing nothing is not an option and a certain amount of idealism and utopianism is inevitable if the objective is to stretch existing boundaries of the political imaginary. There are tensions between short-term relevance and vaguer longer term objectives of promoting policy alternatives and deliberation. There is a danger of duplicating the work of existing single issue campaign groups, hence, the focus has been on solidarity with other campaigns rather than initiating specific campaigns.

The focus on concern for urgent debate about alternative futures remains largely absent from mainstream party politics. The nature of Irish political discourse coupled with

media ownership points away from a high energy democracy. Debate about political alternatives is unlikely to happen from 'above'. If alternatives are likely to come 'from below' the challenge remains to nurture and cherish public spheres and civil society where citizens can deliberate and develop their political imagination (Smith 1998). COF remains part of our collective challenge of creating public space to collectively imagine and argue for a better world.

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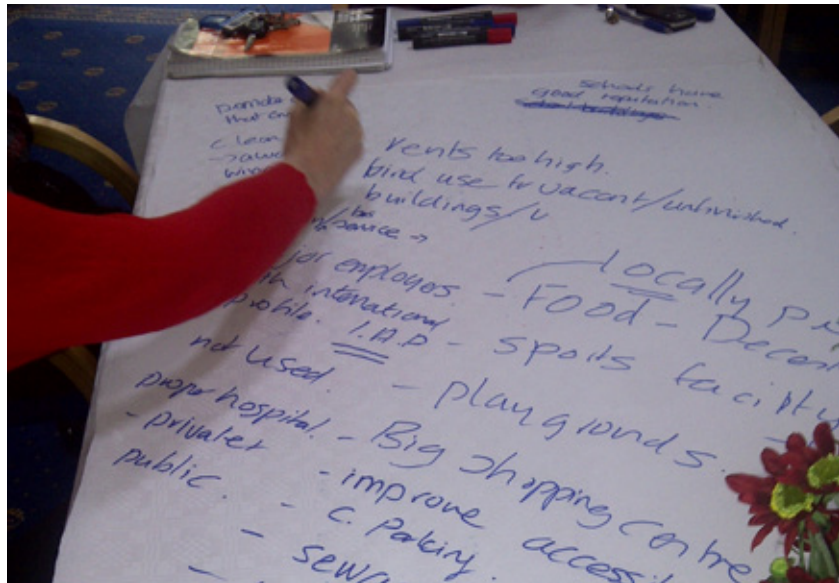Smith, A.M. (1998).   *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary,* London: Routledge

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Expanding the Role of the University in Promoting Civic Engagement

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Introduction

With the publication of the Hunt Report (2010) on the future of third level education in Ireland, there has been a renewed focus on the role of universities and other Higher Education Institutions in promoting the opportunities for and the capacity of citizens to actively engage in democratic life, often referred to as 'civic engagement'. While many universities can point to some level of involvement in broadly defined civic engagement activities, these have usually been confined to pockets of staff and students interested in community impact or participatory democracy. The purpose of this article is to explore how civic engagement might become a central part of universities' role in society.

Civic engagement can take place in a variety of overlapping spaces, for example: democratic renewal through participation; social, cultural and economic development; broadening the curriculum and encouraging active citizenship amongst students; environmental sustainability and other long-term challenges. Within this article we focus on engagement as democratic renewal. We do this by firstly identifying some of the principal logjams – conceptual, dispositional and skills - that have developed over time, and that may limit the potential of civic engagement as a democratic activity. The paper proposes ways in which universities can play a strategic role in facilitating more effective and empowering processes of democratic engagement.

Naming the logjams

There is no shortage of research (Smith 2005, McInerney and Adshead 2010) or anecdotal comment pointing to the weaknesses of participatory approaches to 'doing democracy.' From these we suggest that it is possible to identify three distinct albeit inter-related domains within which civic engagement logjams can occur. These variously involve diverse actors such as bureaucrats, civil society and elected representatives, who variously differ on conceptual understandings, dispositions and skills. Our analysis draws on the Irish experience, but could be applied elsewhere.

Conceptual understanding

There is little evidence to suggest that many of the more formalised civic engagement arenas in Ireland have been developed upon solid conceptual platforms. Frequently, increased levels of civic engagement emerges in response to a crisis, perceptions of crisis or because it is the 'right thing to do' at a particular time. While such instrumental approaches have some potential to generate democratic outcomes, they are always subject, particularly at times of pressure, to being undermined by their inevitably underdeveloped conceptual foundations. These conceptual difficulties are compounded when questions of social justice and the demands of public administration are added to the mix.

From a democratic viewpoint, distinctions have been drawn between formal or procedural democracy, within which representation is key, versus substantive democracy, where deeper forms of participation are encouraged. In reality, to a greater or lesser degree civic engagement represents a fusion of substantive or participatory ambitions with the formal, representative orthodoxy (Luckham, Goetz and Kaldor 1999). Problems arise of course when advocates of participation are confronted with arguments that the representative is primary, questioning the legitimacy and accountability of non-elected voices.

Approaches to social justice further challenge democratic understandings, especially those that identify system failures as the primary cause of exclusion – particularly in the legal and democratic system (Berghman 1995). Clearly these contrast with those who emphasise the centrality of personal responsibility and seek to present the poor as some form of moral underclass (Levitas 2004). Consequently, social inclusion is either something to be achieved through system change or, by contrast, can only be produced by altering the 'handicapping' characteristics of the poor (Sullivan 2002). From a civic engagement perspective, the system's approach implies a need to construct specific, tailored avenues of engagement to enable those who are marginalised to engage with democratic institutions, while the moral underclass approach can be expected to reject such special treatment.

Finally, the role of public administration is also a source of contestation. Is the role of bureaucracy simply to follow, narrow and restrictive rules, to obey its political masters, or should it have a role in facilitating a more deliberative society (Bryer 2007)? A more deliberative society would allow greater levels of bureaucratic discretion, particularly in the area of social equity, for instance.

Attitudinal factors

Within this sphere, the impact of embedded attitudes or dispositions in inhibiting democratic participation need to be considered, reflecting Bourdieu's twin notions of habitus – "the ingrained dispositions within a given group or class which allow 'social structures to reproduce themselves among individuals who share the same material conditions of existence' – and doxa – the "naturalization of the arbitrariness of a given social order in the mind and body of a social agent" (Mann 1999:181). Ingrained dispositions and the assumed 'naturalness' of such dispositions can create situations where civic engagement is rejected or restricted as an option, or is managed in such as way as to prevent its full potential being realised.

Skill shortages

Evidence from Ireland, the UK and elsewhere suggests that on the surface at least, organisational challenges frequently arise within civic engagement processes. While these may of course derive from lack of conceptual clarity or from a particular dispositional location, they may also simply be due to a lack of appropriate skills and technical knowledge. Some of the key technical weaknesses that have been identified include:

- A lack of capacity to create structures / processes to address power differentials and to enable shared goal setting.

- The absence of dialogue skills to enable exploration of common or shared values and attitudes and to deal with situations of conflicting values and attitudes.

- A privileging of certain forms of expertise and contributions over others.

- A poor demonstration of linkage between engagement and outcome.

Thus, a range of conceptual, dispositional and technical elements can individually or, more likely, collectively conspire to confound efforts to develop and deliver effective civic engagement. In the next section, some suggestions are made on how the resulting civic engagement logjams can be addressed by universities.

The potential role of the university

Increasingly, universities are challenged to demonstrate their relevance to the communities within which they are situated. The Universities Act (1997) had previously sets out a comprehensive range of 'objects' that can be seen to fall within a civic engagement rubric. These include: promoting the cultural and social life of society, while fostering and respecting the diversity of the university's traditions.

Universities should support and contribute to the realisation of national economic and social development and disseminate the outcomes of its research in the general community (Government of Ireland, Part III, Chapter 1, S.12).

Within the realm of democratic renewal and civic engagement a number of possible routes could be followed. We now outline some potential roles for the university in facilitating democratic renewal. Universities can:

Table 1: Democratic Renewal
Stimulate discussions on constitutional review and the potential for greater recognition of participatory democracy within the constitution;
Undertake research on the benefits of engagement, policy enhancements etc.
Act as an honest broker to facilitate dialogue in a variety of different contexts;
Support concept stretching dialogue on themes of democracy, social justice and the role of public administration and their role in deepening ideas about engagement.
Supporting the existence and functioning of internal civil society "public spaces" as civic engagement options.
Researching, legitimising and reclaiming protest as a form of civic engagement.

There is no doubt that addressing attitudinal and dispositional issues are amongst the most complex challenges facing efforts to promote deeper civic participation. However, universities are well placed to draw on a range of resources to meet these challenges. Some of the ways this might be done include:

Table 2: Changing Attitudes
Undertaking research to look at the dispositional/trust elements of civic engagement, leading to enhanced possibility for inter-disciplinary research.
Developing participatory approaches to research which can later be used to address attitude differences.
Undertaking research that produces innovative, cutting edge answers to the core questions of citizenship, such as whether ordinary people can take 'good' decisions?
Collaborating with public, private and third sector bodies in order to design processes to support cultural change.

Finally, there are some highly relevant ways in which universities can lend their support to addressing technical, skills logjams. Universities can:

Table 3: Education and Training in Democracy
Support, test and document different forms of participatory processes, ranging from information sharing to consultation to shared decision making.
Provide opportunities for lifelong civic education, training in social enterprise and other active forms of civic engagement.
Support the use of emancipatory / action research strategies that may provide a base of civic engagement.
Support capacity building programmes in democratic institutions at both national and local levels.
Provide permanent but apolitical fora where citizens can develop ideas, take part in participatory research and experiments in democratic deliberation.
Undertake external evaluations (independent or commissioned) of participatory processes.

One example, amongst the many that could be included here, is the work undertaken by the University of Limerick's (UL) Department of Politics and Public Administration in supporting the development of a participatory Hub Strategy for Ennis under the National Spatial Strategy. This initiative, entitled Ennis 2020, brought together a variety of UL masters level students, on different programmes of study, to undertake a community visioning exercise that has provided the foundation for the strategy. Other examples

include the *Community Knowledge Initiative* at NUI Galway and *Campus Engage* (www.campusengage.ie) a collaboration of five higher education institutions.

Conclusions

This paper has described some of the ways in which universities can play a role in supporting civic engagement as an element of democratic renewal. In general terms, a broad and ambitious research and practice programme on lifelong civic participation, education and capacity building is needed. To do this, active international, national and local networks of experts in the area of democratic renewal must be fostered. This approach would work best in tandem with more bottom-up, participatory approaches which bring citizens into the university and university staff into communities to facilitate discussion of important long-term social, economic and political challenges.

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