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Chapter 4

The role of experts in climate assemblies: Recruitment and inclusion

Abstract: Experts often play a crucial role in the governance and delivery of mini-publics like climate assemblies by occupying advisory roles or contributing to the giving and sharing of information and perspectives in order to support assembly participants' understanding of the issue at hand. While equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) of climate assembly participants is universally paid great attention, we ask: do climate assemblies consider EDI when recruiting and accommodating experts? In this chapter, we theoretically explore why EDI for experts in climate assemblies should be prioritised. We then analyse 23 mini-publics on climate change held in the UK since 2019 and find that there is little to suggest that EDI considerations are taken in practice with respect to the recruitment and inclusion of experts. We outline why this is particularly problematic for assemblies focusing on climate change and offer suggestions for both the practitioner and academic communities.

Keywords: mini-publics, expertise, expert recruitment, EDI, climate assemblies

1 Introduction

Experts participating in mini-publics, like climate assemblies, play a key role in conveying evidence to citizen participants, drawing from their expertise garnered from both professional activities and/or lived experience. This evidence supports participants to make informed decisions on issues related to climate change (Roberts and Lightbody 2017). While the extent of expert involvement can range based on the size or scope of the assembly, existing literature suggests that it is paramount to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented by experts in the evidence-giving process (Roberts and Lightbody 2017, 2).

Because of the increasing use of climate assemblies and their potential to influence policy, continual evaluation of the processes and practices involved can help to ensure that they are inclusive, create evidence-based outcomes that take the perspectives of all relevant actors into account, and are viewed as legitimate by both participants and the wider public (Roberts et al. 2020). For these reasons, ensuring equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) of participants is prioritised by climate assemblies in a range of ways (Climate Assembly UK 2021, 10). Assembly members are often chosen via sortition, such that the composition of participants reflects a cross-section of the wider community (for example, in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, age, income, (dis)ability, and/or other social categories or characteristics) as closely as possible (Escobar and Elstub

2017). Increasingly, inclusion of different viewpoints has played a role in the recruitment of participants, with some climate assemblies accounting for participants' level of concern about climate change within their selection criteria (e.g. Climate Assembly UK 2021; Scotland's Climate Assembly 2021; Aberdeen Climate and Fairness Panel 2021; Adur and Worthing Climate Assembly 2020). In addition, participants can be offered monetary compensation, technological support, childcare, accessible spaces, and other accommodations to ensure accessibility and inclusivity of their participation in the assembly (Roberts et al. 2022).

In comparison, little attention has been paid to whether EDI measures for the experts involved in climate assemblies are prioritised. It is thus unclear whether existing policies or practices of climate assemblies have sought to ensure EDI considerations, standards, or thresholds for the recruitment of those involved in evidence-giving. This is important because, first, issues of inequality in society, politics, and education – particularly in the fields of engineering and physical sciences from which experts for climate assemblies are often recruited (Blackburn 2017; Reggiani et al. 2023) – precede and foreground climate assemblies, potentially increasing the likelihood of over-representation of already privileged demographics within the pool of expert evidence-givers. Second, paying attention to oppression and inequalities is particularly important when it comes to issues of climate change due to the disproportionate impact of a changing climate on vulnerable groups around the world (Dietzel and Venn 2021; Tubi and Feitelson 2019) who tend to be underrepresented, marginalised, and/or disadvantaged in political institutions and processes.

To address this gap in both the literature and practice, we first explore the role experts play in mini-publics and put forth a theoretical basis for addressing EDI issues for experts in climate assemblies. Following this, we investigate existing practices of EDI for experts through an analysis of 23 UK climate assemblies. We assess the demographic makeup of the pool of experts who participated in these climate assemblies and whether organisers of climate assemblies in the UK embed EDI principles for expert inclusion throughout the process, including having measures in place to ensure and report on EDI for experts.

2 The role of experts in climate assemblies

To complement or deepen participants' knowledge of the topic being deliberated, experts are tasked with providing information and answering participants' questions (Brown 2014). While climate assembly organisers and/or those in governance roles carefully curate the format and style of the evidence-giving process, experts can convey information through a range of means, including presentations or talks, written briefings, videos, articles, site visits, games, etc. (Iredale et al. 2006; Roberts et al. 2020;). Evidence-giving usually takes place via formal plenary sessions or breakouts, or informal round table discussions.

In the case of climate assemblies, experts play an important role in conveying technical or scientific information about climate change in accessible ways to participants. But they also help to unpick commonly held, socially-engrained assumptions. For instance, while some participants may think that the solution to climate change mitigation involves individuals making more sustainable choices, experts can introduce more systemic perspectives. These perspectives can highlight, for instance, policy's ability to make sustainable choices the easiest, most affordable, most inclusive, and most available option for individuals, communities, businesses and institutions. Experts also help to convey the impacts of climate change that participants themselves may not feel or see personally. This may involve explicitly linking issues that may be important for participants (such as the cost of living, immigration, public health, or biodiversity loss) to climate change. Experts' testimony may also enable participants to see themselves as experts by encouraging them to reflect on their own experience of climate change and ecological breakdown (Roberts et al. 2020).

Importantly, democratic processes are founded on egalitarian values which prioritise the fair and equal participation of all citizens. Thus, the mere involvement of experts in these processes produces a tension: experts are granted a particular epistemic authority above 'common' participants by virtue of their extra-ordinary knowledge, and yet in order to make informed decisions, experts are needed to support participants' understanding of the topic they are deliberating. Mini-publics seek to mitigate this tension between egalitarianism and the need for informed decision-making by limiting the power of experts (who serve as advisors to participants rather than decision-makers themselves). We assert that EDI considerations for experts may also serve as an additional means to ensure that egalitarianism is prioritised within these democratic processes.

Experts not only maintain a wide range of responsibilities in mini-publics, but the information they provide citizens during the deliberation process has the most sway on their opinions of the topic at hand (Goodin and Niemeyer 2003; Thompson et al. 2021). For this reason, experts should come from a wide range of knowledge backgrounds, including those with highly specialised and/or technical expertise in aspects of climate science or policy as well as those with lived experience related to the topic. For example, including disabled lived-experience experts could expose participants to the particular implications of banning plastic straws or car travel in cities for the disabled community. Such lived experience experts may also come from local communities, other marginalised groups, or environmental justice movements (Schlosberg 2013; Fischer 2000). In selecting experts, therefore, governors of climate assemblies should embrace an expansive notion of what constitutes expertise and, therefore, who counts as an expert.

Experts participate in the governance of climate assemblies in various ways, including by serving in governance groups (e.g. Stewarding Board). In some cases, a group of topic experts are given a formal role (Expert Panel, Expert Leads or similar) to coordinate and oversee the selection of other experts. As Roberts et al. (2020, 7) outline, experts usually select "the information and perspectives that they think are most

relevant”, although in some instances this information is vetted by climate assembly governance groups. Thus, while it is clear that experts’ privilege extends across multiple levels of the governance in climate assemblies (Roberts et al. 2022), the implications of this dynamic has not yet faced sufficient academic attention.

Similarly understudied are the ways experts are selected. Governance bodies are often responsible for choosing experts to participate in mini-publics, although in some cases citizen participants may request additional experts to speak on topics they would like specific evidence on, particularly as climate assembly unfolds. Yet, Roberts et al. (2020) show that the process of recruiting experts can be challenging for a number of reasons. ‘Who’ is considered an expert, and how these experts are identified, often depends on the individuals inhabiting the climate assembly’s governance roles and the connections of these individuals.

Even in the face of research demonstrating the various roles and relative power of experts in climate assemblies, research has yet to a) offer a theoretical backing for the importance of EDI amongst these experts and b) investigate the existing role of EDI in the identification, selection, and participation of experts in climate assemblies which have already taken place. This is a notable oversight. As Moore (2021, 554) asserts: “if we assume that in complex societies reliance on expertise is unavoidable, valuable, and yet potentially threatening to democratic ideals, then we need to devote more attention to the question of how reliance on expertise is organised and how its legitimacy might be sustained”. This is key to support citizens’ decision-making in ways that are not detrimental for the democratic process, for example by using ideologies of ‘meritocracy’ (Sandel 2021) such that disproportionate decision-making power is given to experts rather than citizens. Here, we offer a theoretical framework justifying why attention should be paid to EDI amongst experts. Then, we investigate if and how UK climate assemblies have considered EDI for experts thus far.

3 Theoretical framework: The importance of EDI for experts

Here, we set forth our theoretical framework explicating the importance of taking EDI for experts seriously in the climate assembly process.

3.1 Improved fairness: The normative stance for EDI among experts

From a normative standpoint (what *should* be), ensuring that EDI principles for experts are embedded in climate assemblies will improve the fairness of these democratic decision-making processes. A ‘powerful justice’ argument from the political science literature on representation argues that it is unfair for powerful groups and individuals to

“dominate descriptive representation” (Childs and Lovenduski 2013, 493) to the detriment of those historically underrepresented, excluded, and disadvantaged. Phillips (1998) suggests that even in cases where binding mandates have been made by powerful groups to ensure equality for oppressed groups, these mandates are limited in their power and ultimately subject to the considerable autonomy of representatives as individuals, “which is part of why it matters who those representatives are” (Phillips 1998, 44). Particularly relevant to democratic decision-making processes, Phillips (1998, 44) asserts that “there is something distinctly odd about a democracy that accepts a responsibility for redressing disadvantage, but never sees the disadvantaged as the appropriate people to carry this through”. Because it is more likely that disadvantaged groups will follow through in their self-advocacy when they represent themselves, it is unfair for their representation to be left to the fickle will of the over-represented group’s ‘commitment’ to them (if such a commitment exists in the first place). Thus, in line with theories of fair and democratic representation, climate assembly experts should include participation of a wide range of demographics identities.

3.2 Improved representation of diverse perspectives

While experts are not ‘representatives’ in the electoral sense, they undoubtedly play a significant role in representing *ideas and information* to participants in climate assemblies. As we have outlined, experts are responsible for choosing who provides evidence and perspectives, what information to provide, what type of evidence should be prioritised, and the manner in which this information will be presented. Thus, even when climate assemblies’ governance bodies curate or vet experts’ contributions, individual experts often use their own discretion to choose to represent, or to not represent, information based on their own expertise, opinions, perspectives, and values.

The literature on descriptive and substantive representation suggests that identities indeed influence such decisions. Phillips’ (1998, 44) explains that when over-representation of certain identities and interests persists in politics over time, it is likely that certain issues, preferences, needs, and ideas not only go ignored, but lack the opportunity to be crystalised as part of a political agenda. Underrepresentation creates “an additional problem of preferences not yet legitimated, the views not even formulated, much less expressed ... [since] preferences are always formed in relation to what has been set as a norm”. Phillips (1998) thus suggests that over-represented groups are simply unqualified to champion the interests of groups that are underrepresented and oppressed, as they have no basis for knowing what these interests are without such groups’ direct involvement.

Building on both the political science literature and extant research on the role of experts in mini-publics, we argue that underrepresentation of marginalised groups and individuals in the pool of experts may play an important role in limiting the content of the evidence itself, which may have negative implications for the assemblies’ outcomes. The social, economic, and environmental context of climate change and ecological

breakdown is far from inherently value-free, and as such experts' standpoints, experience, and professional or scientific perspectives on various matters are informed by a range of factors (Roberts et al. 2020). The evidence that experts choose to present to climate assembly participants is thus—purposefully or inadvertently—inextricably linked with their experiences of social privilege and oppression. Experts who belong to privileged social groups may maintain perspectives which fail to represent the interests of disadvantaged groups. By comparison, experts of less privileged backgrounds may be more effective at providing evidence in line with experiences and interests which have lacked the opportunity to be legitimated or formulated due to existing norms (Phillips 1998).

Empirical testing of theories of inclusivity in governance demonstrate that increased participation of disadvantaged groups in politics indeed impacts wide-ranging political outcomes (Mastracci and Adams 2021; Essener-Jedenastik 2017), oftentimes in ways that benefit these groups (Wittmer and Bouché 2013; Clayton et al. 2019). Thus, overall, we suggest that improving EDI for experts may indeed also influence the outcomes of climate assemblies and make them fairer, better, and more impactful.

3.3 Improved legitimacy perceptions of climate assembly processes and outcomes

Next, we argue that addressing EDI issues related to experts may impact the perceived legitimacy of climate assemblies. Within the literature investigating the impacts of diversity on legitimacy perceptions of a range of democratic activities, Christensen (2020) finds that inclusivity of mini-publics does not impact citizens' perceived legitimacy of these processes. Yet, other literature demonstrates the opposite. Mini-publics are seen as particularly legitimate by those who feel under-represented by traditional politics (Goldberg and Bächtiger 2022), suggesting that increased inclusion and diversity particularly distinguish mini-publics from existing political institutions. Goldberg (2021, 64) finds that survey experiment respondents prefer mini-publics to be “maximally representative and inclusive” while Pow (2021, 2) finds that citizens who value political equality view “the purest selection model... as particularly legitimate” when it comes to selecting participants.

Arnesen and Peters (2018) find that decisions are more accepted when made by descriptively representative bodies, particularly when outcomes are unfavourable. Similarly, descriptive representation of women improves perceptions of legitimacy, especially when ultimate decisions are anti-feminist (Clayton et al. 2019). While descriptive representation of women did not impact substantive legitimacy of non-gendered issue outcomes, it still impacted perceived legitimacy of the *procedures*, indicating that “inclusion matters for broader reasons of justice” (Clayton et al. 2019, 124). Rassmusen and Reher (2023) find that citizens' legitimacy perceptions decrease when social justice-based interest groups are under-represented. Additionally, descriptive representation of Latino citizens makes their perceptions of government more positive and decreases

their belief that “government is run for the benefit of the few” (Sanchez and Morin 2011, 498). Similar research shows that diversity within bureaucracy improves legitimacy perceptions (Choi and Hong 2020), and that this increased legitimacy leads to increased trust and compliance with these organisations (Riccucci et al. 2016; Riccucci and Van Ryzin 2017).

3.4 Importance of EDI for the climate and ecological crises

Apart from considerations of normativity, representation, and legitimacy, climate assemblies should also put emphasis on issues of EDI because of their unique remit. While there is increased evidence that climate and ecological destruction will unavoidably affect all global citizens, different groups will face differentiated impacts based on their social, economic, and/or political statuses (Tubi and Feitelson 2019). Climate change vulnerability is informed by communities’ and households’ ability to “anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the direct and indirect impacts of extreme weather events and geophysical shift such as sea level rise” (Shonkoff et al. 2011, 486), all of which are determined by income, geographical placement, social and political rights. EDI considerations are therefore a main priority for the organisation of climate assemblies when it comes to the sortition of participants, which ensures that the pool of participants reflects a cross-section of the broader community.

Because individuals’ experiences are contingent in many ways on their identities, experts’ understanding of climate change and ecological breakdown is shaped by their backgrounds—which may then impact the type and content of the evidence that they present (Muradova et al. 2020). Thus, it is particularly important to examine and address EDI for experts in the context of climate action due to the disproportionate impacts of climate change on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (Dietzel and Venn 2021; Tubi and Feitelson 2019).

4 Research design: Data and methods

We have outlined a theoretical framework emphasising why EDI amongst experts should be considered and assessed by climate assembly organisers. Yet, no research has yet been conducted to examine this topic systematically. To address this gap, we examined 23 cases in the UK to explore the processes in place to foster EDI among experts, their demographic makeup, and the measures taken to ensure EDI throughout the mini-public process.

We investigated the 23 climate change-related assemblies, juries, or panels (hereafter, collectively referred to as climate mini-publics) which have taken place in the UK, and for which public-facing reports had been published by March of 2022. We chose to include assemblies, juries, and panels to create the broadest dataset possible, and because these various types of mini-publics function in very similar ways and have

very similar remits (see Escobar and Elstub 2017 for an overview). We identified these climate mini-publics through systematic searches of Participedia and Involve’s Citizens’ Assembly Tracker which we cross-referenced with web searches. Of the 23 climate mini-publics included, 16 were citizens’ assemblies, four were citizens’ panels, and three were citizens’ juries; two took place in Wales, three took place in Scotland, and 17 took place in England (see Table 4.1 for a full list of cases).

Table 4.1: Climate mini-publics included in the analysis

[n.] Mini-public name	Type of mini-public and number of participants	Timeline
[n. 1] Climate Assembly UK	Assembly (108)	Jan-May 2020
[n. 2] Scotland’s Climate Assembly	Assembly (105)	Nov 2020-Mar 2021
[n. 3] Aberdeenshire Climate and Fairness Panel	Panel (23)	Feb-Mar 2021
[n. 4] Adur and Worthing Climate Assembly	Assembly (43)	Sept-Dec 2020
[n. 5] Blaenau Gwent Climate Assembly	Assembly (44)	Mar 2021
[n. 6] Brent Climate Assembly	Assembly (53)	Nov-Dec 2019
[n. 7] Brighton and Hove Climate Assembly	Assembly (50)	Sept-Nov 2020
[n. 8] Camden Citizens’ Assembly on the Climate Crisis	Assembly (over 50)	Jul 2019
[n. 9] Copeland People’s Panel on Climate Change	Jury (30)	Jul-Sept 2021
[n. 10] Croydon Citizens’ Assembly on Climate Change	Assembly (42)	Jan-Feb 2020
[n. 11] Devon Climate Assembly	Assembly (70 selected/66 participated)	June-Jul 2021
[n. 12] Glasgow Citizens’ Assembly on the Climate Emergency	Assembly (50)	June-Aug 2021
[n. 13] Greater Cambridge Citizens’ Assembly	Assembly (53)	Sept-Oct 2019
[n. 14] Kendal Climate Change Citizens’ Jury	Jury (20)	Jul-Oct 2020
[n. 15] Lambeth’s Citizens’ Assembly on Climate Change	Assembly (52)	May-Jul 2021
[n. 16] Lancaster District Climate Change People’s Jury	Jury (30)	Feb-Oct 2020

Table 4.1 (Continued)

[n.] Mini-public name	Type of mini-public and number of participants	Timeline
[n. 17] Leeds Climate Change Citizens' Jury	Jury (25)	Sept-Nov 2019
[n. 18] Leicester Climate Assembly	Assembly (of the 71 potential attendees, 53 [75 %] took part on the day)	Jan 2020
[n. 19] Newham Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change	Assembly (43)	Feb-20
[n. 20] North of Tyne Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change	Assembly (49)	Feb-Mar 2021
[n. 21] Oxford Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change	Assembly (50)	Sept-Oct 2019
[n. 22] South Wales Valleys Climate and Fairness Panel	Panel (19)	Oct-Dec 2020
[n. 23] Thurrock Climate and Fairness Panel	Panel (20)	Jan-Feb 2021

We used content analysis to examine the reports published by each of the climate mini-publics. We paid particular attention to the reporting of the selection processes for citizens and experts, EDI considerations for experts, EDI considerations embedded in the design of the processes, and the listing of specific experts. Such information sometimes came from the climate mini-public website, rather than published reports. The 23 climate mini-publics included in our study involved a total of 476 experts, some of whom presented at more than one case in our sample.

Four climate mini-publics were completed before the COVID-19 pandemic and held in person. The remaining 19 were at least partially impacted by lockdowns, and thus conducted online. While some informed national policy (n. 1, 2) and had over 100 participants, most informed local policy (n. 3–23) and had an average of 41 participants (ranging from less than 20 to over 60 participants). The number of experts ranged from over 100 (n. 2) to less than 10 (n. 10) depending on the size and scope of the mini-public. The length of the process varied from 16 sessions (n. 16) to one session (n. 18), and almost all¹ were held entirely on weekends and evenings. Figure 4.1 shows the number of experts who were involved.

¹ Specific timings were not explicitly reported for 5 Assemblies (n. 5, 10, 11, 15, 17).

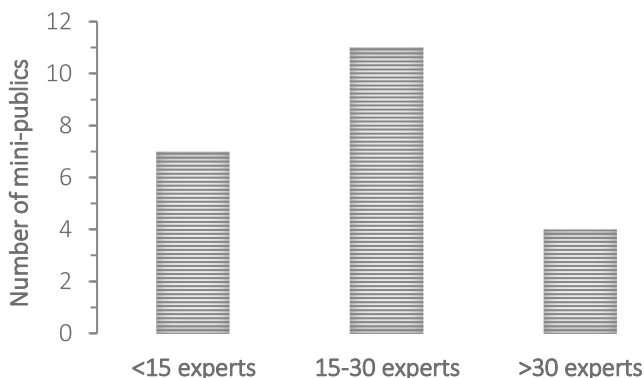


Figure 4.1: Number of experts involved in 22 mini-publics on climate action in the UK

5 Findings

Given that mini-public processes are (or should be) centred on transparency and representation, it follows that open reporting² on governance and selection processes would be expected, including with respect to experts' identification, selection, and diversity. Nevertheless, this is not the case for the 23 climate mini-publics we examined. Below, we outline our findings for each of the key areas of interest outlined above.

5.1 EDI processes for selecting experts

Through our content analysis, we find that most (19) of the reports explicate that the responsibility of expert identification and selection usually falls to climate assembly governance groups (called the Oversight Panel, Stewarding Group, Expert Advisory Board, Advisory Group, etc.). Yet, these reports do not make clear any specifics regarding the criteria or characteristics of the expertise being sought, how this was decided, or the specific manner in which experts were chosen. While one climate mini-public (n. 19) allowed participants to request additional speakers to cover topics they felt “would improve their ability to respond to the Assembly question”, reports usually only offer a succinct statement such as “the identity of the commentators was decided upon by members of the Oversight Panel” (n. 20).

Our key finding is that none of the 23 reports explicate any EDI initiatives taken with regard to expert selection for either evidence-giving or governance roles. Four climate mini-publics do not mention how experts were selected at all (n. 8, 10, 18 and 21). Four (n. 4, 5, 8 and 16) report a desire for diversity among experts, but this is in refer-

² We examined public information and reports available prior to June 2022.

ence to a diversity of perspectives, expert opinions, and/or affiliations rather than to inclusivity of a broad range of demographic categories or identities. While two assemblies report that ‘lived experience’ experts are included (n. 4 and 11), neither report makes clear the criteria for what counts as ‘lived experience’.

In all the cases, the process of identification and recruitment of individuals into governance groups responsible for selecting experts is not clearly explained. As such, the steps that lead to establishing the management team(s) and the criteria used to appoint governance roles are unclear. Like the process of expert selection, no substantial information is available in public-facing materials to assess whether the process of recruitment into governance roles was fair and inclusive, as none of the climate mini-publics reviewed referred to EDI considerations.

Overall, it is impossible to ascertain exactly how experts were appointed because of the lack of information that is publicly available. This does not mean that the organisers or governing groups do not consider EDI during witness identification, selection and recruitment; a great deal of thoughtful and careful work may go on behind the scenes without being reported. However, without providing this information publicly, the question of whether the processes of expert selection were fair, inclusive, or EDI-informed is thus left unanswered.

5.2 Demographic data of experts

We next turn to the reporting of experts’ demographic information. We find that names and affiliations of the experts are reported by climate mini-publics, either in their formal public-facing reports or on their websites, in all but one (n. 18). However, experts’ demographic information is not reported by any of the climate mini-publics. Moreover, there is no indication that such demographic data is collected at all. This contrasts severely with the thorough reporting on participants’ demographic information.

Expert names and affiliations are not sufficient for assessing EDI, as inferring gender or any other identity categories from this limited information is either impossible or unethical. Rather, to assess whether the group of experts is diverse and inclusive, there is a need for aggregated reporting of demographic information provided freely and anonymously by the experts to the organisers. We recognise that where the number of experts is small (e.g. less than 20 individuals, like in n. 7–10 and 12) it may not be appropriate to publish even aggregated demographic information for privacy reasons. Further, EDI issues are heightened for the climate mini-publics in which fewer experts participate, as it is more challenging to capture broad representation with small numbers. However, failure to report or acknowledge expert demographics in any way, or seemingly to record such information at all, inevitably results in a lack of transparency and may (re)produce or exacerbate existing inequalities.

5.3 EDI considerations for experts during climate mini-public processes

Finally, we reflect on whether expert-related EDI considerations are made during the climate mini-public process. We find that, while accessibility considerations are made for participants (e.g. accessible locations, technology support), no mention of such accessibility is made explicitly for experts; this is particularly problematic when considering lived-experience experts, who may not have the resources of other experts or have particular accessibility requirements. While 20 climate mini-publics report providing financial compensation for participation, remuneration or compensation for experts is not mentioned in any report. This is problematic, as participation may equate to working overtime for some experts. In other cases, experts may be volunteers for various political or social causes (e.g. conservation volunteers, environmental activists, urban gardening groups, etc.) giving testimony in that capacity, and thus there may be assumptions that these experts do not deserve or expect remuneration. While one case (n. 13) refers to a £3.5K budget for “Advisory group/ Speaker/ Expert lead honorarium / accommodation / travel / subsistence expenses”, it remains unclear to whom this money was allocated, how much was allocated, and how this was decided. Further, there was no mention in the reports of measures such as the provision of childcare, to support their participation (this was covered for participants in at least one Assembly; n. 1). In fact, none of the reports acknowledge any potential barriers to expert participation, which is particularly important for those contributing insights from lived experience or community perspectives (Lightbody and Escobar 2021). For example, it is not clear whether the organisers assured potential experts from underrepresented or disadvantaged groups of the measures taken to ensure a supportive and inclusive space, or that accommodation and other such logistical support would be offered where required.

Overall, no substantial information is available to assess whether the process of expert participation is fair and inclusive in the climate mini-publics we examined.

6 Discussion and conclusions

We have offered a theoretical framework explicating why equality, diversity, and inclusion matter when it comes to recruitment and participation of experts in climate mini-publics. In practice, however, we find that these measures are, at best, not reported. While our findings do not imply that EDI issues for experts were entirely ignored in the climate assemblies which have taken place in the UK, given the lack of transparent and publicly available information, this might as well be the case.

Without attention paid to EDI issues, the influence of privilege may escape notice, and lead to outcomes which replicate existing power dynamics that (re)produce exclusion and oppression of already disadvantaged and marginalised groups. This is particularly important when considering the need to go above and beyond ‘stopping climate

change’ and instead focus on a Just Transition toward climate justice which is equitable for all (Just Transition Commission 2023). For this reason, we suggest that future climate assemblies, and mini-publics more broadly, take the EDI of experts seriously in decision-making about their organisation and execution. This internal dimension of a climate assembly is highly consequential for its external dimensions. It matters for both normative and practical reasons: it can elevate the legitimacy, capacity and credibility of climate assemblies and thus their potential for impact.

First, we assert that climate mini-publics should integrate EDI frameworks in the recruitment and inclusion of experts, which entails both a) setting targets to ensure a diverse and inclusive pool of experts and b) collecting and reporting experts’ demographic data while ensuring their identities and privacy are protected. The multifaceted nature of experts’ potential to impact processes and outcomes of climate mini-publics justifies increased attention to these areas. A lack of sufficient EDI measures may indeed raise compelling questions regarding the quality of the deliberative process. As discussed in this chapter, experts not only provide evidence to participants; in some cases, their influence extends far beyond this remit by contributing to the design and governance of climate mini-publics. For example, in Scotland’s Climate Assembly (n. 2), not only did a selected group of experts (the Evidence Group) identify experts, but they also influenced the design of the assembly, gave evidence themselves as ‘informants’, and reviewed and fed back assembly draft outputs and recommendations. The same experts also reviewed and scored the quality of the Scottish Government’s responses to the recommendations of the assembly; participants then relied on these scores to assess the Government’s response one year after the assembly concluded. The influence of these experts calls for increased attention to ensuring barriers to their participation are lowered and demographic targets of inclusivity are developed and met.

Second, we argue that transparency of these processes is required. While it is possible that the UK climate assemblies we investigated indeed took some steps towards EDI without reporting them, this still poses a significant issue, as it contrasts directly with the fundamental pillar of transparency that in many ways differentiates mini-publics from traditional methods of political decision-making wherein we trust representatives to make decisions for us. EDI processes should be adequately reported to ensure that experts from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds are meaningfully considered for such influential roles. This would not only improve both fairness and the democratic quality of the deliberative process, but also ensure that a wide range of views are included. This is particularly important for issues of climate change and ecological breakdown that require radical approaches and have differential impacts across populations.

Our research also has implications for further research. While different roles and responsibilities in governance, design, and delivery of climate assemblies tend to be clearly outlined in official reports, how these groups interact is less clear. Who is ultimately responsible for what, who has the first say, and who has the final say should face academic scrutiny. In addition, research could more thoroughly investigate if

and how climate assemblies ensure that experts represent a broad range of viewpoints, particularly when these viewpoints are radical.

When outlining our recommendations, we recognise that these are based on a sample of climate mini-publics in the UK and that our findings are influenced by the context in which the study was undertaken. However, to stimulate future research and best practice, we also find it important to acknowledge that the global nature of climate change as a political issue calls into question the role of global expertise and perspectives in regional, city, and national climate assemblies and climate change decision-making more generally. It is therefore important for future research to unpack the role of incorporating global voices, particularly those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and climate action, into the deliberations and discussions surrounding sustainable transition and transformation at a range of scales. We believe this is key for climate action that is inspired by democratic principles of social justice and which (truly) leaves no one behind.

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