

Democratic innovation and their impact: lessons from Gdansk citizens' assemblies

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Abstract

Nowadays in local government we can observe the growing popularity of new forms of citizen participation based on deliberation. The key stage of the participatory and deliberative processes is the implementation of their recommendations. The evaluation models created in the literature, among other criteria of evaluation of both participatory and deliberative processes, mention their influence on public policies (Rowe, Frezer 2000, Gutmann, Thompson 2004, Gastil, Knobloch, Kelly 2012), likelihood of implementation of their recommendations (Crosby, Kelly, Schaefer 1986) or their long-term effects (Gastil, Knobloch, Kelly 2012).

One of the popular deliberative processes that are used as a citizen participation tool is the citizens' assembly (the CA). Despite their popularity, most of the CAs are not institutionalised yet and the implementation of their recommendations is not legally regulated. Additionally, it often remains unknown if the recommendations of the CAs are implemented and what are the factors that impede or expedite their implementation. Then it is hard to determine if and how the process of implementation should be improved and democratised.

The aims of the paper will be to answer three research questions: (1) to what extent the recommendations of CAs are implemented, (2) what are the factors that impede or expedite their implementation and (3) which elements of design or implementation of the CAs could be improved in order to increase the chances that CAs' recommendations will be implemented.

For this purpose I will analyse the process of implementation of recommendations of the first three Polish CAs that were organised in Gdansk in the years 2016-2018. First, the implementation will be analysed with the use of a desk research method. The subjects of the desk research will be the documents concerning the recommendations of the Gdansk CAs and procedure of their implementation, as well as normative acts adopted in Gdansk in the years 2016-2022 within public policies related to the topics of the CAs. Then I will investigate the extent of the implementation and identify the factors impeding or expediting the implementation and elements that could be improved with the use of in-depth interviews and focus group interviews. The IDIs will be conducted with the organisers of the CAs, as well as with policy-makers and public administration officials working in the area of citizen participation or public policies related to the topics of the CAs; the FGIs will be conducted with the stakeholders and experts who participated in the CAs.