

# **When researchers become designers: Critical feedback from our role in designing the G1000, the Permanent Citizen Dialogue and the Deliberative Committees in Belgium**

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## **Introduction**

Researchers may embody a large diversity of roles in the development and analysis of deliberative processes. These can go from the mere analysis of different aspects of these processes, to the co-creation of deliberative processes, hand in hand with political actors, civil society and/or practitioners. As we will see through this paper, these roles become increasingly blurry, as researchers tend to become at the same time analysts, advocates, advisers, designers and even organizers.

Based on three Belgian case studies (the G1000, the Permanent Citizen Dialogue and the Deliberative Committees) and more specifically on the reflections of three researchers (the authors of the present paper) who embodied mixed roles in the development and analysis of these processes, we will shed light on several trade-offs generated by this blurring of lines between the traditional position of researchers as analysts and their new roles as advocates, advisers, designers and organizers. Also, we will see how this diversification of roles does not only affect researchers but expands on all actors involved in the design and organization of deliberative processes, from policy-makers to practitioners.

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First, we come back on the origins and causes of this multiplication of roles. Then, we describe our three cases and the particularity of the Belgian territory with regard to deliberative processes and their ties with the academic community. Third, we analyze the role the authors have had at different stages of the development of the three processes. Then, we investigate the motivations of actors (mainly academics and policy-makers) to grant increased competences to researchers in the design and implementation of deliberative processes. Fifth, we scrutinize the effects this deep involvement of researchers might have had on the processes themselves and on the researchers' work. Lastly, we consider how this mixture of roles impacts researchers relation to the other actors involved: other researchers, policy-makers, civil society and practitioners.

### **1. Between analysis, advocacy, advice, design and organization**

During the last century, social sciences literature was dominated by a vision of researchers as neutral analyst who should abstain from any societal engagement, as developing links and judgements on their field could interfere with their faculty to perform qualitative, objective and neutral scientific work (for a review, see Pfefferkorn, 2014).

Earlier developments have begun to heavily criticize this dominant view, advocating that it would simply be impossible for a researcher to remain totally disconnected from its field. As a matter of fact, social scientists' object of study is no other than the society, its dynamics and actors, and everyone, even researchers, are naturally embedded in this society as well physically as mentally. Moreover, studying social sciences is inevitably observing and reporting inequalities, flaws and tensions, which in turn indirectly participates in exposing and criticizing these problems and try to discuss potential solutions (Baudelot, 2003). Consequently, absolute neutrality in social sciences seems rather difficult to defend.

Deliberative democracy makes no exception and has also followed the same evolution. Indeed, historically, researchers' role was limited to analyze the processes, their origins, effectiveness and their legitimacy after they occurred, hence leading them to take on a scientific and analytical position (Jacquet & Reuchamps, 2016). However, in recent years, their roles became blurrier and began to encompass advocacy, policy advice, design and organization of participatory and deliberative processes (Suiter & Reuchamps, 2016).

First, researchers have begun not only to analyze but also to advocate for the use of deliberative processes in the public sphere, as a cure for the ongoing democratic malaise. Usually, they tend to frame their lobbying as a complementarity between representative, traditional political institutions based on election and randomly selected bodies of citizens (Fung & Wright, 2001; Gastil & Wright, 2019). In general, they do not tend to advocate for the abolishment of representative democracy, but rather seek to propose ways to fill its gaps and restore trust thanks to the use of citizen deliberation (Caluwaerts et al., 2018; Jacquet et al., 2020). To give just a few examples of the benefits advanced to justify the use of deliberative experiments, researchers tend to criticize the lack of representativeness and deliberativeness of party politics (Leydet, 2015). These flaws, according to some scholars of the field, could be tempered by an increased use of diverse, randomly selected panels of lay citizens brought together in a

discursive space encompassing all necessary conditions for qualitative deliberations and consensus to unfold<sup>4</sup> (Fung & Wright, 2001; Gastil & Wright, 2019) and let the diversity of opinions present converge towards recommendations advancing the common good.

Second, political actors, as they increasingly seek to rebuild trust with their electorate, have begun to call upon the help of researchers (who become more and more visible and build their legitimacy in terms of expertise in deliberative practices) when they plan to set up deliberative events (Reuchamps, 2013). More generally, organizers of deliberative events (political actors as well as civil society actors) tend to increasingly use the advice of academic experts of the field, sometimes as consultants before the shaping of the process, and/or as co-creators of the experiments. They justify this deep involvement of researchers by external and internal motives (Jacquet & Reuchamps, 2016). With regard to external reasons, deliberative experiments' organizers use the presence of researchers as advisers and or/co-designers of their processes to make them appear scientifically grounded, especially towards the media and for the participants. Also, they might need this scientific backup to increase the credibility of the process they want to organize in the eyes of other political actors. Indeed, a larger political support is usually needed and hence several actors need to be convinced of the benefits of such processes to secure their support in making the processes concretely happen. As for internal reasons, having a scientific eye shed upon the process and involved in its design give the organizers guidance in applying the best practices and base their processes' features on the most up-to-date research results from the field. They hope this will allow them to secure the success of their process with regard to its specific goals.

Third, researchers' role might overlap with the one traditionally held by civil society actors and political actors, as they can themselves become the forces at the origin of the process and be the organizers of deliberative events. Here, the motivation of researchers to act upon their field is the most salient, even if it can also explain why they agree to advise and co-design processes and lobby for their development. As a matter of fact, in Belgium, academics do not only have the mission to analyze and publish scientific results, they also have to accomplish services for the broader society, such as giving lay audience conferences, writing in non-academic magazines or in our case becoming the drivers of the change they analyze through their scientific work (Reuchamps et al., 2017). Also, as experts in deliberative democracy might have precise research objectives, it is sometimes best suited to proceed to their own field study rather than to rely on existing cases. By implementing deliberative events themselves, they make sure to control all potential confounders and study exactly the variables and aspects of the processes they are interested in (Falk & Heckman, 2009). The most famous examples of such researcher-led processes are the Deliberative Polls set up by James Fishkin (1992; 2009).

As we will see in the next section, one single researcher might play some or even all of these roles at different stages of the same process, which might have effects on their work, on the

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<sup>4</sup> Such conditions usually encompass a mix between small group and plenary discussions, professional facilitation of the deliberations, distribution of scientific information and balanced arguments on the topic, among others.

processes and on the researchers' relationship with the other actors involved in the design and implementation of the processes.

## **2. Three iconic deliberative events**

The Belgian case is of particular interest when it comes to investigating the roles of researchers in the analysis, shaping and proliferation of deliberative practices. As a matter of fact, the exceptional multiplication of deliberative events at all levels of power (from the local to the federal level) and on a large variety of subjects (from health to mobility or education) can partly be attributed to the active role of researchers, along with other activist's demands, in advocating for the use of deliberative practices in the public sphere (Van Damme et al., 2017; Vrydagh et al., 2020). More specifically, following the extensive public outreach of the G1000 (see below), the researchers involved in it, gathered around a small coordinating group led by David Van Reybrouck and composed of Yves Dejaeghere, Benoît Derenne, Cato Leonard, Christoph Niessen and Min Reuchamps. They continued building their network and began to act as lobbyists and consultants in the field of democratic innovations. The subsequent strengthening of this mediatized and active lobby, as we will see through this article, played a crucial role in the dissemination of deliberative processes, their evaluation and the development of their standards through the establishment of good practices. In turn, the calls of such lobbies have been increasingly heard by political actors. In the context of growing political disaffection (Thomassen, 2015), political actors are eagerly looking for tools that might (re)build their legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. Therefore, the encounter of researchers' advocacy and political actors' eagerness to develop innovative and legitimate tools to rebuild trust relationships with citizens has converged to give rise on a proliferation of deliberative practices in Belgium, leading to a mixture of roles of researchers in their development, shaping and analysis.

### **2.1 The G1000**

In 2010, in the midst of a deep democratic crisis during which party elites tried for 541 days to form a federal government, resulting in a complete political deadlock (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2014; Deschouwer & Reuchamps, 2013), 27 Belgian citizens launched the G1000 Citizens' Summit, a grassroots organization aimed at giving the floor to citizens<sup>5</sup>. The motto of the event was: "if elites are not able to govern, then let the people try"<sup>6</sup>.

Following this view, organizers built an entirely citizen-focused experiment (Reuchamps, 2011). First, citizens were involved as participants. They were recruited through random phone calls inside the Belgian population, accompanied by a targeted recruitment among the most vulnerable groups of the society to make sure they would be represented at the Citizens' Summit. In the end, 704 people attended the meeting on November 11 2011. (Reuchamps et

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<sup>5</sup> All aspects of the G1000, from its coordination, to the communication, the practical organization, or the fundraising were driven by a group of academics, practitioners and civil society actors.

<sup>6</sup> The full manifesto of the G1000, outlining its principles and context of creation can be consulted here: <http://www.g1000.org/en/introduction.php>.

al., 2017) Based on the observations of international observers and on subsequent statistical analyses, this group has been said to have reached representativeness of the diversity of the Belgian population (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2016). Second, citizens (and researchers) were not only the driving forces at the origin and behind the whole design of the process but were also at the heart of its funding, as the whole G1000 process was crowd-funded (Jacquet & Reuchamps, 2018). Third, aside from the 704 participants, the broader citizenry was also involved in the process. On the one hand, it could set the agenda of the Citizens' Summit by dropping ideas and ranking them on an online platform. This resulted in the selection of three topics: social security, wealth distribution and immigration<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, people who were not randomly selected but still wished to participate in the experience could join the discussions through so-called "G'Offs" and "G'Home". After the Citizens' Summit, 32 participants were randomly selected among the volunteers wishing to continue working deeper on some aspects of the discussions and devote three more weekends to the deliberations.

From the agenda setting to the logistics around the event, this process was therefore fully citizens-focused and led, which led to a relative disconnection from the political sphere. If the results were presented to all Presidents of Parliaments of the country, these remained unanswered and didn't concretely weigh on public policies. However, thanks to the high visibility and active lobbying around the event, it delivered another impact: it participated in putting deliberative democracy on the agenda and inspired other processes, even outside Belgian borders (Boogaard et al., 2016).

Researchers played a crucial role in coordinating the event, from the very idea of its organization to the analysis and evaluation of its different aspects. This allowed them have access to a tremendous amount of data to better understand deliberative events and trigger the awakening of new areas of research (Jacquet & Reuchamps, 2016). Also, it helped bringing deliberative democracy on the public stage and in the political debate. Therefore, the G1000 and the consecutive formation of a network by its designers constitutes a critical juncture not only when it comes to the blurring of roles of researchers in such processes but also more generally for the proliferation of deliberative experiments in Belgium and beyond.

## 2.2 The Permanent Citizen Dialogue

Starting in September 2019, a Citizen Council (*Bürgererrat*) composed of 24 members is implemented to propose policy recommendations to the elected Parliament on its own initiative or after a request formulated by parliamentarians or 100 citizens of the region<sup>8</sup>. In doing this, the Council relies on recommendations drafted by regular, independent Citizen Assemblies drawn by lot (*Bürgerversammlungen*). The Parliament has to respond to the recommendations, that is, to justify their rejection, implementation or future refinement and the legal processes

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on the practical aspects and outcomes of the G1000, the final report is available here: [http://www.g1000.org/documents/G1000\\_EN\\_Website.pdf](http://www.g1000.org/documents/G1000_EN_Website.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> A full description of the Permanent Citizen Dialogue, also known as the Ostbelgien Modell is available in German (Niessen & Reuchamps, 2019a), in French (Niessen & Reuchamps, 2019b) and in English (Niessen & Reuchamps, 2019c).

ensuing. This initiative was the result of an agreement between all political parties wishing to experiment with deliberative democracy again, after a first Citizen Dialogue on childcare several years before (Niessen, 2017). However, this time, they aimed to establish a permanent, institutionalized deliberative tool.

Members of the Citizen Council hold their seat for a year and a half. They are drawn by lot from previous members of the Citizen Assemblies and convene once a month. A Citizen Assembly, on the other hand, lasts approximately three weekends over three months and has a maximum of 50 members. The Citizen Council will be able to decide how large a specific Citizen Assembly needs to be and how long a given topic should be debated. Participation by citizens is not mandatory, but a daily fee is given to those who attend the meetings. Efforts are deployed to make the composition of both bodies, Citizen Council and Citizen Assemblies, as diverse and quasi representative as possible in terms of gender, age, education and residence (Niessen & Reuchamps, 2020).

The decision of the German-speaking Parliament to organize the deliberative process along the specific features outlined above is based on a model developed by researchers from the Belgian G1000 coordinating group, together with 13 international experts in the field of deliberative democracy. Together, they developed the Permanent Citizen Dialogue, after extensive consultation with the different political parties and the public administration. The result is an ambitious model for a permanent representation of citizens through sortition as a complement to the existing political institutions and processes. The role of researchers was therefore here to advise to the political actors by providing a model to be adapted by political actors themselves. In this perspective, researchers were often in contact with all political actors, from the majority and the opposition, and sometimes their role was to go-in between in order to show how the idea of the Permanent Citizen Dialogue was not a by-product of the majority but an idea that could be in the interest of all people in the German-speaking Community. In the implementation of the Dialogue, the researchers continue to support the Parliament by answering the questions of the Permanent Secretary and also carrying out questionnaires to participants and citizens, so that a comprehensive assessment can be performed and the process improved.

### 2.3 The Deliberative Committees

In December 2019, the Francophone Brussels Parliament and the Regional Brussels Parliament, following the impulse of Ecolo, one of the partners forming the Government majority, both decided to integrate in their internal regulations the faculty to organize Deliberative Committees, thereby institutionalizing the existence of a deliberative process at the Brussels level (Reuchamps, 2020)<sup>9</sup>. These allow randomly selected citizens of the capital to come and deliberate with elected representatives of the Parliament to formulate recommendations on policy problems. Practically speaking, a Deliberative Committee is organized on the request of one or several parliamentarians who would want to put an issue on the table of citizens and

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<sup>9</sup> One year later, the Walloon Parliament also adopted the possibility of Deliberative Committees. In this paper, we focus on the Brussels' Deliberative Committees.

representatives and open it to their advice. Also, the process can be launched if 1000 Brussels citizens sign a petition asking for the organization of a Deliberative Committee on a specific subject. The Committee is composed of  $\frac{1}{4}$  elected representatives (the ones sitting in the Parliamentary Committee in charge of the policy field relating to the issue discussed) and  $\frac{3}{4}$  randomly selected citizens of the capital (Vrydagh et al., 2021).

The first Deliberative Committee will focus on the 5G technology, on the request of one political party of the Brussels Parliament. The second one will ask participants to come up with recommendations on the housing of homeless people, and will be organized thanks to 1431 signatures on an online petition drafted by one single individual.

As showed by the lines above, this process aims to significantly empower citizens, as they can set the agenda of the discussions and outnumber elected representatives at the table. Also, great efforts have been made to secure a follow-up of the recommendations. As a matter of fact, the Parliamentary Committee in charge of the relevant policy area with regard to the discussed subject is obliged to motivate the acceptance/rejection of the recommendations produced by the Deliberative Committee within six months of the reception of the final report. They are then in charge of proceeding to more thorough legal follow-up (asking questions to the responsible Minister, organizing votes, etc)<sup>10</sup>.

In this specific case, experts in deliberative democracy have been involved first as advocates for the use of deliberative tools in decision-making. Indeed, the idea of integrating the Deliberative Committees in the functioning of the Brussels institutions comes from the party Ecolo, which has been advocating for the creation of such processes at all levels of power. Their eagerness to push for the development of such tools and the content of the propositions they raised in the different Belgian parliaments are largely inspired by the discourses and research outputs of experts in deliberative democracy, and more specifically the ones of the G1000 network's activities and ideas. Once in power at the Brussels level, they succeeded in making this idea come true, and didn't hesitate to invite experts in early stage hearings to define the contours and learn the best practices with regard to such processes. Both organizing institutions also recruited a scientific committee composed of four experts in deliberative democracy to guide and help designing and implementing the process. Also, this scientific committee will be in charge of evaluating the process after two years to learn from this first experience to improve its functioning in the future. Last but not least, the Francophone Brussels Parliament created a specific position of "counsellor in democratic innovations" to monitor and follow the process. The person in charge of this mission is a former active member of the G1000 network, once again showing the crucial role played by this event in Belgian deliberative democracy.

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<sup>10</sup> All practical aspects of design, recruitment and follow-up of the Deliberative Committees can be consulted here: <https://www.parlementfrancophone.brussels/documents/vade-mecum-et-glossaire-etablis-par-le-groupe-de-travail-commissions-deliberatives-en-application-de-l2019article-42ter-du-reglement/document>.

## 2.4 Comparing actors' roles

If we take a step back and look at how different actors are involved at different stages and achieve specific missions throughout the different processes in which we were involved, we see that not only the researchers' roles get blurry (see Table 1). As a matter of fact, we observe that all actors can perform multiple roles, and that these can differ from the ones that are traditionally attributed to them. For instance, policy-makers are not bound to remain mere recipients of the process' recommendations: in the case of the Deliberative Committees, they themselves become participants in the definition of these recommendations as they sit with citizens in the process? Also, in the case of the Permanent Citizen Dialogue, it is the *Bürgerrat*, composed by lay citizens, that decides upon key formal features of the citizen assemblies: its length, the number of participants, its budget, etc.

Table 1: Actors' roles in the three processes

	Creation	Advocacy	Advice	Design	Practical orga.	Participants	Agenda setting	Analysis
Researchers	1	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 3			1 2 3
Organized civil society/activists	1	1	1	1	1			
Practitioners	1		1 3	1 3	1 3			(1) (3)
Policy-makers	2 3					3	2 3	
Civil servants		3	3	3	2 3			
Lay citizens				2		1 2 3	1 2 3	

1= G1000

2= Permanent Citizen Dialogue

3= Deliberative Committees

This observation further fuels the idea that researchers', as well as other actors' roles are not compartmentalized: one role is not devoted to one actor, and one actor is not ascribed to only one role. This again demonstrates the practical infeasibility of axiological neutrality: why should researchers be confined to one role and other actors be able to perform several functions?

Another observation that can be made based on Table 1 is the relative exclusivity of researchers on the analysis of the process (sometimes also accompanied in this task by practitioners, which might generate different evaluations of the same process as both actors focus on different elements to assess the success of a deliberative event – see below). The fact that evaluation and analysis of the process remains in the sole hands of researchers seems key to secure its objectivity and scientific validity. If researchers can perform different roles, they cannot escape the analysis one or leave it to another actor who would have interests in the process and/or no theoretical and/or empirical background towards which to evaluate the process.

However, sometimes, practitioners also get involved in the analysis of the process, through a kind of self-assessment of their work. For instance, the contract of the practitioners involved in the organization of the Deliberative Committees stipulates that practitioners should provide a guarantee of results and foresee means to control the quality of delivered services. However, this type of evaluation is in no way entering in competition or contradiction/conflict with the



analyses performed by researchers. Indeed, practitioners generally assess the success of deliberative processes along different lines, based on different norms than academics (Mansbridge et al., 2006). Practitioners tend to focus on the achievement of the group's task and the satisfaction of participants, keeping in mind that both interplay: a satisfied, happy group will perform better towards the concretization of its goal, and a group reaching its objective will end up being more satisfied. The focus attributed to these two elements is natural when we consider that practitioners are paid to deliver the goal they were asked to fulfill, and that leaving participants unhappy would reduce the chances to see such kind of practice happen again, and therefore reduce their amount of working opportunities.

Researchers, on their side, do not use such instrumental criteria to assess the quality of a deliberative process, but rather base their evaluation on elements building its legitimacy (Mansbridge et al., 2006). In that sense, they derive theoretical elements considered to foster the legitimacy and quality of deliberation use them as standards to evaluate processes in the real world. Such elements encompass rationality, respect, orientation towards the common good, freedom and equality (Cohen, 1989). In the eyes of academics analyzing deliberative processes, the achievement of these norms is the goal towards which to thrive in any deliberative event, because only under the presence of those can the process and its outcomes be deemed legitimate to have a role in decision making. This posture therefore works quite the other way around as the one of practitioners, for whom the presence of these elements is only a way to reach goal-attainment and satisfaction with the process. In that sense, they envision rationality, respect, orientation towards the common good, freedom and equality as the drivers of the building of a good atmosphere and consensus building among participants (Mansbridge et al., 2006). For instance, they do not label a process as a failure if participants use emotions rather than reason to back their claims. They sometimes tend to see emotional discussions as a necessary step towards empathy and shared vision among participants, which constitutes a solid basis for the maintenance of group cohesion and good atmosphere, and hence their faculty to move forward together towards the formulation of recommendations (Mansbridge et al., 2006).

### **3. Actors' motivations**

In this section, we investigate first the motivations behind the researchers' involvement beyond mere analysis of deliberative processes and illustrate these by reflections coming from our own involvement in the three events described above. Second, we focus on the motivations of political actors and civil society actors organizing deliberative processes for inviting researchers as advisers and/or co-designers of these events, backed with examples from our own experiences in the cases under study.

On the researchers' side, based on our own experience, two types of motivations can be highlighted. On the one hand, as our work as researchers is financed by public funds, we naturally tend to answer positively to civil society and political actors' calls for collaboration in the set up of deliberative events. Moreover, research positions usually foresee that a portion of the researcher's working time should be devoted to serve the society. When it comes to our experience in particular, for instance, Christoph Niessen and Sophie Devillers are financed by

a specific fund intended to finance research projects with societal impacts<sup>11</sup>. For researchers under this type of funding, it is imperative to practically act upon their field of study, as they did here in the frame of the Deliberative Committees and the Permanent Citizen Dialogue. Also, this trend to be actively involved with their research object is driven not only by legal constraints but also by personal reasons. Sophie Devillers, for instance, justifies her involvement in the Deliberative Committees as a way to give a meaning to her work, outside academia and to put the knowledge acquired through her research activities to the whole society's benefit.

On the other hand, we also accept to take part in the set up and design of deliberative events for more instrumental reasons. As a matter of fact, establishing close collaborations with public officials or civil society actors in their organizations of deliberative processes usually is a win-win situation in which they benefit from our expertise and scientific guarantee, and we benefit from a privileged access to the data generated by these processes. For instance, the involvement of researchers as organizers and designers of the G1000 allowed them to control the design of the process from A to Z, and therefore to develop a full knowledge of its functioning, which is of course the necessary first step of all field study. Also, having a deep involvement in the process allowed researchers to have a direct access to the participants, and to be able to easily submit them pre and post questionnaires about their participation, as in the Permanent Citizen Dialogue. For this process, we are studying it from a multidimensional dimension: participants, observation of the deliberation, tracing of the recommendations, surveys of the general population. With the involvement in the Brussels case, we have gained access to a direct observation of the effects of a mixed composition on the deliberations, impacts and dynamics in deliberative events. Thanks to their active role in the process, they are given access to all necessary resources to actively investigate these questions, and be the first ones to enter the debate on that aspect.

On the organizers' side, as outlined above, the reasons mobilized to justify the involvement of researchers in the building and designing of their processes can be either external and/or internal. Based on our experiences, we have witnessed different internal and external reasons depending on the process in which we participated.

Internal reasons linked to the involvement of researchers specialized in the field of democratic innovations were put forward in the case of the Deliberative Committees and the Permanent Citizen Dialogue. In both cases, the expertise of (among others) the three authors of this paper in order to build the most qualitative process possible with regard to legal, political and resources constraints. From the emergence of the idea to the adoption of the law enshrining its legal existence, the political actors and their staff collaborated closely with a group of experts who participated in shaping the contours of these two world premières.

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<sup>11</sup> See: Fonds pour la recherche en sciences humaines, 2016, *Règlement Bourses de doctorat FRESH*, article 2, page 2, [https://www.frs-fnrs.be/docs/Reglement-et-documents/FRS-FNRS\\_REGL\\_FRESH\\_BD\\_FR.pdf](https://www.frs-fnrs.be/docs/Reglement-et-documents/FRS-FNRS_REGL_FRESH_BD_FR.pdf).

In the German-speaking Community, the legitimacy of the G1000 group helped to start off the idea of designing a specific process tailored to the need of the Community. By seeking the help of the G1000, the Minister-President and the President of the Parliament did want to collaborate with a group outside of the Community but with a high legitimacy in the Community. Building an institutionalized process of deliberative democracy is quite a challenge and had never been done before with such ambitions. This motivated policy-makers to call upon Belgian and international experts to design the process and make sure it would work.

In the early stages of the Brussels process' development, their expertise in terms of inclusion, deliberative quality and political impacts was crucial in the drafting the formal *vademecum* outlining the particular features along which the Deliberative Committees would be organized (their length, the functioning of the random sampling, the share of representatives present, etc). Once this document was adopted and the Deliberative Committees launched, a group of four experts in deliberative democracy (among which we find Sophie Devillers) has been set up to guide the practical development of the process. Among others, the role of this scientific committee is to guide and advise the staff of the Parliament in charge of practically organizing the event. For instance, they helped writing the letter that was sent to the randomly selected citizens to invite them to participate. The experience of the committee in terms of inclusion in deliberative events allowed to write a convincing and accessible letter that gathered almost 8% of positive response rate.

The organizers of the processes in which we were involved also mobilized external reasons to justify the presence of academics in all stages of the development of their process. Indeed, organizers admit that having academics on board help them secure a perception of legitimacy and quality of the process they implement in the eyes of the media, of other political actors and of citizens (as well the participants as the larger public).

In the G1000 process, the presence of researchers was often emphasized for methodological soundness. Indeed, researchers were presented as the “methodologists” and often the other organizers looked at them for design choices. They were seen as holding a “methodological truth” that needs to be followed in any case, even though for researchers such truth does not exist. The presence of researchers was also important to defend the choices publicly. At the time of the G1000, the idea of sortition could appear as quite strange and odd, outside of judicial juries. Researchers were then often called upon to explain what sortition is, what deliberative democracy is, and more generally what was the G1000 about.

As the Permanent Citizen Dialogue comes in the wake of the G1000 and a first experience of deliberative (the Citizen Dialogue on childcare), the role of the researchers was not so much to defend the choices but rather to explain that the process is not a by-product of the government and/or the majority. The fact that the Belgian researchers were joined by an international team of experts contributed to this external legitimacy. Moreover, the involvement of researchers also contributed to the fact that the process could receive the support from parties in the opposition. This contributed to the adoption of the decree establishing the Permanent Citizen Dialogue by all parties represented in Parliament.

When it comes to the Deliberative Committees, academics revolving around the process were not necessarily put forward in the media. In this case, the presence of scholars and their participation in the design of the process is rather used by Ecolo, the driving political party on this matter, to ground the legitimacy of the Deliberative Committees in the eyes of the other parties composing the Parliament and bring arguments justifying the choice for specific design features. In that sense, they use on the scientific guidance received to convince their partners to support this deliberative process and abide to the way it is deemed to function. As a matter of fact, internal working documents and the final *vademecum* include references to the experts' hearings organized in the early stages of the process, as justifications for the design choices that were operated. For instance, the arguments advanced by academics regarding the necessity to set up all supportive conditions fostering qualitative deliberations helped to convince a more refractory party of the necessity to have small group sessions aside from plenary meetings, and not to broadcast these small group discussions to protect freedom of speech (Vrydagh et al., 2021). This allowed to reach a consensus among all partners and see the text eventually be adopted by all parties. Also, academics were present during the meetings of the commission, with for instance an active role during the information session launching the process during which they could answer the questions of participants regarding the process.

#### **4. Effects of the blurring of lines**

Now that we know more about why researchers can be involved throughout the design and implementation of deliberative processes, we investigate how this involvement affects both the shape and impacts of the processes, as well as the researchers' work. It seems indeed that we face a two-way relationship between the researcher and the deliberative process he or she is involved with.

On the one hand, the presence of researchers might dramatically weigh on the functioning of the deliberative process. When it comes to the G1000, the academics on board had a strong interest in building a fully citizen-focused experience, away from any political or other external pressure, aiming solely at creating dialogue and qualitative deliberations between a large and diverse group of participants. These goals naturally drove the organizers to opt for design features helping to concretize these goals, among others a random selection of the participants to guarantee quasi representativeness (or at least a large diversity) and a relative disconnection with political actors to allow free and open deliberations to occur. This focus on deliberativeness, freedom of speech and independence of the process of course came with trade-offs. The isolation of the G1000 from political institutions prevented its recommendations to permeate into policy making processes, hence making the G1000 effect on political decisions neutral (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2016). In the two other cases, because they are institutionalized, we find less of this dynamic.

On the other hand, not only can researchers have an effect on the processes, but the processes can also have an effect on researchers and their work. For instance, the lack of political impact of the G1000 and the trade-offs between qualitative deliberation and political impact it allowed

to highlight participated in opening new research avenues on the impacts of deliberative events. Until then, research focused more specifically on the transformative benefits of such processes on their participants, their faculty to deliver qualitative deliberations and foster changes of mind by avoiding polarization (Gastil et al., 2008; Caluwaerts, 2012). The Brussels case will also probably pave the way to new questions and research interests specifically on the mixed composition of the process, that is up to now rather left under-studied because of a lack of real-life cases. Indeed, before the emergence of the Brussels process, only one mixed process had been organized and deeply studied: the Irish Constitutional Convention, that gathered 33 elected representatives from the Irish Parliament and 66 randomly selected citizens. This event was only organized as a one shot experiment, therefore, the institutionalized aspect of the Brussels model will surely allow to further investigate the effects of a mixed composition on all the aspects of deliberative processes in the long run.

## **5. Other actors' perceptions of researchers' multifaceted roles**

Lastly, we investigate how the blurring of lines between the roles of researchers, between analysis, advocacy, advice, design and organization is perceived by others actors involved at different stages of deliberative processes, backed with concrete examples from our own experience.

First, other researchers tend to view our position between researchers, organizers and activists as a continuum on which we can use different skills and different postures depending on the role embodied. They usually have no trouble understanding our desire to have a concrete impact on the society and benefit from these to also gain access to data. If sometimes the impartiality towards the object studied – and hence the scientific character of the research and its results - can be questioned in conferences and in the publication process, we usually tend to detach our closeness with the case studied from potential manipulation or partiality of the research. Indeed, if we are close to the subject during its design, we are also called upon by organizers for our faculty to take some distance when comes the time for evaluation. Practically speaking, the fact that we use scientific methodologies to collect the data (surveys and/or semi-directive interviews on participants and non-participants, recordings of the discussions, etc) and analyze it quantitatively and qualitatively builds a solid basis for objective scientific analyses.

If criticism occurs, our close connection to some deliberative processes is also often used as a resource for other researchers wanting to also use the data to which we have access, thereby establishing connections, research networks and collaborations on publications, allowing the large quantity of data produced by deliberative events to be extensively analyzed under many aspects. For instance, the involvement of Sophie Devillers in the Deliberative Committees has been a key resource for the writing of the first co-authored scientific article focusing on this process (Vrydagh et al., 2021). Her inside knowledge of the process has, according to the author authors of the paper, allowed to spare lots of time in the information research and gives a very concrete and inside-looking character to the piece.

Second, when it comes to the perceptions of practitioners involved in the conception of the processes, they also tend to have mixed views on the involvement of researchers. As we have seen, the standards on which they assess the “success” of a deliberative process is different of those of researchers. This can at the same time provide nuanced and complementary evaluations, and also trigger tensions when problems arise during the process: researchers and practitioners might indeed have different views on how to manage these unforeseen events.

For instance, the discussions among the G1000 participants could sometimes become quite tense, especially when discussing issues related to identity and religion. When conflicts emerged, or when participants questioned the functioning of the process, practitioners were eager to put an end to the conflict as quickly as possible, as it both disrupted the good atmosphere and generated a delay in the schedule. On their side, researchers viewed these moments as an expression of the freedom of individuals in voicing their opinions and criticizing the process. In their view, these conflictive moments shouldn’t be constrained in order to avoid domination and constraints on the participants above all, despite the delays and lowered satisfaction it could cause.

Also, ideals advanced by academics and more practical considerations put forward by practitioners might conflict. For instance, during the practical organization of the first meeting of the Deliberative Committees, researchers highlighted six different sub-topics they wanted to put on the table of the participants, based on presentations and discussions performed by six different experts during the first day of deliberations. With in mind the ideal to provide all participants with the same information, they thought of small tables at which all participants could come and discuss with each of the six experts. When confronted to this request, practitioners rapidly advocated that this was impossible to put in practice during only one day. These practical aspects linked to the timing and ideals of perfect information eventually converged towards an intermediate solution offering the possibility to participants to choose to go and discuss with four out of the six experts.

Third, views might also differ between researchers and policy-makers: the ideals and best practices suggested by academics might be constrained by the need for political compromises and accordance of diverging interests and ideologies. In designing the Permanent Citizen Dialogue, one key issue was the constitutional framework. The Belgian Constitution does not allow that citizens are lawmakers; only elected parliamentarians are lawmakers in Belgium. Hence, the design of the process had to take into account this strict constitutional framework.

In the case of the Deliberative Committees, for instance, compromises among decision makers about the budget that would be devoted to the process necessarily put restrictions on the design choices that could be operated by the designers of the process. For instance, as Brussels is a highly multicultural and multilingual region, researchers advised to allow live translation of the discussions in multiple languages to foster the inclusiveness of the process. However, as this is quite costly, it couldn’t fit in the budget planned for the event. Hence, compromises have been made to keep the costs low but still provide guarantees for inclusion of all participants, regardless of the language they speak. For instance, the letter sent to randomly selected

participants was only sent in the two official languages of the Brussels administration (French and Dutch) but were also possible to consult online in the five most spoken languages of the Capital. Also, as the group's discussions wouldn't be interpreted, participants who don't speak French or Dutch are able to rely on a "buddy system"<sup>12</sup> to help them with the back and forth translation.

Finally, one should note that the perception of researchers by the participants of deliberative processes can vary substantively. During the process, participants would ideally not notice researchers or only feel slightly observed by them. At the evaluation stage, however, critical assessments by researchers – even if they are only focused on the process and set-up – can be perceived by participants as a critique of their own work because they have strongly identified with the process. This is especially valid for permanent institutions like the Permanent Citizen Dialogue because participants of a Citizen Assembly take part in its evaluation and, when sitting in the Citizen Council, are charged with the organization of the next ones. The main challenge resides then to engage in a dialogue between researchers and participants in order to create a common understanding of how the process is judged and how one can jointly think of its improvement without criticizing the work that has been done by the participants themselves.

## **Conclusion**

Through this paper, we have first described the multiple roles researchers were designated to have in the proliferation, design, organization and analysis of deliberative processes. Then, based on our experience in three Belgian deliberative events, we have confirmed the impossibility for researchers to just remain analysts in such processes. In that regard, we have first analyzed the motivations behind this increased multiplication of roles, as well from a researcher point of view as well as on the side of political actors. Then, we have analyzed to what extent this blurring of lines between researchers' posture as analysts, advocates, organizers and designers can have impacts on the processes, on the researchers and on their relationship with other actors. With regard to this last element, we have also observed that researchers are not the only actors whose roles become blurry: political actors and practitioners can also embody different roles depending on the process in which they are involved, opening the door for further research.

The main conclusions we can draw from our involvement in the three cases on which this manuscript is based are the following. First, the motivations of researchers to get engaged in their field are various, from legal requirements related to their funding to a personal desire to actively participate in reshaping democracy. On the organizers' side, there can also be multiple reasons to involve researchers in the design of their processes, from seeking their expertise to build qualitative processes, to giving it a certain legitimacy, scientific guarantee to make the process appear serious in the eyes of the press, participants, and other political actors. Second,

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<sup>12</sup> The "buddy system" allows participants speaking another language than French or Dutch to form a pair with another participant speaking the same third language and who is also fluent in French or Dutch to help him or her to contribute to and understand the discussions. If there is no other participant speaking the same third language, the participant is allowed to come with another person (who is not a participant) who will help with the translation.

we have seen that the involvement of researchers produces a win-win situation in which they bring quality to the process and the process in turn brings them access to data and new research avenues. Finally, and more crucially, we have also seen that this doesn't come without effects on the researchers' relationship to other actors (namely with practitioners, policy-makers, other researchers and participants), and that the roles of these actors can also get blurry. Therefore, it seems that it is not really the evolution of the roles of one of these sole actors taken independently that is the most interesting to investigate, but rather how all these actors can work together and make their different competences become complementary, how they build synergies so as to develop the best possible deliberative processes.

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