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Looking to the future? Including children, young people and future generations in deliberations on climate action: Ireland's Citizens'Assembly 2016–2018

Clodagh Harris*

Department of Government and Politics and the Environmental Research Institute, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland

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The effects of climate change are multiple and fundamental. Decisions made today may result in irreversible damage to the planet's biodiversity and ecosystems, the detrimental impacts of which will be borne by today's children, young people and those yet unborn (future generations). The use of citizens' assemblies (CAs) to tackle the issue of climate change is growing. Their remit is future focused. Yet is the future in the room? Focusing on a single case study, the recent Irish CA and Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action (JOCCA) deliberations on climate action, this paper explores the extent to which children, young people and future generations were included. Its systemic analysis of the membership of both institutions, the public submissions to them and the invited expertise presented, finds that the Irish CA was 'too tightly coupled' on this issue. This may have been beneficial in terms of impact, but it came at the expense of input legitimacy and potentially intergenerational justice. Referring to international developments, it suggests how these groups may be included through enclave deliberation, institutional innovations, design experiments and future-oriented practice. .

Keywords: democratic innovations; Ireland Citizens' Assembly; deliberative democracy; children; future generations; citizens' assembly; climate action

Introduction

The use of citizens' assemblies (CAs) to tackle the issue of climate change is growing. Ireland, Scotland, France and the UK have all established such popular assemblies to directly engage citizens in deliberating with experts, stakeholders and their fellow citizens on the myriad challenges presented by the climate emergency. They have been employed in different contexts and formats in the countries in which they have been created and levels of governmental responsiveness to their proposals have varied. Yet, as deliberative mini-publics (DMPs) these CAs have many commonalities.

Firstly, in keeping with deliberative democracy's commitment to equality and inclusion they recognise the role of bringing together people with diverse opinions, backgrounds and lived experiences to co-develop responses to the climate emergency (Devaney et al. 2020; Dryzek and Niemeyer 2019). Each CA has endeavoured to

*Email: clodagh.harris@ucc.ie

achieve this by using stratified random sampling to ensure the assemblies' overall composition is broadly reflective of wider society in terms of age, gender, socio-economic background, educational attainment, regional representation, etc. Some, such as the UK Climate Assembly, have taken care to ensure diverse views on climate change are present. Others have used additional measures to ensure groups that may be overlooked by stratified random sampling are specifically targeted, for example, the French Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat. To facilitate voice as well as presence, the CAs have used professional facilitators to encourage participation and to ensure all members have the opportunity to speak and be listened to with respect. Secondly, as deliberative democratic institutions they have emphasised informed, respectful and considered judgement. Their processes include expert witnesses to inform the deliberations and members are invited to deliberate with them and amongst themselves respectfully to develop what Offe and Preuss have defined as 'fact, future and other regarding' recommendations (Offe and Preuss 1991).

It is to the future orientation of these assemblies that this paper turns. As assemblies discussing climate change, their remits are future focused. Yet is the future in the room? Are children,[1] young people[2] and those not yet born (future generations), at the table and do they have a voice in the process? As the generations, with the most to gain or lose in modern responses to the climate emergency, their inclusion is linked to the input legitimacy of such DMPs.

Looking at the Irish CA and the subsequent deliberations in the Joint Oireachtas (Parliament) committee on climate action (JOCCA), this paper asks to what extent, if any, were children, young people and those yet to be born present and/or represented in the process.

It takes a case study approach to its analysis and is structured as follows. It starts in Section 1 with a brief discussion of the impact of climate change on children, young people and future generations and the importance of their inclusion in democratic decisions from the perspective of legitimacy. Section 2 presents a short overview of the CA and focuses on its link to the wider deliberative system, specifically the work of the JOCCA that was established with the purpose of responding to its recommendations. It is followed in Section 3 by a critical analysis of the extent to which they were included in the CA and JOCCA. This involves an examination of the membership of the CA and JOCCA as well as the public submissions and expertise presented to them. The final section discusses the findings and suggests methods and means through which children, young people and future generations can be represented in deliberative fora and their decision-making processes.

DMPs – inclusion of children, young people and future generations

The effects of climate change are multiple and fundamental. It threatens all that is core to our survival as humans, namely, shelter, clean water, safe food and peace. Decisions we make (or don't make) today may result in irreversible damage to the planet's biodiversity and ecosystems, the detrimental impacts of which are being borne and will be suffered even more so in the future by today's children, young people and future generations. For instance, it is estimated that 'children already suffer around 90% of the global disease burden from climate change with almost all of this occurring in developing countries which are the least responsible for climate change' (Stanley and Farrant 2015, 415). It is not just children and young people's physical health that is being damaged, there is, as Sanson and Burke observe *clear evidence of widespread emotional*

reactions, even in high-income countries that are not yet suffering its direct effects. Surveys have found that many young people experience fear, sadness, anger and a sense of powerlessness' (Sanson and Burke 2020, 345).

In matters of policy, children, young people and future generations will be free in the future to make their own decisions, except where our actions (or inactions) have irreversible consequences (MacKenzie 2018). It is the omission of this broad cohort from processes leading to decisions that have 'irreversible consequences' that this paper addresses.

The exclusion of significant sectors of society from decisions that determine their futures and quality of life, risks weakening the democratic credentials of such outcomes, as it undermines the diversity required to meet democracy's legitimacy, epistemic and ethical functions (Beauvais and Baechtiger 2016).

There are diverse arguments on the inclusion of children, young people and future generations in political decisions. Nishiyama (2017) notes mainstream and conventional tendencies to view children as either lacking the necessary capacities to participate in democratic life and/or proper understanding of their interests and the decisions at stake. Refuting these depictions of children as 'future citizens' or 'citizens of tomorrow', he reconceptualizes them as 'deliberators' and 'effective agents of democracy' (Nishiyama 2017).

When it comes to discussions on future generations, views are also mixed. These range from presentists, who argue that the preferences of the current generation alone should inform policy decisions, to those who advocate for a rights-based approach (Howarth 2011). According to presentists, we need not be unduly concerned with intergenerational conflicts as 'people hold altruistic preferences concerning the welfare of their children and grandchildren and that those preferences provide the most appropriate basis for balancing short-run costs and long-run benefits'(Howarth 2011, 347). Proponents of a rights-based perspective take a less paternalistic stance, noting that the present generation 'holds a duty to ensure that life opportunities are maintained from each generation to the next' (Howarth 2011, 348).

A number of institutional and constitutional options have been detailed to include future generations. These include the institutionalisation of DMPs within existing legislative frameworks to enhance deliberation in the empowered space (MacKenzie 2018); the creation of an independent ombudsperson/high authority for future generations[3] (Hara et al. 2019); electoral innovations that weight votes in favour of children and youth (Saijo 2018); parliamentary committees for the Future (Smith 2021); constitutional provisions that explicitly grant rights to future generations (Gosseries 2008) and a blend of these and other options (Smith 2021; Krznaric 2020).

For his part, MacKenzie (2018) notes that the interests of future generations can be reconciled with those of the current generation through deliberation as it can 'help encourage longer term thinking by forcing us to publicly justify our claims in ways that others might plausibly accept' (262). It can also facilitate the development of shared societal objectives about the type of future we wish to enjoy.

A theory of political legitimacy, deliberative democracy emphasises virtues of inclusion, justification and reflection (Dryzek 2016). Collective decisions, it argues should be made using reflective public reasoning and are legitimate to the extent that those subjected to them have the right, opportunity and capacity to contribute to deliberations on them (Hendriks, Dryzek, and Hunold 2007). They differ from 'aggregate' forms of democracy to the extent that they focus not on individual knowledge and preferences but emphasise 'civility and argumentative complexity' (Dryzek et al. 2019, 1144).

In recent years we have witnessed the operationalisation of deliberation in DMPs such as CAs and citizens' juries. Their deliberative features are evident in their focus on informed, reasoned, and respectful 'considered judgement' based on the common good. They invite ordinary citizens to consider the arguments of differently situated and opinionated others, to present reasons for their own preferences, weigh up the arguments and to be open to changing their minds as a result (Isernia and Fishkin 2014; Dryzek 2010). Bringing 'scientific evidence together with public views and values', DMPs have much to offer in terms of addressing the climate emergency (Howarth et al. 2020, 1112). As Howarth et al. (2020) argue, they can 'support citizens to imagine different ways of living … making society a co-designer of climate action' (1113).

Their emphasis on inclusion and equality in terms of presence and voice endeavours to widen participation and highlights their participatory credentials (Smith 2009; Wojciechowska 2019). Citizens' assemblies endeavour to achieve inclusion through their recruitment methods; the provision of accessible 'expert' opinion and information; facilitated small group deliberations; and decision-making rules. Their legitimacy rests on: the diversity of backgrounds, opinions and lived experiences of those who contribute to their recommendations; the inclusiveness of their process; wider public acceptance that all views have been considered by them; and the justifiability of their recommendations to those who would be affected by them. Smith, for one, contends that they are 'arguably the most socially and cognitively diverse of all democratic institutions in contemporary polities' (2021, 97) while Krznaric (2020) sees a crucial role for CAs in deepening democracy by moving political thinking and decision-making beyond 'short termism'. He points to three particular features of CAs that commend them in this regard: their diverse membership; their recruitment through sortition which limits 'domination' of powerful political actors and interest groups; and the time and space afforded to their work that facilitates 'slow thinking' (181).[4]

Deliberation is not limited to CAs or other types of DMPs but can occur, as the systemic turn in deliberative democratic theory recognises, in multiple locations, such as parliament, the media, social movements, and civil society forums, and involve a diversity of actors. It notes a division of labour across institutions or sites within the wider system and asserts that 'the entire burden of decision-making and legitimacy does not fall on one forum or institution' (Mansbridge et al. 2012, 5). This paper draws upon this systemic understanding of deliberative democracy and uses Nishiyama's evaluative framework that focuses on actors, spaces and impacts (2017) to analyse the Irish case study.

Ireland's Citizens' Assembly (2016–2018)

Ireland has emerged as a world leader in DMPs, as CAs have become a common feature of the Irish constitutional and policy landscape (Harris 2021). Its Constitutional Convention (2012–2014) and the Citizens' Assemblies of (2016–2018) and (2020–2021) have all formed part of its recent Constitutional revision process.[5]

This case study examines the work of the Irish Citizens' Assembly (2016–2018) focusing on its deliberations on climate action. Established in July 2016 by an Oireachtas resolution, it was charged with deliberating on an eclectic range of issues that included: the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution (concerned with the provision on abortion); how to make the state a leader in tackling climate change; how to respond to the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population; and two political reform measures, namely fixed-terms parliaments and the manner in which referenda are held.

The initial draft Oireachtas resolution that established the CA did not include climate change as a matter for deliberation. An amendment proposed by the Green Party led to its inclusion. Originally it had been intended that it would be the final issue for deliberation and that it would take place over one weekend. However, at the assembly members' request, it was moved up the programme and allocated a second weekend. It became the third item on its work programme.

It was comprised of 99 ordinary citizens, recruited by a polling company using stratified random sampling across four categories, age, sex, geography and social class. To be eligible[6] for random selection a person had to be 'entitled to vote at a referendum', that is an Irish citizen aged 18 or over.

The CA took three-stage approach namely, information, deliberation and decision making. Its work programme involved: a call for public submissions; invited accessible 'expert' presentations; discussions with invited panellists; facilitated small-group deliberations amongst the members; and a private ballot on their draft recommendations.

The expertise provided to it on climate action came from senior officials and researchers from a range of national and international agencies and institutions. Each of the weekends also included a panel on leadership initiatives at a local and community level.

In its final report, it issued 13 recommendations and 4 ancillary recommendations that included calls for new governance structures, specific sectoral recommendations as well as a call for the introduction of a tax on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture (Citizens' Assembly 2018). As Devaney et al. (2020) observe, 'the Assembly's deliberations on climate change received the highest consensus scores of all topics considered, with 80% or more citizens voting in favour of each recommendation proposed' (1).

The Assembly's report was forwarded to the JOCCA. Established in July 2018, its remit was to consider the CA's report on climate action and how their 'recommendations might inform the further implementation of Ireland's National Mitigation Plan and the development of the draft National Climate and Energy Plan while taking the National Development Plan into consideration' (Houses of the Oireachtas 2019).

Both the Irish CA and JOCCA processes included public calls for submissions. They came from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), representative groups, advocacy groups, political parties, commercial entities, academics and individuals. They were the means through which those not selected to sit in the Assembly could participate (albeit indirectly) in the deliberations. An important link with the wider public (the maxi-public), they formed what Devaney et al. (2019) have termed the midi-public.

It is to an analysis of this midi-public, the membership of the CA and JOCCA and the sources of the expertise presented to them that this paper now turns.

CA and JOCCA deliberations on climate action: an analysis

This desk-based research analysed official documents, public submissions and official archival video footage to gather its data. To this end, it examined: the membership of both the CA and the JOCCA; and the public submissions, meeting agendas and reports archived on the CA (2016–2018) and JOCCA websites. This involved identifying the origin of each public submission on the topic to the CA and the JOCCA as well as identifying the professional background of each of those who contributed to the CA and JOCCA deliberations on climate action, either as an expert witness or panellist.

These data were then coded to determine the number of public submissions received and presentations made by: children, young people, their organisations (such as students' unions, youth wings of political parties), organisations representing them (such as the

national youth council of Ireland), and wider umbrella organisations that included those advocating for children and/or young people (such as the environmental pillar). When determining those who presented to the CA and the JOCCA, the meeting agendas were cross-referenced against archival video footage of the CA and JOCCAs' public proceedings.

This method was not without its limitations given the scope of the research question. Arguably it would have been ameliorated by a discourse analysis of the CA and JOCCA internal deliberations to determine the extent to which the interests of and/or appeals to the interests of children, young people and future generations were considered. That parts of their deliberations took place in camera and were not recorded made this impossible.

Actors

Young people were eligible to be randomly selected and their presence in the CA was proportionate to their representation in the wider population. The specific demographic target was set at ten members for the 18–24 age cohort. It was achieved (Farrell et al. 2021). Children and future generations were not eligible to be members of the CA. The route through which they could have had voice and influence in the CA process was through the public submissions process and by being invited as expert witnesses and/or panellists.

The CA issued a separate call for each topic it discussed. It received 1,205 public submissions on the climate action topic, 1180 of which were received online and 25 were received by post. A very small proportion of them were not published (20 in total) as they were either duplicates of other submissions, off topic or withdrawn by the authors (Citizens Assembly 2018).

Turning to children and young peoples' voices within this midi-public, this paper analysed the total number of submissions received on the topic to determine the number submitted by; children, young people, their organisations, organisations representing them and wider umbrella organisations.

The number of relevant submissions came to 48, a mere 4% of the total number of public submissions received on the topic. As outlined in Table 1, the majority of these 48 submissions came from children and young people directly. However, in terms of the total number of submissions made to the CA on climate action, those that came directly from children and young people[7] only amounted to 3%.

It is possible that the timing of the call for submissions proved an impediment. The call was issued in the broadsheet press on June 12th 2017 with a deadline of August 11th 2017. The timing was far from child or young person friendly. By this time, University students had finished their end of year exams and were on their summer break. It also coincided with state examinations for large cohorts of secondary school students, the final weeks of primary school and the summer break. Additionally, it was a time period in which many of the children and young people's own organisations would have been on holiday.

Table 1. Public submissions to the CA.

	Children	Young People	Young people's organisations	Organisations presenting children and young people	Umbrella groups	Total
Number of submissions	12	22	7	4	3	48

The JOCCA, established primarily to respond to the CA's report on climate action, comprised of political representatives of all parties and independents from each of the Houses of the Oireachtas. None of its members was aged between 18 and 24.[8] It was asked to consider the CA's report on climate action and how their 'recommendations might inform the further implementation of Ireland's National Mitigation Plan and the development of the draft National Climate and Energy Plan while taking the National Development Plan into consideration' (Houses of the Oireachtas 2019). It received 107 submissions from 78 different bodies that included Government departments, individuals and organisations. Only seven of the submissions it received came from organisations and/or bodies with links to children and young people.[9]

Spaces

The specific question asked of the CA, as outlined in the Oireachtas Resolution was 'How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change'. This framed the discussions in a particular way, as observed by Devaney et al. who find 'a preoccupation with national policies, measures and strategies for tackling the climate crisis' (2019, 12). Framing issues also come to the fore in the CA's use of the public submissions.

Given the tight timelines involved and the significant number of submissions received from the midi-public, it was agreed to condense them into a signpost document 'to identify, in order of popularity, the key issues/topics/themes which presented in the submissions' and to group them into 'broad thematic areas … to present a selection of the perspectives which were received' with a view to assisting the assembly with its work (Citizens' Assembly 2018, E6).

To ensure a broad cross-section of submissions, the assembly's secretariat drew on the submissions of the 153 NGO, advocacy and interest groups and a random sample of 100 of the total 1,185 submissions.[10] The signpost document provided a brief overview of the 'substance of some of the key issues emerging in a sample of the submissions' and included a ranking exercise of the issues raised (Citizens' Assembly 2018, E6).[11] To prepare it the Secretariat recorded the number of times a given issue was raised. The resulting top three issues were transport, energy, and agriculture with food coming in fourth and waste coming in sixth (Citizens' Assembly 2018). This informed the document's layout and structure. The submissions selected for inclusion, whether individual or organisational were cited throughout.

An analysis of the signpost document reveals that of the 48 submissions outlined in Table 1, ten are explicitly cited. Of these ten, two are from umbrella groups, three came from individuals (two young people and one child), two are from a young persons' organisation and three from organisations representing young people. Of the 153 advocacy groups included in the signpost document's list of submissions from advocacy groups[12], fifteen are linked to young people to the extent that they came from a group organised by them, an organisation representing them, or an umbrella organisation.

Informed by the submission process, its members and the expert advisory group, the CA took a sectoral approach to its work. The first weekend involved a discussion of the science behind climate change, the current impact of climate change and current policy responses in Ireland and internationally. In the second weekend, the CA focused on those sectors that had been the most prominent in the public submissions as ranked by its Secretariat, namely, energy, transport, and agriculture, food and land use (Citizens' Assembly 2018).

In their detailed quantitative analysis of the public submissions on climate action, Devaney et al. (2019) note three 'key blocks', the first of which captures the most prominent topics such as renewable energy, one of the sectors discussed by the Assembly, as well as calls for community engagement in the transition, a topic that received significantly less attention in the CA . Their second 'block' of issues includes climate justice both in terms of 'geographical and intergenerational standpoints', an issue that received little attention in the CA. It also lists agriculture and transport, two sectoral issues considered by the CA.

The process used by the CA to determine the prominent themes emerging from the public submissions shaped the sectoral approach to its deliberations. It may have been efficient and pragmatic but it was not sufficiently nuanced to capture all the key issues, as evidenced in the differences between Devaney et al.'s 'blocks' 1 and 2 and the signpost document's prioritisation exercise (2019). This raises questions around the framing of the deliberations in ways that possibly limited the CA's focus and recommendations. Such concerns are particularly pertinent in light of Devaney et al.'s (2020) findings of 'a tendency for individuals to draw on climate justice arguments more than experts; groups and NGOs to focus more on community engagement; (and) experts to place greater emphasis on national policy measures' (13).

The expertise provided to the CA came from academics, and senior officials and researchers. Innovatively, each of the weekends incorporated a panel on leadership initiatives at a local and community level. These initiatives were all Irish and reflected the sectoral focus adopted by the CA. None of the expert presentations or panel contributions came from youth organisations, organisations representing them or umbrella organisations. It is worth noting that children had previously given evidence to an Irish Citizens' assembly.[13]

An analysis of the JOCCA's proceedings finds young people, children and future generations were even less visible there. The JOCCA's deliberations were more lengthy and took place over 7 months, resulting in 42 priority recommendations and 39 ancillary ones. Its work started with a presentation from the Chairperson of the Citizens' Assembly and its report was structured according to the CA's recommendations, each receiving a considered response.

Unsurprisingly, given its terms of reference, the Committee invited evidence from the Chair of the CA and its Secretariat, the Minister with responsibility for climate action, eight Secretaries General and key stakeholders namely, employers' organisations, trade unions, and farmers' organisations. Only two organisations could be described as including, in some organisational form or other, the voices and views of young people.

Impact

The Irish mini-publics' record of impact is mixed. Some of their recommendations (for example voting rights for citizens resident outside the state, reducing the voting age to 16, etc.) have been long fingered. Others such as those relating to the response to an ageing population and the call for the incorporation of economic, social and cultural rights in the Constitution have either been overlooked or rejected outright. However, a number have contributed to constitutional change in terms of marriage equality, the provision of abortion and the removal of the offense of blasphemy. They have also influenced parliamentary and policy reform (Courant 2021).

By and large, the JOCCA supported the CA's recommendations with the exception of its recommendations on introducing a tax on GHG emissions from Agriculture. Described

as 'detailed, ambitious and far-reaching' (Torney 2019), the JOCCA report heavily influenced the cross-government Climate Action Plan, that was published in June 2019.

In January 2020, the Draft General Scheme of the Climate Action (Amendment) Bill 2019 was published. It reiterated the Government's commitment to make Ireland net zero by 2050, echoed the governance and accountability elements prioritised in the Climate Action plan and set out the legislation required to underpin the new governance processes on climate action. It also envisaged making the adoption of carbon budgets a legal requirement from 2021. The 32nd Dáil was dissolved before the bill could be presented to it.

Climate Action was a priority for the new coalition Government of Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and the Green party that took office in June 2020. It published the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (amendment) Bill in October 2020 and the revised bill in March 2021 that included a commitment to a 51% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and provisions for: five yearly carbon budgets; a stronger Climate Change Advisory Council; and greater oversight and accountability powers for the Oireachtas (Parliament). Both bills were strongly influenced by the recommendations of the CA and the JOCCA.

In short, the Assembly did enjoy some success in influencing climate policy. Yet it should be noted that the 'empowered space', that is the institutions and actors that make political decisions (Dryzek 2010), framed how the CA's recommendations would be considered. In setting the terms of reference for the JOCCA, the Government shaped the lens through which the recommendations would be discussed. Coming on top of the tightly focused wording of the CA's remit and the limited time allocated for its deliberations, it restricted the framing of the deliberations.

Discussion of findings

This paper focuses on a specific deliberative process on climate action in a single case study involving two discrete institutional formats, a CA and a parliamentary committee. Its analysis finds that voices of the future, particularly those of children and those yet unborn, were absent. Drawing on international research and practice, it makes some suggestions as to how these groups might be included through enclave deliberation, design experiments and future-oriented practice.

The Irish processes may have blazed a trail in terms of achieving impact through uptake and responsiveness. Their success in this regard, has rested, in no small part, on the extent to which the CAs have been 'coupled', that is connected through 'institutional mechanisms' to the wider political system such as the Oireachtas and the Government (Hendriks 2016). They, are after all, established by Oireachtas resolutions that prescribe: the recruitment of members; the topics for discussion; the duration of the process; process governance; and how reports are considered by the Oireachtas. Finally, they are funded by Government and serviced by a Secretariat that comes from the Department of an Taoiseach (Prime Minister).

All of this raises the following question, has the system been 'coupled' too tightly? This can happen when one part dominates over the other to the extent that the deliberative democratic system's 'self-corrective quality is lost' (Mansbridge et al. 2012, 23) and where there is a risk of 'co-option' (Hendriks 2016; SetÄlÄ 2017). Coupling that is too tight can result in a distortion of outcomes.

The framing of the question, the eligibility criteria, the timing of the public call for submissions and the limited time allocated to the CA deliberations on the matter,

limited the scope of the deliberations and indirectly prevented the views of children, young people and future generations from securing a foothold in the process.

Allocating two weekends to the topic was too short a time period for a complex, crucial and 'wicked' issue.[14] That the CA managed to produce a comprehensive and considered report within such limited time settings is a credit to the members' diligence and commitment and to all those who supported them. Nonetheless, it raises questions about what may have been achieved in a longer, slower, separate (that is one that did not include climate action as part of an eclectic and far-reaching agenda) and less mechanistic process.

Arguably all involved in the discussions ranging from Government Ministers, Oireachtas members, CA members and those who made public submissions[15] might claim, with validity that their work on this topic was guided by a concern for those coming behind them (children, young people, those not yet born). Yet is this sufficient in terms of democratic legitimacy? Can we contend that the views of all those impacted by the policies, and in some cases their irreversible consequences, have been considered?

Children, young people and future generations are not only three separate cohorts but each is in of itself heterogenous. Recognising that policy choices will create and reinforce 'power differentials in social and economic power and vulnerabilities' within and across these generations (Smith 2021, 7), this paper now explores how they could have been better included in the micro deliberative democratic system[16] as outlined in our case study.

Children and young people

Traditionally, concerns have been raised about children's capacity to participate in political life, yet we have seen more and more examples of institutions and processes in which they actively engage. We have, for example, seen the extension of the franchise to include 16-year-olds in countries such as Austria. Another formal way in which children are involved in politics is through youth parliaments (YP) which are 'ubiquitous' across the EU (Shephard and Patrikios 2013). As Shephard and Patrikios observe, their impact on policy is limited and with the notable exception of the Scottish YP, they tend to 'not fulfil their potential as direct channels that aggregate youth voice and transfer it to policy-makers (democratic function)' but play a more civic educational and socialisation role (2013, 767).

YPs are a form of enclave deliberation, that is deliberation in a group of similar members. It is one of the approaches Wojciechowska (2019) recommends as a means of including groups that are traditionally marginalised or indeed overlooked in processes that use sortition. Providing a safe, supportive space, enclave deliberations can facilitate excluded groups in clarifying their common aims, strengthening their arguments and developing recommendations (Wojciechowska 2019). They can also help build capacity within a cohort.

In the Irish context, enclave deliberation for children, in the 'invited space'[17] has taken two forms. Firstly, it can be found in the formal institutional 'invited space' that is the Irish Youth Parliament, Dáil na nÓg. This meets annually and includes roughly 200 children and young people (aged 12 up to 18), who have been directly elected to their local youth councils, Comhairle na nÓg.[18] It is supported by a youth council that comprises 34 elected members, one per local youth council, and serves a two year term. Dáil na nÓg and the Comhairle na nÓg, similar to their counterparts across the EU, are consultative fora.

Secondly, it can be located in formal, ad hoc 'invited spaces' such as the Youth Citizens' Assembly on climate action, established by the Houses of the Oireachtas, that sat for one day in November 2019 and resulted in 10 recommendations that were put to the then Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment.

Finally, an analysis of children and young peoples' inclusion in the deliberative system cannot afford to overlook the 'claimed'[19] space and the contribution made by the school climate strikes and other youth activist movements to wider political debates.[20]

Recognising that a well-designed DMP can include those who are traditionally disempowered and marginalised in political processes (Smith 2009; Curato et al. 2017; Harris 2019) the question then becomes how to meaningfully include the outcomes from these enclave deliberations. What shape would this 'division of labour' take and how might it be sequenced in a way that permits presence and voice? For example, could a separate children's CA be used to help define and prioritise the principles and values that would underpin a wider CA process? Could the children's CA, the Comhairle na nÓg, Dáil na nÓg and the School climate strikers be facilitated in developing public submissions to CAs and Parliamentary Committees? Should public submission processes permit varied forms of submission? Do they, for example, have to be predominantly text based, could they include video footage, images, drawings, etc? Could the various children's fora be invited into the process as 'experts' and panellists to present their recommendations, views and lived experiences?

There is much we can learn from the innovative and important role played by the Scottish children's parliament in the Scottish Climate Assembly's deliberations. Noting that the Climate Assembly's membership was limited to those aged 16 and over, the Secretariat invited the children's parliament 'to support the participation and engagement of children under 16, to ensure their views, experiences and ideas were part of the discussions and calls to action' (Children's Parliament 2021; Scottish Climate Assembly 2021). Using surveys, videos, drawings and games, the children's parliament worked in partnership with the Climate Assembly and in March 2021 voted to prioritise 42 calls to action. These were presented to the assembly and assembly members had the opportunity to meet with the children to discuss them with them. At the time of writing, these 42 calls of action are due to be included in the full report of Children's Parliament Investigation for Scotland's Climate Assembly and Scotland's Climate Assembly's final report.

Care needs to be taken as to how discussions involving children are framed, facilitated and finalised. One way is which this could be achieved is to ensure children are involved in a leadership role in the design of the processes, their facilitation and governance. A starting point may be to establish a children's CA on how they envisage such a design and their role within it, that is how they believe their presence and voice can be included.

Such an assembly could also ask children for their views and ideas on other forms of participatory engagement in other arenas. This paper has focused primarily on one form of participatory and deliberative engagement, namely the CA model. However, it is mindful that there are many other forms of participatory and deliberative processes that could also be used to great effect and in tandem with approaches such as YPs and CAs. A more holistic approach to the inclusion of children and young people in the participatory process could see the inclusion of participatory budgeting processes in YPs, schools, student unions and elsewhere as well as the use of participatory forms of theatre as additional ways of engaging young people and children in community and policy development through processes that are less 'technocratic or cookie-cutter'[21] than CAs.

Future generations

By virtue of the fact that they are not yet born, their direct involvement in current processes is impossible. How then can we endeavour to ensure their interests are considered?

Smith, noting that CAs and other DMPs alone cannot deepen democracy for the long term, calls on us 'to be creative and to allow space for experimenting' (2021, 112–113). Innovative and imaginative approaches such as formal institutions, future-focused experiments, the promotion of intergenerational justice through the adoption of a legacy mindset and seventh-generation thinking can bring the interests of future generations to the fore.

Formal institutional structures such as the Finnish Parliamentary Committee for the Future and the Welsh Commissioner for Future Generations, to name but two, have been established with a view to providing an indirect form of representation for Future Generations in current policy processes (see Smith 2021). Such institutional innovations face challenges in 'myopic' democratic systems (G. Smith 2020, 2021).[22] Yet their emergence and their growth across the globe offer some hope for policy processes that actively consider the needs of future generations.

The same is true of experiments being developed and used in Japan (Kamijo et al. 2017; Hara et al. 2019; Saijo 2020). Of greatest interest and relevance to this paper is the experiment that took place in Yahaba Town in 2015–2016. It was the first local municipality to use 'participation-style future design' (Hara et al. 2019). Responding to a requirement to develop a 'long-term vision' for 2060, the officials in the Town Hall working with University researchers held 6 workshops over a six-month period (Sept 2015-March 2016) with 20 local residents that were 'balanced in terms of age and gender'. They were tasked with developing 'A vision of Yahaba Town in 2060'. Dividing the participants into four groups of five, two of the groups were asked to represent the present generation in the deliberations. The remaining two groups were invited to represent imaginary future generations by 'assuming the role of people living at that time'.[23] Initially they deliberated in their individual generational enclaves to develop their vision and identify policy options to support it. Then the groups joined one another and 'negotiated together to develop a consensus over the most essential policy measures' (Hara et al. 2019, 1613).

Research on the process found different 'thinking patterns' between the two generations (Hara et al. 2019). The imaginary future generation tended to be more original and innovative in approach and was less concerned about current institutional and other constraints (Saijo 2018). The present generation, on the other hand, 'could not help but to view the future as an extension of the present, creating visions that focus primarily on finding solutions to current problems and producing ideas within the limits of present conditions' (Saijo 2018, 7). They also observed that those in the present generation groups became more aware and understanding of the future generation. This mutual understanding helped reconcile intergenerational conflicts and produce consensus on recommendations. The inclusion of representatives who would act as imaginary future generations could prove an innovative and very timely means through which the views of future generations are considered in DMPs and the wider deliberative system.

Finally, Krzarnic reminds us that we don't have to become too experimental either in our institutions or structures to be future focused (2020). To become good ancestors and achieve intergenerational justice, there is much we can learn from pre-existing approaches such as the development of cathedral thinking and a 'legacy mindset' as well as from the traditional philosophies of indigenous cultures that embed seventh generation thinking in their practice (Krznaric 2020). Highlighting the challenges of political myopia, he suggests the development of an intergenerational 'good ancestor' citizens assembly based on Ireland's CAs and the Japanese future design experiments to deepen democracy (182).

Conclusion

Actions taken (or not taken) today will impact children, young people and future generations in ways that will be irreversible in the future. This makes their inclusion an imperative from the perspective of democratic legitimacy, particularly deliberative democratic legitimacy that argues for political decisions to be justifiable to those impacted by them.

Noting the recent use of CAs to develop policies on climate action, this paper, considers how the 'future' can be included both in terms of voice and presence. The way in which CAs are currently recruited using stratified random sampling elicits broader legitimacy concerns regarding the representation and inclusion of citizen cohorts that tend to be marginalised and/or disengaged from political processes. It raises questions regarding the need for further consideration of the role of enclave deliberation and how such enclaves should in turn be included within the wider deliberative democratic system.

Focusing on a single case study, the recent Irish CA and JOCCA deliberations on climate action, it explored the extent to which children, young people and future generations were included in the discussions. Its work, primarily, involved an examination of the public submissions made to both the CA and JOCCA. This meant focusing on an indirect form of public input to the deliberations as opposed to direct involvement in the discussions. Nonetheless, in the case of children and future generations, it was the only means through which they or their 'representatives' could engage. Additionally, as the analysis reveals, the public submissions had a significant impact on the scope and framing of the deliberations in the CA and as a result in the JOCCA. Their exclusion from the membership of both bodies, absence from the invited contributions and very limited presence, and absence in the case of future generations, in the public submissions meant that children and future generations had little or no input to the wider deliberations. At best, their voice was but a whisper.

This systemic analysis finds that the Irish CA was 'too tightly coupled' on this issue and that while this may have been beneficial in terms of uptake and impact, it came at the expense of input legitimacy and potentially intergenerational justice. The framing of the CA's remit and programme of work, the JOCCA's terms of reference, the timing of the call for public submissions and the length of time afforded to the topic in the CA all served to squeeze these cohorts out.

As more data on recent CAs on climate action in UK, France and Scotland emerges, there is great potential for comparative work on inclusion within them and the wider deliberative democratic system. Further theoretical, empirical and experimental research is required to explore how children, young people and future generations can be included in deliberative democratic processes. It shouldn't be confined solely to DMPs such as CAs but should consider these cohorts' involvement within the wider deliberative democratic system. Climate action was this paper's focus but other intergenerational matters such as state pension funds and state decisions on 'bailing out' private banks that extend the debt across future generations could have been considered. As the Japanese 'Future Design' experiments show, environmental issues though salient are not future citizens' sole concern (Kamijo et al. 2017; Hara et al. 2019; Nakagawa, Hara, and Saijo 2017).

Hendriks argues that 'to be effective, "designed coupling" requires actors to step outside their comfort zone to build new relationships and engage in new spaces with different sets of actors and rules' (2016, 57). Recognising that democracy comes in many forms, that CAs are but one site of democratic deliberation and acknowledging democracy's ability to reimagine itself, this paper suggests that future-

oriented democracy needs to be both wider and deeper. It needs to be widened to include those who have been overlooked or omitted to date, for example children and future generations. A deeper democracy requires 'a vibrant democratic ecology' (Escobar 2017) that combines democratic approaches and involves associational, participatory, direct and representative democratic institutions at different stages in the policymaking process.

Imagining this vibrant, future oriented, democratic ecology will require expanding existing spaces and the development of new spaces, some of which may be deliberative enclaves. These could include CAs but should not draw exclusively from them nor should moments of participation and deliberation be limited to them but should be encouraged and supported throughout the wider deliberative system.

Endeavours to co-design a future-oriented democracy will need to consider institutions and policy processes that include children, young people and future generations such as, for example, a Commissioner for Future Generations, future design experiments, the promotion of seventh generation thinking and so forth. Most importantly, they will need to include children, young people and future generations and/or their representatives.

Notes

1. This study takes the legal UNICEF definition as those under 18 years of age. In terms of participation, it draws from the definition used in the Estonian youth parliament which includes children aged 7–18.
2. Recognising that the UNESCO definition describes them as aged between 15 and 24, this paper uses the Irish CSO (central statistics office) 18–24 category to distinguish between children and young people.
3. See (G. Smith 2020) for a discussion and analysis of these institutions.
4. Interestingly, he specifically singles out the work of the Irish CA on abortion.
5. The Irish Constitution requires that all proposed amendments to it are endorsed by popular referendum. It is worth noting that recent citizens' assemblies have also included deliberations on topics that do not require constitutional reform.
6. https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2016-07-13/33/.
7. Those who identified as students but who did not give their age were, nonetheless, categorised as young people. It is highly probable they were aged between 18 and 24 but not a certainty.
8. It should be noted that to run for election to Dáil Éireann a candidate must be an Irish citizen and aged 21 or over.
9. These all came from the one body – the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition – a coalition of civil society organisations that includes youth organisations. It was not possible to ascertain from the data the age profile of those who made individual submissions (accounting for less than 6%).
10. Further details on the method used can be found on page 6 of the Citizens' Assembly signpost document https://2016-2018.citizensassembly.ie/en/Submissions/How-the-State-can-make-Ireland-a-leader-in-tackling-climate-change/Signpost-Document/Signpost-Document-May-2018.pdf (accessed 2nd December 2020).
11. The methodology used was similar to that used for the 12,200 submissions on the 8th amendment (Citizens' Assembly 2018).
12. See Appendix A in the signpost document (Citizens' Assembly 2018)
13. A number of adolescents (aged 16 and 17) from the 'vote at 16 campaign group' in the NYCI made a presentation to the Convention on the Constitution on the first weekend of its deliberations. For more details see http://www.constitutionalconvention.ie/ConventionVideos.aspx?cid=20.
14. In contrast the UK and Scottish Climate Assemblies allocated 6 and 7 weekends to their deliberations respectively, while the French Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat dedicated 20 days to its work.
15. Only 3% of the public submissions made did not believe in climate change, see Devaney et al. (2019).

16. It is described here as micro as it doesn't include wider discussions in the media, activist movements and the wider public sphere.
17. See (Cornwall 2002) for details.
18. Each local authority in Ireland has a directly elected youth council that meets on average once a month.
19. See (Gaventa and Barrett 2012) for discussion.
20. For a discussion of 'deliberative activism' see Fung (2005) and for a discussion of the role of protests in the deliberative system see (W. Smith 2020).
21. The author thanks one of the peer reviewers for this term that captures the somewhat formulaic aspect of the CA processes.
22. For his part, G. Smith outlines the legitimacy challenges they face and advocates their use of CAs and participatory processes to counteract some of them (2020).
23. 'The participants were asked to assume that they had time-travelled to the year 2060 without aging.' (Hara et al. 2019). A series of simple but effective exercises assisted their 'time travel'.

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Notes on contributor

Dr Clodagh Harris, is a senior lecturer in the Department of Government & Politics, University College Cork and affiliate of the Environmental Research Institute. Her research interests include deliberative and participatory democracy; democratic innovations; and democratic governance and climate change. She has published widely on Ireland's Convention on the Constitution (2012-2014) and its Citizens' Assembly (2016-2018) and has successfully secured international and national funding to conduct community engaged research on sustainable energy transitions. She served on the International Scientific Advisory Board of Ireland's first Citizens' Assembly 'We the Citizens' (2011), the board of International Observers to Belgium's G1000 citizens' summit (2011), the Academic and Legal advisory board of Ireland's Constitutional Convention (2012-2014),and the Advisory Board of the ESRC funded UK Citizens' Assembly on Brexit (2017). She currently sits on the Scottish Citizens' Assembly's Research and Advisory Group (2019-2021).

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