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Chapter 9

The Global Climate Assembly: A new global deliberative space?

Abstract: While some argue that a challenge as urgent as climate change requires putting democracy aside, others propose that deliberative democracy may be the most effective approach for tackling a socio-ecological problem of such complexity and lament the democratic deficit in existing global governance institutions. This paper contributes to discussions on democratising climate governance by examining the 2021 Global Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change –a pioneering democratic innovation. This assembly, comprising 100 participants worldwide, aimed to amplify citizen voices in global climate governance, a realm where they are typically absent. Our methodology draws on the concept of deliberative capacity, defined as the extent to which a system allows for deliberation that is authentic, inclusive, and consequential. Findings reveal both the assembly's innovative contributions and its limitations. We conclude with reflections about the shortcomings and possibilities demonstrated by the Global Climate Assembly and how this learning may inform the development of new global spaces for citizen deliberation and climate action.

Keywords: Global Climate Assembly, global governance, deliberative capacity, COP 26, democratic deficit

1 Introduction

Climate change is a multilevel crisis which demands a coordinated global response. The socio-economic complexity of climate governance makes it particularly important to democratise (Stevenson and Dryzek 2014; Dryzek and Niemeyer 2019). Yet the enormous challenge of conceptualising, let alone realising, democracy at the global scale is widely acknowledged (Scholte 2002). But even in democratic contexts, representative governments routinely fail to address longer-term issues like climate change due to electoral incentives and short-term priorities (Fischer 2017; Smith 2021). This bolsters the argument for more deliberative approaches to democracy, for example through the use of mini-publics (Escobar and Elstub 2017; Elstub and Escobar 2019). The idea of assemblies is an increasingly popular approach to remedying democratic deficits in climate governance, though until recently the idea had only been implemented at local and national levels, and predominantly in Europe (Roberts and Escobar 2015; Elstub et al. 2021; Boswell et al. 2023).

While the idea of a global citizens' assembly was theorised in 2011 (Dryzek et al. 2011), it was not put into practice for another decade. In 2021, the world's first Glob-

al Assembly (GA) was established, bringing together a group of a hundred randomly selected citizens from across the globe to deliberate about how to address the climate and ecological crisis. They presented their recommendations (the People's Declaration for the Sustainable Future of Planet Earth) at the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held in Glasgow in November 2021. The GA was thus a unique opportunity to research the contribution that mini-publics, and in particular citizens' assemblies, can make in global climate governance.

In this chapter, we evaluate the extent to which this first global citizens' assembly contributed to a more deliberative approach to global climate governance, and what lessons can be learned for the design and implementation of future assemblies. To do so, we apply the concept of deliberative capacity, defined (following Dryzek 2009) as the extent to which the GA promoted deliberation that was inclusive, authentic and consequential. The chapter proceeds as follows. In the next sections, we (2) review the literature, (3) present the theoretical framework and explain how it was adapted to the case of the GA, (4) outline the methodology used to assess its activities and (5) present the results.

2 Literature review. The theory and practice of global citizens' assemblies

International relations theory generally conceptualises the global system as 'anarchical' in the sense that there is no ultimate global legal authority. There are, however, many institutions that seek to facilitate cooperation and influence action through norm and rule setting. Citizens, however, are rarely present in these institutions, despite growing public awareness of their activities (Zürn, Binder and Ecker-Ehrhardt 2012). Several suggestions have been made to democratise institutions at the global level and directly bring the voices of citizens to participate in global governance – as opposed to entrusting civil society organisations to represent them.

It is acknowledged that some democratic institutions will work better at the global level than others (Dryzek 2006; Bohman 2007). Dryzek et al. (2011) argued that elected parliaments, for example, would not work well at the global level for a number of reasons. Firstly, there might be opposition from countries such as the United States (US) that would not accept challenges to their democratic institutions. Countries that do not have a history of national-level competitive elections, such as China, might see the endeavour as a threat to their sovereignty, and be unwilling or unable to support democratic selection of candidates. It would also be challenging to identify the appropriate electoral system to use given the significant sociocultural diversity of a 'global public'. Even if countries were to accept an elected global parliament, and an appropriate electoral system could be identified, it might not be considered legitimate due to the electorate being so far removed from their elected representatives. Accountability

would be difficult to achieve, especially given the inevitably huge number and diversity of constituents each member of a global parliament would have to represent. Furthermore, it would be hard to avoid competition between national interests, in a context in which forming a ‘global public’ is challenging.

Dryzek et al. (2011) proposed that deliberative global citizens’ assemblies could overcome many of these problems. The problems with elections would be avoided through the use of sortition to recruit participants. Pragmatically, countries like the US may feel less like the mini-public challenges domestic legislatures; single-party states like China would not feel pressured to alter their domestic electoral processes. Normatively, a global mini-public would be more likely to promote global public goods when dealing with issues like climate change and less bound by national interests. Such a proposal is imbued by the ideal of deliberative democracy: “Deliberative democracy means citizens communicating about and reflecting upon preferences, judgments and values regarding common concerns. The aspirational ideal is inclusive and meaningful communication joining citizens, activists and leaders” (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2019, 411).

In practice, however, there are only a few examples of transnational mini-publics that have enabled researchers to explore these claims empirically and these have primarily been part of European Union governance rather than global (Luskin et al. 2008; Isernia and Fishkin 2014; Elstub 2014; Böker and Elstub 2015; Abels et al. 2022; Youngs 2022). A notable example was the WWViews process which has been used to address global warming, climate and energy, and biodiversity (Mikami 2010; Bedsted et al. 2012; Rask et al. 2019). These consultations were organised prior to key COPs in 2009, 2012 and 2015. However, they were a networked series of nationally based mini-publics, rather than a global citizens’ assembly bringing citizens from different parts of the world into collective deliberation. The evaluation of these initiatives is mixed. Rask *et al.* (2012, 3) noted for instance that the policy impact of WWViews on global warming was limited. Blue (2015) also wondered whether the consultations were truly deliberative, as they lasted only one day and did not extend across national borders.

By contrast, the 2021 GA was a unique initiative, aimed at bringing together a demographically diverse sample of the global population to discuss possible action and make recommendations. It was composed of a Core Assembly –the focus of this chapter– and of Community Assemblies, organised all around the world. The Core Assembly brought together 100 members from 49 countries who spent 68 hours deliberating online, over 11 weeks between October and December 2021. Members of the GA deliberated on the following overarching question: How can humanity address the climate and ecological crisis in a fair and effective way? The initiative was led by a team of practitioners specialised in deliberative methodology and citizen empowerment.

3 Conceptual approach. The deliberative capacity of the GA

Scholars of deliberative democracy have looked at deliberative processes in individual events or institutions, but also increasingly in broader governance systems (Mansbridge et al. 2012; Elstub et al. 2016). The concept of deliberative capacity was originally developed to allow researchers to evaluate whole deliberative systems, as opposed to individual instances of political communication. What we are proposing here, though, is to use this analytical tool to evaluate the role that the GA was able to play in and of itself, as well as within global climate governance. We assess this contribution both within the GA and, where necessary, in relation with other institutions and coalitions of actors.

Dryzek (2009) offers three criteria for evaluating the deliberative capacity of a system: the extent to which it allows for deliberation that is (1) inclusive, (2) authentic, and (3) consequential. *Inclusiveness* refers to the extent to which all relevant interests and/or discourses are meaningfully and equally represented in decision-making processes. Different visions of inclusiveness exist. The literature can be divided between the proponents of socio-geographical representativeness –as Landemore (2013, 1229) puts it, the “politics of presence”–, and the advocates of discursive representativeness –the “politics of ideas”. The former associate inclusiveness with a set of socio-demographic criteria (age, gender, social status, etc.) and/or geographical criteria (rural, suburban, urban, etc.). The second focuses on the emergence of ideas, whatever the socio-demographic and geographical configurations. These two perspectives are not mutually exclusive but complementary: public opinion research has indicated a link between socio-demographics, geography, and political attitudes (Lax and Phillips 2008). Inclusiveness is therefore a function of both the socio-geographical representativeness of the members and the discursive representativeness of the deliberations (Dryzek and Niemeyer 2008). In the case of climate- and environment-related deliberative processes, participants can speak in their own name (reflecting where they come from) while at the same time consciously or unconsciously conveying specific discourses, i.e. narratives to which they subscribe and which enable them to link facts in a coherent way and give meaning to their beliefs and experience (Hajer and Versteeg 2005; Dryzek 2022).

Inclusiveness must also, we argue, be approached paying particular attention to the populations or interests that are both more affected, and may be marginalised or under-represented in political or economic institutions (Gherghina et al. 2021). The idea that all those who stand to be affected by a decision should be able to influence it (the ‘all-affected’ principle) is a widely accepted norm of democratic inclusion (Koenig-Archibugi 2017). However, it can be critiqued on a number of grounds including its expansiveness and indeterminacy. Afsahi (2022) for example proposes replacing it with a ‘most-deeply affected’ principle. When it comes to socio-environmental issues, some sections of the population are likely to be more affected (or affected earlier)

than others by sudden or gradual environmental catastrophes, including the poor, displaced people, or socio-cultural and demographic minorities (Martinez-Alier 2003; Nixon 2011).

Apart from the composition of the mini-public (socio-geographic and discursive), another way to approach inclusiveness is to examine to what extent and under what circumstances marginalised or under-represented groups are included, or excluded, in the governance of a deliberative event, in the deliberations themselves and in the production of recommendations (Gherghina et al. 2021). In this chapter, we consider inclusiveness in terms of both the composition of the assembly and the deliberation process (from design to facilitation).

The inclusiveness of the deliberation process is closely related to its *authenticity*. For instance, if the process is dominated by one social group, or by a single (hegemonic) discourse, its quality will be limited. *Authenticity* refers to the extent to which deliberations “induce reflection noncoercively, connect claims to more general principles, and exhibit reciprocity” (Dryzek 2009, 1382). Reflection can be induced noncoercively by setting conditions for deliberation that allow participants to properly think about relevant issues and different interests, and create opportunities to discuss, ask questions, and challenge each other’s ideas.

Deliberation, that involves technical information, should provide sufficient time for participants to study relevant materials and ensure the availability of resource persons (e.g. expert witnesses, facilitators or ‘community hosts’), if possible, locally. Facilitators can also create opportunities for reflection by asking questions or encouraging participants to discuss or challenge each other’s opinions or beliefs. Authentic deliberation also involves thinking more in terms of the common good than personal benefits or particular interests. One way of achieving this is to ensure that a diversity of discourses and interests (particularly of the most marginalised) are represented in the deliberations or expert witness presentations.

Reciprocity (a feature of authenticity) refers to communicating and formulating arguments in terms that others can accept, for instance by linking claims to common or shared principles (Gutmann and Thompson 1996; Dryzek 2009). Reciprocity, which is important for building trust, can be supported by facilitators, for example when participants are made aware, or see in practice, that deliberating on difficult or contentious topics can be done in respectful ways. When deliberating on issues involving highly scientific or technical information, reciprocity enables participants to engage with each other and with expert witnesses in a meaningful manner. When reciprocity is high, participants are not only open to learning with other participants and expert witnesses, but also know that their life experience, by itself, can offer rich contributions for the deliberation. At the global level, creating reciprocity can be particularly challenging due to the backgrounds of participants that involve multiple languages, cultures and histories.

Finally, *consequentiality* refers to the extent to which deliberative processes influence collective decisions or underpin a cultural change. Citizens’ assemblies have the potential to be impactful; policymakers may consider their recommendations seriously

as they indicate what people might think about an issue if they had the time, information, and inclination to consider it in detail (MacKenzie and Warren 2012). The influence of mini-publics on policy in general, however, has been limited, with their recommendations often being cherry-picked by policymakers (Smith 2009; Elstub 2014), or used to legitimise decisions already made in the formal public sphere (Böker and Elstub 2015). The direct policy impact of transnational mini-publics has certainly been low (Rask et al. 2019). At the global level, such impact is even more challenging (Dryzek 2006; Bohman 2007).

Taking a broader view of consequentiality, MacKenzie and Warren (2012) argue that the public can be influenced by a mini-public, if they perceive the participants to be ‘people like them’ who have considered the issue in a deeper manner than the rest of the public (see also Curato and Böker 2016). Relatedly, Niemeyer (2014) suggests mini-publics can stimulate and influence public debate. To influence public opinion and debate, mini-publics need a good level of media exposure, which can be hard to achieve (Carrick and Elstub 2023; Rask et al. 2019). This is especially the case at the global level where the public sphere has not been developed to the same extent as the national level due to the absence of a common language, cultural base, and mass media outlets (Dryzek 2006; Bohman 2007). WWViews, for example, did not get much media exposure (Schneider and Delborne 2011).

Existing research identifies significant challenges to achieving impact in climate governance. The impact of climate assemblies is highly variable and context matters (Boswell et al. 2023). For example, from their analysis of a case study of a local climate assembly from England, Sandoval et al. (2021) concluded that it provided only a minor challenge to the power of existing local authorities. Research by Wells et al. (2021) on the impact of local climate assemblies and juries indicates that they are primarily being used to support already existing policies rather than to determine climate change responses themselves. Elstub et al. (2021), while researching a national climate assembly in the UK found that the impact of the assembly was affected by design choices, including the scope of the assembly. Researching the same national UK case Carrick and Elstub (2023) found that the lack of public awareness of the assembly reduced the pressure on policymakers to respond to the assemblies’ recommendations in a meaningful manner. Some politicians in France, predominantly from the Right, felt threatened by the national climate assembly (Buge and Vandamme 2022).

This emerging body of research on climate assemblies, and their influence within climate governance, are invaluable yet limited. The terrain for global climate governance is considerably different to national and local politics (Stevenson and Dryzek 2014). The challenges for achieving consequentiality at this level could therefore be significantly different and consequentiality may need to be interpreted differently (see e.g. Demski and Capstick 2022).

4 Methods

We build our analysis on an evaluation of the GA conducted between 2021 and 2023 by a team of sixteen researchers (including ourselves) located in eleven universities in seven countries (Curato et al. 2023, 14–17). The evaluation was based on mixed methods (Escobar and Thompson 2019):

- semi-structured interviews (63) with people who held different positions in the GA, including organisers, community host, facilitators, notetakers and assembly members;
- surveys of assembly members, conducted during and after the GA (response rate of 70–90 %);
- direct observation of breakout group deliberations and plenary sessions;
- discourse analysis of the transcripts of breakout groups, in particular of the deliberations concerned with “Reviewing Scenarios, Pathways, and Principles” – one of the key blocks of the GA, focusing on issues of fairness and effectiveness in addressing the climate and ecological crisis. The analysis was informed by existing typologies of climate discourses (Stevenson and Dryzek 2014; Bäckstrand and Löbrand 2019; Hulme 2021; Dryzek 2022);
- content analysis of various documents produced by the GA and expert testimonies available on YouTube, including the Report of the GA (Global Assembly Team 2022), the information booklet distributed to assembly members, the People’s Declaration, and minutes of the Knowledge and Wisdom Committee (KWC)’s meetings;
- content analysis of all online media articles (56) and a random sample of social media posts (28 from Twitter, 16 from Instagram and 9 from Facebook), available in English, published from May 2020 – August 2022.

These methods allowed the evaluation team to study the GA from various angles and to evaluate its demographic and discursive diversity, its deliberation process (including the inequalities that it created), its governance, and its impact (see Curato et al. 2023). This chapter builds on the Evaluation Report and focuses on a subset of the data collected. To answer our research question on the inclusiveness, authenticity and consequentiality of the GA deliberations, we focused our analysis on the aspects reflected on Table 9.1.

Table 9.1: Guiding questions used to operationalise the concept of deliberative capacity and main data sources for each dimension

Inclusiveness	Authenticity	Consequentiality
How inclusive was the GA? How diverse was the membership at different levels (the assembly and its governance)	How authentic were the deliberations? How reflective were the deliberations?	How consequential was the GA? On global climate governance (UNFCCC and COP26)

Table 9.1 (Continued)

Inclusiveness	Authenticity	Consequentiality
How diverse were the discourses represented?	How did the deliberations connect to general principles of common interest?	On the public (assembly members) and media (traditional and social media)
To what extent were the most affected people and interests included?	How reciprocal were the exchanges among participants?	On other actors (e.g. civil society, UN institutions)
How inclusive was the deliberative process?		
Main data sources		
Report of the 2021 Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis; Transcripts of breakout groups; Interviews; Minutes of the KWC's meetings; Information booklet.	Transcripts of breakout groups; Interviews.	Interviews; Online media articles; Social media posts.

In the next section, we discuss the extent to which we observed these aspects of deliberative capacity in the GA. While inclusiveness and authenticity draw attention to the internal workings of the assembly (e.g. governance, selection, deliberation processes), consequentiality focuses on the relationship between the assembly and other parts of the political system (governments, the general public, civil society, media, etc.).

5 Analysis

5.1 Inclusiveness

To assess the inclusiveness of the GA, we examined the socio-geographic diversity of its members and organisers, discursive representativeness, and the inclusiveness of the deliberative process. Through these categories, we place particular emphasis on the extent to which those more vulnerable or marginalised were included in the GA.

The organisers sought to compose a demographic sample of the global population, taking into account geography, gender, age, education and attitudes towards the climate and ecological crisis. They used sortition to select participants, which is often described as a more inclusive mode of representation than election, nomination or certification (Courant 2017). At first glance, the socio-demographic and geographic data of the assembly members shows a relatively representative sample of the world's population, especially from the Global South (77% were from the Global South) (Curato et al. 2023, 48–54). Several members also came from countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, including least-developed countries (LDCs) and small island developing states (SIDS) – although there was only one representative from SIDS.

The socio-economic diversity of those involved in the governance of the GA was mixed, with high-level decision-making power resting in the hands of actors located in the Global North. Diversity was not actively sought at the level of the Central Circle (the organisers responsible for the conduct and design of the GA) whose members mainly came from Europe (6/10). Members of the Knowledge and Wisdom Committee (KWC) –formed to provide input on the selection of witnesses and the information material made available to assembly members– were also mainly from the Global North (5/9 were based in Europe and North America). In contrast, those in charge of “making the GA happen” (the facilitators, note takers and editors) were mainly located in the Global South (Curato et al. 2023, 87).

The exchange language was English, and real-time translation was provided for those who needed it. In spite of the provision of interpreters, the choice of English affected the inclusion of the members for whom English is a foreign language. For example, native English speakers could respond directly to comments made by other speakers, and tended to find it easier to engage in the nuances of debate, while others had to wait for their interpreter to translate each remark. Many assembly members expressed feelings of intimidation for not speaking English and felt that native speakers were more confident and dominated the discussions (Curato et al. 2023, 103).

As far as the discursive representation of the GA is concerned, the record is equally mixed. Firstly, the organisers attempted to ensure that participants’ attitudes to climate change were broadly representative of the global population’s attitudes by asking potential participants whether they thought “climate change is a global crisis”. Doing so, they sought to mirror UNDP data on global attitudes to climate change (Global Assembly Team 2022, 54). This question proved to be problematic both conceptually and pragmatically, as the terms ‘global’ and ‘crisis’ may be translated and interpreted in multiple ways –meaning that a ‘no’ response did not necessarily indicate climate quietism, scepticism or denial. In practice, many Community Hosts found it difficult to recruit participants in their local area who answered ‘no’ to this question. This may explain why discourses of climate scepticism were not featured in the deliberations (Curato et al. 2023, 51).

Our analysis revealed that the deliberations focused on climate science (drawing heavily on discourses of ecological modernisation and mainstream sustainability, cf. Dryzek 2022) and climate change mitigation, but also considered various forms of climate injustice (whether socio-economic, historical or environmental). While this is valuable, we noted the absence of some discourses, such as those addressing climate change adaptation or loss and damage (major concerns for Global South countries) or deep critiques of capitalism (green radicalism, cf. Dryzek 2022). This could be a consequence of the framing of expert evidence by the Central Circle and the KWC. As noted by Curato et al. (2023, 59) “a possible reason for the ‘missing discourses’ relates to the decision of the Committee to focus the Global Assembly on what can be done now, i.e., in the next five years, instead of opening debates with a twenty-year horizon. The discourse of degrowth, therefore, is put aside in favour of topics like ‘reducing overconsumption.’”

In terms of inclusiveness of the deliberative process, the organisers took a number of steps to support equitable participation between assembly members. The challenge of organising a deliberative process (from conception to facilitation) is particularly accentuated on a global scale, because of the great diversity of socio-cultural, linguistic, and material situations of the populations that are to be represented. Differential ability to access and engage in deliberative sessions illustrates both the material and socio-cultural challenges of achieving inclusive deliberative process on a global scale. All participants received a stipend as financial compensation for their time, and those for whom English was not a first language were provided with an interpreter and translated documents. As the deliberations were entirely online, the (many) members who did not have access to the internet were given temporary internet access near their homes. In some cases, this took place in the home of the community host whose on-the-ground support with logistics and understanding of the process was often key to the accessibility of the process, though the level of support varied.

Despite the welcome technical considerations involved in enabling people to access the internet easily, as well as support from translators and community hosts, several members reported problems with security or disclosure of identity (offline). For example, for some women, it was not possible or safe to walk to the wi-fi zone to attend late-night sessions. The scheduling of the deliberations was also not always inclusive, as the organisers devised it assuming (sometimes incorrectly) that assembly members lived in socially secure and inclusive contexts, had fewer duties and activities in the evening and had easy access to the internet. Finally, assembly members who were not used to online meetings found it more difficult to engage, given the formal and ‘procedural’ nature of online engagement (to facilitate turns and avoid speech breaks) and the limitations of non-verbal communication (Shortall et al. 2022).

5.2 Authenticity

To assess authenticity, we asked the following questions, in line with the principles of noncoercive reflection, pursuit of common interest and reciprocity: How were participants introduced to the scientific aspects of the climate and environmental crisis? Were there opportunities for reflection? Were participants able to discuss a variety of solutions encompassing the concerns of wealthier and poorer countries? What was the nature of interactions among participants, facilitators, and expert witnesses?

The deliberation process fostered learning and meaningful exchanges of views. Assembly members were particularly eager to learn about the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss and felt more confident discussing these issues after the GA (Curato et al. 2023, 68). The organisers and facilitators, however, also faced challenges in promoting authentic deliberations due to the dispersed and diverse backgrounds of assembly members (Curato et al. 2023, 54) that involved multiple languages, cultures, and time zones. The knowledge and literacy levels of members and facilitators varied and, in some cases, created huge disparities between them. This posed some barriers for au-

thentic deliberation, e.g. when facilitators or more knowledgeable members were viewed as authority figures by other members. There were also challenges posed by time constraints and the complexity of the issues under discussion (the climate problem and global climate governance). In some cases, the role of the facilitators, seen as ‘teachers’ by assembly members, contributed to limiting, rather than encouraging, participants’ authentic engagement in the deliberations (Curato et al. 2023, 39). The discussions took a more pedagogical turn, where members were more inclined to take a deferential position.

The design of the GA was organised around presentations by expert witnesses and group deliberations, with members required to absorb and understand a lot of information in a limited time. In the initial stages, assembly members familiarised themselves with the current climate and ecological situation and debated various scenarios and pathways toward decarbonisation. While this learning stage was necessary, it in fact largely conditioned the nature and boundaries of the ensuing exchanges. During group deliberations, members tended to view the GA like a classroom, where the main point was to learn. Indeed, it seems that participants focused less on questioning and deliberating and more on digesting and quoting scientific arguments. This resulted in a situation where reflection tended to be minimal, i.e. participants may not have fully internalised and reflected on these arguments, formulated their own opinions, or engaged deeply with each other’s perspectives. As a facilitator noted, “it often happened that... I felt people were repeating the text [given to them]. They would say the same thing in different ways. What was written there, but in other words. Whenever you wanted to know what they thought or how they felt, it just didn’t [work]” (Curato et al. 2023, 76).

Authentic engagement was also constrained by a relatively narrow understanding of the climate and environmental crisis. Although the GA’s remit was broad, the agenda set by the organisers focussed on mitigation rather than adaptation, which could be interpreted as a prioritisation of the concerns of wealthier countries over the urgent and sometimes existential adaptation concerns of poorer countries. Further, when invoked, discussion on climate justice focused more on rich vs. poor countries than on injustices occurring within and across countries. For instance, the information presented to assembly members emphasised CO₂ emissions by country rather than by ‘(socio-) ecological class’ (Latour and Schultz 2022).

A major constraint to reciprocity and reflection was that facilitators tended to lead and structure the conversation more than the assembly members themselves. This was partly a symptom of having limited time to cover large amounts of information while managing other constraints such as pauses for translation and internet issues, but the result contributed to limiting the organic flow of ideas. Facilitators often found themselves in a delicate position: on the one hand, they expressed appreciation for receiving a clear and standardised process plan; on the other hand, they sometimes felt overburdened by the large amount of material they needed to go through to prepare for each session (Curato et al. 2023, 91–92).

There was also a noticeable gap, both actual and metaphorical, between the members and the expert witnesses. The latter (and sometimes facilitators) were seen as holders of knowledge, perhaps for cultural reasons as well as the format of deliberations, and assembly members were unlikely to question them or the learning materials. While a congenial and harmonious environment between members could have facilitated reciprocity, participants felt in this case uncomfortable or reluctant to challenge or debate with each other.

5.3 Consequentiality

The organisers of the GA envisioned three “routes to impact” (Global Assembly Team, 2022, 30). They wanted to activate: (1) institutional actors (governments, businesses, etc.) and (2) the public (especially GA members) to take action to address the climate and ecological crisis, and (3) to propose a new governance model of decision-making at the global level. One of the organisers stated that the GA “is not a campaign or NGO, it’s a new operating system for global governance” (GA media release, 2021).

With regards to institutional actions, the organisers sought to connect, or “dock” (in their own words), the GA to the UNFCCC. This was done by seeking endorsement of high-profile figures and presenting the People’s Declaration at COP26. This, however, did not disrupt the intricate and lengthy path of deliberations in the public and empowered spaces of the COP (Dryzek and Stevenson 2011). A concrete impact could have been observed if, for instance, a group of actors (states or civil society groups) had endorsed the People’s Declaration, if a new agenda item had been identified, or if a COP decision had been issued. However, none of these happened. External factors limited the influence of the GA, such as the configuration of power in the UNFCCC, and the complexity, technicality and inflexibility of its procedures. As such, although the UNFCCC is open to a wide range of stakeholders, major decisions are taken by government representatives.

Design choices also constrained this route to impact. On the one hand, because the organisers privileged an independent and bottom-up initiative, it meant that the GA did not have any formal link to the UNFCCC –although its Secretariat proved helpful in supporting the GA organisers to navigate the UN bureaucracy. Key individuals (e.g. Alok Sharma, the UK COP president; Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland; and António Guterres, the UN Secretary General) endorsed the GA, raising its public profile. António Guterres called the GA “a practical way of showing how we can accelerate action through solidarity and people power” (Global Assembly Team 2022, 2).

No endorsement, however, came from individual countries. While some civil society groups felt inspired by the work of the GA (Global Assembly Team 2022, 247), many also remained unaware of its existence (Simangan and Pham 2024). This may be due to the fact that advocacy was limited in time, as outreach mainly targeted COP26. The decision by the organisers to support a broad remit of discussion, which contributed to

rather generic statements in the People' Declaration, also made it challenging for the GA to have a targeted imprint on the UNFCCC (Curato et al. 2023, 126).

The impact of the GA on the public was also limited. While it had concrete impacts in participants' everyday lives, encouraging many of them to adopt environmentally-friendly practices, it struggled to reach other audiences and advance a 'cultural wave'¹ (Curato et al. 2023, 133). Media coverage was also limited. Across the GA lifespan, we only identified 56 online media articles available in English². This coverage was distributed across 20 countries in total, but predominantly appeared in British and Indian media outlets. Media coverage was also uneven across the globe, as only 18 of 56 articles were reported in the Global South media. This coverage peaked at the launch of the GA at COP26 and in the period after the launch. The coverage primarily focused on the GA itself and was positive. The social media coverage of the GA was also limited and varied across the different social media platforms. Content creation and responses were uneven across platforms. The most GA related social media content appeared on Twitter (794 posts) and messages on this platform also received the most attention (2,225 followers).

While there was sufficient media and social media activity to raise the idea of citizens' assemblies at the global level, especially amongst political elites, ultimately, the GA did not receive enough media coverage across the globe to generate significant public awareness or to stimulate global debate about international climate action. There are several reasons for this. First, this was always going to be a significant challenge due to the lack of a global public sphere (Fraser 2014), even for transnational events such as COPs, which generally receive a high level of media attention (Neff et al. 2022). Second, it is likely that as found in other climate assembly studies (Carrick and Elstub 2023) the lack of impact on COP26 and other global governance arenas meant there was not a sufficiently news-worthy story to attract more media attention. Thirdly, with limited resources, the organisers concentrated primarily on the challenging logistics of delivering the GA and less on its communication and advocacy strategy.

6 Conclusion

Ten years ago, in their analysis of the deliberative capacity of the UNFCCC, Stevenson and Dryzek (2014, 9) noted that they found it "wanting, though not completely irredeemable". The GA represented a first step toward making the UNFCCC, and global climate governance more broadly, more democratic by conveying to it the informed opin-

1 The cultural wave is defined by the organisers of the GA as "an invitation to artists and creators to develop work that expressed the idea of the Global Assembly and the climate and ecological crisis in a way that would reach people through popular culture" (Global Assembly Team 2022, 25).

2 Only a handful of articles were published by non-English speaking media (in France, Italy, Spain, Finland, Brazil, Germany, Mexico). See the appendix of the Report for the 2021 Global Assembly (Global Assembly Team 2022).

ions of a diverse sample of global citizens. Intended as a ‘proof of concept’, the GA set a precedent and generated many useful practical lessons and conceptual and ethical insights to inform future global-scale citizens’ assemblies, both on the issue of climate change and more broadly.

In this chapter, we used the concept of deliberative capacity to evaluate the quality of the GA in terms of its inclusiveness, authenticity and consequentiality. This framework proved particularly helpful in the way it links the internal and external deliberative dimensions of citizens’ assemblies. We found that the inclusiveness of the GA was encouraging; the organisers took this aspect into account when recruiting members and designing the process of deliberation. Greater inclusiveness could, however, have been sought in the governance of the GA (such as sharing the design and management of the assembly between the Global North and South), and in the diversity of discourses and interests reflected (ensuring an openness, for example, to more radical philosophies and subaltern voices). We also found that despite efforts to foster authentic deliberations and learning between participants, the discussions often resembled a classroom exercise, with ‘knowledge’ flowing uninterrogated from the experts or facilitators to the participants. Finally, we found that of the three criteria of deliberative capacity, consequentiality was the least developed: beyond the enthusiasm of a few political leaders and civil society representatives, the GA had very limited influence on international climate negotiations or the worldwide public debate on climate change. While some of the points we raise relate to structural constraints that are difficult to overcome (e.g., the digital divide, the UNFCCC as a country-driven process), others (e.g. greater diversity in the governance of an assembly, greater focus on deliberation than on learning) deserve attention.

Despite these limitations, the case of the GA successfully demonstrated that it was feasible to transform such an ambitious global project from theory to practice. As noted by Curato et al. (2023, 121) the GA demonstrated “that global citizen deliberation was possible”, thus setting the stage for the next iterations, or similar projects. It showed that citizens can unite for a common cause and make informed recommendations. The GA thus “made significant first steps in establishing itself as an actor in global climate governance” (Curato et al. 2023, 117). We believe that the GA was crucial in highlighting the need for ordinary people to be able to weigh in on UNFCCC decisions and processes, in a context in which *all* stakeholders are asked to take action (cf. preamble of the Paris Agreement). While more could be done to enhance the relevance and legitimacy of any similar future initiative, this world-first GA expanded our imagination towards empowering citizens to take part in the deliberative system of global governance.

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