

# **Deliberation and Policy-Making: Three Ways to Think About Minipublics' Consequences**

Vincent Jacquet and Ramon van der Does

UCLouvain and F.R.S.-FNRS

Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

**Abstract:** Policy-makers are increasingly experimenting with various ways to involve citizens in policy-making. Deliberative forums composed of lay citizens (minipublics) count among the most popular of such innovations. Despite their popularity, it is often unclear in what ways such minipublics could affect policy-making. This article addresses this issue of conceptual ambiguity by drawing on an original systematic review of the literature. It shows that the literature has approached these consequences in three ways: congruence with decisions, consideration in the policy-making process, and structural change. The article discusses the implications for empirical research and points out trajectories for future research on deliberative minipublics.

Keywords: participatory governance, policy-making, impact, minipublic, PRISMA

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Public disillusion with the functioning of the political system is growing in most contemporary representative democracies. Various innovations have recently been proposed and implemented to face this challenge (Elstub and Escobar, 2019). Minipublics such as citizens' assemblies, consensus conferences, and citizens' juries, count among the most popular of such initiatives (Grönlund et al., 2014; Fung, 2015). These forums bring together a group of citizens that deliberates on a political issue, listens to stakeholders and expert testimonies, and subsequently formulates a set of policy recommendations. Minipublic participants are recruited through a process of (quasi-)random selection in order to establish a diverse sample of citizens (Carson and Martin, 1999).<sup>1</sup>

The spread of minipublics has stimulated a lively exchange among political theorists about the role such innovations should have in the political system. Their most fervent advocates conceive of minipublics as effective vehicles to make contemporary democracy more deliberative and inclusive (Fung, 2007; Dryzek et al., 2019). James Fishkin, for instance, considers that the output of well-designed minipublics offers the view the people would have if they had the time, resources and motivations to carefully discuss political issues (2009). These innovations should accordingly be used to shape the views of decision-makers. In this vein, some radical proposals also suggest giving authoritative power to randomly selected assemblies (for a discussion see Gastil and Wright, 2019). Other scholars argue that minipublics should promote political participation and deliberation in the wider political system (Felicetti et al., 2016; Curato and Böker, 2016). According to this view, minipublics should have an indirect impact on the policy-making process. Minipublics could for instance synthesize and disseminate arguments into the public sphere in terms that can be understood by the broader population in order to foster the quality of argumentative exchanges at a systemic level. According to Simon Niemeyer, for example, minipublics could scale up deliberation to every political setting if they succeed in becoming an exemplar for other grass-root practices (Niemeyer, 2014).

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Other political theorists are nevertheless more skeptical about the democratic virtues of minipublics (Chambers, 2009; Pourtois, 2016). Most notably, Christina Lafont argues that the focus on micro-deliberative settings may lead to bypassing deliberation in the public sphere and create a new form of elites detached from the mass public (2015). Others also point out that minipublics lack formal accountability to other citizens (Parkinson, 2006). Landa and Pevnick (2020), finally, argue that minipublics should not make binding decisions, because there is no guarantee that participants will not act according to their own private interest or be manipulated by the bureaucracy in charge of the organization of the debates. They therefore call for a purely advisory role for minipublics.

Despite ever-growing scholarly attention paid to minipublics, the nature of their consequences on the policy-making process remains unclear. Whereas political theorists continue to exchange about the ideal role of minipublics, most notably the binding character of their recommendations, both in previous and existing cases the recommendations produced remain advisory. Even in the most institutionalized minipublics, such as the Canadian Citizens' Assemblies on electoral reform (Fournier et al., 2011) and the Irish Constitutional Citizens' Assemblies (Farrell et al., 2019), only *recommendations* are transmitted to decision makers. This raises a fundamental question: what kind of consequences can minipublics have on the policy-making process?

For the past thirty years, the literature has provided rich insights into this question. Enthusiastic about the development of minipublics, scholars were initially concerned with showing that such micro-forums can sometimes leave discernible traces on policy-making (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006). Yet, the proliferation of case-specific analyses has led to a wide variety of understandings of the nature of the consequences minipublics can have on the policy-making process. For instance, some studies analyze the content of subsequent decisions taken by a national authority (Fan, 2013), while others focus on the effects on a regional administrative

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system (Gourgues, 2010) or the event's visibility in the public sphere (Felicetti et al., 2016).

These different understandings of consequences make it difficult to draw general lessons about the role minipublics can and do play in policy-making.

The present article starts to fill this gap by mapping and systematizing how preceding work has conceptualized minipublics' consequences on policy-making. It is not our goal to assess the various normative positions on mini-publics. The main objective of our review is analytical. We rely on a systematic review of the literature on minipublics' policy-making consequences published before 2019 (N = 131). Originating in health and clinical sciences, systematic reviews are now becoming increasingly more common in public administration to map the main developments in a research field as well as to identify caveats in previous research (see for instance Cucciniello et al., 2017; van der Heijden and Kuhlmann, 2017). Based on this review, we make three key contributions. First, we propose an original conceptual framework that differentiates three main types of consequences that minipublics can have on the policy-making process: congruence with decisions, consideration in the policy-making process, and structural change. We constructed this conceptualization inductively from our systematic review of existing studies. Our second contribution is the comprehensive overview we offer of the existing literature on each of these three types of consequences. We show concretely how they appear in the literature and point out what their implications are for empirical research. Our review reveals that academic concern for minipublics' consequences on the policy-making process has increased since the early 2000s but has remained focused on immediate rather than structural consequences. This leads to our third contribution: we identify multiple research trajectories to overcome the limitations of previous studies. We propose to broaden the scope of empirical work on the topic and provide several methodological suggestions.

The article begins with a description of the data and methods used to conduct the systematic review. The next section presents the main trends in the literature on minipublics and introduces

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the three types of consequences. In the final section, we discuss the results and identify avenues for future research.

## **In Search of Policy-Making Consequences**

### **Literature Search and Selection Criteria**

Previous attempts to synthesize the literature on minipublics' consequences on policy-making are either narratives that do not systematically search and map the literature (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006; Fung, 2007; Smith, 2009), or systematic reviews that focus on a particular country (Masuhara et al., 2016), policy area (Safaei, 2015; Street et al., 2014), or type of policy-making consequence (Michels, 2011). To the best of our knowledge, this is the first attempt to provide a review of the respective literature that is both *comprehensive* and *systematic*. The findings are reported in line with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Moher et al., 2009).

The review relies on a search in the Scopus database. Its content largely overlaps with that of the other major social science databases and has the advantage that it also includes book chapters and monographs. Such a database search is a common strategy in systematic literature reviews (e.g. Ritz et al., 2016; van der Veer and Haverland, 2018).<sup>2</sup> The search was based on the title, keywords, and abstract and included all scientific publications published before 2019 (last search performed in June 2019). It relied on the following search terms that reflect common ways of referring to minipublics :

‘minipublic\*’ OR ‘mini-public\*’ OR ‘mini-populus’ OR ‘minipopulus’ OR  
‘deliberative poll\*’ OR ‘planning cell\*’ OR ‘citizen\* jur\*’ OR ‘citizen\* assembl\*’ OR  
‘citizen\* panel\*’ OR ‘issue\* forum\*’ OR ‘twenty-first century town meeting\*’ OR  
(‘consensus conference\*’ AND ‘deliberat\*’)

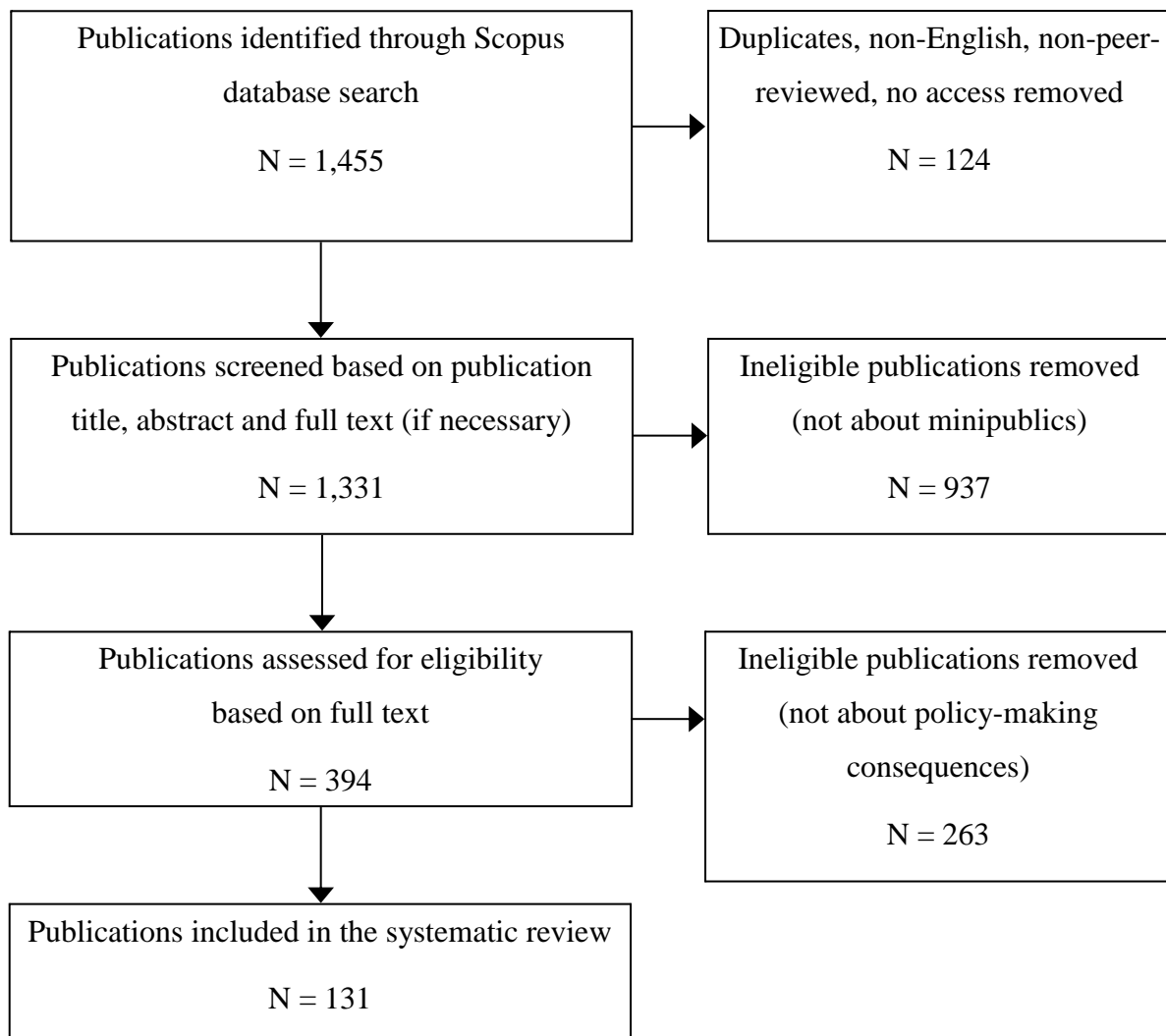
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'Consensus conference\*' needed to be complemented with 'deliberat\*' because otherwise the number of retrieved documents increased by several thousands. A scan of these additional documents revealed that this was because in medicine a consensus conference refers to a meeting of experts (see for instance Einsiedel and Eastlick, 2000).

The initial search resulted in 1,455 publications (for a detailed presentation of the database, see Jacquet and van der Does, 2020).<sup>3</sup> After the removal of duplicates, we reviewed all peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters in edited volumes, and monographs from academic publishers written in English. This reduced the sample of potentially eligible publications to 1,331. We then excluded publications that did not deal with minipublics defined as a forum that involves structured discussion among unorganized lay citizens, with an attempt to make 'some claim to representativeness of the public at large' (Goodin and Dryzek, 2006: 221) by engaging citizens through a process of random selection or targeted recruitment. These definitional criteria rule out processes that bring together organized interests and/or experts to discuss an issue (e.g. consensus conferences in medicine), those that aim at direct collaboration between lay citizens and government officials (e.g. collaborative governance), and those that rely predominantly on self-selection (e.g. many participatory budgeting initiatives). This reduced the database to 394 publications.

Based on the full text, we subsequently retrieved all articles that dealt with consequences (or absence of) on the policy-making process defined as anything resulting from the minipublic on the broad process of collective decision-making that goes from agenda-setting in the public sphere to policy evaluation (Howlett and Giest, 2013). The final sample is composed of 131 publications (for the full list of included publications, see the online appendix). Figure 1 visualizes the search and selection process. For all of the publications, we retained the following basic information (if available): author(s), publication year, document title, source title, source number, doi, and abstract.

**Figure 1.** PRISMA flowchart



### Coding and Reliability

To ensure reliability, we conducted the coding of the publications collectively. First, one researcher screened the titles and abstracts of the initial publications to assess whether these dealt with minipublics following our definitional criteria. Two researchers then independently checked a random sample of 10% of the codes and disagreed with the first researcher only once

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(inter-coder agreement of 99.2%). Next, one researcher assessed whether the remaining 394 publications dealt with minipublics' consequences based on the title, abstract, and, if necessary, the full text. Another researcher assessed the reliability of the coding based on a random sample of 10% of the codes and we obtained an inter-coder agreement of 100%.

The main purpose of the analysis was to classify the various ways the literature has conceptualized the consequences of a minipublic on the policy-making process. We identified 131 publications that deal specifically with such policy-making consequences. The distinction between the three types of consequences was based on an iterative and inductive process. Two researchers independently read a sample of twenty articles and proposed a classification. They compared their coding, discussed it and agreed on a first common typology of consequences. They subsequently analyzed separately new samples of ten articles. The classification was adapted and refined collectively after each round of coding. The procedure was repeated until a parsimonious way to map the literature was found and all the 131 publications were coded. In order to ensure reliability, documents that were more difficult to code were discussed by the two coders during face-to-face meetings. For a similar procedure to ensure the quality of the review during such an inductive coding process, see the systematic reviews by Ritz et al. (2016) and De Vries et al. (2016).

### **Three Ways to Think about Consequences**

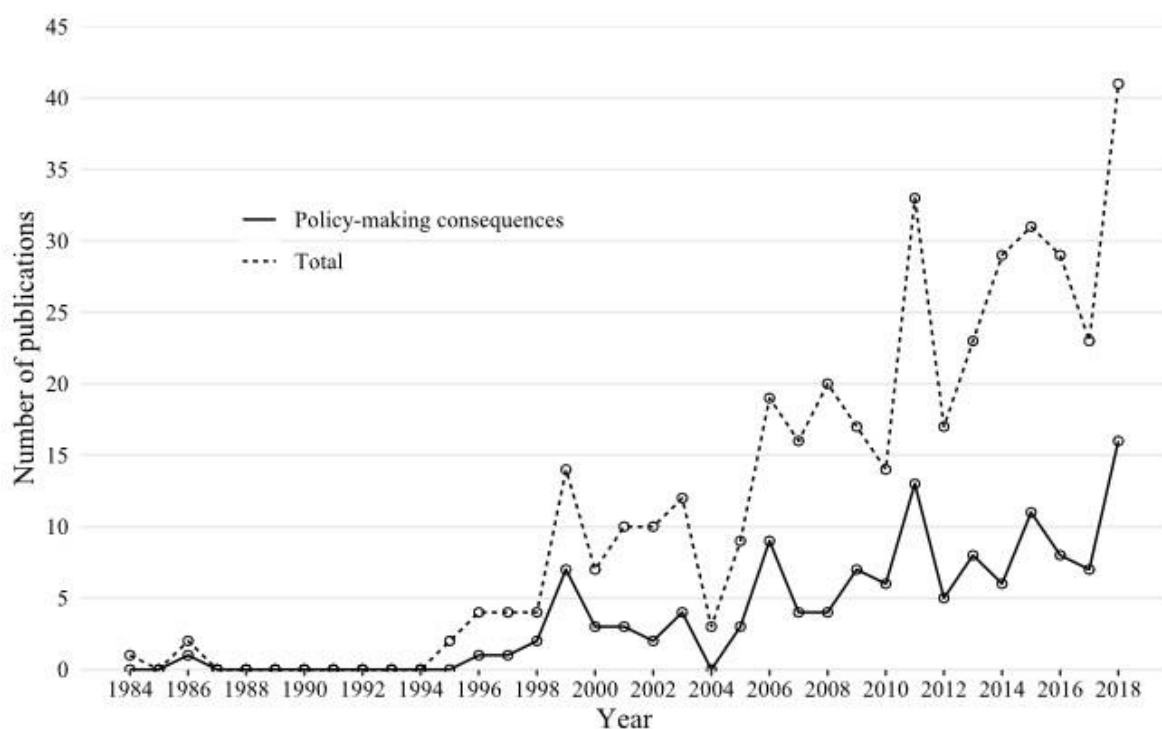
Research on policy-making consequences has followed the wider development of the literature on minipublics. Figure 2 displays the number of publications over time that consider minipublics and their consequences on the policy-making process. While minipublics appeared already in the 1970s in Germany (Peter Dienel's planning cells) and the United States (Ned Crosby's citizens' juries), it took until the late 1990s for the role of minipublics in the policy-



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making process to become a common research topic. Research on the topic has steadily increased but still accounts for less than half of all publications on minipublics (39% in 2018). While research on the topic has appeared mainly in journals and books in the fields of political science and public administration, it has also appeared in journals outside of these fields, such as *Health Policy*, *British Medical Journal*, and *Local Environment*.

**Figure 2.** Research on Minipublics and Their Policy-Making Consequences (1984 – 2018)



We identify three main ways to conceptualize policy-making consequences: congruence with decisions, consideration, and structural change. The first focuses on the *content* of policy-making; the second on the *process* of policy-making; and the third on the more indirect and long-term *structure* of policy-making. While they are not independent from each other, it is essential from an analytical perspective to distinguish these three dimensions. As we will

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illustrate with real cases below, congruence can appear without consideration, structural change without congruence and so on.

Table 1 shows the underlying research questions associated with these three conceptualizations of consequences and the respective number of publications.

**Table 1.** Three views on policy-making consequences

Conceptualization of consequences	Underlying Research Question	Number of publications
Congruence with decisions	Are minipublics' recommendations translated into policies?	105
Consideration in the policy-making process	Do actors consider the minipublic in the public sphere and in empowered institutions?	128
Structural changes	Does the minipublic change policy practices (in a particular domain)?	16

### **Congruence with Decisions**

A first body of literature addresses minipublics' consequences by focusing on the content of public decisions. Empirical studies in this line of work analyze whether decision makers translate recommendations into public policies. As an illustration, Watanabe (2016) argues that a minipublic's recommendations contributed to the phase-out of nuclear power by the Japanese government. Equally, de Cock Buning et al. (2008) show how the output of a minipublic led to the transformation of Dutch health policy on prenatal genetic testing. According to this

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perspective, a minipublic is consequential when policies reflect a minipublic's recommendations.

An absence of congruence is a finding in itself. By reviewing participatory mechanisms implemented at the level of the European Union (EU), including a deliberative poll, Boussaguet (2016) concludes that such minipublics are symbolic instruments used to legitimize the EU without any attempt to empower citizens in the decision-making process. She explains that deliberative practices are used to show that EU policy-making is inclusive and open to citizens' inputs but that they do not affect its main decisions. Other case studies also find no evidence of the implementation of any recommendation by public authorities (Fan, 2013).

This first way to conceptualize policy-making consequences is at first glance the simplest because it focuses on the core of policy-making: the content of decisions. Nevertheless, this approach has two main limitations. First, identifying a clear set of recommendations is not always possible. Depending on the exact objective assigned to the minipublic by its organizers, the output can be more or less precise in terms of policy proposals. The output of some minipublics consists in a list of abstract values or an aggregated vote for different options. In such cases, researchers cannot easily assess their translation into concrete public policies. Analyzing pan-European deliberative minipublics from 2006 to 2007, Hüller (2010) notes, for instance, that the output is not sufficiently precise to deliver clear recommendations that would allow for an evaluation of the congruence with European policies.

Second, observing congruence between recommendations and subsequent decisions does not imply that the minipublic was the determining factor in the adoption of the respective decisions. Analyzing a deliberative poll held on Canadian Energy Policy, Johnson (2015) indicates that while subsequent policies reflected the minipublic's recommendations, an in-depth analysis of the policy-making process indicated that this deliberative procedure was not a major driving force behind the policy-makers' choice. The decision resulted from the bargaining among

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professional politicians and stakeholders, and the influence of the deliberative polls was very marginal. The sole observation of congruence does not tell us what the exact role of the minipublic is in the policy-making process. The following approach contributes to fill this gap.

### **Consideration in the Policy-Making Process**

As long established by specialists of policy science, the policy-making process cannot be depicted as a single decision taken by a monolithic actor (Goodin et al., 2006). Policy-making is an iterative process where multiple types of actors compete and collaborate to produce policies in- and outside state institutions (Teisman, 2000). In this complex process, the second way to conceptualize minipublics' influence consists in analyzing whether a minipublic is considered at some stage of the policy-making process. In the review of the literature, 91 publications discuss (the absence of) consideration in the public sphere and 112 consideration in empowered institutions.

A first scenario is that a minipublic is largely ignored in both of these areas. Analyzing an Austrian consensus conference, Seifert (2006) indicates that recommendations had been transmitted to parliament. Nevertheless, consideration in this empowered space was minimal. The minipublic was not followed by any parliamentary debate or legislative proposal. The media coverage was low and nobody referred to the minipublic after the closing ceremony. The consideration was very low in both the public sphere and empowered institutions.

In their analysis of a local citizens' panel on energy and climate challenges in Alberta, Boulianne et al. (2018) sketch another scenario. The report produced by the minipublic attracted almost no attention from the media and other actors in the public sphere. However, the authors indicate that the recommendations were carefully considered in empowered institutions when the local council and administration discussed a new energy strategy for the city. The opposite

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pattern may also occur. When discussing a French consensus conference on GMOs, Dryzek and Tucker (2008) suggest that on one side a series of experts, journalists, and stakeholders made reference to the minipublic and its recommendation. This consideration in the public sphere was reinforced by the fact there was a controversial debate about the establishment of the conference. Yet, on the other side, when it comes to empowered institutions, there was no sign of attention among policy-makers, notably because the recommendation did not challenge the government's positions.

These illustrations of this second way to think about minipublics' consequences shed light on the complex and sequenced character of the policy-making process. It indicates that a minipublic can be considered in various places in the policy-making process. Nonetheless, this approach does not provide insight into whether the minipublic has had deeper consequences on a particular policy sector. In other words, beyond the formal reference to the minipublic in the discourse of various policy actors, does the minipublic induce more structural changes? This last conceptualization is discussed in the following section.

### **Structural Change**

The third type of consequence refers to the structural change of the policy-making process induced by a minipublic. 'Structure' is meant to refer to an enduring set of practices and rules that characterize a particular policy domain (March and Olsen, 1995). This change can concern a shift in informal practices as well as rules that are more formal. Only 16 publications discuss such types of consequences. It is nevertheless a promising way to conceptualize minipublics' output because it encompasses more indirect and permanent consequences.

This approach is well illustrated by the following case study. After a public consultation including citizens' juries on the therapeutic transplantation of organs, tissues, and cells from

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animals to humans, a minipublic did not lead to clear, immediate public policy changes in Canada (Jones and Einsiedel, 2011). There was no congruence with decisions and no consideration of the recommendations in the decision-making process. However, the event contributed to the structural change of the particular policy field. Drawing on the concept of institutional learning, the authors analyze how the introduction of a minipublic triggered changes in the Canadian Public Health sector. Public servants and policy-makers acquired new skills and developed more positive attitudes towards citizen deliberation. Based on this experience with citizens' juries, new standardized procedures were developed in order to involve lay citizens in the policy-making process. In this way, the citizens' juries contributed to the restructuring practices of policy-making in the public health sector.

This approach underlines that the fate of recommendations is not the only element to take into account when assessing the consequences of minipublics (Gourgues, 2010). Even if the content of policies does not evolve in the short term, minipublics can trigger deeper transformations in a particular policy domain. One of the main challenges for researchers that attempt to scrutinize this type of consequence is that it requires one to broaden the scope of potential impacts. The two previous conceptualizations capture the immediate effects of a minipublic. Information can be collected relatively shortly after the event. Structural change requires another approach, involving the collection of data well beyond and after the organization of the minipublic. For instance, in the aforementioned study, the authors conducted interviews with associated actors a decade after the six citizens' juries (Jones and Einsiedel, 2011).

## **Discussion**

For the past three decades, public officials worldwide have increasingly implemented deliberative minipublics. The academic literature has followed this trend and, by now, has

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scrutinized their effects on the policy-making process. Based on a systematic review of the literature published on deliberative minipublics since the 1980s, we have suggested that there are three main ways to conceptualize their consequences on the policy-making process: congruence with decisions, consideration in the policy-making process, and structural change. The review shows, first, the literature has so far focused predominantly on the first two types of consequences (decisions and consideration) and neglected the potential structural changes to the policy-making process. Second, it indicates that the way we think about minipublics' consequences has important implications for empirical research. We discuss both points in turn and indicate how future research can address the main limitations.

### **Investigating the Structural Dimension**

Research on minipublics appears mostly drawn to the event and its immediate consequences. Yet, addressing structural consequences is essential if one wants to grasp minipublics' contributions to contemporary governance. Democratic innovations, including deliberative minipublics, are indeed presented by normative scholars as an ingredient for the profound transformation of the functioning of democracy (Fung, 2007; Curato and Böker, 2016). Although minipublics are not envisioned to replace election-based representation (for a rare exception see Bourcibus, 2018), they are commonly expected to foster public deliberation and participation in the entire political system (Niemeyer, 2014; Dryzek, 2017; Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012; Curato and Böker, 2016).

In order to assess to what extent minipublics indeed lead to changes in political rules and habits, it seems insufficient to focus on the first two dimensions (congruence and consideration). Even when both citizens and policy-makers consider a minipublic's recommendations and these recommendations translate into concrete policy decisions, a minipublic might still have little impact on the functioning of the policy-making process itself, most notably with regard to the involvement of ordinary citizens. Future empirical research should therefore analyze if and

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under what conditions minipublics transform the formal rules and informal practices of the policy-making process. For to neglect this structural dimension would mean running the risk to disconnect the study of minipublics from the functioning of political systems.

A lack of insight into structural changes would also make normative discussions about the appropriate role of minipublics incomplete, as they would forgo the potential long-term, and perhaps unintended, consequences minipublics may have on policy-making. For instance, would it really matter whether minipublics in some way 'improve' public debate in the short run when this effect is absent in the long run? Would it still be normatively desirable for minipublics to stimulate public debate to such an extent that the policy-making process slows down or is even paralyzed completely?

### **Trajectories for Future Research**

Our review illustrates the value of different perspectives on minipublic consequences. Focusing on a single type of consequence may indeed lead to an underestimation of a minipublic's impact on policy-making. For instance, while a minipublic's recommendations may not directly translate into policy, it may still affect public debate or the standing of public participation among members of the relevant administration. Similarly, even if empirical evidence indicates that a minipublic has led to a structural change in the policy-making process, we would not know to what extent the recommendations of those minipublics in fact leave their mark on policy-making (for instance in the form of concrete policy decisions). This has clear implications for the analysis of democratic transformations. Without such pluralistic assessments, it remains difficult to see to what degree minipublics truly bring people back into policy-making or instead serve the interests of those in power. In the same vein, the study of negative cases will be crucial to understand the mechanisms behind the often-observed absence of minipublics' impact on policy-making (Spada and Ryan, 2017).



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The review also makes clear that it may not be straightforward to assess a minipublic's effects on policy-making, given the many other actors involved in the policy-making process as well as the process's sensitivity to contextual factors. To address these limitations, we suggest two ways forward. First, the field could profit from more comparative research. Comparative empirical research that addresses minipublics' policy consequences is still scarce (e.g. Hendriks et al., 2007; Dryzek et al., 2009; Dryzek and Tucker, 2008; Felicetti et al., 2016; Caluwaerts and Reuchamps, 2016; Curato and Böker, 2016; Fournier et al., 2011; Hendriks, 2005; Font and Blanco, 2007; Petts, 2001). In this respect, minipublic research could follow recent efforts to analyze the policy impact of other participatory processes, such as participatory budgets or local open forums (Pogrebinschi and Ryan, 2018; Ryan, 2014; Font et al., 2018; Geissel and Hess, 2017). Such large- and medium-N research has been able to provide robust findings on the effects on policy-making by accounting for various contextual factors. To illustrate, based on the analysis of 571 policy proposals made by 39 Spanish local participatory devices, Font et al. (2018) conclude that the main factors that influence the translation of a proposal into a decision are the 'proposal's cost, the extent to which it challenges existing policy and the degree of support it has within the municipality' (615). Similar comparative research projects could aid our understanding of what factors drive the consequences of minipublics, including factors related to their design (e.g. large citizens' assemblies on major constitutional issues vs. local experiments on narrow problems) or the political system in which they are embedded (e.g. tradition of inclusive vs. exclusive policy-making) (Dryzek and Tucker, 2008; Felicetti et al., 2016).

Second, future research could examine in more detail the explanatory mechanisms that trigger (or obstruct) minipublics' consequences. That is, to gain a clearer picture about whether minipublics matter for policy-making, we also need to better understand *how* they affect policy-making. Process-tracing could be used to disentangle how a cause X (here: a minipublic)

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triggers a consequence Y (here: a policy-making consequence) (Beach and Pedersen, 2019).

For instance, it has been mobilized to describe how some epistemic communities succeed to influence decision makers while other do not (Löblová, 2018). This approach seems particularly relevant to address the challenge of identifying the influence of a minipublic when a decision taken by a public authority seems congruent with the recommendations made by the respective minipublic. The research question is here no longer 'Are the decisions congruent with the recommendations?', but 'How can we reasonably assume that the minipublic contributed to the (absence) of the decisions?' It forces the researcher to stipulate the series of expected activities and their 'observable manifestations' that link the minipublic to the specific consequences being studied (Beach and Pedersen, 2019). This approach can help the field to move past narrative accounts of how policy-making effects come about and move towards the specification and empirical verification of detailed mechanisms.

Substantively, then, it also opens up new empirical and theoretical avenues on the issue of transmission from the deliberative minipublic to the policy-making process (Bächtiger and Parkinson, 2019). Once citizens have written the report, we often do not know how other actors in the political system receive the recommendation, through which channels, and how these channels affect the potential consequences. This applies to both actors within empowered institutions, such as representatives or civil servants, as well as actors in the public sphere, most notably the media. Research on minipublics' influence on policy-making in this respect has for too long ignored the wider literature on interest group influence (Dür, 2008). This body of literature provides several promising approaches to the study of transmission. These include, for example, studies that examine patterns in access to policy-making institutions (Junk, 2019; Colli, 2019) or scrutinize the type and framing of a message transmitted to other actors (Voltolini and Eising, 2017; De Bruycker, 2016). We add that especially the role of the media

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as a key actor in the transmission and (re)framing of a minipublic's recommendations deserves more attention (for a notable exception see Parkinson, 2006).

We end by acknowledging that one limitation of our review is that it has focused solely on peer-reviewed publications published in English. As such, it has not considered potentially valuable 'grey' literature, such as reports published by government agencies, nor work published in languages other than English. Future studies could cast an even wider net to integrate these studies into the review.

## **Conclusion**

These trajectories for future research can benefit both democratic theory and practice. Theoretically, research focusing on how minipublics may be linked to policy-making will be informative for the increasingly popular systemic approach in political theory that seeks to formulate how micro sites of deliberation can and should be coupled to the wider political system (Elstub, 2010; Mansbridge et al., 2013). Practically, it will aid those that seek to promote citizen involvement through inclusive and deliberative consultations to understand what effects such exercises can have on real-life policy-making. Based on the current state of the literature, our review, on the one hand, spells caution to practitioners and theorists that expect minipublics to fundamentally transform the functioning of democratic decision-making. We simply do not know enough about it yet to draw robust conclusions. On the other hand, it has pointed out several studies that have offered some first indications that minipublics can indeed do more than stir public debate or influence a specific political decision.

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<sup>1</sup> This selection procedure is sometimes combined with targeted recruitment to attract the less privileged segments of the population.

2 For the coverage of the database see the Scopus Content Coverage Guide (January 2020) available at [https://www.elsevier.com/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/69451/Scopus\\_ContentCoverage\\_Guide\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.elsevier.com/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/69451/Scopus_ContentCoverage_Guide_WEB.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> The full database including all 1,455 publications is available at <https://osf.io/qn5sm/>