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The Role and the Future of Deliberative Mini-publics: A Citizen Perspective

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Abstract: The last decades have witnessed a spread of democratic innovations. Chief among them are deliberative mini-publics that gather randomly selected citizens to discuss salient public issues with the aim of generating some kind of ‘uptake’ in the broader political system. Political theorists have addressed the pros and cons of such innovations. Nevertheless, little is known about the citizens’ perspective on such mini-publics and on their role in the political system. Drawing on qualitative in-depth interviews, this article scrutinizes participants’ expectations. Findings show that they are motivated by internal expectations (desire of sociability, learning, and civic duty) and external expectations (presence and voice). Participants fundamentally perceive mini-publics as a way to enrich the linkage between voters and their representatives, without forsaking the logic of electoral delegation. This work suggests that citizens may have complex and evolving conceptions of democracy.

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1. Introduction

Recent years have witnessed the development of democratic innovations to foster citizen participation and deliberation. Chief among these innovations are deliberative mini-publics as citizens’ assemblies, consensus conferences and deliberative polls (Smith, 2009). These processes gather randomly selected citizens to discuss salient political issues with the aim of generating some kind of ‘uptake’ in the broader political system (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006).

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Most empirical research dealing with mini-publics focuses on testing theoretical assumptions about the internal dynamic and the effects of deliberation on participants (for an overview of the research see Grönlund et al., 2014). These works have improved knowledge of how deliberation functions in such small-scale settings. However, political theorists continue to question the role of mini-publics. Some advocate the use of such innovations to shape public policies (Fishkin, 2009), while others criticize this option because it neglects the goal of mass participation (Lafont, 2015). But little is known about the citizens' perspective on such innovations. What do participants expect from their commitment? How do they envision the role of mini-publics in the democratic system?

Answering these questions is fundamental to grasp the citizens' conceptions of democracy. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) have initiated a debate about the kind of democracy that citizens would like. Challenging the deliberative trend, they argue that citizens do not want to be more involved in public decision-making nor in deliberation about political issues. They prefer to let politicians decide. Following this seminal work, other scholars surveyed the level of support for different conceptions of democracy, showing that the interest in deliberation and participation is much more widespread than expected (Bengtsson and Christensen, 2016; Webb, 2013; Neblo et al., 2010; Gherghina and Geissel, 2017). Despite some differences, they show that citizens' conceptions of democracy can be classified into three categories: participatory, technocratic and representative. Nevertheless, the main limitation of existing research is the vague and broad nature of these preferences. Using survey methods, citizens are invited to indicate their preferred decision-makers: citizens, elected officials, experts and even businesspeople. But these studies do not scrutinize the way citizens perceive concrete opportunities of deliberation in the current democratic system. More precisely, they do not explain why some citizens engage in mini-publics, and if they reject the logic of electoral delegation or not. To fill this gap, we analyse the desires and expectations of those who are actually confronted with such democratic innovations: the mini-publics lay participants.

This article presents the results of a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with participants of two Belgian mini-publics. These reflect the two main types of deliberative mini-publics (Papadopoulos, 2013). The first is the G1000 and was organized by civil society. The second is the Climate Citizens' Parliament and was organized by public authorities. The in-depth feature of interviews seeks a deep understanding of the participants' perspective (Legard et al., 2003). Interviewees could freely express their expectations towards the mini-publics as well as the role of this process in the political system. This is essential to go beyond the results of the survey-based research.

The analysis indicates that two types of incentives attract citizens. The first can only be achieved by participating in the mini-public: namely a desire of sociability, learning, and a sense of civic duty. This underlines that citizens who participate in democratic innovations are not only attracted by their uptake in the system, but also by internal rewards. Secondly, regarding the output of the mini-publics, the findings reveal that the mini-public participants

want to provide the decision-makers with information about their concerns. They aim to enrich the representative linkage between voters and politicians, without forsaking the logic of electoral delegation. According to their perspective, engagement in deliberative processes and voting are complementary ways to hold the representatives accountable. This suggests that citizens may have complex conceptions of democracy based on the contribution of different actors at different stages of the decision-making process.

The comparison of interviewees also indicates that citizens' conceptions of democracy are not static. We can see a shift in the beliefs of some participants. The less politically engaged citizens participate mainly because of internal expectations, but develop a more participatory vision of democracy during the mini-publics. Indeed, the citizens' conception of democracy does not rely on fixed preferences. They can evolve when citizens participate in democratic innovations.

The structure of the article is as follows. It begins with the characteristics of deliberative mini-publics and the normative debate about their role in the broader political system. Next, the two cases are presented, and the data collection and analysis are described. The results are subsequently presented with illustrative quotes. The paper ends with a discussion about the complex and evolving nature of the citizens' conceptions of democracy.

2. The Role of Deliberative Mini-publics

2.1 The Spread of Mini-publics

Political deliberation among randomly selected citizens goes back to ancient Athens and the Italian republics of the Middle Ages (Manin, 1997). The modern use of this practice dates from the seventies with the creation of citizens' juries and planning cells (Carson and Martin, 1999). Among political theorists, Robert Dahl was a pioneer to conceptualize the creation of deliberative mini-publics in his sketches for an advanced democratic country (1970). He proposed the creation of one mini-public for each major political stake and one central mini-public to determine the agenda of the others. Nowadays, one can observe the spread of mini-publics in representative democracies (Grönlund et al., 2014). The most standardised forms are citizens' juries, consensus conferences and deliberative polls (Smith, 2009). Citizens are randomly recruited in the population. With the help of trained facilitators, participants deliberate about specific political issues. Experts and stakeholders are often invited to share their views and feed the discussions. At the end of the process, participants make a series of recommendations or vote on some statements that are presented to the decision-makers and the broad public.

Mini-publics are favoured because they appear to realize a combination of two democratic goods (Smith, 2009). First, mini-publics are supposed to embody the ideal of inclusive governance. Through random selection, they tend to attract citizens with diverse opinions and experiences (Fung, 2007). The aim is to avoid the over-representation of already active and more advantaged groups that characterizes forums recruited through an open call. Some

scholars argue that if enough citizens are recruited, it is possible to create a microcosm of the society from a descriptive point of view (Fishkin, 2009). Others insist on the virtue of diversity generated by this method of recruitment (Landemore, 2013).

Second, mini-publics offer a deliberative space to generate considered judgements. This mode of communication refers to theoretical turns observed in political theory in the 1990s, which put the notions of mutual justification, public reason and preference (trans)formation at the centre of democracy (Dryzek, 2010; Manin, 1987). Mini-publics invite citizens to discuss their opinions through a process of informed, respectful, and competent dialogue. The diversity of the participants' profiles and experience is supposed to guarantee the quality of the decision (Landemore, 2013).

2.2 *The Theoretical Debate about the Mini-publics' Role*

According to Fung, the development of deliberative mini-publics is a key ingredient to foster and renew civic engagement in contemporary democracies (2007). But more practically, what role should mini-publics perform in the political system? In the last decade, theorists have provided different answers to these questions. To structure the discussion, it is possible to distinguish between the influence on public decisions, the educational function and the effects on the broader deliberative system.

Regarding the influence on public decisions, a trend argues for the institutionalisation of mini-publics (Setälä, 2017). According to the shortcut view (Fishkin, 2009), the deliberation of the mini-public substitutes for the deliberation of the broader public, and its recommendations should be translated into binding decisions. Some go as far as to advocate for the creation of legislative assemblies composed of randomly selected citizens (Gastil and Wright, forthcoming). But this kind of proposal is not unchallenged. Another trend in democratic theory criticises the use of mini-publics to shape public policies (Chambers, 2009). Lafont argues that if democrats think about the future of democracy in terms of micro citizens' assemblies, they can potentially achieve the goals of inclusiveness and reasoned judgement, but they will abandon the goal of mass-participation (2015).

Beyond policy influence, some scholars propose to develop deliberative mini-publics for other purposes. Numerous mini-publics, especially those organized by foundations and civic organisations, have an educational function. They are concerned by the transformation of citizens who participate in the process (Fung, 2007; Papadopoulos, 2013). This taps into the participatory tradition (Mansbridge, 1999). The realisation of this educational function is partly observed by research on the transformation of participants' attitudes and opinions induced by deliberation (Grönlund et al., 2010; Andersen and Hansen, 2007; Fishkin, 2009). Evidence shows that mini-publics increase participants' knowledge of the discussed topic as well as their civic skills. But the main limitation of such educational function is its restriction to the individuals who take part in such forums.

The last role of mini-publics is their influence on the whole political system, including on actors who were not actively involved in the process. In light of the systemic turn of deliberative theory (Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012), some theorists argue that mini-publics can only be fruitful if they promote deliberation in the broader public sphere (Curato and Böker, 2016). For instance, Niemeyer proposed to develop mini-publics that provide the public opinion with information about complex political issues (2014). Using the testimony of stakeholders and experts, the participants could synthesize the different positions and arguments in terms understandable by the wider population. According to this perspective, mini-publics cannot be evaluated for themselves, but for their contribution to the entire democratic dynamic.

2.3 *The Citizen Perspective: Towards a Qualitative Approach*

The previous considerations show that political theorists disagree on the legitimate role of mini-publics. But this normative perspective is not sufficient to assess the democratic potential of such innovations. Mini-publics are inclusive processes that seek to convince ordinary citizens of the legitimacy of this form of political engagement. This invites us to examine the mini-publics' nature and role from the perspective of those who attend them. This research investigates the participants' expectations towards these deliberative processes and their role in the broader political system.

Previous studies have mostly scrutinized the ways social, political and psychological characteristics affect engagement in mini-publics. Findings indicate that random selection does not break the logic of self-selection. Mini-public participants come from more advantaged groups of the society, notably in terms of educational level (Curato and Niemeyer, 2013; Goidel et al., 2008; Griffin et al., 2015). Those who accept the invitation to join also seem to be more interested in politics (Fishkin et al., 2014) and demonstrate a more positive appraisal of the political system (Curato and Niemeyer, 2013). In addition, recent studies underline that psychological traits do matter. Willingness to take part in mini-publics is notably driven by individual levels of extraversion, conscientiousness and openness (Jennstål, 2018). These traits interact with contextual factors to induce particular motivations to engage in the mini-public (*Ibid.*). An experimental study also indicates that the social dominance orientation¹ influences the potential appraisal of a participatory and deliberative procedure (Werner et al., 2017). Some citizens envision citizen participation as a goal per se, and do care about this procedural component when they evaluate the decision of a deliberative process. Other citizens consider engagement as a means to achieve objectives and mostly focus on the outcome.

This study complements these findings. Survey-based studies demonstrate that only some citizens want to join mini-publics and value deliberative participation. They identify the participants' profile but fail to disentangle the participants' expectations towards such processes. Even when tackling motivational factors, this method does not allow us to understand the way citizens perceive the role of mini-publics. For instance, when

participants check the option ‘I can influence politics’ to justify their engagement (Jennstål, 2018), the interpretation of this response is unclear. Does it reflect a rejection of elections towards a more direct and participatory form of democracy or a confidence in the elected officials’ responsiveness? What should be the mini-public’s influence according to the participants? To fully explain what drives engagement in deliberative processes, it is necessary to explain how and why citizens want to influence politics instead of letting politicians decide. In order to grasp these perceptions and aspirations, we develop a qualitative research drawing on in-depth interviews. The aim is to learn how mini-public participants actually envision this form of engagement and its role in the current political system. Open questions seek to achieve a wide and deep understanding of the interviewees’ perspective, beyond their preference for one type of decision-makers. Moreover, in-depth interviews rely on the interviewees’ reflexivity. Respondents refer to their own reasoning and evolutions associated with a social event. They may indicate if their vision of the deliberative mini-publics’ role has evolved during the process and afterwards. The next section describes how this methodology was carried out in the two selected case studies.

3. Listening to the Citizen Perspective: Case Selection and Methodology

3.1 Two Cases of Mini-publics

Two deliberative mini-publics have been selected to conduct the field research: the G1000 and the Climate Citizens’ Parliaments (CCP). Both cases were located in Belgium, a country without a long tradition of organized citizen deliberation and involvement in decision-making (Caluwaerts, 2012). It has often been presented as the best illustration of consociational democracy where the leaders of each social segment solve political problems in non-transparent negotiations (Lijphart, 1981; Deschouwer, 2012). In this elitist context, grassroots citizen participation was avoided because it was thought to exacerbate social conflicts. There were neither practices of direct democratic tools² nor organized deliberation with citizens. Nevertheless, since the late 1990s, Belgium has experienced an increasing number of democratic innovations like many European countries (Van damme et al., 2017). These processes have been developed by civil society and public authorities to address growing distrust in politics. Belgium is therefore a fruitful area to study the way citizens perceive mini-publics in a context where they are increasingly implemented to cure the malaise of representative democracy.

The two cases reflect two main types of mini-publics (Papadopoulos, 2013). Some mini-publics are organized by civil society. These grassroots mini-publics pursue an educational goal by engaging ordinary citizens in deliberation about public issues. They usually provide the decision-makers with the citizens’ recommendations. Other mini-publics are initiated by public authorities themselves around a policy area. In these cases, citizens are commissioned to produce a report on the topic that may feed the actions of public authorities.

Table 1. Two cases of mini-publics

<i>G1000</i>	<i>Climate Citizens' Parliaments</i>
Organized by an ad hoc group of citizens (bottom-up)	Organized by public authorities (top-down)
National level of governance	Local level of governance
704 participants	45 participants
1 day of deliberation	3 week-ends of deliberation
Agenda determined by citizens online: social security, immigration, redistribution of wealth	Agenda determined by initiators: climate change and renewable development
Output: list of statements with vote to prioritise them	Output: report with recommendations written by participants

The G1000 was organized in unique circumstances. After the 2011 elections, the country was left without an effective national government for several months. Flemish and French-speaking parties could not find an agreement on a potential reform of the federal structure. The first argued for increased autonomy for sub-entities, while the second defended the status quo. This gridlock situation caused frustration in the population. During this troubling time, a group of citizens decided to create a mini-public gathering 1,000 inhabitants³ of the country. Their main goal was to show that citizens are able to express a considered opinion between electoral campaigns. On 11th November 2011, 704 randomly recruited participants deliberated about three issues selected from a large on-line consultation: social security, immigration and redistribution of wealth. This case constitutes one of the largest face-to-face mini-publics in the world. A list of statements with votes to prioritise them was eventually given to the presidents of Belgium's seven parliaments.

The Climate Citizens' Parliament was organized by public authorities in the province of Luxembourg, an intermediary level of governance in Belgium. This province is the largest and most rural of the country. Under the leadership of the local minister in charge of sustainable development, a deliberative mini-public was initiated in 2014. The timing was connected to the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris. From September to October 2015, 45 randomly selected participants deliberated during three weekends. Having heard experts and stakeholders testimonies, they addressed potential policies related to sustainable development on the territory of their province. At the end of the process, participants wrote a report underlining different concerns and proposals for public policies. This report was presented in a plenary session of the Provincial Council.

3.2 Conducting and Analysing the Participants' Interviews

This research is based on in-depth interviews with mini-publics participants. From the full list of randomly selected attendees, we selected respondents for their diversity in terms of gender, age, education and professional occupation. As usual for qualitative research, the aim was not to reach a representative sample of the targeted population but to discover the

diversity of meanings attached to their experiences (Legard et al., 2003). Citizens were contacted by phone to propose a face-to-face interview and every one of them agreed to meet the researcher. These interviews are retrospective. They were conducted two years after the process for the G1000 participants and four months later for the PCC participants. This allowed the interviewees to reflect on their experience during the process but also afterwards. The number of interviewees was determined by the principle of saturation: meetings were gradually planned until no additional information was provided by new interviews. In total, 23 mini-public participants have been interviewed. The following table sums up the interviewees' profiles.

Table 2. Profile of interviewees

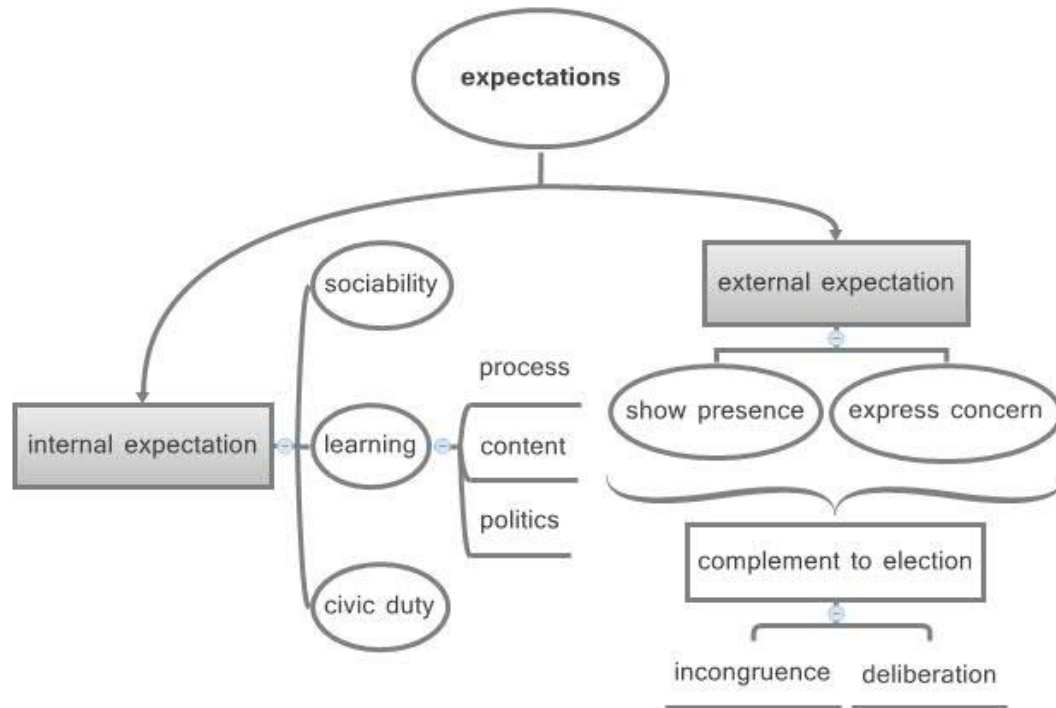
Gender	Men	12
	Women	11
Age	18-35	8
	36-59	13
	60+	4
Occupational position	Public sector employee	7
	Private sector employee	4
	Self-employed	3
	Retired	3
	Unemployed	6
Education	< Secondary	11
	Undergraduate	9
	Graduate	3
Mini-public	G1000	12
	Climate Citizens'	11
	Parliament	

The interviews lasted from one to two hours. Participants were asked to reflect on their expectations before their participation, their experiences in the mini-publics and their views about such mechanisms in the democratic system. According to the logic of in-depth interviews, the structure was sufficiently flexible to permit topics to be covered in the order that most suited the interviewee and to allow responses to be fully probed and explored (Legard et al., 2003). The whole conversation was audio-recorded with the agreement of the respondent. The 23 interviews were transcribed verbatim and the NVivo software was used to manage the large amount of data (QSR International, UK).

The analytical strategy has been structured in two main stages. First, we conducted a data-driven thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) in order to grasp the expectations towards the mini-publics reported by the participants. Every interview was analysed with the aim of identifying meaningful segments: a sentence or a group of sentences. These segments were coded as initial codes. The initial list has been progressively organized by merging, dividing and hierarchizing codes. For instance, after careful readings of the interview excerpts, the theme 'learning' has been subdivided into three sub-themes: 'process', 'content' and 'politics'. Afterwards, we identified a global coding scheme structured in main themes and sub-themes. These themes have been stabilised by using the double dual criteria of internal

homogeneity and external heterogeneity. At the end of this stage, we identified a final thematic map as illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: Thematic map: expectations towards the mini-public



Second, a more holistic strategy was carried out (Rossman and Rallis, 2012). The previous thematic analysis is useful to discover the diversity of meanings attached to the mini-publics, but it is important to analyse how those are related to each other in the interview. To analyse this internal logic, each participant's interview was summarised. This summary includes the expectations about the mini-publics, but also the broader political trajectory and opinions of the interviewees. The summaries were systematically compared afterwards to identify some common patterns and differences.

4. Two Types of Expectations

When asked to reflect on their expectations towards the mini-public, participants refer to a diversity of elements. To make sense of them, a main distinction is introduced.⁴ On the one hand, there are internal expectations that can be defined as gratifications relating to attendance in the mini-public. These rewards are more individualistic and can only be achieved by participating in the mini-public. On the other hand, there are the external expectations concerning the uptake of the mini-public in the broader political system. This section describes these two forms of expectations, and subsequently, how they are related to different types of participants.

4.1 *Internal Expectations*

Three internal expectations can be observed in the interviews: a desire of sociability, learning and the fulfilment of a civic duty.

Firstly, the desire of sociability is a major source of attraction for participation. This expectation is related to the desire to join a social event and the enjoyment of meeting fellow citizens. A main feature of mini-publics is socialisation with unknown people. The following statement from a G1000 participant provides a good illustration. At the time she received the invitation to take part in the mini-public, she had just divorced and been forced to move to another region. She was unemployed and felt alone. She was primarily interested in participating in the mini-public to meet new people in a different area from her everyday routine. When she reflects on the G1000, she talks about the good organization of the day, including the food and the childcare.

Well, I was unemployed at that time, I was bored to death at home, and I thought: ‘well, why not!’ It was a chance to go out, to meet people and to do something I never do. So, I said to myself ‘let’s be crazy and... let’s go...’ And after all, I don’t know if it was useful, but I think it was well organized. (G1000, woman, 40 years old)⁵

Secondly, participation in the mini-public can also be conceived as an opportunity for *learning*. This reflects the educational function of deliberative mini-publics (Fung, 2007). The learning content is threefold. Citizens can participate to discover how the mini-public is organized and the deliberation is facilitated. This reflects a curiosity for the process in itself and can be linked to specific interests of some participants. For instance, a participant of the CCP worked for a trade union, and was in charge of coordinating meetings with other employees. She was interested in discovering the organization of the CCP to reuse techniques of group management in her own job.

Citizens also want to acquire more knowledge of the issue discussed during the process. This is illustrated by the disappointment of one CCP participant. He wanted to know more about climate change but was disappointed by the experts’ testimonies. He explains that they were too concerned by local strategies to reduce the use of energies but not enough by the trend of global warming at a larger level.

Because yes, I really expected more, to hear specialists who would come and explain the impact of climate change, yes, the how and the why of things, but at a bigger scale, not just talking about pollution and things like that, because pollution is not... well, that’s it. (CCP, men, 26 years old)

The process of learning can finally apply to the political system in itself. This was the case for participants of the G1000 and CCP. Mini-publics can be the occasion to increase one’s knowledge of the public decision-making process.

Well, like I said before, I was intrigued, curious, I wanted to see what it was. And I had hopes; I was hoping something good would come out of this meeting of people and that it would be an enriching experience, so that we could learn something from it. And we can

now say that I know a little bit more about politics than before the Climate Citizens' Parliament [...] We knew we were going to present an opinion to the Provincial Assembly, so yeah, I was also wondering "what's the Provincial Assembly? How is it composed?" I think we learned something from it. (CCP, men, 28 years old)

The third type of internal expectation is *fulfilment of a civic duty*. The satisfaction of complying with the ethic of voting is regularly used to explain why people go to the ballot (Blais and Galais, 2016). Interviews indicate the same rationale for engagement in mini-publics.

I must admit that I felt that as a 'duty', you know... It was like when we go voting. We are happy to be allowed to vote but, at the same time, it's a real pain in the arse. So, um, it was, well, not a good deed, because I had a pretty good day, but it was still exhausting. (G1000, man, 29 years old)

The previous quote shows an essential element to understand the vision of mini-publics through the eyes of participants. For this member of the green party, there is a clear connection between voting and being engaged in a democratic innovation. This connection will be further discussed with the external expectations.

4.2 *The External Expectations*

Beyond these internal expectations, mini-public participants are not indifferent to the potential output of mini-publics outside the doors of the discussion rooms. Interviewees discussed their wishes but also disappointment about the uptake of the deliberative processes.

All interviewees expressed an expectation that the mini-public should allow citizens to make their presence felt (*presence*) and express their concerns (*voice*) in the political arena. In the following quote, a woman explains that it was important to be present in order for her professional category to be represented. The ideal of incorporating diversity in the deliberative mini-publics is in line with the desire of some participants to 'represent' a segment of the population.

Because I heard that everybody, every layer of society was represented. So I thought that if every woman farmer said no, it wouldn't be OK. So, I went there, yes, cheerfully. (G1000, woman, 49 years old)

The use of in-depth interviews allows us to understand why those citizens intended to make their presence felt and express their concerns via the mini-publics. For the grassroots G1000 as well as for the state-organized CCP, participants explain that they wanted to influence the decision-makers in the framework of representative democracy. In the following quote, a participant states that elections and participatory forums like the G1000 are two sides of the same coin. Citizens choose between programmes that candidates and parties made to constituents during the campaign. But according to him, citizens have to 'follow' their representatives to ensure they act according to the concerns of the population.

You have to vote, because if you don't vote, the others decide for you. If you don't vote, you can't do anything. It's like giving up democracy. To me, people need to vote and also they need to follow those they gave their advice, their vote to. They need to follow them. If they see that they take bad measures for the people, they need to protest, to participate in meetings like the G1000, you can find them everywhere in Belgium. The follow-up is as important as the vote. (G1000, man, 32 years old)

But why do citizens not want to let representatives act independently from their constituents? The answer is linked to the perceived divergence between concerns of the population and concerns of the politicians. The involvement of a G1000 participant is very illustrative. This mini-public was born in a situation where parties were unable to form a government because of differences of opinion about the reform of the federal state. But for this participant, the transformation of the institutional structure of the country does not interest ordinary citizens. These problems are created by politicians. He wanted to participate in the mini-publics to draw the representatives' attention to this distortion.

I hoped it would maybe lead to more concrete results, results that are closer to the people's wishes than to fights between parties. Well, than useless quarrels... (Laughs). I hoped it would bring politics down to earth while saying: 'What are the real problems?' without beginning to fight about something that is less important as the linguistic oppositions (G1000, man, 46 years old).

Some participants go further and explain that politicians fail to represent the people because they live in a world apart, with its own rules, disconnected from the everyday life of citizens. It is embodied by the common narrative that politicians 'do not know the price of basic food'. After a certain time, politicians only focus on the evolution of their career and want to acquire material and symbolic benefits. In this circumstance, mini-publics should draw attention to what does matter to lay citizens.

I think that's because... Well, to me, they [politicians] are way too busy with their ideas. They are 'parliamentary', 'parliamentary' people. They have too many... they don't have the same views as we, ordinary citizens, do. So, they focus on their own business, they don't value some aspects that we would like to change, or things like that. So, I think it [the CCP] is good to renew their thinks (laughs). To try to go forward, to do something. And then I thought it would be good. If they could do things like this more often, to ask the citizens' opinion to make decisions, I think it would be great (CCP, woman, 42 years old).

When asked to further explain why they were willing to participate in the mini-public, participants state that the deliberative nature of this type of democratic innovations matters too. The previous types of expectations could be observed with different forms of political action which challenge the power of the elites. However, participants of the G1000 and CCP also value the deliberative feature of the process. The exchange of arguments among participants with different backgrounds is supposed to produce a legitimate voice of the people.

Well, when you attend the G1000 or... or citizens' groups in a broader sense, your state of mind is more, uh, maybe you have the ability to take a step back, or you are really motivated and you really want to get things done, etc. But what I think is that the mix of ideas can maybe bring something else. Because I see things in my way and another one will see them

in his way, we exchange, we discuss and then... But the issue remains the same. I mean, you can look at this chair, you will see it in your own way and I will see it differently, but basically it remains a chair. Uh... and I think that this exchange, this mixing of ideas should open more perspectives, and create a salutary thinking and, at some point, solutions that could be more 'intelligent', more convenient maybe than... the political class, which works on short term really, we see their mandates for the coming years, they try to get re-elected, etc. In general, the ideas are more or less known, they don't really change [...] and this goes further than a simple opinion poll (G1000, man, 52 years old)

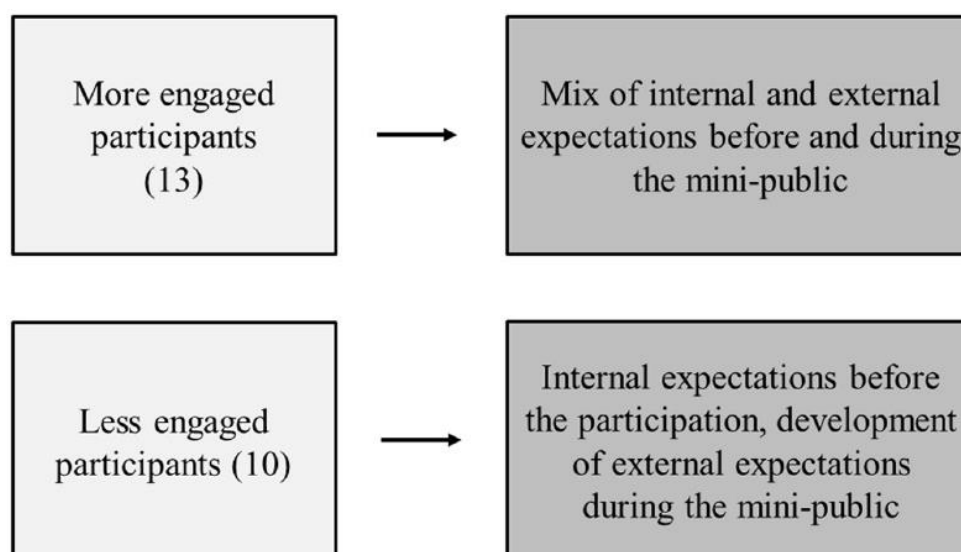
In the previous quote, the participant compares the deliberative processes to the traditional oppositions between political parties. He explains that the shortcoming of this way of conducting politics lies in the fact that actors stay on their prior position without trying to find a solution towards the common good. He considers that citizens who participate in mini-publics can benefit from their different perspectives to find innovative solutions to tackle political issues.

In short, when mini-public participants are asked about their external expectations, they hope that mini-publics offer a space of expression between electoral campaigns. This is justified by the perceived incongruence between politicians and the lay citizens' concerns as well as the advantages of a deliberative feature.

4.3 *The Relationship between Internal and External Expectations: the Interplay with Political Engagement*

How are these two types of expectations related to each other? Is one of them more important to explain the willingness to join the mini-publics? The analysis of interviews shows that answers to these questions are contingent upon the type of participants. The second stage of data analysis based on the comparison of summaries reveals that the expectations depend on the citizen's engagement in the political realm. This is summarized in figure 2.

Figure 2. Political Engagement and Expectations.



During the interviews, participants were asked to explain what their general attitude towards politics is. Every interviewee introduced himself or herself as politically interested, attentive to the news and concerned by some public issues, which is congruent with the previous survey-based research identified above. Discrepancy appears when they reflect on their practices. On the one hand, 13 interviewees portrayed themselves as politically engaged and active in the public realm. They mention current or previous membership in civic organisations or political parties. Some also explain that they are in contact with official representatives by regularly attending the municipal assembly or sending them letters. On the other hand, 10 interviewees introduced themselves as rather passive citizens. They explain that they feel interested in politics, but they do not actually undertake political actions. Subsequently, we refer to these groups as the more engaged participants and the less engaged participants. Note that this distinction concerns the subjective self-presentation of interviewee and not the actual number of political actions that they can undertake.

Both groups of participants mention internal and external expectations towards the mini-public they have attended. Nevertheless, from a diachronic perspective, these motivations do not play the same role. For the more engaged participants, both internal and external expectations are present before the participation. Those citizens are motivated by meeting new people, learning from this experience and expressing their concerns in the political process as illustrated by the following quote of a G1000 participant. He is a member of the green party and considers this form of engagement as a clear continuation of his previous conventional political engagement. According to this perspective, the mini-publics only expand his repertoire of public action.

And I believed it was a way to give my opinion, other than by voting, it was really simple even if it wouldn't change the face of the world... It was also a good way to meet people. I like being confronted with other ideas, other opinions and uh, well that's it. (G1000, man, 25 years old).

Participants who portrayed themselves as less engaged in the political realm show a different pattern. Interviews indicate that before the beginning of the process, they mainly had internal expectations towards the mini-publics. They were motivated by knowing more about the content of the discussion and by taking part in an unusual social event. During the process, they developed more external expectations about the two mini-publics and their uptake in the political system. They explain that they 'found out' that such mechanisms could be connected to the political process and could empower citizens beyond the elections. This is illustrated by the statement of a CCP participant who explains she accepted out of curiosity and to learn more about climate change. By discovering the process, she realized that such mini-publics could be useful to take into account the concerns of the population.

- It would be a nice if the citizens' opinions were taken into account with things like that [CCP], and if they did it a little more often.

- Is this an idea that you had before attending this event or something that you reflected upon?

- No, no. Yes, it's afterwards, it really came to my mind afterwards. I went there to find out what it was about and out of curiosity. Before, no. I really didn't expect that. I didn't even expect this point of view. I didn't think I would look like this at things we did and said. I really didn't expect that. (CCP, woman, 42 years old)

By participating in mini-publics, these less engaged participants develop new expectations towards the role of citizens in the decision-making process. They support a more participatory conception of democracy. Note that the analysis did not show differences between interviews conducted four months (CCP) and two years (G1000) after the mini-publics.

4.4 *The Desirable Future of Mini-publics Through the Eyes of Participants*

After having shared their experience in the G1000/CCP, interviewees were invited to reflect more generally on the desirable future of deliberative mini-publics in the political system. All favoured the development of such processes. The justifications rely on the internal and external expectations presented in the previous sections. But when it comes to the final decision, none of the 23 interviewees endorsed the idea that mini-publics should make binding decisions. The following quotes show that citizens, while arguing for the development of mini-publics, prefer to let elected representatives decide at the end. The common narrative is based on the lack of appropriate competences among citizens. Participants explain that lay citizens can feed the policy-making process with (innovative) proposals closer to the concerns of the population. Nevertheless, they continue to endorse the principle of division of political labour with elected officials specialized in public issues (Manin, 1997). Participants assume that this specialisation is meant to increase the competences of decision-makers and accordingly the quality of their policies or decisions.

- Would you be in favour of giving real power to this kind of mechanism?

- No, I don't think so. I think you still need people who know how to do their job, who know what they're talking about because uh... yes, citizens can give their opinion; of course, they can...well. But you still need someone who is, who is specialized in a particular field, who knows what he is talking about, who can manage, because I don't think that citizens could manage all this on their own. So, no... no. You still need people in charge, people who know what they're doing and...and that's it. It makes sense to me. (G1000, woman, 20 years old)

All interviewees favour an advisory role for this kind of democratic innovations. Mini-publics are perceived as a complement to electoral democracy. That was observed for the two kinds of mini-public: the one organized by the civil society (G1000) and the one organized by public authorities (CCP).

5. Discussion: Complex and Evolving Citizens' Conceptions of Democracy

The findings of this study generate insight into the way mini-public participants perceive deliberative processes and, more broadly, the democratic system. These popular perspectives can be related to the normative views present in the first section. Internal expectations, especially learning, fit with the educational function of democratic innovations (Fung, 2007).

Citizens may participate and favour mini-publics because they constitute a source of personal enrichment (Curato and Niemeyer, 2013). This indicates that when considering deliberative processes, the connection with the decision-making process is not the sole relevant dimension. The deliberative dynamic can be a motivational factor per se. This is a concrete action point for practitioners who intend to increase attendance in democratic innovations. During the recruitment phase, they could insist on these intrinsic rewards which have the advantage to be less hypothetical than the uptake of the recommendations in the political system.

The external expectations can be connected to the mini-publics' external influence. Interviews indicate that participants conceive mini-publics as part of a broader democratic system where deliberative processes and elections are complementary. A main pattern revealed by the qualitative analysis is the continuity between elections and mini-publics through the eyes of participants. They argue that democratic innovations and voting belong to the same toolkit that citizens may use to make their voice heard and hold representatives accountable. In this respect, participation in mini-publics is not seen as an alternative to electoral delegation. This explains why participants do not want to give a binding power to mini-publics. They are in favour of mini-publics that feed and enrich the democratic representation.

These findings allow us to reframe the scholarly debate about citizens' conceptions of democracy. Previous research has forced the respondents to determine the type of actors who should govern in a democratic system, notably citizens versus politicians (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002). The findings of the present study reveal that this opposition does not make sense for the citizens who accepted to take part in deliberative mini-publics. They do not argue that these mini-publics should substitute for the decision-making by politicians. The citizens' conceptions of democracy cannot be simplified and seen as a preference for only one type of decision-makers. They desire complex democratic processes where decisions result from the contribution of diverse types of actors with different legitimacies.

These complex conceptions of democracy can find echoes in the development of the deliberative theory in terms of sequences. Parkinson (2006) has developed a macro or systemic approach of deliberative democracy by distinguishing the different stages of the cycle model of the policy process. In fact, the interview analysis indicates that mini-public participants consider this form of participation relevant at some stages, but not all. More precisely, they desire to draw attention to specific problems during the agenda setting stage and to make proposals during the policy formulation stage. But they do not want such mini-publics to make binding decisions. This responsibility should remain in the hands of elected representatives. Citizens support a view where mini-publics can contribute to foster deliberation in the democratic system (Curato and Böker, 2016) but they do not consider it as a shortcut that could bypass the actions of other democratic institutions and actors (Fishkin, 2009; Lafont, 2015).

Another main pattern in the analysis is that citizens may evolve in their conceptions of democracy. This research indicates that participation in mini-publics may not only induce transformation in policy opinions, but also in the way they perceive democracy. It is the case for less politically engaged participants. They join mini-publics for internal expectations and discover new practices and discourses during the process about the virtue of citizen participation and deliberation outside the ballot box. Previous analyses of the citizens' conceptions of democracy presented these preferences as stable (Bengtsson and Christensen, 2016; Gherghina and Geissel, 2015; Webb, 2013). However, the retrospective interviews with the participants show that they are quite evolving. When individuals participate in democratic innovations, their vision of the role of citizen participation and deliberation in the democracy may evolve.

This evolution corroborates the results of Curato and Niemeyer (2013) on the Australian Citizens' Parliament, but the direction of the change is different in this case. They observed a shift in their comparative analysis of the participants' discourse in the first and last sessions of the parliament. In the first session, the impact of recommendations emerged as the most resonant theme. In the last session, participants reflected more about the intrinsic goal of deliberation like expression of mutual respect and recognition. The analysis of participants' interviews shows a different pattern because the changes concern only one group of participants and towards more external expectations. This difference can be explained by the different approach. Curato and Niemeyer focused at an aggregate level on the content of group-discussions during which citizens were asked to reflect about their experiences. The emphasis on the intrinsic goal of deliberation does not imply that participants have abandoned the more instrumental goals. It is precisely what has been captured with the retrospective interviews that allow us to study the evolution of each individual over time.

Consequently, the transformations of democratic conceptions in deliberative settings warrant further research. The analysis does not indicate discrepancies related to the moment of the interview. Interviews conducted a few months after the mini-public (the PCC case) and those made a few years later (the G1000 case) show the same pattern. When invited to explain how the change appeared, interviewees explained retrospectively that the evolution was progressive. Accordingly, the nature and the chronology of this evolution deserve more scholarly attention. As it has been done for change of policy opinions (Goodin and Niemeyer, 2003), further research should determine whether the change occurs at the outset, during the deliberation or after the event. Participants could be interviewed at these different stages to systematically assess their conception of democracy (or absence of) evolution. Similarly, mini-publics are usually short deliberative events (lasting from one day to a couple of weekends). One could expect that democratic innovations require a longer engagement as participatory budgeting to influence more deeply citizens' conceptions of democracy.

More broadly, the results of this research raise another question. Participants are not the only players and their expectations can conflict with the expectations of the mini-publics organizers. Few studies deal with the perspectives of the political elites who establish

democratic innovations. Evidence shows that they are mostly interested in collecting experts information and answers to questions they have precisely determined (Hartz-Karp and Carson, 2009; Sintomer et al., 2016). They conceive it as a management tool to increase the efficiency of public action. This can create conflicts or cause frustration if citizens intend to challenge the objectives of decision-makers and raise new points on the agenda as suggested by this research. This potential clash of expectations is a main stake for the future development of mini-publics.

6. Conclusion

This article represents an attempt to qualitatively analyse mini-publics participants' views about such engagement and its role in the democratic system. It leads us to three main conclusions.

First, internal expectations, namely a desire of sociability, learning, and the fulfilment of a civic duty, are crucial to explain citizens' attendance in mini-publics. Beyond their potential uptake in the political system, deliberative processes produce rewards that matter to citizens. This is essential for analyzing citizens' attitudes towards democratic innovations because it indicates that deliberation can be attractive in itself.

Second, participants conceive mini-publics as a complement to electoral forms of participation, like voting or party membership. This suggests that the debate about citizens' conceptions of democracy cannot be simplified and seen as a preference for only one type of decision-makers. Mini-publics participants want elected representatives to take the main political decisions and, at the same time, participatory processes that provide these representatives with feedback and proposals. Citizens may accordingly show complex democratic preferences, articulating participation, citizen deliberation and representation.

Third, popular beliefs about how the government should work can be subject to evolution. Our findings indicate that the less politically engaged participants develop a more participatory conception of democracy by participating in mini-publics. Citizens' preferences regarding procedures for political decision-making are accordingly not static. In particular, engagement in democratic innovations stimulates demand for greater citizens' participation and deliberation in the political system. Further research on citizens' conceptions of democracy should take this evolving character into consideration.

The in-depth nature of this study allowed us to grasp the complexity of the rationales behind the participants' perspectives. The two cases were located in Belgium, where deliberative and participatory processes have recently been implemented. But as suggested by Jennstål, the perception of mini-publics and their place in the broader political system may vary across different situations (2018). This should invite other researchers to develop similar research design to observe whether the citizens' expectations towards deliberative processes do differ in other contexts, including in countries with a longer tradition of citizen involvement in decision-making.

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¹ This notion was initially perceived as a psychological trait, but now more presented as a value (Werner et al., 2017).

² Except for very rare cases at local level.

³ G1000 and CCP participants were randomly selected from lists of fixed and mobile lines, regardless of their nationality.

⁴ This opposition is inspired by the oppositions developed in the study of political participation between general and selective incentives (Teorell, 2006).

⁵ All participant quotes have been translated from French into English by the author.