Citizen engagement in politics and policymaking: Lessons from the UK

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Table of contents

Executive summary

– Decentralisation has been, and continues to be, an ongoing process. From the devolution of formal powers and institutions at the outset, it is increasingly about creating new opportunities for communities and citizens to play a more direct role in public decision-making. New forms of citizen engagement are seen as an important addition, not a replacement, to representative democracy.

– Citizen engagement has been most successful when seen as part of a holistic approach to government and democratic reform. Rather than one legislative measure or one consultation on an ad hoc basis, it is about a medium- to long-term approach to decentralisation and democratic participation.

– Offline and online engagement are complementary. While new online tools allow governments to bypass the limitations of time and space, the need for in-person meetings will never disappear. This is especially true when it comes to issues or decisions that require people to have empathy and build trust.

– The case studies outlined in this report cover a number of actors and how they fit together: national government; regional government; local government; non-governmental organisations (NGOs); academic institutions and less formal community groups. They cover formal pieces of legislation, the impact of bottom-up civil society campaigns on shaping government action, the interaction between government, NGOs and civil society, and the relationship between government and participatory practitioners to build the evidence base of 'what works.'

– The case studies include:

- Tings: Deliberative engagement of citizens in decision-making
- Participatory budgeting
- Community Empowerment Act (Scotland)
- What Works Network
- Living Labs
- "Act as if you own the place" campaign: Scotland
- Scottish Independent Commission on Parliamentary Reform
- The Democratic Society: Supporting neighbourhood engagement in an English town
- Local Government Association: Engaging citizens in devolution
- People's Plan for Manchester
- Participation Cymru
- Irish Constitutional Convention
- Long-form deliberative processes: Canada and Australia
- Melbourne People's Panel

– The UK government has produced a set
  of consultation principles. It is not a legally
  binding document, but it provides government
  departments with clear guidance on conducting
  consultations. On the basis of interviews,
  the civil servants and non-government
  organisations involved with citizen engagement
  activities have not encountered any legal
  challenges, though they are always cautious.
  Quite often, they are working together with the
  relevant politician or government department
  within the framework of the law, so there is little
  risk of a legal challenge.

Introduction

The UK has a uniquely asymmetric division of powers between the central government, devolved governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and local authorities. The decentralisation agenda has been, and continues to be, an ongoing process. May 2017 will see the latest transfer of powers to newly created mayoral authorities across the North of England as part of the government's 'Northern Powerhouse' agenda. There is equally decentralisation happening within the devolved powers. Scotland's recently introduced Community Empowerment Act, for instance, creates new opportunities for communities and citizens to play a more important and direct role in public decision-making. Beyond formal processes, civil society campaigns have also played a central part in shaping devolution and democratic institutions.

The key finding from this research is that citizen engagement is most successful when it is part of a holistic approach to government and democratic reform, embedded in institutions. Rather than being about one legislative measure here or there, or one event or consultation on an ad-hoc basis, it is about taking a medium- to long-term approach to establish a coherent agenda for both decentralisation and democratic participation.

These findings are complemented by new research by the Royal Society of Arts and Manufacturing (RSA), which emphasises that "the evidence suggests that past experiences of citizen engagement can help drive stronger participation, highlighting the important role that... strongly embedded participatory institutions can play."[1] Success in the form of better policies, an active and engaged citizenship, and increased legitimacy seems to come most often when government, civil society organisations, campaigning groups, and citizens themselves are all working toward a common goal. As one former government minister put it:

"Greater citizen involvement is not just about getting the right decision, it's about reconnection between citizens and those in power. It's about challenging some of the cynicism about politics."

Moreover, the research also highlights that offline and online engagement are complementary. Despite the advent of new digital tools available, the need for in-person participation will never disappear. Involving citizens in public decision-making which requires them to consider trade-offs and try to understand a problem from all angles is better done when people can meet face to face, fostering social bonds which are difficult to form online. Trust and empathy require a human touch. On the other hand, the digital space offers many more opportunities for new forms of engagement that were not possible a few years ago. It allows governments and public bodies to surpass the limitations of space and distance, helping scale the number of people that can be involved. The availability of open data is also a new opportunity for citizens to create innovative tech-based solutions to community problems.

The following report will provide an overview about why citizen engagement in politics and policymaking matters and how it has evolved in recent years. It will outline various models available, both online and offline, supported by case study examples. In doing so, it will highlight the impact of citizen engagement on politics and policymaking. The challenges involved, suggestions for overcoming them, as well as legal issues related to different models will also be discussed. Finally, the report will offer a conclusion.

[1] RSA. 2017. "How citizenship, technology and democracy can make your city thrive." Available at: https://medium.com/citizens-and-inclusive-growth/emerging-findings-from-the-citizens-and-inclusive-growth-programme-65eea0a0a7a#.qy9o77t5d.

Why citizen engagement matters

While trust in politicians and government institutions has never been particularly high, it has been falling in recent years[2]. Trust underpins the legitimacy required of political leaders to make public decisions. When it falters, the security and stability of the system comes into question. It creates the space for anti-establishment parties and leaders to thrive. In the UK, it has been argued[3] that the feeling that people's voices do not count in the decisions taken by elected representatives has been one of the forces fuelling support for the two nationalist parties: the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the Scottish National Party (SNP). According to polling in that study, seven in ten people (68%) in the UK also think that the system of governing Britain needs to change – one of the most popular changes is to give citizens more of a voice in public decision-making. The slogan of the campaign to leave the European Union (EU), "take back control," resonated with many people for a reason.

Furthermore, as Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson detail in *Why Nations Fail*[4], citizen engagement also matters because inclusive political institutions are the foundation that allow for wealth and prosperity to flourish. Many governments are in difficult fiscal situations needing to balance budgets while dealing with an ageing population, the impact of technology and automation on jobs, and other challenges.

In these circumstances, the need to build public support and find legitimacy for action is stronger than ever. Citizen engagement in making public decisions has helped elected officials and policymakers to identify the public's priorities, gain backing for tough choices, and develop long-lasting solutions which can withstand party politicking.

Another reason why citizen engagement is important is to do with increasing the diversity of experiences, perspectives and viewpoints which are brought into public decision-making. By using a combination of public participation methods, particularly when they involve either random selection or when they try to ensure representativeness of the people, a much wider cross-section of society is 'brought to the table.' Research from political and social science, psychology and business has emphasised that a diversity of perspectives and ideas helps lead to better quality decisions. Assumptions are more likely to be challenged than when experts or like-minded people are the only ones in a room, as they tend to have access to the same sources of information and reinforce each other's views instead of putting forth new ideas. Widening the group of those involved with making public decisions beyond politicians and experts through citizen engagement can thus lead to better policy decisions.

[2] OECD. 2017. "Trust in Government." http://www.oecd.org/gov/trust-in-government.htm.
[3] Chwalisz, Claudia. 2015. The Populist Signal: Why Politics and Democracy Need to Change. New York: Rowman & Littlefield. Available at: http://www.policy-network.net/publications/4918/The-Populist-Signal.
[4] Acemoglu, Daron and James Robinson. 2012. Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty. New York: Crown Publishing Group.

While people in the UK want even greater citizen engagement than is currently the case, the British example also shows the process of decentralisation of power to institutions and communities is ongoing and evolving. There has been gradual devolution in the UK since the Middle Ages, constantly evolving to the present day. Citizen engagement is a key addition that enriches representative democracy – it is not a replacement. Ultimately, politicians are still responsible and accountable for the decisions they make. However, there are many different ways in which they can make their decisions: involving citizens in a meaningful way is one of them.
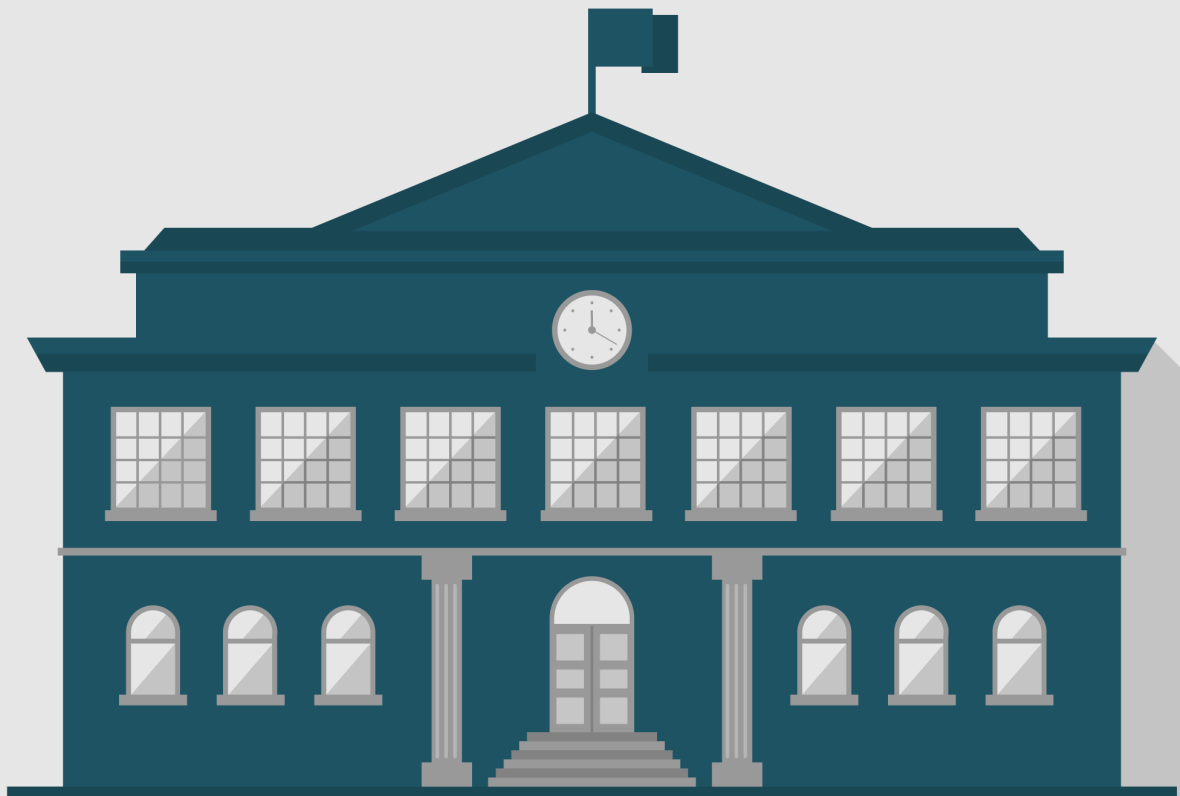
The evolution of devolution and citizen engagement in the UK

3 The next big change came as a result of the Local Government Act in 1888, which formalised a number of the piecemeal changes that had been taking place over the previous decades and established local government. Until that point, the counties had been mini-monarchies enforcing central government power, with appointed sheriffs, lieutenants and justices in charge. The Local Government Act introduced the role of elected representatives to govern the county or borough councils. It also formally established civil parishes as smaller 'community councils' for rural settlements, which did not have a local government district to themselves.

1 As defined on the UK government's website,[5] "devolution is a process of decentralisation, and puts power closer to the citizen so that local factors are better recognised in decision-making."

2 The heterogeneous system of local government, devolved regional government and various forms of citizen participation have evolved in an evolutionary way since the Middle Ages, when the power of governing was broken down into separate town and countryside administrations. The most pronounced changes did not occur until the Great Reform Act of 1832 to account for the great changes in population during the Industrial Revolution. The Reform Act abolished small boroughs as administrative units, enfranchised new industrial boroughs, increased the size of the population eligible to vote and ended various corruption practices in government. Although it did not directly have anything to do with local government, it paved the way for future reforms.

4 Various small reforms took place over the decades afterwards, with Local Government Boundary Commissions reviewing the appropriate size of counties and creating new ones where the population had expanded, as well as other reforms to Greater London in particular. The updated Local Government Act of 1972 attempted to simplify the system and make it a more uniform, two-tier system. However, since then, metropolitan county councils were abolished in 1986, and the Local Government Act of 1992 made many small changes which brought the system back towards a more heterogeneous set-up.

6 The 2000s then brought attempts to create eight new regional devolved assemblies in England, with new decentralised powers. A London Assembly with a directly elected mayor was created, but plans for the other assemblies were scrapped after a referendum on a North-East Assembly rejected the idea. In England, local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) were encouraged in 2011 by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. These are voluntary partnerships between local authorities and businesses to help jointly set economic priorities, create jobs in the local area and lead economic growth.

5 Major changes occurred in the late 1990s. Referendums were held in Scotland and Wales in 1997. In both regions, a majority chose to establish a Scottish Parliament and a National Assembly for Wales. In Northern Ireland, devolution and the creation of a Northern Irish Assembly were part of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. With the public's support, the parliament passed three Acts: the Scotland Act 1998; the Northern Ireland Act 1998; and the Government of Wales Act 1998. These established the three devolved legislatures, outlining the powers that Westminster was to reserve. Anything not listed was therefore devolved.

[5] Gov.UK. "Devolution of Powers to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland." https://www.gov.uk/guidance/devolution-of-powers-to-scotland-wales-and-northern-ireland.

7 Other more participatory aspects of decentralisation also began occurring from the beginning of the 2000s. While difficult to trace the first instances of participatory budgeting (PB) in the UK, the PB Unit was established in 2000 – a project led by the national charity Church Action on Poverty until 2012. At that time, its work was picked up by a newly formed PB Network across the UK as well as PB Partners.[6] Over the past decade, participatory budgeting, where citizens play a more direct role in allocating a portion of budget resources, has become more and more commonplace across all of the UK. Outlined in greater detail within the case studies section, it is one of the clearest steps from decentralisation changing from being mostly about devolution to new government institutions towards more power going directly to communities themselves. In many cases, PB accounts for only around 1% of local budgets, though this is still an important sum in the millions of pounds.

9 The use of government consultations has also exploded to the point where the gov.uk consultation website[8] now discusses how to "reduce the risk of 'consultation fatigue.'" On many policies, it is strongly recommended that the government carry out a consultation with the public (discussed in greater detail in the final section of this report regarding legalities). This often takes place in the form of an open online submission process, where anyone is able to provide a response. In reality, given the complexity involved with understanding the government's plans and the time requirements for putting together a submission, this tends to mean that it is organised interest groups, charities, private companies and other formal bodies that submit the majority of responses. The average citizen has little say.

8 Co-production, which means "delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours,"[7] has also taken off as an approach to citizens, businesses, and public service providers and users work together to develop the best outcomes.

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[6] See https://pbpartners.org.uk/.
[7] Scottish Co-production Network. "What is Co-production?" [8] http://www.coproductionscotland.org.uk/about/what-is-co-production/.
[9] See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance.
[10] See https://www.loomio.org/about.
[11] Simon, Julie, Theo Bass, Victoria Boelman and Geoff Mulgan. 2017. Digital Democracy: The Tools Transforming Political Engagement"
London: Nesta. Available at: http://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/digital-democracy-tools-transforming-political-engagement.

12 It is also worth mentioning that online technologies have been enabling new forms of citizen engagement. For participatory budgeting, there is usually a mix of online and offline events and activities involved with reaching a final decision. Tools such as Loomio[9] allow for more deliberative discussions about priorities. The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (Nesta) has recently published a report on digital democracy[10] which outlines technologies that are being used to empower citizens and bring them into policy discussions around the world as well, offering lessons to the UK which may also be of interest elsewhere.
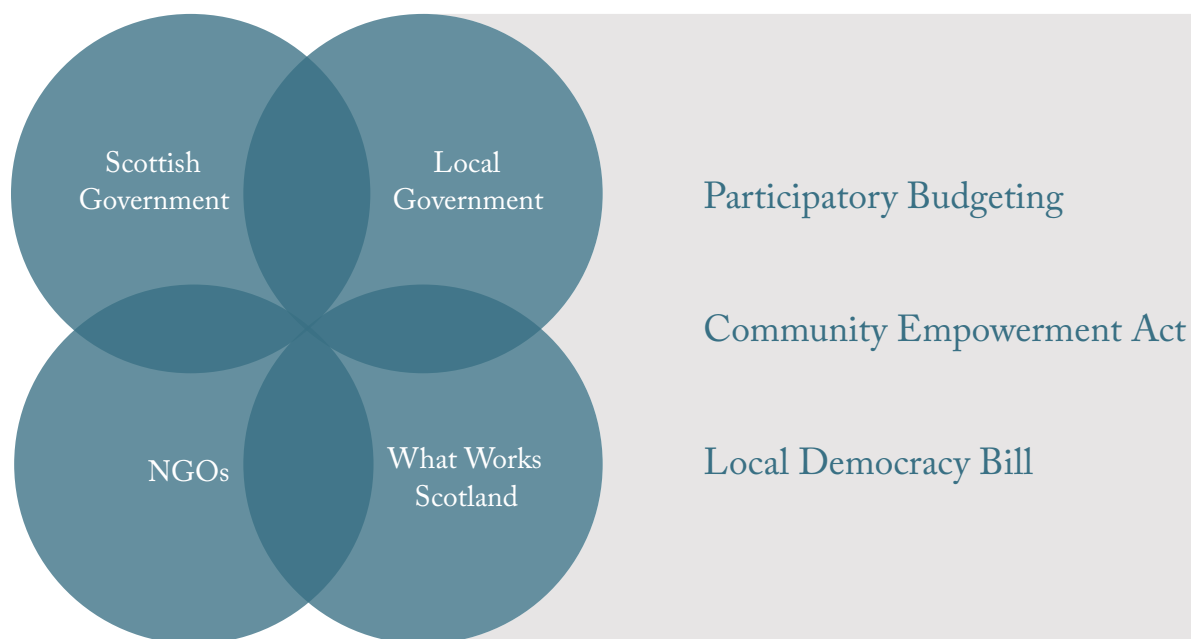
10 At the local level, these online consultations are sometimes complemented by town hall meetings, which are open for anybody to attend. However, their format usually means that it is elected representatives speaking to the public, often defending their plans, rather than it being a two-way conversation where citizens are given the time and resources to propose informed recommendations.

11 The 2000s also saw the national government experiment with citizens' juries, which tend to involve around 12-24 randomly selected citizens coming together for one or a few days to learn, deliberate about and propose ideas for solving a policy problem. The government's pilots, rather understandably, stopped around 2008 at the time of the financial crisis when other priorities became more pressing than developing better citizen engagement practices. However, citizens' juries have still been used on an ad hoc basis since that time, most recently in Scotland about the location of wind farms, about health inequalities and about community policing.

Overall, the decentralisation of power to different levels of government and to citizens has been a long, ongoing process which is still developing as new ideas and technologies take hold.
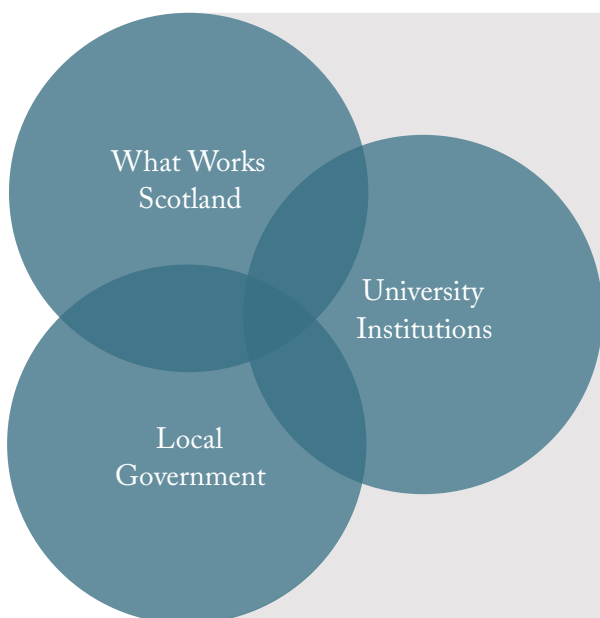
Different models of participation: Case studies

The following section goes into greater detail about some of the methods touched upon briefly thus far. Although they are outlined as separate occurrences and approaches, the best way to read through this section is by keeping in mind how all of these models work together to form a more coherent approach to democratic renewal. There are also a couple of international case study examples from Ireland, Canada and Australia which are particularly noteworthy. Below is a graphic which helps to visualise how the different actors work together for each of these participatory mechanisms. For illustrative purposes, all of the examples are from Scotland.
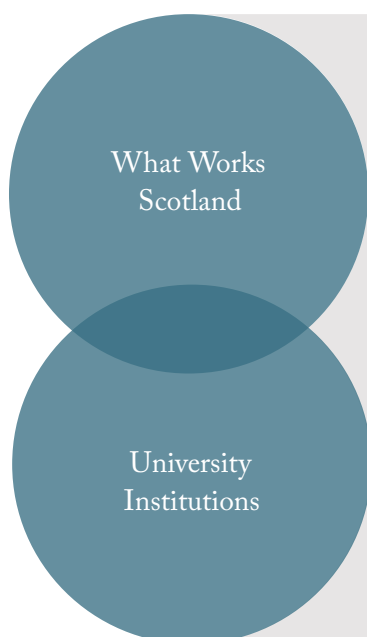
Scottish Government

Local Government

NGOs

What Works Scotland

Participatory Budgeting

Community Empowerment Act

Local Democracy Bill

Scottish
Government

Economic
and Social
Research
Council

What Works Scotland

What Works
Scotland

University
Institutions

Local
Government

Living Labs

What Works
Scotland

University
Institutions

Co-production Evaluation

Citizens' Juries

Tings: Deliberative engagement of citizens in decision-making

The word "tings" comes from an ancient Anglo Saxon word, which remains in "hustings" and in the name of the Icelandic parliament. It means a place where citizens come together to make decisions. Tings are experimental and in their infancy; they are a collaboration between Scottish Government and a number of democratic organisations with the aim of connecting people through to power, in a way that can directly affect a change.

The first Ting took place in Lanarkshire (in the Scottish Lowlands) in mid-2016 about health with the Health Board of Lanarkshire. It was run by a consortium involving civil society organisations Involve, The Democratic Society, Electoral Reform Society as well as the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC). The Health Board was writing a new strategy, thinking about how those who are not already involved with patient groups could get engaged.

They gathered a group of around 30 people together for a full day to understand every perspective, different attitudes, and to examine all the evidence. Then they were asked to think through what their actions might be to help solve the problem. Roughly half of the participants were from an audience already involved in various health organisations or patient groups. The others were randomly selected people who had never been involved with anything health-

related before. These people were chosen by members of the two civil society groups, Involve and the Democratic Society, interviewing people at a shopping centre in Lanarkshire.

One of the challenges that the organisers recognised is that it was difficult to encourage people to attend. It took a lot of effort to get enough people involved and numerous people also dropped out on the day. Doreen Grove, Head of Open Government in the Scottish civil service, suspects that "there was a fear associated with not having been involved in this sort of thing before. So for the next Ting, we are thinking about how to mentor people before participating. We are establishing some preparatory work. It is also about setting it up well in advance."

The Ting was moderated by Andy Williamson, one of the co-managing directors from The Democratic Society, with the help of five facilitators to make sure that every voice could be heard. It was structured as a deliberative event: first the evidence and understanding; then hearing from each other, and only then thinking about actions that could be taken.

The citizens came up with a list of 10 recommendations, which were presented directly to the Health Board, who deliberated on them after the meeting. Some of these could be easily

done, and others will require more thinking, especially as it was a group of only 30 people that came up with them in the first place. The Health Board feels it will need to gain more legitimacy to proceed with implementing them. However, the Ting was not a one-off. The Board will be following up with another citizens meeting to discuss what they plan to do, and are considering a number of the recommendations that came from the citizens who participated. One of the ideas, which is likely to be implemented, was for the Health Board to establish a place where they can hold citizen meetings on a regular basis.

According to Doreen Grove:

The second set of Tings that the Scottish government is planning is on death, organised with the Youth Justice Team and Young Scot, a national youth and citizenship charity, given their extensive work with young people. This recognises that people who have experienced serious trauma are much more likely to offend. It's a big problem that has received little attention by policymakers so far. The aim of the Tings is to think about what public services could do to mitigate the impact of trauma. There will be three events with three different demographics, one of which will be with young offenders.

"We recognise that this is experimental (one of many happening in Scotland). The aim is to bring in as many voices and perspectives into the room as possible in order to solve problems together. We believe that asking people to be involved in decisions is really important, and see Tings as a neutral mechanism to make this happen, but retaining a strong link to government. We would like to see Tings grow into a network of spaces and places for talking about tricky issues."

Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting (PB) is when ordinary citizens are involved with helping decide on where a proportion of a locality's budget should be allocated. It can take many different forms – often through a mix of offline and online engagement. The approach to PB has been different in the various regions in the UK. It is currently most institutionalised in Scotland, but it has been undertaken by councils and other public sector bodies in the rest of the United Kingdom as well.

In Scotland, the 2015 Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act includes a number of measures which act as 'the stick', encouraging public sector bodies to go in the direction of involving the public in deciding a portion of their budgets. The 'carrot' is in the form of match funding and support for PB activities. If local authorities were willing to move from giving money based purely on decisions taken by elected representatives towards involving the community in those decisions, the government would match the funding. This national fund is currently called the Community Choices Fund, worth £2 million for 2016/17, to open up opportunities and particularly support deprived areas. Initially a Scottish National Party (SNP) manifesto commitment, the Scottish Government's target is for local authorities to allocate 1% of their budgets through participatory budgeting (an average of £160 million).

Furthermore, the Community Empowerment Act includes a new regulation-making power which gives Ministers the authority to require Scottish public authorities to encourage and facilitate public participation in their decision-making, including budget allocation. While the legislation does not specifically refer to PB, it is one of the most used methods and the Scottish Government has been supporting it in various ways, such as funding a consultancy called PB Partners to support 20 local authorities across the country.

The Scottish Government also commissioned The Democratic Society (DemSoc) to complete a research project into the digital tools available for PB. DemSoc researched how to use digital tools, analysed them, and came up with the top five available, providing the government with demo sites for all of them. Their report "Digital Tools and Scotland's Participatory Budgeting Programme"[11] was published in February 2016. The government then asked DemSoc to help

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[11] The Democratic Society. 2016. Digital Tools and Scotland's Participatory Budgeting Programme. Edinburgh: Government of Scotland. Available at: http://www.demsoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/DS-Digital-Tools-paper.pdf.

make the digital process happen in 18 local authorities, offering them support to help deliver and to enable them to do PB themselves. In this first stage, DemSoc also helped the local authorities develop their questionnaires and to establish a PB Learning Group which provides workshops and learning materials to public sector authorities interested in participatory budgeting.

On top of funding capacity-building in local authorities, the Scottish Government is also funding Glasgow Caledonian University to run a two-year evaluation programme "to assess the impact of PB on communities, services and democracy with a particular focus on the relationship between PB and inequalities."[12]

The government's efforts are also informed by the PB working group[13] which provides advice and guidance on a bi-monthly basis, and includes a mix of civil society groups, academics and non-profit consultancies: Scottish Community

Development Centre (SCDC), Scottish Community Alliance, What Works Scotland, the University of Edinburgh, Church & Society Council, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO), the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), and the Democratic Society. The working group's remit focuses largely on capacity building: developing and maintaining the PB Scotland website; digital innovation training; building a PB network across Scotland, and a 'Champions' network so that there is less reliance on external experts. As Oliver Escobar from What Works Scotland stresses, "the point is to develop the critical mass within public authorities here who can train and support each other." Importantly, the government's PB initiatives are part of a wider process of democratic renewal rather than a one-off or separate set of engagement measures.

[12] Scottish Government. "Participatory Budgeting." http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/engage/Participatory-budgeting.
[13] PB Scotland. "PB Working Group." https://pbscotland.scot/about/.

Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

What later became one of the Scottish Government's key pieces of legislation relating to citizen engagement initially began as a Scottish National Party (SNP) manifesto commitment about allowing communities to deal with abandoned buildings. The two public consultations that the former Minister for Local Government and Planning, Derek Mackay, later ran on the issue broadened out the scope to give communities more power generally. These consultations were rather typical government consultations that run through the representatives of various groups. A huge policy document goes online and technically anyone can respond with a submission, but given the time and expertise required to put together a response, it ends up being dominated by interest groups and organisations.

Marco Biagi took over the portfolio, renamed to Local Government and Community Empowerment, in 2014 shortly after the Scottish independence referendum. He inherited a bill that had already been constructed with the task of taking it through parliament and reconsidering a number of questions. Notably, he did some consultations with the main charities, tried to get community councillors to come forward, and held big participative projects including a series of geographic and themed meetings across the country with the general public. On the question of participatory budgeting, Biagi thought it would be good for PB to allow some ministerial direction, introducing the measures outlined in the Participatory Budgeting case study.

Crucially, Marco Biagi also stressed that the Community Empowerment Act was not a one off act, but was part of a larger agenda of democratic renewal. "If you think of it as a pyramid," he explained, "with local councillors, elected representatives, those who are super involved at the top, and those who don't vote and are disengaged at the bottom, above the disengaged you have those who vote, but just want their elected representatives to get on with it. There is then another layer above them which is about 25-30% of the population who want to do more than just vote, but don't necessarily want to sit on a committee or an action board. We wanted to ensure that this group can have the opportunity to have a meaningful say." As part of the Act, the government thus required local authorities to ensure the participation of underrepresented individuals.

There was a big effort made by the government to engage as many people as possible in the process of shaping the Act. The big programme of democratic renewal meant that as well as considering the Community Empowerment bill, everything else that the Government started in that period was done with a similar ethos, including the Fairer Scotland Action Plan and the Local Tax Commission. Biagi explained the rationale in an interview for this research:

"Whereas once we would have just met with the policy representatives of the housing associations, for example, for this process we asked them to also involve end users. The intention was not necessarily to hear something different. It was so that people felt they were part of the process and felt more connected to power and to the outcome. I addressed meetings with lots of different groups – with disabled people, with refugees, with old people. They were often organised by partner organisations, such as Age UK, but it went past just meeting with the policy officer.

The main insight was that people were saying largely the same thing as representatives, but with a much richer experience. When we followed up with people afterwards, they had felt empowered to be part of the process."

The Community Empowerment Act is currently in the implementation stages under Biagi's successor, Kevin Stewart, in his renamed portfolio as Minister for Local Government and Housing. According to Oliver Escobar, co-director of What Works Scotland, the Act "has the potential to be a game-changer." One of the big potentials has to do with participation requests. There is now a tool that any community group (which can be informal or established) can request to participate in a public decision-making process if they can demonstrate that they can help improve the outcome. "The purpose," Escobar says, "is to open up the 'black box' of decision-making." What remains to be seen is whether people will use this tool, which is potentially very powerful.

What is clear is that the democratic renewal agenda is continuing after the Community Empowerment Act. The government is already talking about following up with a Local Democracy Bill, which is also based on the SNP manifesto commitment to "consult on and introduce a Bill that will decentralise local authority functions, budgets and democratic oversight to local communities."

What Works Network

The What Works Network is a multi-partner initiative to enable public service practitioners and deliverers to have access to independent, high quality evidence about 'what works' across a wide range of social policy areas.[14] The major funder is the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and each What Works Centre has its own set of partners. It is made up of seven independent What Works Centres in England and two affiliate members in Scotland and Wales. The What Works Centres in England were the first wave, adopting a fairly traditional approach by mostly conducting system reviews. The Welsh and later the Scottish What Works Centres followed. The latter in particular, being the last one, had the opportunity to take a different approach. Their research fellows spend time in government and communities; they help them to develop the skills. It is a collaborative action research approach.

While the Centres operate independently, and each is funded by a different mix of actors (all of them receive some funding from the Economic and Social Research Council; the rest comes from a mix of devolved governments, academic institutions, charities and other third parties). The What Works programme also receives ministerial backing from the national government and the two affiliate centres are supported by the Scottish and Welsh governments. A report by Nesta evaluating the success of the What Works Centres stresses that their independence is key for their success, as their "fierce culture of impartiality and detachment from political meddling" allow them to avoid biasing evidence to political needs.[15]

Participatory budgeting and citizens' juries

A co-director of What Works Scotland (WWS) was interviewed for this research to better understand how their work fits within the Scottish ecosystem of decentralisation and democratic renewal. In addition to being a partner in the Participatory Budgeting Working Group focused on capacity-building, WWS was also recently involved in supporting four citizens' juries – three on health inequalities[16] and one on community policing.

Evaluation activities: Example of co-production through Operation Modulus in Glasgow

As part of its exploration of 'what works,' the Scottish centre also conducts evaluations to understand why projects succeed or fail. One of its recent evaluations was of 'Operation Modulus,'[17] "a highly successful, innovative, award-winning violence and anti-social behaviour intervention targeted at a gang of young people in the Gorbals area of Glasgow."

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[14] Economic and Social Research Council. "What Works Centres." http://www.esrc.ac.uk/collaboration/collaboration-oportunities/what-works-centres/

[15] Breckon, Jonathan. 2014. "Why the What Works Centres are Working." http://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/why-what-works-centres-are-working.

[16] The University of Edinburgh. "How Should We Tackle Health Inequalities?" See http://www.healthinequalities.net/citizens-juries.

[17] Brunner, Richard and Nick Watson. 2016. Operation Modulus: Putting Christie Into Practice in the Gorbals. Edinburgh: What Works Scotland. Available at: http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/operation-modulus-putting-christie-into-practice-in-the-gorbals/.

While Operation Modulus was a small project, it proved to be a genuine example of how co-production can have positive outcomes and how different agencies can work together to solve issues and overcome the gridlock which comes from no single agency having full ownership of a societal problem. In this case, it was an area of Glasgow which had problems with gangs of young people for many years. It was costing a lot of money; the council, the housing association and the police were struggling to cope with situation. It took someone from the fire service coming into this space as a facilitator and a catalyst for working together with the young people to develop exit strategies. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) brought together partners from public services, the third sector and the private sector in a tailed four-week program that was co-produced with the gang members. The programme led to an 80 per cent decrease in crime related to individuals in the gang; a significant reduction in complaints from the community about the gang; gang members gaining trade qualifications and employment; significant cost savings to public services, and ongoing changes in the partnership practices and relationships between all of the partners involved in developing the programme. It demonstrated that once you overcome the gridlock of problem ownership (it had multiple sources of responsibility), by working together with citizens (in this case, the gang members), they were able to solve it and lead to lasting outcomes.

Living Labs

What Works Scotland are also working to set up 'Living Labs' in four European cities (Glasgow, Birmingham, Copenhagen and Amsterdam) with the help of EU Horizon2020 funding. These are local spaces for policymakers, researchers, local authorities, industry and third sector actors to solve problems in cities. The idea is to work in particular with disadvantaged areas to better understand how to solve problems through a process of continuously experimenting, refining and redefining an intervention to ensure that it has the intended outcome.

These new Living Labs take inspiration from previous initiatives such as the Edinburgh Living Lab,[18] which was co-founded with the City of Edinburgh Council and the University of Edinburgh. Its goal is to bring the city-wide collaboration of partners "to work with citizens in co-designing, testing and implementing new services, process and products that generate social, environmental and economic value... Our approach combines data-driven analysis and participatory design techniques to support social innovation." A key aspect of the Living Labs approach also involves carrying out participatory research through small-scale experiments.

"Act as if you own the place" campaign: Scotland

"Act as if you own the place" is a coalition of organisations and individual citizens interested in local democracy.[19] It's a people-driven campaign which is a turn away from parliament and the legislative process. The main organisations involved in the campaign – Electoral Reform Society Scotland, Common Weal, Scottish Rural Parliament, Scottish Community Alliance, Democratic Society, Centre for Scottish Public Policy, Scottish Community Development Centre and Galgael, The Stove Network and the Citizen Participation Network – partner with local organisations across Scotland to organise deliberative events about what people want local democracy to be.

The meetings are rather structured. Facilitators guide the discussions to begin with talking about 'what's wrong' with local democracy as it is and what are the salient issues facing the community. Next a local group or organisation who has set up a project or is already doing something presents, followed by a presentation from one of the organisers about local government structures and what could be done differently. Finally, the community deliberates on what next and what they can do concretely to make a change. As Willie Sullivan of the Electoral Reform Society Scotland says, "the group in each local area then develops a life of its own."

The campaign has done three of these events already – in Kirriemuir on 14 January 2017, in Govan Glasgow on 4th February 2017 and in Dundee on 18 March 2017. They will be doing eight or nine of them over the course of the year and will end with a big festival that brings them all together in the summer. What the campaign wants to achieve is creating a network of involved people and connecting local networks with one another. People have also become interested in running their own events, so the campaigners have put together a template for how to do so online. The idea is for this to build over time.

"Act as if you own the place" is a campaign that will influence legislation in an indirect way. The organisers' process has become part of the consultation for the Decentralisation Bill (also mentioned in the Community Empowerment Act case study). Every event will have a report, which can be submitted to the Decentralisation Bill's consultation. In addition, there were quite a few local councillors who attended the first meetings (in their capacity as citizens), and the campaign organisers are also meeting with the Bill's ministerial team in late March 2017.

[18] See http://edinburghlivinglab.org/.
[19] See http://www.ourdemocracy.scot/.

Scottish Independent Commission on Parliamentary Reform

The Commission was established in October 2016 to consider ways in which the Parliament can "be assured it has the right checks and balances in place for effective conduct of parliamentary business; increase its engagement with wider society and the public; and clarify its identity as distinct from the Scottish Government."[20] To engage citizens in the Commission's process, they have held deliberative workshops, public events in parliament, public sessions with experts and NGOs, town hall meetings across the country, as well as the traditional open response submission process online. The Commission's recommendations should be done by June 2017.

The Democratic Society: Supporting neighbourhood engagement in an English town

The Democratic Society (Demsoc) is an NGO undertaking research and practical work supporting the development of new democratic models. It exists in the middle space between government and civil society, helping governments navigate societal transformations from a hierarchical "machine" government to a more networked government which is closer to its citizens. Demsoc's work revolves around the question of institutional change, an important element of which is helping government manage the cultural change needed for citizens to be active citizens. They have now done about 90 different projects since they were founded 10 years ago.

The case study discussed here about supporting engagement in different neighbourhoods within an English town is highlighted because of some of the difficulties involved and the important lessons to keep in mind when thinking about designing meaningful citizen engagement that has a lasting impact. [The name of the town has been kept anonymous].

It was a project that ran for around one year in six neighbourhoods within a town, located in a conurbation outside London. Areas were chosen to ensure the project worked with different demographics and different issues. The Democratic Society with two other partners was asked by the city council to develop a model in which the town could use a different approach to engaging citizens in each area, dependent on their needs.

The project used a mix of different approaches – online, offline and both. There were important issues to discuss in each of the six neighbourhoods. For example, in one of them, there was a local park which residents wanted to fix up. In another, where there were many students, there was a concern about licensing. In other parts of town, issues included children's services and library locations.

What made the project difficult, according to Anthony Zacharzewski, the founder of The Democratic Society, was "to get through the process in a timely manner." He said there were a few key lessons for the organisation, and for civil society organisations working with governments more generally.

[20] See https://parliamentaryreform.scot/.

The first lesson is that having enough time is essential to an engagement project's success. It is also important to set ambitions in line with the time available. The project had 86 person-days of time available, spread across one year, of which roughly seven or eight days were spent in each neighbourhood, and the other days were used to coordinate with the council, organise the engagement activities and develop a strategy. This was not enough time to develop something sustainable for numerous reasons.

First, working in partnership with other public services and those already working in local areas was important, but added complexity. The project worked across a partnership of different public service providers, which was intended to help ensure coordination with their efforts. However, in reality, the results were mixed. It meant there were multiple levels of coordination and a lot of time spent liaising between different areas and individuals.

This reduced the time available for designing engagement approaches for each area – something that was already ambitious for the time scale. The project was trying to create different things in different places. But ultimately, they reached the view that if time is a constraint, it would be better to replicate well-tested methods across different areas. Creation and method design should only be undertaken if there is enough time allocated for it.

The second overall lesson was the importance of finding two sided issues which both the council and the community care about. Some of the issues that the areas raised were important

to them, but the council either had no remit to act upon them or had other priorities. For engagement to be effective, it needs to be on issues that both politicians and the community care about.

The third lesson was the different and complementary roles of co-ordinating organisations (like the Democratic Society) and community development organisations already present on the ground. In this instance, those already working in an area understood the issues in the place, and thought it unnecessary to involve outside organisations to help them. Anthony Zacharzewski said, "In some of the neighbourhoods, we had very productive conversations. In others, people were sitting with their arms crossed and didn't understand what we were doing there." It's important for the government body – in this case the local council – to understand how bringing in specific subject expertise gels with the local and practical expertise already present in the community.

The fourth lesson was that in a context of a place where people had been told year on year that the council would provide a project to change culture from top-down provision to a more facilitative role could not be a small project. It had to be about wholesale change. What the Democratic Society found was that as soon as it seemed a side project, it lost credibility in communities. "Don't claim to be doing something totally new when you only have the resources for a small project" was the advice from Zacharzewski.

Local Government Association:
Engaging citizens in devolution

The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government in England and Wales, working with councils across parties to support, promote and improve local government. The LGA has recently put together a comprehensive guide to citizen engagement called 'New Conversations,'[21] in addition to developing resources for engaging citizens in devolution (in partnership with the New Economics Foundation),[22] and presenting councils with case studies of community action.[23] The LGA's guides range from outlining formal consultation processes, deliberative meetings, listening exercises, co-production, crowdsourcing, events and public meetings.

The LGA's guidelines for engaging communities in devolution is most of interest to this research project. A useful starting point is the three principles outlined by the Association, which should underpin citizen participation:

1   **Deliberative:** That citizens should be given the adequate time and resources to develop an informed view before being asked for their opinion or recommendations. Early engagement should be encouraged to allow citizens to help shape not only the solutions to the problems, but also the nature of the questions asked.

2   **Responsive:** The local authority should be committed to consider the recommendations from a citizen participation process and give feedback on next steps.

3   **Legitimate:** The citizens involved should represent a wide cross-section of society. One way of ensuring this is the case is by representative sample, working systematically to involve a large range of civil society groups. It is important to ensure that aspects of the population are not being over- or under-represented.[24]

The LGA also outlines five approaches to engaging citizens in devolution,[25] a number of which are detailed within the case studies in this report as well. They include: citizens' assemblies; digital engagement; participatory budgeting; community organising, and co-production.

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[21] Local Government Association. 2016. "New Conversations: LGA Guide to Engagement." Available at: http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/8150261/New+Conversations+Guide+9-2.pdf/a5d96348-0866-4a6c-b6f4-61c33a12ac1d.
[22] Local Government Association. "Engaging Citizens in Devolution." http://www.local.gov.uk/engaging-citizens-in-devolution.
[23] Local Government Association. "Community Action Case Studies." http://www.local.gov.uk/community-action-case-studies.
[24] Local Government Association. "How Can Local Government Engage Communities Effectively?" http://www.local.gov.uk/how-can-local-government-engage-communities-effectively.
[25] Local Government Association. "Approaches to Civic and Democratic Engagement." http://www.local.gov.uk/approaches-to-civic-and-democratic-engagement.

People's Plan for Manchester

The UK government champions the 'Northern Powerhouse' devolution agenda to decentralise power across the North of England.[26] As well as allocating financial support through new Growth Deals and investment in transport and schools, the central government will also transfer powers to new mayors in Greater Manchester, the West Midlands, Tees Valley, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, Liverpool City Region, Sheffield City Region, and the West of England.

In Greater Manchester, an independent group of citizens and civil society has come together since 2015 to form a public engagement programme called "The People's Plan for Manchester."[27] It was prompted by the perceived problem in representative democracy – that the devolution deals were decided by elected leaders without adequate consultation with the people living in those areas. There is a feeling that the plans could have reflected the views of local people a lot more.

Various campaign groups, voluntary sector organisations, political actors, and individual citizens came together to establish a website, conduct online surveys, and organise events to develop a 'people's plan' which outlines the priorities for Greater Manchester, as reflected by a wide range of local citizens. All aspects of the People's Plan are open to participation from anyone in the city to contribute their views,

priorities and proposals. It is not designed to end with a wish list handed to the newly elected leader; rather it is to engage people in a wider participative process and to develop ideas, some of which could be implemented by local people themselves, and some of which can be championed by local politicians.

According to Neil McInroy, chief executive of the Centre for Local and Economic Strategies (CLES), one of the organisations involved in the People's Plan, there have been two to three thousand people engaged in the various events. "There is a genuine energy about the Plan. People of all ages have come along and contributed," McInroy says.

All of the mayoral candidates have mentioned the People's Plan in their campaigns, and the interim mayor, Tony Lloyd, has been fully supportive of the initiative as well. The aim is for the mayoral candidate to endorse or support the 20 ideas, and for the People's Plan to have a life beyond the election in May 2017.

[26] See http://northernpowerhouse.gov.uk/
[27] See http://www.peoplesplangm.org.uk/.

Participation Cymru

Hosted by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), Participation Cymru is a partnership of public and third sector organisations that work to achieve better public engagement in the design, development and delivery of citizen-centred services in Wales. They have developed a set of national public engagement principles, to which over 130 organisations have now signed up. Participation Cymru also works as a network which provides in-house training to help individuals and organisations build up their capacity and skills in a wide variety of public engagement techniques, methods and approaches. Their website provides resources and case studies, which are worth exploring in greater detail.[28] The engagement projects range from participatory budgeting, developing integrated community plans and local development plans, creating community council charters, and running workshops.

[28] Participation Cymru. "Case Studies." http://www. participationcymru.org.uk/national-principles/case-studies.

Irish Constitutional Convention

While not part of the UK, the Irish Constitutional Convention[29] might also be of interest as a somewhat unique citizen engagement exercise in Ireland in 2013. It was prompted as a response to the financial crisis and ensuing political crisis. Following Fine Gael's win in the 2011 elections, a citizens' assembly for political and electoral reform was promised.

The resulting Irish Constitutional Convention comprised 66 randomly selected citizens (though controlled for a gender, age, religion and socioeconomic balance), 33 politicians (one from each of the parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly that wanted to participate, as well as members of the Irish parliament in proportion to party strengths), and a chair appointed by the government.

The Convention's members worked in small groups with facilitators, note-takers and experts to reach a consensus on eight highly contentious issues: "reducing the presidential term of office to five years and aligning it with the local and European elections; reducing the voting age to 17; review of the Dáil electoral system; giving citizens resident outside the state the right to vote in presidential elections at Irish embassies, or otherwise; provision for same-sex marriage; amending the clause on the role of women in the home and encouraging greater participation of women in public life; increasing the participation of women in politics; and removal of the offence of blasphemy from the Constitution."

The Irish Constitutional Convention met on numerous weekends over the course of a year. The participants made their recommendations on the basis of majority votes on each of the topics on the table for discussion, submitting reports to the government. If the government accepted them, any proposed changes were to be ratified by a referendum. Towards the end of the year, the convention additionally discussed other potential reforms which were not included in the list handed down by the government. Ultimately, they added two more areas, about reforming the Dáil and economic, social and cultural rights. The government accepted the first three reforms proposed by the convention, on reducing the voting age to 16, retaining the length of the presidential term and reducing the minimum age for presidential candidates, and that same-sex marriage should be introduced. The government agreed to hold referenda on the voting age and same sex marriage by 2015. For the rest, they considered the convention's recommendations but did not commit to any referenda. The first referendum as a result of the convention's recommendations was on legalising same-sex marriage in May 2015, which passed in favour.

In many ways, the Irish case is a good example of meaningful citizen engagement. First, the method of choosing participants was democratic in nature, ensuring that the citizens taking part were representative of Irish society. Additionally, by involving them in the process, it was ensured that politicians would not feel so alienated as to simply ignore or discard proposals. The researchers involved with the process, especially the director David Farrell, also found that the politicians did not dominate in the discussions, which was one of the fears of including them in the deliberations. Finally, research from studying the deliberations has led to affirmation of the thesis that diversity is a prerequisite for good deliberation.[30] On the practical side, the convention completed its work within the time frame initially set out by the government and within a relatively tiny budget, proving that such a process need not be expensive.

On the other hand, there were some lessons learned in how the design of the constitutional convention could be improved. The agenda handed down by the government limited the convention's scope in terms of the issues to be discussed. The topics varied widely, both in their content and in their narrowness or breadth. Some were criticised for being largely irrelevant. A year after the convention ended, four of the nine proposals produced were yet to be debated in parliament. The government has also taken back its promise to hold a referendum on reducing the voting age, one of the recommendations which they had voted to accept. This was done in a newspaper interview. Another proposal on voting rights in presidential elections for citizens outside of the state was also rejected rather undemocratically in "a glossy brochure announcing the government's new diaspora policy."[31] Beyond the referendum in May 2015 on same sex marriage, another has been vaguely committed to on blasphemy, and there has been a commitment to establish an electoral commission at an undetermined point within the next government. Despite the pledge for a referendum on voting age, this has also been abandoned. The lesson should be for governments to only agree to such an undertaking if they are willing to be responsive to the results, at the risk of fuelling disillusionment.

[29] See https://www.constitution.ie/Convention.aspx.
[30] Farrell, David, Eoin O'Malley, and Jane Suiter. 2013. "Deliberative Democracy in Action Irish-Style: The 2011 We The Citizens Pilot Citizens' Assembly." Irish Political Studies 28(1): 99-113.
[31] Farrell, David. 2015. "Constitutional Convention 'Brand' is in Jeopardy." The Irish Times. 17 March 2015. Available at: http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/david-farrell-constitutional-convention-brand-is-in-jeopardy-1.2142826.

Long-form deliberative processes: Canada and Australia

Since 2010, there have been around 50 examples of this type of citizen engagement in policymaking in Canada and Australia. In Canada, long-form deliberative processes tend to be called citizens' reference panels, citizens' assemblies or citizens' commissions. In Australia, the preferred term is citizens' jury. But the confusing difference in vocabulary masks the fact that in both countries, the process is remarkably comparable. They are characterised by the following criteria:

– "Random selection process: often around 10,000 random invitations to participate are sent by post, with a 5-12% response rate, meaning around 500 to 1,200 people respond. Amongst respondents, a random sample is chosen, stratifying for age, gender and usually one or two other criteria such as housing tenure or geography, both of which tend to be correlated with other socio-economic indicators such as income level and education.

– Trustee role: Participants are not asked to think about issues from their own personal point of view, but more widely as citizens of a wider community.

– Time: participants have the opportunity to learn and to meet with one another for two to three months, coming together in person between four to six times. The process is broken down into learning / understanding / deliberating / proposing.

– Authority: the public authority commissioning the long-form deliberative process agrees to publicly and directly respond to (not necessarily accept) all of the recommendations.

– Publicity: It is a public process. Early on, there is a commitment to promote the long-form deliberation in the press before any recommendations are made. It helps to engage the wider community and to build trust in the jury or panel members, and thus also the outcome."[32]

A more detailed overview about all 50 examples are available in forthcoming publication (out in May 2017) by Claudia Chwalisz called The People's Verdict: Adding Informed Citizen Voices to Public Decision-making.[33] To illustrate an example, below is an extract from The People's Verdict highlighting a case study from the City of Melbourne People's Panel.

[32] Chwalisz, Claudia. 2017. The People's Verdict: Adding Informed Citizen Voices to Public Decision-making. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
[33] See http://www.rowmaninternational.com/book/the_peoples_verdict/3-156-18082fd3-2549-4b20-9f33-a7c4a1c93027

City of Melbourne People's Panel 2014

Melbourne is the largest growing city in Australia with significant population growth expected. In 2014, the Council had committed to a range of projects and long-term strategies that would require serious funds. The purpose of the People's Panel was to give recommendations to the City of Melbourne for its 10 Year Financial Plan (worth $5 billion AUD), helping determine how projects should be funded and which ones were priorities. The Panel's remit was to reach agreement on how Melbourne can remain one of the most liveable cities in the world while maintaining a strong financial position into the future. The Council agreed to listen to the Panel's views and consider all recommendations when developing its ten year financial plan. As part of this commitment, the Council promised to meet with the Panel and formally respond to all of its recommendations.

In late May 2014, the Council and the newDemocracy Foundation (nDF) – the independent organisation in charge of organising and running the Panel – began the process with a 'kick-off' or planning meeting. This was to decide the background information and expert contributions to include, to identify communication targets for submissions, to decide on the dates and goals, agree the media strategy and finalise venues.

Once this was all decided, 7,500 invitations from the Lord Mayor on behalf of the entire Council were mailed to a random sample of citizens and students, with a three week period to respond. Six thousand addresses were from the Council's ratepayer database and 1,000 were from the University of Melbourne database. In the meantime, there was a call for public submissions and stakeholder briefings. Among the 2,000 people who responded, 45 panellists were randomly chosen, stratifying for age, gender, ratepayer status and location. As the newDemocracy Foundation notes, this is not a 'perfect' method, but ratepayer status is a good indicator of income and education, and it delivers a more representative sample than any other community process. Given Melbourne is also a business hub, nDF also ensured that there was a descriptive mix of small and large businesses and residents – owner occupiers and renters – in equal parts. Just as in judicial juries, participants were paid a per diem of $500 AUD to avoid exclusion due to financial hardship.

Once the Panel was finalised, they received the welcome kit materials which had been decided upon in advance. Panellists were also invited to join a live online discussion group where they could speak with one another and propose expert speakers they would like to hear from during the meetings. At the end of August 2014, the Melbourne People's Panel met for the first

time in person, kicking off the learning stage. They were welcomed by the Mayor, introduced to the topic, reminded about their influence and the wider context. As with all of nDF's citizens' juries, the panellists were also familiarised with the process, its precedents, an understanding about the inevitability of bias and the importance of constructive, critical thinking.

Amongst themselves, the group of 45 also agreed on the principles which would guide their participation and their decision-making: SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely); sustainable; forward-thinking; adds value to Melbourne; relevant to the remit and the challenges, and is a 'considered' recommendation that is aware of the implications for people. After these were principles were set, the Panel heard from a number of experts that were driven by their pre-meeting online discussions and a question and answer period. They also identified speakers they wanted to hear from in future assemblies.

Overall, the People's Panel met five times – once every three weeks from August until November 2014. During this time, they agreed the principles that would guide their deliberations, they heard from a wide range of experts and stakeholders, discussed with their family and friends between meetings, determined their priorities and weighed various funding models. In order for a recommendation to make it into the final report, an 80% supermajority was required within the group. The Melbourne People's Panel put forth 11 concrete recommendations to the Council, presenting their proposals directly to the Lord Mayor and the city's councillors.

[34] City of Melbourne. 2015. 10 Year Financial Plan 2015-2025. Available at: http://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/application/files/1314/3640/5781/City_of_Melbourne_10_Year_Financial_Plan.pdf.
[35] Molony, Lee-Anne. 2015. Evaluation of the community engagement process for the 10 Year Financial Plan. Melbourne: Clear Horizon Consulting. Available at: http://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/application/files/3514/4477/8217/Evaluation_of_community_engagement_for_the_10_Year_Financial_Plan.pdf.
[36] Ibid.

The Council considered the People's Panels proposals over the course of a few months, releasing their final 10-year financial plan on 30 June 2015, seven months later. The final plan was "heavily influenced by Council's People's Panel, a 43-member citizens' jury convened to advise on spending and revenue priorities for the next decade.[34] Accepting ten out of 11 of the key recommendations, they explained why and why not for each one. In the City's final publication of the plan, all of the citizens' juries recommendations are in their unedited form, with a 'yes' or 'no' column, and an explanation alongside.

Regarding panellists' views about the experience, a survey among the participants at the end of their final session found that 96% of the participants highly rated their involvement as a worthwhile experience.[35] At the end of the deliberation process, the same survey indicates that participants had higher levels of confidence in the City of Melbourne, higher levels of internal and external efficacy (an individual's belief that they can understand politics or that political actors are responsive to them), and general satisfaction with where the City is heading.

In terms of the effectiveness of the consultation, an independent review of the public engagement process by Clear Horizon also found that it was good value for money in terms of effectiveness and economy. "The recommendations, i.e. the outcomes of the engagement process, are highly implementable."[36]

The Melbourne People's Panel was one of the most successful citizens' juries in Australia for a number of reasons: the problem was the clear; the Council was open to hearing the Panel's proposals, and it accepted the vast majority of them, closing an $800-900 million (AUD) budget hole.

Legal citizen engagement principles

This section will discuss the legal elements of citizen engagement in the UK.

The UK government has produced a set of consultation principles, released in 2016 as an update to the previous Code of Practice on Consultation.[37] It is not a legally binding document, but it provides government departments with clear guidance on conducting consultations. The principles are:

1   Consultations should be clear and concise. (Plain English, avoid acronyms, be clear about the questions)

2   Consultations should have a purpose. (Do not consult on issues where there is already a final view, use consultation responses when formulating policy)

3   Consultations should be informative. (Provide people with enough information to take an informed view)

4   Consultations are only part of a process of engagement. (In addition to new digital tools and collaborative approaches)

5   Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time. (Dependent on nature and impact of topic)

6   Consultations should be targeted. (Should engage the full range of people, business and voluntary bodies affected by the policy)

7   Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted. (Different groups might need different amounts of time, resources, etc.)

8   Consultations should be agreed before publication. (Collective agreement before publication, always published on gov.uk)

9   Consultation should facilitate scrutiny. (Response should be on same page as original consultation, responses should be explained)

10   Government responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion. (Within 12 weeks of the consultation or with explanation of why it's not possible)

11   Consultation exercises should not generally be launched during local or national election periods.

[37] See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/492132/20160111_Consultation_principles_final.pdf.

From the interviews conducted for this research, the civil servants and non-government organisations involved with citizen engagement activities have not encountered any legal challenges, though they are always cautious to ensure they are not "treading on any toes" as one interviewee put it. Quite often, they are working together with the relevant politician or government department within the framework of the law, so there is little risk of a legal challenge.

Conclusion

Even in mature democracies, devolution, democracy and participation continue to evolve. For instance, in the current context of Brexit, Prime Minister Theresa May has promised First Minister Nicola Sturgeon that some of the powers regained from the European Union (EU) will go straight to Scotland. This will open a whole discussion about how these new powers should be institutionalised within the region. Furthermore, Brexit also seems to have awakened in the British public a desire for greater participation in politics and in public decision-making.

As others have noted, processes of devolution and decentralisation around the world are "largely driven and continually shaped by politics."[38] Yet, countries and international development partners seeking sustainable reform abroad have little information and few tools to guide them in taking a more political approach. Previous efforts have tended to focus too heavily on the central government's role, to the detriment of sub-national and local actors. This has proved both exclusionary and risky. It places too much emphasis on the need for 'political will' at the centre and ignores the potential benefits of citizens and civil society to drive reform through broad-based support.

The evidence from the UK seems to show that it is those governments and areas that have taken the lead in experimenting with new forms of citizen participation, as part of a holistic approach to democratic reform, that are most successful. By working constructively together with NGOs, academic institutions, civil society groups and communities, they are restoring people's faith in politics. They also end up with better policies and decisions that have the public backing to endure the long term. Participatory mechanisms are new additions that strengthen representative democracy by helping elected representatives make more legitimate decisions that receive public support.

[38] Eaton, K., Kaiser, K., & Smoke, P. (2011). The political economy of decentralization reforms in developing countries: Implications for aid effectiveness. Washington, DC: World Bank.

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